

# 2021 ISAC Top Priorities

Iowa State Association of Counties

## Mental Health and Disability Services

**PROBLEM:** Addressing long-term, sustainable funding has been an issue since Iowa moved to a regional based mental health and disability services (MH/DS) delivery system. This need has only increased as new services for addressing complex mental health needs and services for children have now been mandated on the regions without any financial support from the state or giving the counties/regions the necessary ability to fund these services on their own. This situation has been complicated further by the tremendous demand for basic core mental health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, as mental health access centers begin to provide services, we have seen implementation challenges that need to be addressed to make sure all parties are best served.

**SOLUTION:** ISAC recommends that the 2021 Legislature:

1. Provide the needed funding to counties/regions to ensure stability in the MH/DS delivery system due to the increased demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and state mandates for additional services.
2. If no essential revenue is provided from the state, counties should be allowed to exceed their current maximum per capita levy of \$47.28 to fund new services.
3. If the above remedies to the lack of funding are not advanced, counties/regions should be allowed flexibility in the implementation of recent mandates and not be penalized if circumstances prevent implementation of those services. Specifically, the recent mandates are those related to the following:
  - New services for complex mental health needs.
  - The second set of services for children's mental health: crisis stabilization residential beds, inpatient, and crisis stabilization community-based services.
4. The requirement that counties can only carry forward a fund balance of 40% should be delayed or eliminated.
5. Review current Iowa statutes and administrative rules pertaining to access centers to ensure they meet the needs of the patient, mental health region, and county law enforcement. In addition, there should be an exploration of ways to streamline the involuntary commitment process to address this as well.

## Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Backfill

**PROBLEM:** The taxable valuation of commercial and industrial property was legislatively reduced by 10% beginning in FY 2015. A standing appropriation from the state to local property taxing jurisdictions was implemented to make up for the future reduction in property tax revenue due to this rollback. Local jurisdictions are already absorbing property tax revenue reductions due to the rollback on the new multi-residential classification, the rollback on railroad property, the new exemption for telecommunications property, and the reduced growth limitation for residential and agricultural property. Any reduction or elimination of the commercial and industrial property tax backfill would likely cause a property tax increase that would fall largely on homeowners and agricultural property owners, a reduction in important services the residents of Iowa depend on, or a combination of both.

**SOLUTION:** The legislature should fully fund the commercial and industrial property tax backfill and should resist legislation implementing a rapid elimination or that affects local budgets that have been set or are in the process of being set.

## Emergency Medical Services

**PROBLEM:** Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are insufficient in many parts of the state due to a lack of a stable funding mechanism, leaving rural residents lacking vital services in a time of need.

**SOLUTION:** ISAC recommends the passage of legislation intended to provide better coverage and adequate funding of EMS countywide by allowing boards of supervisors to declare EMS an essential service and put in place an ad valorem property tax to fund the operations.

## Iowa's Natural Resources, Outdoor Recreation, and Water Quality and Quantity

**PROBLEM:** There continues to be a need to provide adequate, sustainable, and dedicated state financial resources to address statewide needs related to Iowa's natural resources, outdoor recreation, and water quality. Water quantity management also is needed to minimize or mitigate damage caused by floods. In 2010, Iowans voted to add the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreational Trust Fund to the Iowa Constitution to address these and other natural resources and outdoor recreation needs. Unfortunately, the Trust has yet to receive any funding. The Trust Fund is the best-known mechanism to address Iowa's natural resources, outdoor recreation, and water concerns and, in so doing, promotes public health, rural revitalization, economic growth, and quality of life for Iowans. The Trust will be a legacy for generations to come.

The Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program is authorized in Iowa Code to receive \$20 million annually, plus revenues from the sale of natural resource license plates. However, the program has never been fully funded and in recent years cuts have been more dramatic, with some funding diverted to state park operations and maintenance. The REAP Program is scheduled to sunset in 2023. This important state program provides diverse funding for Iowa's historical resources, county parks, city parks, public green space, conservation education, roadside vegetation management, and state open spaces.

**SOLUTION:** ISAC recommends the following:

1. Passage of a state-wide sales tax increase of at least 3/8th of one cent, to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund as per the Iowa Constitution. This will also fully fund REAP.
2. Absent the Trust Fund, REAP should be fully funded, with a sunset extended until at least 2031.
3. Funds from the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust should be distributed through a formula that maintains the integrity of the constitutional amendment, similar to language found in Iowa Code Chapter 461. This funding formula was developed by the Sustainable Funding Committee, and was the basis upon which Iowans voted to establish the Trust Fund in 2010
4. The passage of legislation that would support and encourage public sector entities, such as counties, to be directly involved in water mitigation projects that would involve county conservation boards, engineers, and supervisors.

**ISAC** members are elected and appointed county officials from all 99 counties. We represent 16 affiliated associations. Representatives of these affiliates make up our Legislative Policy Committee and our Board of Directors.

**Mission** promote effective and responsible county government for the people of Iowa.

**Vision** principal, authoritative source of representation, information and services for and about county government in Iowa.



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