



JAMES “TIGER” MORTON CATASTROPHIC ILLNESS COMMISSION

2022 Annual Report

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Since 2000, the James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission (Commission) has provided lifesaving interventions to more than 1,700 West Virginians. The Commission is a last resort for those in dire need of medical assistance where the risk of death is imminent and no other resources are available. Six commissioners are appointed by the Governor and include a doctor, lawyer, social worker, nurse, and two members at-large.

The Commission makes direct payments to providers through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources’ (DHHR) Medicaid program, administered by the Bureau for Medical Services, for individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid benefits yet cannot afford to pay costs associated with catastrophic illness. Many West Virginians live just above the federal poverty level; they cannot afford insurance and are not eligible for state assistance.

The Commission’s executive director consults with DHHR’s Bureau for Medical Services and hospital charity care programs to determine if applicants are eligible for those programs. Before receiving assistance from the Commission, an eligible applicant must apply for and be denied coverage by Medicaid and attempt to obtain health insurance coverage through the Marketplace ([healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov)) or private insurance options.

Assistance provided by the Commission includes lifesaving medical treatments and related travel costs. Assistance is capped at \$200,000 for medical services and \$5,000 for transportation costs. Examples of covered expenses include:

- Proven and accepted medical procedures, such as surgery, organ transplants, and chemotherapy;
- Medication that prevents rejection after a transplant and/or recurrence of a life-threatening illness; and
- Gasoline, lodging, airfare, and car rental costs to travel to medical facilities for patients to receive treatment or for related medical appointments.

Through direct financial assistance and referrals to other programs, the Commission assisted 50 individuals in calendar year 2022 (January through November). Three additional applications are projected through the end of the year. Partnering programs include the American Cancer Society, Angel Flight, Patient Advocate Foundation, United Way, local DHHR offices, hospital financial counselors, regional community action agencies, hotels with discounts for medical treatment, and local cancer assistance programs. Prescription drug discounts and online medical co-payment assistance were also utilized. By working with these partners and available resources, the Commission leverages additional funds for client assistance services.

A key objective of the Commission is to leverage scarce resources for maximum benefit. An example of leveraging can be seen in the Commission’s historical data. For every dollar billed to the Commission for providing lifesaving care of a West Virginia resident, the Commission pays only 20-25 cents by utilizing Medicaid rates. Not only does the Commission save lives, but it saves money.

Examples of assistance provided in 2021 and 2022:

- 61-year-old male had a kidney transplant; currently providing travel assistance
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- 57-year-old male with kidney cancer received medical treatment and travel assistance
- 73-year-old female with lung cancer received travel assistance
- 50-year-old female with lung cancer received transportation for treatment
- 65-year-old male with breast cancer received medical treatment and travel assistance

- 57-year-old male with throat and neck cancer received travel assistance

General revenue funds of \$105,695 were allocated to the Commission by the West Virginia Legislature in SFY 2021. Funds are used for salaries, operating expenses, client medical assistance, and related travel expenses. With the change in allocated funds for SFY 2022 and a projected transfer of \$11,429 to assist with life-saving treatments, the Commission’s funds could be exhausted during state fiscal year 2024 if client obligations increase.

The number of applications for assistance decreased by half in 2020. However, the dollar amount of medical claims received by the Commission did not decrease until 2021, as demonstrated in the chart below. Applications increased in 2022 and expenses are expected to increase in 2023 due to the Commission implementing a renewed public relations campaign and the lifting of the Public Health Emergency related to COVID-19.

James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Financial Snapshot: SFY 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022		
Medical Claims Received from Providers	2019 \$1,361,486 (approx.) 2020 \$1,386,770 (approx.) 2021 \$ 154,377 (approx.) 2022 \$ 55,674 (approx.)	increase of 100% from SFY 2018 (was \$677,365) increase of 1.85% from 2019 decrease of 89% from 2020 decrease of 64% from 2021
Medical Claims Paid by Medicaid on behalf of the Commission*	2019 \$282,964 (approx.) 2020 \$235,726 (approx.) 2021 \$ 60,200 (approx.) 2022 \$ 10,593 (approx.)	increase of 60% from SFY 2018 (was \$176,638) decrease of 16.7% from 2019 decrease of 74.5% from 2020 decrease of 82.5 from 2021
Travel Costs Paid by the Commission	2019 \$13,191 (approx.) 2020 \$15,898 (approx.) 2021 \$ 4,579 (approx.) 2022 \$11,751 (approx.)	decrease of 40.5% from SFY 2018 (was \$32,253) increase of 21% from 2019 decrease of 71.5% from 2020 increase of 257% from 2021

**Payment amounts do not include outstanding claims returned for corrections.*

Since October 1, 2015, the Commission has reduced operational costs as the executive director assumed the additional duties of a second DHHR commission. Salaries and office expenses were shared equally until October 23, 2022. Due to recommendations made in the 2022 Legislative Audit Report on the Commission, the Commission executive director position was restored to a full-time position and all salaries and office expenses will now be covered by the Commission budget. The full Legislative Audit Report is available online, https://www.wvlegislature.gov/legisdocs/reports/agency/PA/PA_2022_743.pdf.

Under 26 U.S.C. §170, the Commission can accept tax-deductible contributions, gifts, property, and grants from both private and corporate donors. To date requests to multiple foundations and charitable organizations were made without any success. The Commission has also reached out to political subdivisions within the State. One county responded to a request for aid with a \$3,000 grant and similar requests will be made to additional political subdivisions. Despite these efforts, the Commission believes that the majority of funds necessary to continue providing services will have to come from budgetary resources, such as legislative appropriations or collected state fines or fees as recommended in the 2004 audit by the Legislative Performance Evaluation and Research Division. Past requests for a line item on state tax returns were denied. The Commission will continue to provide educational presentations and materials at conferences, outreach events, and online media outlets to increase awareness about the Commission’s services for West Virginians with life-threatening illnesses.

The chart below identifies West Virginians by county who received both in-kind assistance and financial

assistance from the Commission in 2019; those who received in-kind assistance (37) or were waitlisted (34) for assistance in 2020, those who received in-kind assistance (25) or were waitlisted/covered (10) for assistance in 2021, and those who received in-kind assistance (36) or were covered (16) in 2022.¹ These numbers do not include individuals that the Commission continues to assist from previous years or applications taken after December 6, 2022.

Catastrophic Illness Commission Clients: Calendar Years 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022

County	2019	2020	2021	2022	County	2019	2020	2021	2022	County	2019	2020	2021	2022
Barbour	3	1			Kanawha	14	10	4	5	Pleasants			1	
Berkeley	4	1		4	Lewis	1				Pocahontas	1			2
Boone	1	1	2	1	Lincoln	1	2			Preston	1			1
Braxton		1			Logan	3	2			Putnam	5		1	
Brooke	2		1	1	Marion	3		1		Raleigh	15	3	8	5
Cabell	3	2		3	Marshall	2			2	Randolph	3	3		
Clay	1	1		1	Mason	2	3			Roane				1
Fayette	6	6	2	5	Mercer	1	4	3		Summers	2	1	1	
Grant	1	1	1		McDowell				1	Taylor	1			1
Greenbrier	5	2		3	Mineral	1				Tyler		1		
Hampshire	2				Mingo	2	2	1		Upshur	1			1
Hancock	2	1			Monongalia	4	4	1		Webster	4	1		
Hardy	4	1		1	Morgan		1			Wetzel	2			
Harrison	12	3		1	Monroe	6				Wood	7	1		2
Jackson	2		2	1	Nicholas	4	1	2	2	Wyoming	3	2		1
Jefferson	2	1			Ohio	1	1			Unknown	7	7	4	4
					Pendleton	1			1	TOTAL	148	71	35	50

The Commission remains committed in its efforts to continue assisting West Virginians with catastrophic illnesses who are without other resources to enable them to receive the life-saving treatment they need.

James “Tiger” Morton Catastrophic Illness Commission Members

Jacques Williams, Attorney, Chair, Monongalia County
Sandra Cotton, Registered Nurse, Monongalia County
John Davidson, Jr., Member-at-Large, Kanawha County

Patricia Davis, Member-at-Large, Hampshire County
Frances Roberts-Buchanan, Social Worker, Cabell County
Dr. Victoria Shuman, Physician, Greenbrier County

¹ From November 2019 – October 2021, the Commission utilized a waitlist for new applicants due to the anticipated obligations for current clients. The waitlist was lifted in October 2021 and the Commission resumed accepting eligible clients for financial assistance with medical services and related travel.