



## **Testimony for New York State Committee on Health February 8, 2022, Hearing**

Good afternoon, Chairs Senator Rivera and Assembly Member Gottfried and distinguished members of the New York State Committee on Health. I am Michelle DeMott, and I am the Chief of Staff to Mitchell Netburn, President & CEO, of Samaritan Daytop Village (SDV). I first want to thank you for your continued support during these challenging times. SDV is a nationally recognized organization that provides comprehensive health and human services to more than 33,000 people each year through a network of over 60 facilities located in the five boroughs of New York City, Long Island, and the lower Hudson Valley. SDV depends on funding from the State to continue to safely provide these services to thousands of New Yorkers. We offer a rich array of programs including treatment for mental health issues and substance use disorder, transitional and supportive permanent housing, and innovative services for veterans, women, children, youth, seniors, and families.

The critical importance of mental health and substance use services has never been clearer than at this moment. The federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that over 100,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in the 12-month period that ended in April of 2021. This represents a nearly a 30% increase from the previous year. New York State demonstrates a similar trend as evidenced by the CDC data reporting that almost 3,100 New Yorkers died of drug overdoses during the same period.

- In 2020, New York State (excluding NYC) reported:
  - o 2,438 deaths from opioid overdoses
  - o 6,166 opioid overdoses documented at outpatient emergency room visits
  - o 1,611 opioid overdoses documented at hospitals
  
- In 2020, New York City recorded:
  - o 2,941 opioid overdoses documented at outpatient emergency room visits
  - o 1,507 opioid overdoses documented at hospitals
  - o 8,500 naloxone administration reports by EMS
  - o 585 naloxone administrations reported by registered Community Opioid Overdose Prevention (COOP) programs

(Reference:

[https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/opioid/data/pdf/nys\\_opioid\\_annual\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/opioid/data/pdf/nys_opioid_annual_report_2020.pdf).)”)

Additionally, because of the increased need for behavioral health services due in large part to the effects of the pandemic, New York must take a strong stance to support the efforts of behavioral health providers to protect its citizens. The clients that we serve are the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many of whom are low-to-no income with complex medical and behavioral health needs. The physical and emotional isolation caused by the pandemic, has manifested into new and increased feelings of anxiety, restlessness, and stress, which can be triggers for those with behavioral health and substance use disorders. The unprecedented rise in the demand for behavioral health services directly correlates with the increase in alcohol and substance use and, tragically, drastically increasing opioid overdoses, as noted above.

The behavioral health workforce and community-based organizations throughout our state are struggling to address the ever-worsening public health crisis connected with the opioid epidemic, the devastating impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and related increased rates of suicide, particularly among younger people.

Community behavioral health agencies have not received the statutorily promised Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) on an annual basis as the adjustment has only been appropriated three times in the past 15 years. The state’s neglect of and failure to invest in the mental health and substance use disorder service delivery system has driven away our workforce due to unacceptably low wages and impossibly high caseloads. These conditions, combined with an ever-rising demand for services, has brought New York’s safety net system beyond crisis proportions and requires immediate action by state government.

In SDV’s residential treatment programs, there is a high incidence of co-occurring mental health disorders in the population that is served. For example, in our Highbridge Program located in the Bronx, 75% of the program participants have prevalent co-occurring disorders. Given the severity of the mental health issues observed in those we serve, the need to enhance clinical services to improve care and create better outcomes for our clients is critical and we urge you support enhanced services statewide. We also ask that reimbursement rates be adjusted to match the true cost of care and that the social determinants of health be addressed. Lastly, the state needs to invest in workforce training initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We stand ready to help our state, city and our local communities continue to recover from the lasting effects of COVID-19 as well as the staggering effects of the opioid epidemic. We know that the long-term strength and vitality of New York requires increased access to behavioral health

care to help individuals process the trauma, grief, anxiety, and stress of these crises. With the financial support of the State, we can ensure that New Yorkers regain their health and well-being, and that New York retains its commitment to take care of those in need.

I thank you, on behalf of Samaritan Daytop Village, and we look forward to continuing to be on the front lines in partnership with you, and the communities you serve, to fully address the needs of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.