

February 16, 2023

**Testimony of
The NYS Office of Mental Health to
NYS Assembly and NYS Senate
Fiscal Committees**



**Office of
Mental Health**

Good morning, I am Dr. Ann Sullivan, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH). Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Brouk, Gunther, and members of the respective committees, I want to thank you for the invitation to address OMH's proposed 2023-24 Budget.

This is a historic budget aiming for the first time to support the implementation of a truly comprehensive mental health system with an investment of more than \$1 billion. Over the past three years, New York State has experienced an increased demand for mental health treatment and services across all ages and geographic regions. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, OMH has addressed some of the core elements to improve mental health care, such as investments to expand ambulatory care as well as strengthening crisis services. And, while this vital work continues, I am so pleased to present a budget that will now transform the mental health system to provide a full continuum of care from addressing the needs of the most seriously mentally ill to expanded prevention and adult and youth services in communities across the state.

Improving mental health care in New York state requires that each component of our continuum of care is strengthened and the ability to move between levels of care is supported to improve outcomes and recovery. This budget addresses the entire continuum from services for individuals with serious mental illness who require intensive services and supports, to providing timely access for all New Yorkers who need ambulatory care, to supporting practices that interrupt a progression to mental illness and provide for wellness and recovery. Finally, strengthening the system requires that insurers pay for treatment recommended by mental health professionals.

Intensive Services and Community Supports

To increase needed access to psychiatric beds OMH has been working in collaboration with the Department of Health and community hospitals to re-open psychiatric inpatient beds that were repurposed to medical surgical beds during the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor's plan directs these community hospitals to immediately bring the 850 psychiatric beds previously taken offline back into service and includes legislation to strengthen enforcement. Additionally, there's an investment of \$15 million for OMH to open 150 new state operated beds statewide to support those individuals who require an extended period of stabilization.

The components of this plan will be implemented in a manner that ensures individuals don't get lost in the system, but rather receive the care that they need, when they need it at every level by updating standards of care and accountability for admissions and discharges. Nearly \$14 million will also be invested in 50 new Critical Time Intervention (CTI) teams to provide wrap-around services for high need individuals returning to the community from the hospital and emergency rooms and which will now be included as a covered service under Medicaid.

For unsheltered homeless individuals struggling with mental illness, this year's budget also includes more than \$4 million to establish eight additional Safe Options Support (SOS) teams designed to assist individuals in recovery by accessing mental health treatment, stable housing, and support services. Enhanced hospital discharge standards and expanded community-based services, including housing, will further support these efforts.

Accessible housing with needed supports is critical to recovery. This budget proposes a capital investment of \$890 million and more than \$25 million in operational funding for the development of 3,500 new housing units for New Yorkers with serious mental illness, including:

- 900 transitional stepdown units to help individuals transitioning from various levels of care to community-based living,
- 500 community residence-single room occupancy units with intensive services to individuals at the highest risk of homelessness,
- 600 licensed apartment units with intermediate level of services, and
- 1,500 supportive housing units serving individuals with serious mental illness, split between scattered-site rental units that can be opened quickly and new construction or renovated facilities completed over the next five years.

Access For All

Every New Yorker deserves access to mental health services. The Executive budget includes more than \$85 million to expand a wide range of outpatient services to increase care access, reduce wait times, and ensure individuals are able to get the help they need. All of these services will provide individuals with an opportunity for integrated mental health and substance use treatment and will serve all ages. Among the multitude of community services included are:

- 12 new Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs (CPEPs), providing hospital-level crisis care across New York State;
- 42 new Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams that will provide mobile, high intensity services to the most at-risk New Yorkers.
- \$15 million for 26 new Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) tripling the current number of clinics from 13 to 39 and expanding service capacity to as many as 200,000 individuals. These clinics provide open access with walk-in, immediate integrated mental health and substance use disorder services for New Yorkers of all ages and insurance status.
- An investment of \$5 million in Home Based Crisis Intervention programs for youth providing short-term, intensive, in-home crisis intervention services to families.
- Expansion of 20 Article 31 mental health clinics and an increase in Health Home Plus for high need individuals and families
- In addition, critical investments in peer support services including the expansion of the Intensive and Sustained Engagement Treatment (INSET) program that offers peer-based outreach and engagement for adults with serious mental illness helping them reduce emergency visits and hospitalizations.

Also, to ensure that someone experiencing an acute mental health crisis has access to trained mental health professionals, the budget continues full funding for 988, and the necessary crisis continuum of mobile crisis response, crisis stabilization centers and crisis residences. This includes \$25 million in new resources for the continued expansion of 988 call centers.

Prevention Services for All New Yorkers

Increasing access to school-based clinics is one of the most effective ways to help youth who were particularly impacted by the pandemic interrupt the long-term effects of the anxiety and depression they experienced. The budget includes more than \$40 million in new resources in

children's mental health to expand prevention and access to critical services, including a significant investment in school-based clinics, and resources to increase capacity. These resources include increasing the Medicaid payment for school-based satellite clinics, as well as legislation requiring commercial insurance providers to pay for school-based services at a level equal to the higher paying Medicaid rate.

Additional youth prevention services include \$7 million for the expansion of Healthy Steps - a highly effective, evidence-based prevention program integrating mental health services into primary care settings. Also \$10 million in new resources is included to expand suicide prevention programs for high-risk youth especially in underserved communities

Employment is associated with improved self-esteem, confidence, and a vital component of recovery for many individuals. The Executive Budget also includes \$3.3 million of new resources for the implementation of the Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) program which has a proven success rate in increasing competitive employment for individuals living with mental illness. Employment is one of the most effective strategies for the prevention of long-term disability.

Implementation Efforts

As I stated earlier, ensuring timely access and insurance coverage for needed mental health services is vital to the successful implementation of this plan. Among other changes, commercial insurers will be required to provide reimbursement for crisis services including mental health mobile crisis services and crisis residential services as well as school-based services. This proposal will also prohibit insurance companies from denying access to medically necessary, high-need, acute and crisis mental health services for both adults and children. The insurance reforms further address network adequacy and utilization review standards, proposing the creation of appointment availability and geographic accessibility standards for behavioral health services to ensure adequate access to in-network providers in-person or via telehealth.

Finally effective services are dependent on a robust workforce. Recruitment and retention of workforce is critical, and we are building on the efforts of this past year, which had included a 5.4% COLA, federal funding allocated to strengthen workforce, health care bonuses and rate increases and a two-year \$104 million investment in housing services. Going forward, this year's budget includes a 2.5 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for community mental health providers licensed, designated, or funded by OMH as well as \$5 million in additional resources for the expansion of OMH's current \$9 million Mental Health Loan Repayment Program for psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners, to include other clinical professions. Also, the Qualified Mental Health Associate credential will enable paraprofessionals to work within the OMH system and build capacity within our workforce. OMH is also rolling out trainings in youth evidence-based practices, integrated care for individuals with substance use and developmental disabilities, among other opportunities to support staff in feeling confident as they do this incredibly important work.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this historic budget, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.