



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

**Testimony of Chinazo Cunningham, MD
NYS OASAS Commissioner**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene
FY 2023-2024 Executive Budget Proposal Testimony
February 16, 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Weinstein, Senator Fernandez, and Assembly Member Steck. My name is Dr. Chinazo Cunningham, and I am the Commissioner of the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).

Thank you for the opportunity to present Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Executive Budget as it pertains to OASAS. First, however, I would like to update you regarding some important work from this past year.

As you are aware, the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board was fully constituted and met ten times in 2022, culminating with a report of recommendations submitted on November 1st of 2022. Not only did we receive input from members, but at every meeting we also heard from individuals in recovery, family members who are supporting loved ones or who have tragically lost loved ones, providers, advocates, and other stakeholders. I want to acknowledge the Board for its dedicated efforts and commend everyone who took the time to share their story or experience at a meeting. Their voices are critical to the very careful consideration we are giving to settlement fund allocations and highlight why we do this important work each day.

Since receiving the Board's report, OASAS has been working to make Opioid Settlement Funds available that align with recommendations. We have started with Harm Reduction initiatives, the first identified recommendation of the Board, and a top priority of OASAS. To date, OASAS has made funding available to support low threshold buprenorphine access, to expand integrated outpatient services that includes methadone treatment, and to ensure that individuals and providers can access naloxone and fentanyl test strips.

The Executive Budget proposal includes appropriation of Opioid Settlement Funds to be made available based on the Board's identified priorities: harm reduction, treatment, investments across the continuum of care, priority populations, housing, recovery, prevention, transportation, public awareness, and research. We have made \$120 Million available. \$64 Million is funding made available to municipalities and \$56 Million is in support of the Opioid Settlement Fund Board's priority initiatives. An additional \$11 Million will be made available before the end of February.

Looking ahead, Governor Hochul has proposed a budget that will provide OASAS the resources needed to maintain a full continuum of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services. The proposed OASAS budget appropriates more than \$1.2 Billion, including nearly \$175 Million for State Operations, over \$968 Million for Aid to Localities, and \$92 Million for Capital projects.

The budget also continues Opioid Stewardship funds, which will allow OASAS to expand harm reduction services and provide financial assistance to help ensure individuals can access treatment and medication.

Workforce remains a major issue for the OASAS system of care; therefore, the Executive Budget includes recruitment and retention support such as a 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment for not-for-profit providers and the minimum wage increase for funded providers. In addition, the budget continues the healthcare and mental hygiene worker bonus program.

Close collaboration to appropriately treat individuals with co-occurring substance use and mental health conditions is a priority for OASAS and the Office of Mental Health (OMH). The

budget also promotes these critical efforts by tripling the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs). CCBHCs provide coordinated services to address substance use and/or mental health. CCBHCs have an enhanced rate to provide an array of comprehensive services to better serve patients who may have more complex needs.

OASAS and OMH are also continuing to collaborate on the rollout of crisis stabilization centers. Crisis Stabilization Centers are designed to provide support, assistance, and urgent access to care. These centers serve individuals experiencing a crisis situation related to substance use and/or a mental health condition. They are the manifestation of no wrong door.

Importantly, the Governor's budget will allow OASAS to address service gaps through the development and expansion of services, including non-traditional treatment modalities. These initiatives include funding additional mobile treatment units and mobile medication units, the expansion of telehealth technology, and co-location of opioid treatment services that provide methadone treatment within existing outpatient providers.

In addition, OASAS is committed to expanding its reach to individuals who have not previously been engaged in services. Street Level Outreach Teams, Outreach and Engagement Services, Shelter In-reach Programs, ensuring providers have access to naloxone and fentanyl test strips, and funding other Harm Reduction programming are included in these efforts.

Through revenues from casino and mobile sports betting, OASAS will be able to continue prevention efforts to inform the public about responsible gambling. This includes development of public awareness campaigns, enhancing training for clinicians, and promoting screening activities. OASAS is also developing guidance for the State Department of Education to help educate young people about the potential risks of underage gambling.

The proposed budget also includes an appropriation related to Adult Use Cannabis legalization. This funding will support public awareness campaigns and collaborations with schools and community coalitions to help identify and implement effective underage use prevention strategies.

The OASAS continuum of care includes programming and supports to help individuals achieve and maintain their personal recovery goals. Safe stable housing is a core component of recovery and reintegrating into the community. Therefore, the budget provides funding for supportive housing rental costs and to provide wraparound case management services.

Lastly, the budget proposal includes ongoing support for a five-year capital plan to ensure the health and safety of individuals and proper maintenance of facilities.

As I have outlined today, the Executive budget will allow OASAS to continue its critical work to provide access to prevention; treatment, including life-saving medication; harm reduction to keep more people alive until they are ready to be connected to additional services, and programming to help support individuals in achieving and maintaining their individual recovery goals. We appreciate your ongoing support of this critical work, and I look forward to collaborating with you to help ensure we are reaching all those in need. Thank you.