



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

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

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene
FY 2025 Executive Budget Proposal Testimony
February 13, 2024**

Good afternoon Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Weinstein, Senator Fernandez, Assembly Member Steck and distinguished members of the Legislature. 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 (FY) 2025 Executive Budget and how it supports our work at OASAS on behalf of those impacted by substance use disorder and problem gambling. First, however, I want to update you on some accomplishments from the past year.

New York has made opioid settlement funds available to localities and community-based organizations faster than any other state in the nation. The FY 2023 Enacted Budget allocated \$192.8 million in settlement funds, and OASAS has made all those funds available. Of the \$212 million from FY 2024, \$144 million in opioid settlement funds have already been made available to support prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services across the state. We have plans to make the remaining funding available in the coming months. Initiatives have been identified in alignment with the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board's recommendations, within ten key priority areas. That includes establishing integrated outpatient and opioid treatment programs, which will significantly expand access to methadone treatment; additional initiatives to expand access to medication treatment, including low-threshold buprenorphine; scholarships to support the workforce; youth prevention programs; support for recovery centers and transportation; enhanced outreach and engagement; and more.

In addition, last year OASAS launched an online ordering portal, making lifesaving harm reduction supplies available to the public, free of charge. Over the past 18 months, more than 70,000 naloxone kits, 5 million fentanyl test strips and 4 million xylazine test strips were shipped to individuals and organizations across the state. This effort joined a major statewide media campaign ("**Harm Reduction Delivered**") designed to raise awareness about addiction, describe addiction services available, and reduce stigma associated with addiction. July also saw the opening of the first **Mobile Medication Unit** in New York State. These mobile units bring a wide array of addiction services and medical care directly to underserved communities. New Yorkers can expect additional units to roll out across the state in 2024.

The FY 2025 Executive Budget will allow OASAS to continue these critical initiatives and enhance support of our provider system and the individuals they serve. Specifically, this year's budget includes more than \$46 million in Opioid Settlement Funds to support priority areas identified by the Advisory Board and targets over \$17 million for local municipalities, in addition to the over \$110 million provided to localities in the last two years.

In all, the proposed OASAS budget contains roughly \$1.2 billion—including \$171 million for State Operations, \$898 million for Aid to Localities, and \$92 million for Capital projects. It continues **Opioid Stewardship funds**, which allows OASAS to expand harm reduction services and provide financial assistance to help ensure individuals can access treatment and medication.

Workforce recruitment and retention remains a top priority across the OASAS system of care. Despite the ongoing challenges, recent historic investments into the addiction workforce helps us support and expand a skilled, compassionate network of professionals. The Executive Budget includes additional support through a 1.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)—representing three straight years of COLA increases, totaling \$76 million in the OASAS budget. This action

builds upon the \$23 million in Opioid Settlement Funds supporting workforce initiatives, including a newly announced Leadership Institute and paid internship program.

In treating individuals with **co-occurring substance use and mental health conditions**, close collaboration is a priority for OASAS and the Office of Mental Health (OMH). The budget supports ongoing efforts to triple the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics to better address individuals' complex needs—regardless of their ability to pay. OASAS and OMH will also continue the rollout of **crisis stabilization centers**—which provide support, assistance, and urgent access to care to those who desperately need it.

Since 2022, state law requires medication treatment for all substance use disorders in carceral settings. I am very proud to report that all 44 prisons and all 58 jails are implementing all forms of medication treatment for substance use disorders. The proposed budget provides funding for OASAS to expand its support for county correctional facilities to maintain and enhance their treatment programs.

State revenues from casinos and mobile sports betting will enable OASAS to continue prevention efforts related to public awareness campaigns promoting **responsible gambling**. OASAS is also developing guidance for the State Department of Education to help educate young people about the potential risks of underage gambling. Further, we established a new Problem Gambling Bureau within OASAS to develop enhanced training for clinicians; improve problem gambling screening; and collect important data that monitors gambling behaviors among adults and youth.

Regarding the legalization of **Adult Use Cannabis**, OASAS is raising awareness for its responsible use through a brand-new social media campaign and the development of a toolkit containing information about the effects of cannabis on youth. In addition, we are collecting important data from youth and young adults about their cannabis behaviors and attitudes—while also training providers on evidence-based prevention of, and treatment for, cannabis use disorders.

The OASAS **continuum of care** includes programming and supports to help individuals achieve and maintain their personal health and **recovery goals**. In the FY 2025 Executive Budget, the Governor builds on the investment made last year in recovery community centers with \$12 million from Opioid Settlement Funds, and adds an additional \$5 million to continue services that were established with federal funding that will end in October.

Lastly, the proposed budget includes **ongoing support for a 5-year capital plan** to ensure the health and safety of individuals, and proper maintenance of facilities.

As outlined today, the proposed Executive budget will allow OASAS to continue its person-centered, harm reduction, data-driven, equitable approach to service delivery that meets people where they are and ultimately saves more lives. OASAS will continue ensuring that New Yorkers have a full continuum of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery programming and services. We appreciate your ongoing support of these critical efforts, and I look forward to working with you to better serve those in need.

With that, I welcome any questions. Thank you.