



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

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

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene
FY 2027 Executive Budget Proposal Testimony
February 4, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Pretlow, Senator Fernandez, Assembly Member Steck, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

My name is Dr. Chinazo Cunningham, 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 2027 Executive Budget and to discuss how it strengthens New York's addiction services across our state.

This marks my fifth year presenting the OASAS budget. During this time, New York has navigated a global pandemic, a nationwide overdose crisis, and an evolving federal landscape that continues to shape behavioral health systems. Through it all, Governor Hochul has remained steadfast in her commitment to the people we serve. Our work reflects that commitment — one grounded in stability, innovation, and equity.

The FY 2027 Executive Budget proposes an OASAS appropriation of over \$1.3 billion, including more than \$198 million for State Operations, \$1.1 billion for Aid to Localities, and \$93 million for Capital Projects. These investments help ensure we maintain a stable, comprehensive system of care for everyone impacted by addiction.

Protecting Addiction Services Amid Federal Uncertainty

Across the nation, federal policy and funding shifts pose real challenges for states seeking to maintain addiction services. Uncertainty around Medicaid, coverage requirements, and workforce supports puts pressure on programs New Yorkers rely on.

The Executive Budget responds by reinforcing state investments and prioritizing system stability. It maintains funding across prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery—ensuring continuity of care even amid federal uncertainty.

With strategic planning and efficient use of **Opioid Settlement Fund** resources, OASAS remains focused on what matters most: saving lives, supporting families, and strengthening communities. To date, more than \$454 million in settlement funding has been made available—including existing multi-year contracts meant to ensure provider stability and sustainability. It represents one of the largest and fastest distributions in the nation. This year's budget includes nearly \$102 million for settlement-funded initiatives, including expanded low-threshold treatment models, youth prevention efforts, and recovery supports. These long-term investments help sustain essential services while building resilience across the system.

Sustaining Progress in Reducing Overdose Deaths

New York has made meaningful progress in reducing overdose deaths—a testament to our data-driven approach and the dedication of providers and community partners statewide. Since 2023, overdose deaths have dropped by over 30 percent, saving over 1,800 lives. Behind these numbers are real people. This progress reflects a coordinated approach that pairs lifesaving harm reduction strategies with expanded access to compassionate, effective treatment.

Harm Reduction Supplies: Expanding Lifesaving Access

The OASAS harm reduction portal remains a national model for public access to lifesaving supplies. More than 390,000 naloxone kits and 25 million drug testing strips have been distributed statewide—each representing a potential life saved.

Increasing Access to Medications for Addiction Treatment

Medication treatment remains among the most effective tools we have for preventing overdose deaths. The FY 2027 budget continues to support proven models that expand access to these lifesaving services.

Mobile Medication Units deliver medication and clinical services directly to people facing transportation barriers, while **outpatient programs** provide medication, counseling, and harm reduction services in one setting to help people stay engaged in care.

In addition, **medication treatment in jails and prisons** is now available in all 58 jails and 42 prisons and has reached more than 16,000 incarcerated individuals. This nation-leading effort addresses the elevated overdose risk people face during reentry.

Supporting the Addiction Workforce and Providers

A strong addiction system depends on a strong workforce. Governor Hochul's budget continues support for leadership development, scholarships, paid internships, and peer training. Roughly 3,000 individuals have already benefited from these initiatives—building long-term career pathways across the addiction system of care. The Executive Budget also includes nearly \$18 million to support our providers—including a 1.7% **Targeted Inflationary Increase** to address rising costs and enable them to offer more competitive wages and a **minimum wage increase** for the fifth straight year.

Strengthening Prevention, Recovery, and Youth-Focused Supports

Prevention remains foundational to New York's effort to address addiction. OASAS continues to expand evidence-based programs in schools and communities, strengthen early-intervention services, and promote public education campaigns that reduce risk and support healthy choices. That includes our Cannabis Prevention Toolkit, which offers practical, age-appropriate, bilingual guidance to help adults talk with young people about cannabis use and related risks.

To further reach young people, OASAS will host a **youth-led substance use prevention symposium**, empowering students to learn from their peers about the risks of substance use, strategies to support mental health, and how to access community resources. We will also launch a **youth-driven media strategy**, featuring messages developed by young people and delivered across media platforms—meeting youth where they are, in ways they can understand and trust.

For young people on a recovery journey, OASAS will create up to **15 new Youth Clubhouses**, co-located with Recovery Centers. These community-based spaces provide nonclinical supports such as life-skills training, recreation, and peer connection—helping young people build stability, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

OASAS also continues statewide anti-stigma efforts through the *Don't Know? Don't Judge* campaign, promoting appropriate language and reinforcing that substance use disorders are treatable health conditions.

Expanding Collaboration and Integrated Care

In terms of expanding collaboration and integrated care, our partnership with the Office of Mental Health (OMH) remains critical to serving individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

Over half of people receiving addiction treatment also experience a mental health condition—yet services have historically been siloed.

Governor Hochul’s budget will cut red tape by allowing clinics to provide mental health and substance use services under a **single license**. OASAS and OMH will also develop a new **Co-Occurring Capable (CoC) designation** for providers meeting the highest standards for treating complex cases—prioritizing people over diagnoses and ensuring more coordinated, effective care.

The budget also invests over \$6.4 million to increase rates for behavioral health supportive housing programs overseen by OASAS—sustaining housing for roughly 1,500 individuals annually and reducing reliance on costly emergency and inpatient care. In addition, we will collaborate on a **First Responder Behavioral Health Center of Excellence**—supported by a \$1 million investment to develop culturally appropriate, peer-led programming and supports accessible to emergency response agencies statewide.

Addressing Gambling Harms with a Comprehensive Approach

As gambling access expands, the Executive Budget advances a comprehensive strategy to prevent and treat gambling harms. This includes **integrating gambling recovery** services into Recovery Centers, creating a **Gambling Health Workforce Institute**, **expanding insurance coverage** for treatment, launching a long-term statewide study, and strengthening peer supports through specialized certifications.

OASAS continues to strengthen problem gambling and responsible gaming efforts through research, public awareness, and expanded supports. Our *Take a Pause* public awareness campaign — featured during last year’s NFL playoffs, Super Bowl, and horse racing season — encourages New Yorkers to reflect on their betting behaviors and educates youth about potential gambling harms. In addition, through our partnerships with the New York Council on Problem Gambling and the Gaming Commission, we monitor trends and enhance prevention and treatment services.

Building Community and Equity through GRACE

Despite progress, inequities remain. Communities of color continue to experience disproportionate overdose impacts, driven by stigma and barriers to culturally responsive care.

To address these gaps, Governor Hochul is launching **GRACE—Guided Recovery Action through Congregational Engagement**. This interagency initiative, led by OASAS in partnership with the Department of State’s Interfaith Advisory Council, equips faith leaders with training and tools to recognize substance use, reduce stigma, and connect individuals and families to services—strengthening trusted community pathways to recovery.

Conclusion

In closing, Governor Hochul’s budget reflects her commitment to protecting access to care, advancing equity, and strengthening recovery across New York State. Together with our partners in the Legislature, our providers, and the communities we serve, we will continue to strengthen our system that meets people where they are, honors their dignity, and offers hope for the future.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.