

February 13, 2024

**New York State Office of Mental
Health Testimony**

2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing



**Office of
Mental Health**

Good morning, I am Dr. Ann Sullivan, commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Health. Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Brouk, Gunther, and members of their respective committees, I want to thank you for the invitation to address Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2025 Proposed Budget as it relates to mental health.

I am pleased to report that the budget substantially builds on Governor Hochul's historic \$1 billion plan to develop a truly comprehensive mental health system. We enthusiastically began this transformation last year, building services to address the post-pandemic needs of our youth, widely expanding access to community services; and expanding intensive treatment and supports for the most seriously mentally ill. Our staff traveled across the state to engage our communities and inform our efforts to implement these newly funded initiatives before embarking on an ambitious schedule that will have the procurements for all funds released by the end of March. This work was approached with a particular emphasis on diversity, integrated treatment, and the importance of peers in delivering services.

As part of last year's plan, OMH added 150 new state-operated inpatient beds and partnered with community hospitals to restore nearly 500 beds taken offline during the COVID pandemic. This year's budget will build on this success by opening an additional 200 state hospital beds, with a focus on specializing them for individuals with the most complex needs; and including additional Transition to Home Units for our chronically unsheltered clients. This expansion will also provide capacity for youth with complex needs and individuals with recurring criminal justice involvement, while also including an increased forensic bed capacity.

Expanding inpatient capacity, however, is only effective if it results in individuals being successfully transitioned back to the community. This budget fosters connections between hospitals and community providers, with a focus on communication, planning, and data systems to improve patient outcomes after they leave an inpatient or ER setting. OMH will convene sub-regional working meetings to ensure that these connection efforts are focused on the unique needs of each community.

Governor Hochul's continued commitment to improving mental health also focuses on addressing three key areas: placing the spotlight on youth mental health, barriers to care caused by insurance coverage, and the needs of individuals with serious mental illness who are not effectively engaged in treatment.

Focusing on Youth Mental Health

In March 2023, Governor Hochul launched a Youth Mental Health Listening Tour to hear directly from middle and high school students about their experiences with mental health. OMH partnered with the Office of Children and Family Services to conduct additional listening sessions, which included participation from nearly 200 youth. The Governor listened when youth said they needed more services in their schools and a voice in developing those services. She listened when their families requested more intensive community treatment and inpatient access when needed, and more control over their child's access to social media.

Given this input, Governor Hochul has proposed establishing a Youth Advisory Board to ensure that the voice of youth continues to inform our work. She also pledged to provide start-up funding for any school wanting a school-based mental health clinic and has promised enhanced

reimbursement rates, while also ensuring these services are adequately reimbursed by insurance carriers. The budget proposes legislation to control the addictive algorithms aimed at youth and increase parental controls over social media access. In addition, the proposed budget will add state-operated psychiatric inpatient beds to serve children and adolescents with specialized needs.

This year's budget includes \$19.4 million in new resources that will:

- add 12 new Youth Assertive Community Treatment or 'ACT' teams, increasing the total number to 42 serving more than 1,000 youth.
- provide a 25-percent increase to Medicaid rates for partial hospitalization program reimbursement for children and develop new capacity.
- expand youth-led peer programs, including Teen Mental Health First Aid training and safe spaces using peer ambassadors to engage teens.
- expand specialized Children's Community Residences focused on youth transitioning into adulthood.

Maternal mental health initiatives will also be funded with \$1.6 million in new resources to ensure that service providers engaging pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers are equipped to provide the best care. Specialized training will be developed for 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline providers. Training for Project TEACH Maternal Mental Health will also be expanded and offered to an array of frontline practitioners. Additionally, the Office of Mental Health has been selected by SAMHSA to participate in a National Learning Collaborative on this topic.

Engaging Individuals with Mental Illness

One of the primary tenets of the mental health system is to engage individuals in treatment that supports recovery and helps them to live successfully in the community. This also helps to reduce the need for hospitalization and involvement in the criminal justice system. OMH will work intensively with hospitals and emergency rooms to implement new regulations for best practices in admission and discharge planning, including requirement that ensure individuals are not discharged without an appropriate plan and access to follow-up services. In addition, for arrested or incarcerated individuals not effectively engaged in treatment, this year's budget includes \$24.1 million to fund criminal justice system and community mental health forensic initiatives, including:

- a dedicated OMH team to work with regional field offices focused on fostering connections to services.
- mental health navigators to work in county courts with the courts, mental health coordination teams, and local providers and refer individuals to treatment and services.
- 100 new transitional housing beds for individuals with mental illness leaving the criminal justice system.
- 10 new Forensic ACT teams
- a specialized supportive housing program and a team to provide individual and staff support for individuals with a history of repeated arrests and difficulty engaging in mental health treatment.
- an expansion of Crisis Intervention Team or 'CIT' training to support better outcomes when law enforcement responds to individuals in mental health crises.

Ensuring Access to Care

All insurers must pay adequately for behavioral health services. To ensure proper access, commercial insurers will have to pay at least the Medicaid rate for OMH-licensed clinic services. In addition, recently posted regulations by the state Department of Financial Services will require a 10-day access to behavioral health appointments, accurate provider directories, and easy access to out-of-network services whenever in-network options are unavailable.

Finally, the mental health workforce is a vital component of any expansion and improvement plan. As we continue to implement and expand recruitment and retention strategies, including the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program, which this year reserves an additional 4-million-dollar investment for child serving practitioners, this year's budget also includes a 1.5 percent cost-of-living-increase, additional funding for job marketing, the creation of a job bank, a behavioral health fellowship program, and a focus on rural investments.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Executive Budget, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.