



For Immediate Release

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### **Behavioral Health Advocates Raise Grave Concerns on Proposed Mental Health & Substance Use Cuts in SFY 2021-22 Budget Citing Sustainability Challenges & Increased Costs Related to Pandemic**

With escalating rates of mental health issues, overdose, addiction and suicide since the onset of COVID-19, behavioral health advocates whose member agencies serve more than one million adults and children statewide are expressing their concern today at the Joint Legislative Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing regarding the Executive’s proposed cuts to services in the SFY 2021-22 budget. Mental health and substance use providers, who were already struggling with sustainability issues, have had 20% of their reimbursement for certain programs and services withheld since July 2020, and are facing an ongoing 5% cut proposed by the Governor. Advocates question the rationale of these cuts as increased revenue to the State through channels such as the approximate newly received \$2 billion from the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, Opioid Settlement Funding and other relief and tax revenue opportunities continue to surface.

A statewide impact survey revealed the precarious financial condition of behavioral health agencies, with less than adequate cash on hand and increased COVID -19 related expenses for providers who have played a vital role since the onset of the pandemic.

- 25% of the respondents have one month or less of cash on hand, 45% have two months or less of cash on hand and 65% have three months or less of cash on hand; and
- On average, mental health and substance use agencies reported losing nearly one half million in revenue since the pandemic; and
- On average, providers had increased expenses of nearly \$300,000 for the additional purchase of PPE, air filtration and other supplies to increase the safety of the staff and individuals served during COVID-19.

This statewide impact is during a time when the upward trajectory of behavioral health issues are at an all-time high.

- According to a recent CDC study, over one third of New Yorkers experienced depression or anxiety from April-July 2020. Across the US, 13 % of individuals started or increased substance use, and 11 % stated they had considered suicide in the last 30 days.
- Drug deaths have risen an average of 13% this year compared to last year, according to mortality data from local and state governments collected by The New York Times.

“Recovery from COVID-19 is impossible without addressing mental health,” says Wendy Burch, Executive Director, NAMI-NYS adding, “The individuals and families NAMI-NYS represents were already struggling from the events of 2020 and now their anxiety is increased as they worry if their services will still be available to them and their loved ones.”

"The survey speaks volumes about the impact of COVID to the behavioral health community and those we serve. Continued cuts to our community will result in less people getting vital services and increases in hospitalizations, homelessness and incarceration. Investments in our community sector save lives and saves taxpayer dollars. It's a win-win for all New Yorkers" - Glenn Liebman, CEO, MHANYS.

"Community-based mental health and substance use disorder/addiction agencies have been struggling for years to address increasing rates of overdose and suicide in communities across New York. Given the devastation caused by COVID-19 and the financial cliff we were already hanging by, we simply cannot sustain a reduction in financial support for these programs. We know New York is in the midst of a severe financial crisis and we are giving the state everything we have. But these organizations must be held harmless from any and all reductions. This is the only way we can make payroll, retain valued staff, and continue to provide access to care for any New York in need of services." Lauri Cole, Executive Director, NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.

"Well before COVID-19, New York families struggled with alarming increases in mental health emergencies among young people. From 2009 to 2017, reported "suicide attempts by students increased by over 30%, and for years has been the second-leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 19 and the third-leading cause among kids aged 9 to 14. Now, more than 400,000 children have lost parents to COVID while 325,000 children have entered poverty. To not invest boldly in behavioral health services during this crisis is unconscionable, but to cut these services is unforgivable. " - Paige Pierce, CEO. Families Together in New York State.

"It is vital that the Senate and Assembly one-house budgets include funding to offset cuts to substance use and mental health services, strengthen our depleted workforce, and support a full continuum of services to adequately address escalating addiction and mental health issues," said John Coppola, Executive Director of the NY Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP).

"With COVID and a racial reckoning affecting historically underserved communities, demand for behavioral health is skyrocketing. And yet, one quarter of providers can barely make payroll, showing the behavioral health system is at a breaking point. Now is the time to invest in mental health and substance use services, or New Yorkers will suffer the consequences for decades to come," said Amy Dorin, President and CEO, The Coalition for Behavioral Health.

"For far too long, community-based mental health agencies have struggled to keep up with ever growing needs for their services amidst ever-rising operating costs and stagnant funding," said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. "In the wake of COVID-19, a mental health pandemic is emerging that is expected to overwhelm the capacity of these programs, as the profound impact of social isolation and increased rates of depression, poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, suicide and overdoses are rising around us, most notably affecting low income individuals with disabilities."

"We cannot let COVID- 19 and fiscal stress undermine the critical mental health and substance abuse network and system across NYS. The results speaks volumes about the vital and immediate needs of all New Yorkers. We need swift action" - William Gettman CEO, Northern Rivers Family of Services.

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