



Tribute to heroes

*Executive Deputy Commissioner **Moira Tashjian** and OMH Commissioner **Dr. Ann Sullivan** (first row, second and fourth from the left) taking part in a ceremony to honor the staff of **Buffalo Psychiatric Center**, who stayed on-site and worked tirelessly to care for clients and keep the center operating during the blizzard that paralyzed the city from December 23 to 26.*

Strengthening New York's mental health system:

An investment in hope, recovery, and resilience

In her 2023 State of the State address, **Governor Kathy Hochul** announced a bold, comprehensive plan for New York's continuum of mental health care to better address the needs of individuals suffering with mental illness throughout the state.

The multi-year plan includes increasing operational capacity by 1,000 beds for inpatient psychiatric treatment, creating 3,500 units of housing to serve New Yorkers with mental illness, increasing insurance coverage for mental health services, dramatically expanding outpatient services, and creating systemic accountability for hospital admissions and discharges. These proposals, over time, will reflect more than \$1 billion in investment.

"When it comes to protecting New Yorkers' well-being, strengthening our mental health care system is essential and long overdue," Governor Hochul said. "We have underinvested in mental health care for so long, and allowed the situation to become so dire, that it has become a public safety crisis, as well. This proposal marks a monumental shift to make sure no one falls through the cracks and to finally and fully meet the mental health needs of all New Yorkers."

This plan will realign the state's approach toward mental health with a comprehensive package of investments and policy changes aimed at transforming all parts of the mental health care continuum - from prevention to treatment to recovery. This includes:

Increasing operational capacity for inpatient psychiatric treatment by 1,000 beds

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the state allowed hospitals to make operational decisions that resulted in taking inpatient psychiatric beds offline, even while the operating certificate for the beds remained in place. Governor Hochul's plan will direct Article 28 community hospitals to immediately bring 850 currently offline inpatient psychiatric beds online.

New legislation will allow OMH to fine Article 28 community hospitals up to \$2,000 per violation per day for failing to comply with the number of psychiatric beds outlined in their operating certificate. The state will allocate \$18 million capital and \$30 million operating funding to open 150 new adult beds in state-operated psychiatric hospitals, including 100 in New York City alone, which are in addition to the 50 beds that the Governor announced last November.

Creating 3,500 new housing units for individuals with mental illness

Investing \$890 million in capital and \$120 million in operating funding for 3,500 new residential units serving people with mental illness:

- **500 community residence**, single-room occupancy units to provide housing and intensive services to individuals with serious mental illness and at the highest risk of homelessness.
- **900 transitional stepdown units** to help individuals transitioning to community-based living.
- **600 licensed apartment units** to serve individuals requiring an intermediate level of services to be able to live in the community.
- **1,500 supportive housing units** serving individuals with serious mental illness, split between scattered-site rental units that can be opened quickly and new construction or renovated facilities completed over the next five years.
- **60 community step-down housing units** in New York City, funded by \$25 million in capital and \$7.3 million in operating costs.



Commissioner Sullivan and the Governor discussing the mental health program budget.

Improving admissions and discharge planning and establish systemic accountability

Governor Hochul is proposing a combination of policy changes and investments to create systemic accountability for admissions and discharges, requiring:

- Hospitals to responsibly admit patients in need of care, with new comprehensive standards for evaluation and increased state-level oversight to ensure new protocols are being used effectively.
- Emergency departments and inpatient providers to discharge high-risk, high-need individuals into immediately available wraparound services.
- Outpatient programs to provide immediate and ongoing appointments for high-risk individuals during the discharge process.

The plan also calls for investing \$28 million to create 50 new **Critical Time Intervention** teams to provide wrap-around services for discharged patients - from housing to job supports.

Dramatically expanding outpatient services: The Governor's plan will substantially expand a wide range of outpatient services to expand mental health care access, reduce wait times, and ensure appropriate levels of care, dedicating \$60 million in capital and \$121.6 million operating funding to add:

- **12 comprehensive psychiatric emergency programs**, providing hospital-level crisis care throughout New York State.
- **42 Assertive Community Treatment teams** to provide mobile, high-intensity services to the most at-risk, with 22 new teams in New York City and 20 in the rest of the state.
- **26 Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics** to provide walk-in, immediate integrated behavioral health care, providing mental health and substance use disorder services for people of all ages and insurance status, supplemented by an indigent care pool to ensure access regardless of one's ability to pay. This will triple the number of CHBCs in the state from 13 to 39, serving approximately 200,000 people.

- **Eight Safe Options Support teams** to provide outreach and connection to services for homeless populations with mental illness and substance use disorders, with five new teams in New York City and three in the rest of the state.

- **20 expanded-capacity Article 31 mental health clinics** providing care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, which often serve as a front-door mental health service in communities across the state

- **Health Home Plus care management** to provide assistance as individuals with mental illness seek to access the services they need, hiring dozens of new care managers.

- Expanding the **Intensive and Sustained Engagement Treatment Investment program**, investing \$2.8 million to offer peer-based outreach and engagement for adults with serious mental illness.
- Investing \$3.3 million in the **Individual Placement and Supports program** to expand the use of this evidence-based model of supported employment for adults with mental illness.

Expanding insurance coverage for mental health services: The plan will close critical gaps in insurance coverage for mental health services. This includes prohibiting insurance companies from denying access to medically necessary, high-need, acute and crisis mental health services for adults and children, expanding commercial and Medicaid coverage of mental health services.

The plan will also set appointment availability and geographic accessibility standards for behavioral health services to ensure New Yorkers have access to treatment from in-network providers and ensure access to behavioral health services delivered in-person or via telehealth.

Expanding mental health services for school-aged children

- Governor Hochul is proposing \$20 million to expand access to mental health services in schools by increasing Medicaid payment rates for school-based satellite clinics and investing \$10 million in school-based wraparound services.
- The Governor will introduce legislation requiring commercial insurance providers to pay for school-based services at a level equal to the higher paying Medicaid rate, to ensure timely access. The plan also outlines an annual investment to provide the start-up funding necessary to get new and expanded school services in operation quickly.
- The plan also includes an additional \$12 million to expand the HealthySteps program and home-based crisis intervention teams, and \$10 million in grants to suicide prevention programs targeting high-risk youth.

Services and personnel

Governor Hochul's plan provides an additional \$60 million to support the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** - an increase of \$25 million from the prior budget. To support the workforce, the plan provides \$5 million for the OMH Community Mental Health Loan Repayment Program, expanding the eligibility for the program to include licensed mental health professionals and building on the \$9 million included for psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners when the program was launched in 2023.

The Governor will introduce legislation to create a **Qualified Mental Health Associate** credential, which will provide a career ladder and additional training for mental health paraprofessionals, allowing them to work more independently and improve quality and access to care in OMH funded and licensed settings.

In addition, Governor Hochul has proposed 2.5 percent cost of living adjustment, marking the second year she has included a COLA in her budget and demonstrating her commitment to increase support for these critical programs and workers.



Commissioner Sullivan discussing mental health priorities before a State Legislative committee.

Subway safety: Significant progress addressing mental health needs

New data that shows that significant progress is being made on subway and transit public safety initiatives introduced last year.



The Governor, accompanied by Commissioner Sullivan, announced at a news conference (photo above) that major subway crime has declined 16 percent – compared to same period the year before – since the state’s Cops, Cameras and Care Initiative began in October 2022. This is the second-lowest level of transit crime in any January since 1993. The initiative has helped to connect 650 unhoused New Yorkers connected with critical intervention services.

In October, Governor Kathy Hochul and **New York City Mayor Eric Adams** announced that the NYPD and the MTAPD would increase officer presence on platforms while expanding OMH’s capacity to support unhoused individuals who are sheltering in the subway system and those who are suffering from severe mental illness.

Collaboration: OMH partnerships will improve services for people with dual diagnoses

OMH is partnering with New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC), the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and the University of Rochester Medical Center to provide \$3 million in grants for two five-year pilot projects to address the unique and co-existing needs of people with developmental disabilities experiencing mental health challenges.

“Children and youth with both developmental and behavioral health needs require specialized care and services that can be difficult to access,” said Commissioner Sullivan. “Through this partnership, we will expand access and help provide more young people who are dually diagnosed with appropriate care in the least restrictive setting possible.”

The two DDPC funded grants will provide medical staff, families, and people with developmental disabilities more resources and tools to respond in a mental health crisis. One pilot program will provide \$1.5 five years to the University of Rochester Medical Center, to the Division of Transitional Care Medicine and the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, to develop training for acute care nurses to understand health care needs and possible communication barriers, and to better respond to people who are dually diagnosed and in crisis.

Nurse training will begin at the University of Rochester Medical Center and are expected to expand to a minimum of 10 additional hospitals, and will include classroom sessions, simulations and in-person pairing with people with developmental disabilities and family members.



Commissioner Sullivan addressing the Summit on Collaborating to Improve the Lives of People with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and Co-existing Mental Health Conditions. The summit brought together leaders and advocates in both fields to improve I/DD and mental health care and will be part of an ongoing dialogue to produce policy changes and guidance.

The DDPC is also partnering with OMH and OPWDD to create two Home Based Crisis Intervention Teams to respond specifically to youth with developmental disabilities living at home and experiencing a mental health crisis.

OMH is providing \$6.8 million over five years to fund the teams, DDPC is investing \$1.5 million to support the specialized staffing in the pilot period, and OPWDD is providing training and technical assistance. The teams will deliver specialized support to young people with developmental disabilities at risk of being placed in a more restrictive setting because of their mental health challenges.

Opioid settlement: Fund's first grants to be awarded to treatment programs

The first grants from New York State's Opioid Settlement Fund will help develop up to 15 programs offering this safe, effective treatment for opioid use disorder. Grants of up to \$7.5 million will go to state-certified providers and other treatment programs to establish low threshold buprenorphine services to address opioid addiction and save lives.



Administered by the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), the grants will provide up to \$500,000 for 15 programs statewide to offer low-threshold buprenorphine services. OASAS-certified treatment providers, clinics certified by OMH, hospitals, syringe services programs, and harm-reduction programs are eligible to apply for the funding.

While buprenorphine is a safe and effective way to treat opioid use disorder, many providers have rigid requirements for entering and continuing treatment, which ultimately limits the number of individuals who receive this medication. Comprehensive low-threshold services will help to address this issue by allowing for same-day, immediate buprenorphine treatment and care management services.

New York State received more than \$2 billion through various settlement agreements with opioid manufacturers. A portion of these settlements will go directly to municipalities, with the remainder being deposited into a dedicated fund to support prevention, treatment, recovery, harm reduction, and education efforts to address the ongoing opioid epidemic.

The same legislation that established the dedicated fund also created the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board, which is tasked with making recommendations on how settlement dollars should be allocated to best serve those in need. Board members issued their first recommendations on November 1, 2022, identifying the expansion of harm-reduction services as a priority.

New York continued to grapple with opioid-related deaths in 2021, with fentanyl now involved in most overdose deaths statewide, according to a report by the state Department of Health. Other key findings include:

- 4,766 overdose deaths involving opioids, a 14-percent increase over the prior year.
- 10,430 outpatient emergency department visits due to opioid overdoses, a 12.6-percent increase over the prior year.
- 19,139 instances of naloxone being administered by Emergency Medical Services, an 11.8-percent increase over the prior year.

OASAS oversees one of the nation's largest substance-use disorder systems of care with approximately 1,700 prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery programs serving over 680,000 individuals per year.

As the state's opioid treatment authority, OASAS coordinates state-federal relations in addiction services and is also responsible for monitoring the use of settlement funds to ensure that the funds appropriated in the budget are expended for their designated purpose.

Likewise, the Department of Health continues to advance a variety of harm reduction initiatives to reduce the burden of opioid abuse and dependency statewide. This includes New York MATTERS, an electronic referral system for connecting persons with opioid use disorder to local treatment and harm reduction services; the Local Health Department Initiative, providing funding to 24 county health departments with the highest overdose rates outside of New York City to bolster primary care, corrections, harm reduction, emergency departments, public safety; and more than 900 registered opioid overdose-prevention programs.

Housing:

Addressing residential mental health needs

Affordable housing is essential to ensuring that all New Yorkers have a safe and stable place to call home. OMH continues to work with local and state partners to make affordable housing available in communities throughout the state. Here are some of the projects that have recently been completed or broken ground.

Bedford Green House II, the Bronx

Construction began this fall in Fordham Heights on Bedford Green House II, creating 46 affordable apartments for families and seniors and 70 supportive apartments for people experiencing homelessness. The development will also house a 2,300-square-foot medical clinic offering services to residents and the surrounding community.



Bedford Green House II will consist of a newly constructed seventeen-story building located at 2880 Jerome Avenue. All apartments will be affordable to households with incomes at or below 60 percent of the area median income. Residents of the supportive units will have access to rental subsidies funded through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), which is administered by OMH. Project Renewal, Inc. is the project's developer as well as the service provider. Services will include coordination of medical services, occupational therapy, crisis management, and assistance with access to public benefits.

Fifty-five apartments will be set aside for seniors aged 62 or older through New York City's Zoning for Quality and Affordability amendment and Affordable Independent Residences for Seniors provision. Of these 55 apartments, 14 will house seniors who will also benefit from the supportive services through ESSHI.

Financing is through OMH, New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, New York City Council, and the Office of the Bronx Borough President.

Tremont Residences, the Bronx

Tremont Residences, an affordable housing development in the West Farms area of the Bronx, was completed in October. The 119-apartment development offers onsite services for people experiencing homelessness who need support to live independently. Tremont Residences has 95 studio, 14 one-bedroom, and 10 two-bedroom apartments that are affordable to households with incomes between 30 and 60 percent of the Area Median Income.



Developers Camber Property Group and Slate Property Group, partnered with Westhab Inc., to provide on-site support services for 71 households funded through ESSHI. Services include case management, job readiness, placement, retention, referrals, and mental health services. Rental subsidies for the units are also included under the ESSHI funding.

A vacant single-story retail building was demolished to make way for the 11-story new building. The development's amenities include a social services office suite for residents, landscaped outdoor recreational space, full-time security, a 1,300-square-foot community room, fitness center, computer lab, reading lounge, bike storage, and laundry rooms on each floor. OMH and HCR provided funding.

New projects recently announced

In January, the Governor announced more than \$390 million has been awarded through bonds and subsidies to create or preserve more than 1,600 affordable, sustainable, and supportive homes across the state. When coupled with additional private funding and resources, the ten projects receiving funding are expected to create more than \$600 million in overall investment that will assist local economic development efforts and advance the state's commitment to expanding the supply of safe, secure, and healthy housing opportunities for individuals and families across the state.



Gov. Hochul discussed housing initiatives during the State of the State address.

Downstate awards:

- **Bedford Green House Phase II in the Bronx.** The 17-story building will offer 116 affordable apartments with 70 reserved for individuals experiencing homelessness. These residents will have rental subsidies and services funded through an ESSHI award. The remaining 46 apartments will be for families and seniors aged 62 or older. The development will feature a 2,300-square-foot medical clinic to serve residents and the surrounding community.
- **Shepherd Glenmore in Brooklyn.** The seven-story building will offer 123 affordable homes with 74 apartments reserved for individuals experiencing homelessness due to criminal-justice involvement, substance-use disorders, or mental illness. Services and rental subsidies will be funded through ESSHI. Eight additional apartments will be reserved for seniors. The energy-efficient building will have a solar array mounted to the roof to generate on-site electricity.
- **Crotona Belmont Senior Housing in the Bronx.** The ten-story building will include 134 affordable apartments for seniors 62 and older. There are 41 apartments reserved for formerly homeless seniors who will have supportive services funded by a grant from the New York City Human Resources Administration. All households will receive rental assistance through Section 8 Project Based Vouchers administered by the New York City Housing Authority.
- **River View Towers in Manhattan.** The project will fund capital improvements at this 25-story state-supervised Mitchell-Lama cooperative with 385 affordable homes. Originally constructed in 1964, the building needs improvements such as roof replacement and asbestos abatement, replacement of boilers and associated piping, new windows and balcony doors, and masonry repairs. The upgrades are expected to improve energy efficiency and reduce building fuel usage by 14 percent. The owner is River Towers, Inc.

Upstate awards:

- **Tait Lane Reserve in Saratoga Springs.** The project will create 202 affordable apartments across a combination of townhome and three-story walk-up buildings. There will be ten apartments reserved for individuals experiencing homelessness funded through ESSHI. This project was awarded \$148,200 from NYSERDA's Low-rise Residential New Construction program. The development is the result of a rezoning to allow for more residential buildings in this high-opportunity area.
- **Taylor I Apartments in Troy.** Two vacant and obsolete Troy Housing Authority properties will be demolished and replaced with a newly constructed seven-story building containing 141 apartments and over 2,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space. All apartments will be covered by Project-Based Section 8 vouchers issued by the Troy Housing Authority. Taylor I is a priority project for the city's Downtown Revitalization Initiative plan designed to renovate the riverfront area in South Central Troy.
- **Stuyvesant Apartments in Kingston.** The project involves the rehabilitation of a 120-apartment housing development affiliated with the Kingston Housing Authority. Originally constructed in 1972 under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 236 program, the building will undergo extensive repairs and replacement of systems to extend the useful life of the building, improve safety and quality of life for residents, and increase energy efficiency.

- **Marketplace Senior Apartments in Henrietta.** The four-story building will feature 150 affordable apartments with 45 homes reserved for residents aged 55 and older who need supportive services to live independently. On-site services will be funded through ESSHI. The highly energy-efficient design is supported by an \$825,000 award from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Clean Energy Initiative.
- **Magnolia Housing Scattered Site project in Erie and Niagara Counties.** The project will support the preservation of affordability and moderate rehabilitation at four existing state-funded affordable housing developments with a total of 96 apartments. The buildings include Austin Manor and Gratwick Manor, both in Buffalo; Haskell Stovroff in Cheektowaga; and Elizabeth Harvey in North Tonawanda. Upgrades are expected to increase energy efficiency by at least 20 percent through the installation of new appliances, windows, LED lighting, HVAC systems, and water heaters.
- **Pan American Square in Buffalo.** The development will consist of three four-story buildings constructed on vacant land with a total of 150 homes. Eighty apartments will be reserved for individuals with mental illness and will be supported by the OMH's Community Residence Single Room Occupancy program. An additional 20 homes will be set aside for adults experiencing homelessness and funded through ESSHI. The buildings are designed to meet high standards of sustainability and received a \$1.9 million award through the New York State Energy Research and Development Agency's Clean Energy Initiative.

Research:

Racial and ethnic disparities in health care access and utilization

A study by OMH determined that implementation of the Health and Recovery Plan (HARP) contributed to reductions in racial and ethnic disparities in access and utilization among Medicaid recipients. HARP is a statewide integrated special needs program for individuals with serious mental illness.



The study noted that a growing body of research shows that the variations in health outcomes and health disparities experienced by racial and ethnic minority populations cannot be explained by individual-level factors alone. There are social, economic, political, and environmental determinants that contribute disparately to the health of minority populations.

Interpersonal factors, key determinants such as quality education, safe and affordable housing, food security, safe and clean neighborhoods, and freedom from discrimination, and systemic biases in policies and practices, such as structural and institutional racism, adversely affect marginalized or excluded populations and produce health inequity. The fundamental driving force underneath the multiple determinants systemic biases in policies and practices create health inequities that are rooted in racism and discrimination.

Notable among those enrolled in the special needs plan were the declining of Black-White disparities in emergency room visits and inpatient stays, but the disparity in non-behavioral health clinic visits remains. Also, the decline of Hispanic-White disparities in ER, inpatient, and clinic use were more evident for HARP-enrolled patients. Health equity policies are needed in the delivery of care to linguistically and culturally disadvantaged Medicaid beneficiaries.

The research identified four key steps to advancing health equity:

- Identify important stakeholders related to equity and establish roles for partners throughout the entire implementation process.
- Include equity-related considerations when deciding which intervention(s) to implement and/or de-implement.
- Evaluate the performance gap related to the intervention or program of interest in vulnerable populations.
- Identify and prioritize barriers faced by vulnerable populations, including structural racism and power dynamics.

Ombudsman:

Providing help on insurance rights issues

A total of \$320,000 is going to four community-based organizations to help educate the public on their rights and access to insurance coverage for behavioral health issues, under a program organized by OMH and OASAS.

The awards were issued through the Community Health Access to Addiction and Mental Healthcare Project (CHAMP), which was established in the 2018-19 New York State Budget to increase access to substance use and mental health care by assisting individuals in maximizing use of insurance benefits. Receiving awards of up to \$80,000 each were:

- AIM Independence in the Southern Tier.
- Andreus in Westchester County.
- Phoenix House in New York City.
- Second Chance Opportunities in the Capital District.

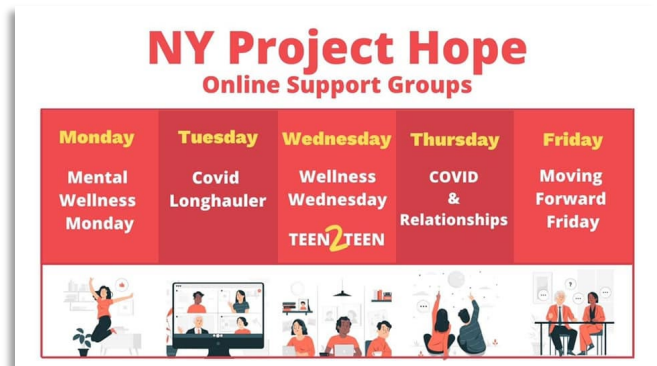
Providers will use the funding to help to raise awareness about the CHAMP program, advise clients how to secure payment and authorization from a health insurance plan, and provide information about mental health and substance use disorder parity laws and other regulations that protect consumers' rights.

NY Project Hope: Vital program was up to the task

With NY Project Hope now closed, OMH wants to thank all who worked to make the program a great success which has helped more than two million of New Yorkers receive support and services during the last two very difficult years. Your commitment is greatly appreciated and has been applauded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) which provided funding for NY Project Hope.

NY Project Hope was initiated during a time of great uncertainty and fear. News reports highlighted overcrowded hospitals, business closures and the dangers COVID posed to ourselves and our families. Stress, anxiety, and depression were common reactions to the reality of the times. NY Project Hope served nearly 490,000 group counseling participants statewide. More than 100,000 calls were made to the Emotional Support Helpline, which initiated 390 online Wellness groups. NY Project Hope's website had more than 7.7 million visits, and we had nearly 4 million engagements on social media.

But these numbers were not just "clicks" and "visits." They represented people – New Yorkers – who needed help during an extremely difficult time in our state's history. Everyone who made NY Project Hope a success rose to the challenge and helped the citizens of our state through the crisis.



One of the numerous, valuable programs that were offered through NY Project Hope.