

Suicide prevention: Conference seeks to change the conversation

More than 350 New Yorkers with a stake in supporting mental health, including high school students, took part in the 2023 New York State Suicide Prevention Conference in Albany, hosted by OMH's Suicide Prevention Center (SPCNY). This year's conference was titled: "Changing the Conversation on Youth Mental Health - From Crisis to Prevention."

"The goal of the conference was to change the way we talk about mental health – in our schools, in our families, in the workplace, and in our communities," said **Jay Carruthers, MD**, SPCNY director.

The **Fred Meservey** Lifetime Achievement Award was also presented at this year's conference. This award is New York State's highest honor in the field of suicide prevention - bestowed upon a New Yorker who has demonstrated extraordinary leadership and contributions.

This year's awardee was longtime SPCNY staff member **Pat Breux** (at center in the photo at right with OMH Commissioner **Ann Sullivan, MD**, and **Tricia Hartnett**, OMH Deputy Director Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives) who retired in 2022.

Pat began her career in suicide prevention in 2010, as a founding member of SPCNY. Throughout her career, she partnered with school districts to identify what suicide prevention resources were already in place and what could be improved upon.

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SPCNY Director **Jay Carruthers, MD**.



OMH welcomes Dr. Ruth!

Iconic talk show host **Dr. Ruth Westheimer** has been appointed by Governor **Kathy Hochul** as New York State's Honorary Ambassador to Loneliness, the first such title in the nation. Dr. Ruth pledged to help New Yorkers of all ages address the growing issue of social isolation.

More than a third of adults 45 or older experience loneliness, with nearly a quarter of adults 65 or older considered socially isolated, according to a [recent study](#).

"I am deeply honored," Dr. Ruth said. "I promised the Governor that I will work day-and-night to help New Yorkers feel less lonely!"

Social isolation significantly increased the risk of premature death from all causes, the study found, rivaling the risk posed by other detrimental health conditions or behaviors - including smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.

Social isolation has been associated with an approximately 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia, while poor social relationships – characterized by social isolation or loneliness – have been associated with a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease and a 32 percent increased risk of stroke.

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This process was iteratively refined and systematized into an all-day planning session with school districts and their community partners in the Creating Suicide Safety in Schools (CS3) training program. In 2022, this was acknowledged by the CDC as being a promising best practice in its *Resources to Action for Suicide Prevention* report.

Pat also developed and implemented a vision for a trainer network in New York State to expand this work. The network is an investment in building capacity and sustainability for suicide safety in schools.

“We are so grateful to the distinguished guest speakers and panelists who made this conference so unique and valuable,” Carruthers said. “I’m very confident that every attendee departed the conference with more knowledge on the current youth mental health crisis and what we can all do to jump-start activities across New York community coalitions that are aimed at getting us on a prevention track for youth mental wellness.”

Supporting suicide prevention

New York State is making \$13.5 million available to support suicide-prevention programs. A total of \$10 million will go over five years to expand the collaborative care model – a holistic team-based approach to treating mental health conditions – at 15 youth-serving primary care practices, with a specific focus on advancing health equity.

Funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the initiative will address mental and behavioral health problems among youth with co-occurring serious emotional disturbance and physical health conditions or chronic disease, with the goal of ensuring equitable access to underserved populations.

An additional \$3.5-million federal grant over five years will go toward expanding the Zero Suicide model – a systemic approach toward integrating suicide prevention – among 13 Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics. The state anticipates helping roughly 50,000 individuals over the course of the grant.



Presenters and activities at the conference.

Expanding outreach: Governor’s initiatives focus on youth and communities

More than \$5.1 million has been awarded to support 137 school-based mental health clinic satellites throughout New York State, including 82 at high-needs schools. Announced by Governor Hochul this week.

“In the age of aggressive social media culture, it is clear young people are facing insidious, and increasingly complex challenges to their mental and emotional wellness,” she said. “By expanding mental health clinics in school-based settings, we can help engage young people of all ages in a familiar and stigma-free environment through conversations led by licensed experts.”

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Governor Hochul announced the awards during a visit to the Leadership and Public Service High School in Tribeca, where she met with students to discuss the mental health challenges they face along with their peers. New York Foundling will establish a satellite clinic at the school using a \$45,000 award through the initiative.

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OMH-licensed providers were awarded \$25,000 per-clinic to establish services at 137 schools throughout the state. The satellite clinics operate at each school's main location and will be staffed by mental health practitioners regularly throughout the academic week.

Through establishing a physical space within a school building, An additional \$20,000 per-school was awarded to those providers establishing services at high-needs schools, where more than 50 percent of the students are classified as coming from economically disadvantaged households.

In total, \$1.4 million in startup funding was provided for clinics at 55 schools, with an additional \$3.7 million awarded to clinics at 82 schools located within high-needs districts. Once these are established, there will be roughly 1,200 school-based clinics throughout New York State.

A comprehensive plan

Governor Hochul has made youth mental health a focus of her administration and included it as an important component of her landmark \$1-billion plan to strengthen New York State's mental healthcare system. In the 2024 fiscal year budget adopted in May, she secured \$30 million to expand mental health services for school-aged children throughout the state, including \$20 million for school-based mental health services and \$10 million to implement wraparound services training.

Governor Hochul's plan also provided a 25-percent increase in Medicaid rates for full-day school-based programs for young people with significant mental health challenges and for school-based mental health services provided by Article 31 licensed clinics serving children in pre-K, elementary, and secondary schools. This additional funding will improve access to services and ensure close coordination between the clinics, schools, and families.

The Governor also increased insurance reimbursement rates for school-based mental health services, ensuring the care provided by school-based mental health clinic satellites will be covered by commercial insurance plans and at the same rates as Medicaid.

Expanding access

The Governor's plan also allocates \$12 million to develop three new Intensive and Sustained Engagement Teams (INSET) to serve communities in New York City, the Hudson River region, and on Long Island. The INSET awards will enable three service providers to develop Peer-led multidisciplinary teams that will provide intensive community support services for New Yorkers with complex needs who have difficulty connecting with traditional forms of mental health care. Baltic Street AEH Inc. in New York City; Mental Health Association of Westchester; and Hands Across Long Island were each awarded \$4 million over five years to establish these teams.

The Governor's plan will more than triple the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics across the state to serve roughly 200,000 New Yorkers. Established in 2022, the clinics provide comprehensive services for behavioral health support, specifically coordinating care across behavioral, physical health, and social service systems.

An additional \$4 million will expand access to Mental Health Outpatient Treatment and Rehabilitative Services for underserved people living with mental illness and with complex healthcare needs. Funding will help licensed clinics enhance or expand existing specialized treatment programs. These programs are often the first point of access to mental health system.

Inpatient beds

New inpatient beds at state-operated facilities were added at OMH's Bronx, Buffalo, Greater Binghamton, Pilgrim Rochester, Rockland Children's, St. Lawrence, and South Beach facilities. In addition, 500 community hospital beds that were taken offline during the COVID-19 pandemic will be restored into service by the New Year.



Governor Hochul and Commissioner Sullivan meeting this fall in Grand Central Station with staff from Services for the UnderServed, which operates one of the Safe Options Support teams based in New York City to help homeless individuals find permanent housing.

CNO Conference:

Two-day event highlights the vital role of care professions in recovery



OMH's 44th annual Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) Annual Education Conference, held November 8 and 9 in Clifton Park, brought together more than 260 psychiatric nurses and mental health professionals to discuss the important role that patient-care professions will play in the expansion of mental health services in New York State.

Titled "Mental Health Nurses: Champions of High-Quality Care, Paving the Road to Recovery for All New Yorkers," the conference offered opportunities to nurses, therapy aids, Peer specialists, and clinical professionals to increase their knowledge about the most-current evidence-based, mental health and psychiatric nursing practices.

The goal is to ensure that mental health professionals have the knowledge, skills, and competence to meet current and emerging needs of the state's changing population.

Speakers from mental health care facilities, organizations, and state agencies covered a wide scope of topics, including:

- Educating patients about medication.
- Forensic population issues.
- Emotional wellbeing and resilience.
- Person-centered treatment and advocacy.
- Alzheimer's Disease care.

The conference also recognized the winners of the nursing practice and research poster awards; graduates of the Nurse Development Program; and recipients of awards for Chief Nursing Officer of the Year, Infection Control Nurse of the Year, Psychiatric Nurse of the Year, Nurses of Distinction and Excellence, and MHTA/SCTA/SHTA of the Year.



Maxine Smalling, (right) MS, BSN, RN, OMH Chief Executive Nursing Officer, served as host of the event and introduced the CNOs from each facility and staff from the OMH Office of Coordinated Nursing Services.

Commissioner Sullivan, updating attendees on Governor Hochul's landmark plan to expand the continuum of mental health care throughout the state.



Keynote speaker **Jean Watson, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN, LL (AAN)**, Distinguished Professor and Dean Emerita, University of Colorado, Denver College of Nursing Anschutz Medical Center Campus, giving a talk on "Reigniting the Heart, Soul, and Science of Nursing."



Anita Daniels, MS, RN, PMH-BC, recently retired OMH Associate Commissioner for the Division of State-Operated Children's and Adult Services, discussed the lead role nurses can play in ensuring equity in the provision of health care.



Exhibition hall



Candle-lighting ceremony

Veterans:

Dwyer Project observes its 10th year of service

The PFC **Joseph P. Dwyer** Veteran Peer Support Project – a Peer-to-Peer program to provide mental health and social support for veterans facing the challenges of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a brain injury (TBI) – has saved thousands of lives since its launch in 2012.

The project, administered OMH with collaborative support from the state Department of Veterans' Services, is named after a medic from Long Island who died by suicide after returning from the war in Iraq with PTSD and a TBI.

In November, OMH took part in a news conference at University at Albany's School of Social Welfare to mark the 10th anniversary of the program and its recent expansion into every county in New York State, made possible by funding included in the 2023 State Budget.

"The Dwyer Project models many of the core values that OMH has followed," said **Jeremy Darman**, MSW, MA, OMH Deputy Commissioner for State and Local Operations. "It uses a strengths-based approach by tapping into the expertise and wisdom of those with lived experience; cultural competence and humility; and the value of Peers in supporting recovery and reintegration after major life transitions."

Dwyer Project services are delivered exclusively by veterans, for veterans. The program creates opportunities for veterans to build community through a range of interactive resources – including recreational, artistic, social, educational, and wellness-oriented activities, among other forms of engagement.

Facilitators are trained in suicide prevention, as well as trauma-focused and Peer-based approaches. They also make referrals for those wishing to connect with a clinical provider. It takes a confidential, one-on-one, Peer-to-Peer approach that has rapidly captured the attention and support of veterans and mental health professionals statewide and across the nation.

The program has steadily demonstrated that the Peer-to-Peer model holds tremendous, untapped value as a tool for helping veterans reintegrate back into civilian life.

By offering mental health and other supports in a non-clinical environment, the Dwyer program alleviates the burden of stigma that can surround mental health care. Open to all veterans, it also fills a critical service gap for those who are not receiving Veterans Affairs assistance.

The university's School of Social Welfare has been instrumental in the program's evaluation, development, and expansion. The news conference was held in conjunction with the program's annual two-day conference.



OMH Deputy Commissioner Darman, discussing the Dwyer Project.



The late PFC Dwyer, the veteran for whom the program is named, rescuing a child in Iraq. Photo by the Army Times



*Speakers for the event included, from left: OMH Deputy Commissioner Darman; State Senator **Jacob Ashby**; State Assemblymembers **Patricia Fahy** and **Aileen Gunther**; Dwyer Coalition Facilitator **Gavin T. Walters Sr.**, MSW-USAF; School of Social Welfare Associate Professor **Eric Hardiman**; University at Albany President **Havidán Rodríguez**; and Department of Veterans' Services Deputy Commissioner **Benjamin Pomerance**.*

Transportation for Life:

Summit focuses on building coordinated approach to suicide prevention

OMH was one of the sponsors this September in the inaugural “Transportation for Life Summit”— a conference to bring together leaders in public health, transportation, education, and other fields to build a comprehensive approach to mental health awareness and suicide prevention in public spaces.

Statistically, deaths by suicide occurring in public spaces are fewer in number than those in other settings. But the public nature of suicide deaths at transportation facilities often makes them the subject of extensive media coverage, which often amplifies the impact of these tragic deaths at the community level.

Experts from multiple disciplines shared best practices and discussed ways to better respond to mental health incidents at their facilities.

For example, the Bridge Authority installed the first helpline phones on the Mid-Hudson Bridge in 1984. Thruway Authority officials noted that when planning for the replacement of the Tappan Zee Bridge a decade ago, the agency developed strategies to install climb-deterrent fencing, add safety barriers, and expand the number of emergency phones with direct access to trained crisis counselors.

Sessions at the summit covered bridge design and engineering challenges and intervention materials, such as signage, brochures, and emergency messages. Panels featured a range of experts, including state agency executives, operators of public-facing spaces, public health officials, and other policy makers. Also taking part were first responders, engineers, architects, and information technologists.

Co-host for the event, which was held at Dutchess Community College in Poughkeepsie, was the New York State Bridge Authority. Partnering were the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Bridges and Tunnels, Metro-North Railroad, and the New York State Department of Transportation, Department of Motor Vehicles, Thruway Authority, Office of General Services, and Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

“When we bring together state agencies, mental health experts, and community leaders, we can work to prevent suicide across New York and ensure services are widely available for those in need,” noted Lieutenant Governor **Antonio Delgado**. “Every agency, organization, or person has the power to make a difference and save lives.”



Commissioner Sullivan welcoming attendees.



Garra Lloyd-Lester, SPCNY Coordinator, Community and Coalition Initiatives, hosting a remote session of the summit.

Staffing the OMH information table at the summit are, from left, **Charles Anthony Rice**, Community Engagement Specialist; **Katerina Gaylord**, LMSW, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Crisis, Emergency, and Stabilization Initiatives; and **Gregory Eves**, SPCNY Communications and Marketing Coordinator.



Peers job board:

New website helps match Peers with employers

OMH is very excited to share the creation of a [new job board](#) to help mental health organizations find and recruit qualified Peer Specialists and Advocates,

Peer Specialists and Advocates have always played a vital role in mental health services and with the increased competition to hire Peers throughout the mental health system, OMH wants to make sure you have the resources you need to get the word out about openings.

If your program is looking to add a Certified or Credentialed Peer (Youth, Family and Adult), please consider listing the position with the National Association of Peer Support's job board. You can create [a free account here](#). (You may want to share this resource with your agency's human resources department.)

This project is funded by OMH and organized by the National Association of Peer Supports (N.A.P.S.). OMH recommends that you sign up for the New York Peer Workforce Advancement and Mentoring Network listserv to hear more about future projects and resources available.

Knowing the struggle

Peer support is gaining recognition in almost every sector of health care. Health researchers are continuing to build an evidence base for Peer support, providers are seeing the benefits of Peer support in their practices, and policymakers see Peer support as an effective strategy for community outreach, quality improvement, increasing access to care, and reducing disparities.

Peer Support Specialists are trained and certified professionals who help others reach their goals in recovery from mental and substance use disorders. They're highly compassionate people with personal experience in recovery and are willing to share this experience to build trust, form relationships, and give hope to others.

These individuals have overcome the same challenges as people who are currently in recovery. They know what the struggle is like. Because of their lived experience of recovery, they are better able to relate to, and understand, the thoughts and feelings of the people we serve. This helps them to build a one-to-one connection that is essential for recovery.

If you have any questions about the job board or the work N.A.P.S. will be doing in New York State, please contact Project Director **Yvette Pate** at: Yvette.Pate@peersupportworks.org.



New Job Board

Find qualified peer specialists today!

Reach New York State Certified Peer Specialists, Youth Peer Advocates, Family Peer Advocates, and more. Post your peer support job and find your next great hire!

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Visions 2023:

Annual event demonstrates the role of arts and creative self-expression in recovery

“Colors of the Imagination,” an exhibition featuring original works of art created by people with a mental health diagnosis, took place this fall at ArtsWestchester’s Shenkman Gallery in downtown White Plains.

The event is part of the annual “Visions” art show series, held by Rockland Psychiatric Center, ArtsWestchester, and the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH).

The Visions series provides an opportunity for the public to meet the artists and hear directly from them about their work. It’s designed to provide a bridge to the community and help support efforts to reduce stigma – allowing others to see that recipients are not only gifted and talented, but capable of engaging in challenging art-making experiences. Recipients develop a sense of pride, accomplishment, positive self-worth, and public acceptance.

This year, 50 artists exhibited 114 pieces of artwork, with most of the artwork for sale. Participating agencies included Rockland Psychiatric Center’s Mt. Vernon, White Plains, Yonkers, and Recovery Centers; Hope House; the Mental Health Association of Westchester’s Sterling Community Center; and New York Presbyterian Hospital - Westchester Division. Several independent artists displayed, as well.

More 80 guests attended the opening reception, including Westchester DCMH Deputy Commissioner **Joseph A. Glazer, Esq.**, and Peer Advocacy and Support Specialist **Adam Black**; who reiterated their commitment to supporting this state, county, and private partnership – noting this event helps the public recognize that recipients should not be viewed as having an illness, but as contributing to the culture of their communities. Rockland PC Director of Rehabilitation **Louis Pachlin** and Director of Community Services Dr. **Edward Herman** discussed the importance of art in recovery, acknowledging the artists’ passion and pride.

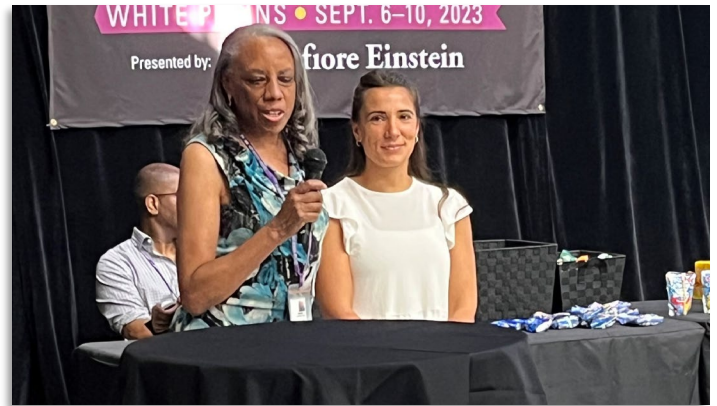
For more than 35 years, this partnership has provided art services and residencies to people with chronic mental illnesses – allowing them the opportunity to participate in art workshops and live performances. “Art activities are designed to be outside the therapeutic framework,” said ArtsWestchester CEO **Janet Langsam**. “Enabling those who participate to tap their imaginations, express their creativity, develop new skills, and more fully integrate into the community.”

Coordinating this year’s show were Rockland PC Rehabilitation Counselor **Meghan Palmiotto** and Mt. Vernon Service Center Service Director **Sharon Freeman**.

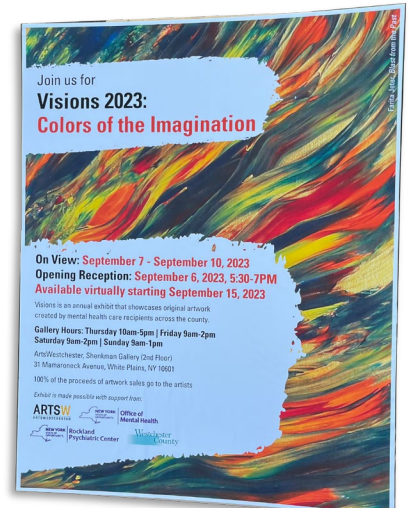
Helping to frame and transport the artwork Rockland PC staff **Marc McIntosh, James Holland, Mary Woods, Dorota Bill, Marley Skroce, Michelle Goscinsky, Jessica Warren, and Nina Stumer**; along with Rockland PC retirees **Patricia Hamill** and **Cheryl McCants-Daughtrey**.

Twenty-seven artists sold 35 pieces of art through both the in-person and online exhibits, totaling more than \$1,300. Proceeds from the sales go directly to the artists. You can see the remaining artwork for sale online at:

<https://artswestchester.org/visions>.



Co-coordinators for this year’s show: **Sharon Freeman** (left) and **Meghan Palmiotto**.



On the road:



Statewide Town Hall meeting

For the first time since the start of the COVID pandemic, OMH held an in-person Statewide Town Hall at its Central Office in Albany on November 30. The event was also streamed online. Commissioner Sullivan and members of the Executive Team discussed progress on top policy and planning priorities. Taking part were consumers, families, representatives of county and local mental health departments, advocacy organizations, managed care organizations, and providers of mental health services.

Daniel's Law Task Force

Commissioner Sullivan also chaired the inaugural meeting of the Daniel's Law Task Force in Rochester. Established in response to the death of 41-year-old **Daniel Prude** in 2020, the task force is charged with developing recommendations to guide behavioral health crisis response and explore avenues for related diversion services. The task force is gathering statewide input from communities, governmental entities, and the public on the best practices for engaging individuals in crisis, with a specific emphasis on equity.



Discussion on childhood trauma

Sarah Kuriakose (center), PhD, BCBA-D, OMH Associate Commissioner, Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families, took part in a panel discussion after a screening of the film *Something Terrible Happened to Joey* in the New York State Cultural Education Center in Albany. The film tells the story about a boy who carries the weight of trauma and overcomes the challenges life throws his way.

Disability rights symposium

Commissioner Sullivan was one of the speakers at the second annual Disability Rights & Employment Awareness Month (DREAM) Symposium in October at the Empire State Plaza. The symposium highlighted the rights of people with disabilities and continued the discussion around increasing the employment rate for people with disabilities throughout New York State.





Supportive housing in the Bronx

OMH celebrated the completion of 2050 Grand Concourse, an affordable and supportive housing development with 96 apartments in the Bronx's Fordham Heights neighborhood. In the last five years, New York State Homes and Community Renewal has created or preserved 14,700 affordable homes in the Bronx. 2050 Grand Concourse continues this effort and complements Governor Hochul's \$25 billion comprehensive Housing Plan to create or preserve 100,000 affordable homes across New York, including 10,000 with support services for vulnerable populations, plus the electrification of an additional 50,000 homes.

Resources:

Guides for working with LGBTQ+ youth

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) has released a series of guides to help professionals, families, and communities support the mental well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.

This series offers action-oriented strategies for supporting youth and highlights sources of joy and positive elements of being LGBTQ+.

In addition to a resource guide and four companion focus guides designed for specific populations, the series includes recommended resources and a glossary of terms.

Developed by SPRC in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago, all content was created with input from LGBTQ+ individuals and those with suicide-centered lived experience.

To get started, watch a brief webinar for an overview of the series, and please help spread the word using the following suggested social media posts:

- **Twitter/X:** Learn action-oriented strategies for supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth in this new series of guides from @SPRCtweets and @NORCNews: <https://ow.ly/GsZB50PS8y1> #mentalhealth #suicideprevention
- **Facebook:** Learn action-oriented strategies for supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth in this new series of guides from the @SuicidePreventionResourceCenter and @NORCatUofC: <https://ow.ly/GsZB50PS8y1> #mentalhealth #suicideprevention
- **LinkedIn:** Learn action-oriented strategies for supporting LGBTQIA2S+ youth in this new series of guides from the @SuicidePreventionResourceCenter and @NORC: <https://ow.ly/GsZB50PS8y1> #mentalhealth #suicideprevention

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

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Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention for LGBTQIA2S+ Youth



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