

Left: Governor Hochul discussing school mental health funding. Center: State landmarks illuminated in honor of World Suicide Prevention Day. Right: OMH's 988 Community Education and Awareness Toolkit.

Raising awareness during Suicide Prevention Month

A series of statewide initiatives to raise awareness of suicide prevention are now underway, including a digital campaign highlighting the state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The initiatives were announced by **Governor Kathy Hochul** as she [proclaimed](#) September as Suicide Prevention Month in New York State.

"While we continue to break down the stigma associated with suicide, there remains work to be done to ensure all New Yorkers are aware of the help in our state that is just one phone call or text away," Governor Hochul said. "By raising awareness and promoting earlier intervention, we can provide the support and resources necessary to save lives across New York."

The [digital campaign](#) was launched at the start of this month by OMH's Suicide Prevention Center (SPCNY). In the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's first year, New York received more than 185,000 calls routed directly to its 988 Contact Centers, a nearly 30-percent increase in annual call volume.

The program has been implemented for 24/7 coverage in all 62 counties and now includes chat and text and services in American Sign Language. A [toolkit](#) to help promote the Lifeline is now available, containing marketing and educational materials, such as brochures, cards, posters, social media graphics, infographics, and other resources all available in New York State's top nine languages. Materials were developed with the input from the New York State 988 Coalition of diverse community stakeholders. See page three for more.

Focusing on youth

New York State has received a five-year \$10-million grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to [expand the Collaborative Care Model](#) among youth-serving primary care practices. This will help to address mental and behavioral health problems among children and adolescents with co-occurring mental and physical health problems by providing integrated services, with a goal of ensuring more equitable access to historically marginalized populations. Since 2022, SPCNY has provided free resources to hundreds of school districts and organizations, focused on prevention efforts.

Events

OMH is partnering with the New York State Bridge Authority to host "[Transportation For Life: How the Transportation Sector and Partners Can Prevent Suicide](#)," at Dutchess Community College on September 22. This summit is aimed at promoting a commitment to suicide prevention and to collectively explore innovative strategies and initiatives to prevent suicides, raise awareness, and support those impacted.

SPCNY will host the [2023 Suicide Prevention Conference](#) in Albany on October 17. Free and open to the public, the conference, titled: "Changing the Conversation on Youth Mental Health: From Crisis to Prevention," will focus on increasing youth suicide prevention and mental wellness efforts. OMH will host in-person and virtual **suicide prevention training** through the end of the year. Nearly 51,000 New Yorkers have completed such training since 2022.

In honor

Governor Hochul ordered certain state bridges and landmarks to be illuminated in purple and teal on World Suicide Prevention Day, September 10:

- Albany International Airport Gateway
- Alfred E. Smith State Office Building
- Empire State Plaza
- Fairport Lift Bridge over the Erie Canal
- Franklin D. Roosevelt Mid-Hudson Bridge
- Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge
- H. Carl McCall SUNY Building
- Kosciuszko Bridge
- Moynihan Train Hall
- MTA LIRR - East End Gateway at Penn Station
- Niagara Falls
- One World Trade Center
- State Education Building
- State Fairgrounds Main Gate & Expo Center

Listening to our youth:

Governor releases report on addressing youth mental health crisis

In June, Governor Hochul released the key findings of a [summary report](#) of the [Youth Listening Tour](#), held statewide this spring, outlining both findings and recommendations on how to best address the youth mental health crisis. The Governor released the summary report at the first-ever New York State Summit on Youth Mental Health at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City, where she was joined by national mental health experts, youth advocates and providers, parents and caregivers, law enforcement specialists, educators, and more than 1,000 attendees to examine the unprecedented [mental health challenges](#) many young people face.

"The isolation and uncertainty we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact young people, who navigated key developmental milestones during this unstable time," she said. "The era of ignoring and underinvesting in mental health is over - it is time for us to be the agents of change that our children so desperately need at this moment."

The Summit on Youth Mental Health convened leaders, experts, and youth themselves to discuss the findings in the [Youth Listening Tour summary report](#), which included several overall themes:

- The impact of the pandemic varied among youth and over time.
- Youth keenly understand the benefits and risks of social media and potential strategies to support healthy use.
- Developing positive peer relationships and social skills is challenging, and youth are calling for multiple school and community-based approaches to assist in the development of interpersonal skills and friendships.
- Youth highly value confidentiality, and why they perceive privacy and confidentiality has been violated it deters youth from developing connections with adults and seeking help.
- Youth prefer mental health interactions with trusted adults who are like them (age, demographics) and reported an overall perception of a lack of empathy and cultural sensitivity in adults.
- Youth want increased accountability for other students, teachers, and school policies.

Based on the findings from the Youth Listening Tour and the discussions held at the Summit on Youth Mental Health, several youth recommendations emerged, including:

- Investing in community-based resources for recreation and mental wellness promotion.
- Youth-vetted training on navigating social media.
- Increased mental health resources that are free or low-cost, confidential, respectful, and culturally competent.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released new data that showed suicide rates among the 10-to-24 age group reached a 20-year-high in 2021. The CDC's [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) found alarming mental health trends among school-aged youth between 2011 and 2021 – especially among teen girls. Nearly a third of teen girls seriously considered attempting suicide in 2021, an increase from 19 percent the prior decade; and about three in five reported persistent sadness or hopelessness in 2021, representing a nearly 60 percent increase over the rate recorded in 2011. The U.S. Surgeon General more recently released a report: [Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#), directly examining the impact of social media on children and adolescents, as they relate to mental health and well-being concerns.

The Governor's fiscal year 2024 budget includes a multi-year [\\$1-billion mental health plan](#) that makes investments in youth and family care:

- \$30 million to expand school-based mental health services.
- \$10 million to strengthen suicide prevention programs for high-risk youth.
- \$3.1 million to bolster treatment for individuals with eating disorders.
- \$12 million for programs that promote early childhood development and in-home Crisis Intervention treatment for children and teens.

More information around the New York State Summit on Youth Mental Health can be found [here](#). Further information about Governor Hochul's work around youth mental health can be found [here](#).



988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:

New community education toolkit to help raise awareness

The 988 Community Education and Awareness Toolkit is a new interactive resource designed to raise awareness about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The toolkit was developed by OMH and includes marketing and educational resources to help the public learn more about 988 and how and when it can be used.

The toolkit contains marketing and educational materials including brochures, palm cards, posters, social media graphics, infographics, and other resources, available in New York State's top nine languages, in addition to English. It also has tips on how schools, caregivers and families, healthcare providers, first responders, and community organizations can use the materials to help spread the word about 988. The materials in the toolkit were developed with the input from the expansive New York State 988 Coalition of diverse community stakeholders.

You can find the toolkit at: <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/crisis/988-toolkit.pdf>.

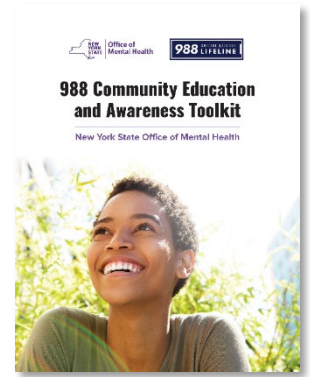
Other 988 resources developed by OMH can be found on the OMH webpage, [988: More than a Number](#).

Between the launch of 988 on July 16, 2022, and April 2023, New York has received well over 152,000 calls routed directly to its 988 Contact Centers. This is nearly a 30-percent increase in call volume within less than a year since it went live. By the launch of 988 in July 2022, New York had successfully implemented 24/7 in-state, primary coverage in all 62 counties. The lifeline is helping to reduce the use of law enforcement in response to a mental health crisis, and, by providing cost-effective early intervention, reducing healthcare costs.

Contacting 988 by phone, chat, or text provides a direct connection to compassionate, accessible care, and support for anyone experiencing mental health or substance use related distress. The 988 Lifeline is helping to remove obstacles to accessing healthcare and reduce disparities for historically marginalized and underserved populations, including people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, older adults, rural New Yorkers, veterans, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people who have limited English proficiency.

The Federal Communications Commission first proposed 988 in a report to Congress in August 2019. The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act was signed into law in October 2020, with the requirement for all phone service providers to make the transition by July 16, 2022.

Since April 2021 New York has been working with an expansive New York State 988 Coalition, which includes diverse community stakeholders, to plan for the implementation of 988 in the state. The statewide coalition members represent New York's diverse population and includes individuals with lived experience, advocates, law enforcement, representatives from state agencies, counties, 911 representatives, emergency services, and more. All have contributed their expertise and commitment to the implementation of 988, and their ongoing collaboration and dedication to this groundbreaking work will benefit all New Yorkers.



Kathy Lynch:

OMH retiree inducted into the New York State Disability Rights Hall of Fame

OMH is proud to congratulate **Kathy Lynch**, retired Regional Advocacy Specialist in the Western New York Field Office, for her induction into the New York State Disability Rights Hall of Fame this spring.

The Hall of Fame was created by the New York State Independent Living Council in 2018 to recognize individuals who have made lifelong achievements that positively impact people with disabilities in society. Areas of lifelong achievement include improving public policy and programs and services, advancing new knowledge and concepts, eliminating barriers, and promoting a positive image for people with disabilities. She is one of only 23 people to have been awarded this honor.

Finding her calling

After multiple experiences with institutionalization as a young woman, often under frightening conditions, Kathy found her calling – improving the quality of life for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. In doing so, she has also changed the public's perception of mental illness and those living with it.

She began by co-establishing one of the first mental health support groups in the early 1980s in Buffalo, "The Unity Meeting." This led to numerous successful advocacy efforts, genuine Peer support relationships, and institutional change throughout the state. Kathy worked with fellow support group members to promote genuine relationships, strengthening one another in times of



crisis and distress, and when in need of advocacy. This is how the Peer Movement began. Thousands of people labeled as severely mentally ill have been impacted by Kathy's leadership with the development of Mental Health Peer Connection.

Also, during this time, Kathy was instrumental in the establishment of a quarterly magazine, with funding provided by OMH, called *Mental Health World*. This magazine gave many Peers a voice to express themselves to local, state, and national audiences on their own recovery experiences.

Encouraging a focus on the community

In the early 1990s, Kathy played a key role in steering OMH's initial reinvestment funds into programs to help those with mental health issues remain in the community and out of institutions. At that time, the patient population of the Buffalo Psychiatric Center was about 700. Today it is closer to 150.

As the first Mental Health Systems Advocate employed by Western New York Independent Living, Kathy led and conducted numerous town meetings, panel discussions, conferences, and workshops on a variety of topics related to mental health - including voting rights, housing needs, trauma-informed and person-centered care, transportation issues, and community integration.

As the first recipient member of the Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention board, Kathy retrained their staff to decrease calling police on those in need of mental health care. Kathy has promoted a positive image of people in recovery from behavioral health issues in media outlets. She was presented the Courage to Comeback award by the Clarkson Institute, the Volunteer of the Year Award by the Mental Health Association of Erie County, and the Western New York Compeer Advocacy and Pioneer Advocacy Award by OMH. Kathy has also received the OMH's John Sheets Lifetime Achievement Award.

In 2010, Kathy came out of retirement to help develop the Center for Self-Discovery Center on the Buffalo Psychiatric Center campus. This first-of-its-kind initiative created a safe and supportive environment for hospital patients to develop social and living skills.

Building relationships and creating opportunities

When the Peer Movement expressed need, Kathy made it her business to be part of meeting those needs, focusing on relationship building. Kathy listened to the concerns of ground-level psychiatric facility staff and patients. She then brought those concerns to top administrative officials in the private and public sectors. This created opportunities for people labeled with psychiatric diagnoses to be empowered, to be free, and to have choices, hope, and recovery.

"Kathy was a huge role model for me," said **Tony Trahan**, Director of OMH's Bureau of Statewide Advocacy. "She showed me how to advocate within the system without alienating people, and without compromising the core values of peer support."

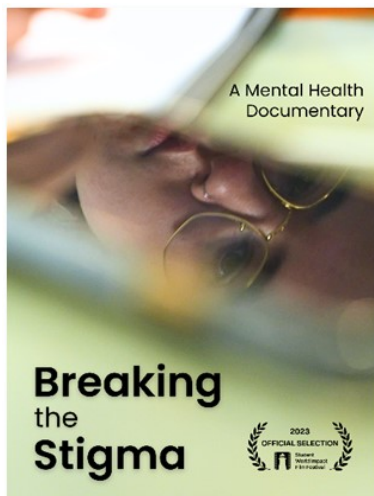
"Thank you so much for your dedication to improving the lives of our fellow peers living with psychiatric disabilities," added **Matthew Petite**, OMH Western Regional Advocacy Specialist. "You have advocated for our needs and inspired us to achieve our full potential. You have helped to create a more inclusive society, and your work will continue to benefit people with disabilities for generations to come."

Breaking the Stigma:

Student documentary focuses on the importance of communication

Breaking the Stigma is a 10-minute documentary featuring conversations with students and parents on several aspects of youth mental health.

It includes personal discussions on struggles with emotional trauma, a showcase of the generational differences in opinion on what "mental health" really means, and – ultimately – reflections on how important it is to speak up and seek help when in need.



The film is produced by **Jack Muscatello** (center), a Film, Television, and Media Arts Major at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut. It promotes the use of the year-old 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which is what first inspired Muscatello to pursue the project.

Closing the gap

Muscatello's background in film stretches back about seven years, starting with promotional and narrative short films that he made in high school. When making the transition to college, Muscatello branched out into corporate video work. "This included additional narrative film projects and a new area of storytelling for me – documentaries," he said.

"*Breaking the Stigma* originated out of a prolonged observation I've had during my time in high school and college," Muscatello said. "There's an ever-expanding gap between the understanding, use and acceptance of prevalent digital technology in everyday life between my parents' generation – Gen X – and the students and children of Gen Z. I decided to tie-in an exploration of this 'gap' with several discussions about the state of mental health challenges in the United States, which has been seemingly worsened by the newfound societal dependence on technology and social media."

Muscatello researched state and federal programs for mental health assistance, education, and crisis care. He found that a lot of available programs are simply not discussed publicly, either in school, at work, or most importantly, among family members. "So, the documentary took off from there," he said.

A larger discussion

"A theme I tried to weave throughout is the importance of transparency and openness in our relationships with others," Muscatello said. "A component to modern technology that I find most interesting is how the abundance of tech, and the interconnected structure of our personal devices, have largely failed at strengthening real, honest, and human connections. There are some caveats of course, but I feel that the prevalence of social media, the habit to text rather than call, and the newfound lack of separation between work and school commitments and our lives at home – post-COVID especially – have contributed a much more negative impact on young minds – including my own – leading to increased stress, a lack of patience and, ultimately, emotional distance."

"I feel that the technology component of the documentary plays into the larger discussion on the state of youth mental health today," he added, "and I think strong relationships are at the center of solving the problem."

Muscatello said that, in developing and editing *Breaking the Stigma*, he discovered a new area of deep interest in documentaries. The medium has grown in popularity with the rise of streaming, helping previously unseen research and important documentation of a variety of causes, impact events, and international conflicts get the proper attention.

"I would love to get more involved in promoting conversations about mental health and relationships, as I think it's an incredibly important topic that demands consistent care, research, and collective understanding. If anything, I hope *Breaking the Stigma* can help start a dialogue – among friends, relatives, and between parents and their children – and spark an interest in the topic for those who watch it." You can see the film at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YMMrZM59vg>.

CARES UP:

Conference brings first-responder organizations together to discuss mental health



Commissioner Sullivan (center) with staff and participants at the CARES UP conference.

OMH's Suicide Prevention Center of New York (SPCNY) recently hosted a conference in Albany for CARES UP grant awardees. CARES UP (Changing the Conversation, Awareness, Resilience, Empower Peers, Skills Building/Suicide Prevention, Uniformed Personnel) is an initiative launched by SPCNY that focuses on improving the mental health and wellness of uniformed personnel and veterans.

Goals of the CARES UP initiative are:

- Promoting organizational and cultural change that supports the mental health of uniformed personnel.
- Reducing the impact of workplace trauma and cumulative stress by enhancing opportunities to learn about resilience, life skills, and healthy coping strategies.
- Promoting acceptance of mental health care and wellness.
- Strengthening connectedness through increasing access to peer programs and other social supports.
- Facilitating access and decrease barriers to wellness options, mental health care, and other supports.

After receiving applications from law enforcement, firefighter, emergency medical service, corrections, and veteran organizations from throughout the state, 15 organizations were awarded grants to participate in the two-year initiative. CARES UP grant awardees have been receiving funds for suicide prevention training and other mental health and wellness support.

The conference served as an opportunity to bring these organizations together to connect, discuss the initiative and learn from each other.

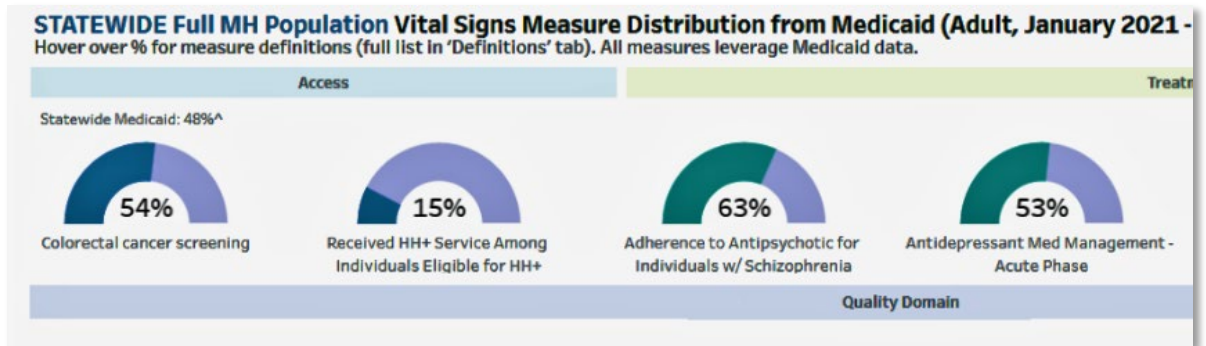
“It was so rewarding to bring our CARES UP awardees together to learn from them, better understand what resources they need to build resiliency, and to honor them for their dedication to advancing these efforts and the CARES UP initiative,” said **Jenna Heise**, SPCNY Director of Implementation.

The CARES UP website will launch in the coming months and will feature a toolkit designed for New York State uniformed personnel organizations. The toolkit offers a step-by-step guide on how CARES UP can be implemented within an organization, including helpful templates and resources to support each step.

Resources:

OMH’s new Vital Signs Dashboard

We’re all aware of the stark reality that people with mental health conditions, especially individuals of color, face disparities in health care in terms of access to care, quality of care, and treatment outcomes; challenges that have only been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic.



To increase attention to health equity in the mental health population, OMH has developed a new data tool – the Vital Signs Dashboard (VSD).

The goal of the VSD is to improve quality and reduce disparities for populations historically and currently known to have unequal access to quality mental health services. Early provider feedback suggests the VSD can help inform efforts to identify and address disparities.

“As a member of the Health & Healthcare Disparities Subcommittee at [my hospital], I was informed of the existence of the dashboard by the chair,” said one user. “After thorough review, I thought the dashboard was a viable tool to see where [we] benchmarked on multiple important measures. Not only was it useful to see internal data, but it also identified goals to reach as the dashboard has the capability to compare statistics between similar institutions. Furthermore, displaying the data based on sub-categories (gender, ethnicity, age) showed more clearly where [we are] succeeding and the disparities that can be improved.”

The VSD includes multiple components to help identify disparities and monitor progress of improvement efforts over time. Current performance and trend data is displayed for 12 adult measures and 11 child measures by race and ethnicity. All dashboards have filtering options that allow the user to view the measures by region, county, provider network or agency, and by population or program type. The VSD also provides options for viewing performance data, as tables or figures, and can be downloaded allowing users to extract data for further analysis.

You can access the VSD at: https://mypublicdashboard.ny.gov/t/OMH/views/OMHVitalSignsDashboardVSD/VSDHome-Adult?:showAppBanner=false&:display_count=n&:showVizHome=n&:origin=viz_share_link.

Addiction recovery: Organization helps LGBTQ+ clients find supportive providers

LGBTQ Friendly Drug Rehab Centers



Despite some advancements over the past couple of decades, members of the LGBTQ+ community continue to be victimized – leading to high rates of substance use disorder.

People who identify as LGBTQ+ often face social stigma, discrimination, and other challenges not encountered by people who identify as heterosexual, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. “They also face a greater risk of harassment and violence,” the institute reported. “As a result of these and other stressors, sexual minorities are at increased risk for various behavioral health issues.”

In response, Drug Rehab USA, a project made up of addiction treatment experts, has put together a national directory of addiction treatment providers who are LGBTQ+ friendly. “We wanted to help people find local LGBTQ+ friendly addiction treatment,” said **Joe Belfry**, Community

Outreach Coordinator. “But we’d noticed that there was no specific LGBTQ+ directory out there.” To fill this void, the group started to build a directory of its own, pulling the information from the government data base from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Information is presented in an easy-to-understand, user-friendly format to make it more accessible. Because treatment centers frequently submit new listings, Drug Rehab USA staff take time to update them by calling the facilities, reviewing their websites and social media accounts.

“The best treatment programs are staffed with people who understand the unique relationship between sexual identity and mental health,” Belfry added. “In order to help overcome substance use disorder and other mental health challenges, LGBTQ+ rehabs provide a compassionate, supportive, identity-affirming environment. Many offer non-gendered housing for transgender patients. Group therapy and individualized counseling provide support and solidarity and, again, create a safe space for patients to open up, exchange insights, and support one another. Most of all, these programs offer a sense of community and belonging in a situation where it’s most needed.”

For Belfry the project has been personal. He currently has seven years’ experience working in the addiction industry. “At one point in my life,” Belfry said, “I struggled with a substance use disorder and I went to rehab, but it took me three attempts to find the right dual diagnosis treatment that I needed to address the mental health issues I also suffered from. So, is important to me that people find the right treatment for them.”

To search the directory, visit: <https://drugrehabus.org/rehabs/treatment/lgbtqa/>.

On the road: Visiting the ICL offices



Commissioner Sullivan; Deputy Executive Commissioner **Moira Tashjian**, MPA; New York City Field Office Director **Bob Moon**; and **Jihoon Kim**, LMSW, Governor Hochul’s Deputy Secretary for Human Services and Mental Hygiene; recently paid a visit to the offices of the Institute for Community Living offices in New York.

Discussing children's mental health



Matthew B. Perkins, MD, Medical Director for OMH Division of Children and Families (far left), recently took part in a roundtable meeting held by New York State Assembly Member **Marianne Buttenschon** to discuss the needs of youth in Central New York. Topics included safe living for youth, fulfilling the need for wrap-around services, providing targeted programs for in-crisis youth as well as early intervention preventative

measures and mental health services. Also attending were Assembly Members **Aileen Gunther**, **Andrew Hevesi**, and **Rebecca Seawright**; as well as representatives from the state Department of Education, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, and the Office of Children and Family Services. *Photo by the Rome Sentinel.*

New location for Malone facility



Jeremy Darman, MSW, MA, OMH Deputy Commissioner for State and Local Operations (far left), took part in the ribbon cutting for the new Citizen Advocates' Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center in Malone. The centers are open year-round, with facilities in Ogdensburg and Malone offering 24/7

services. Patients can walk in and get immediate support. The new location offers additional space, including designated wings for adults and children.

Ribbon-cutting at Mount Sinai



Commissioner Sullivan took part in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Mount Sinai Behavioral Health Center in Lower Manhattan.

The \$140-million facility is believed to be the largest private investment in mental health care in New York State history and will transform behavioral health

care in New York City by serving as a comprehensive "one-stop-shop" for mental health care, substance use treatment, and primary care. Among those on hand were **Zoraida Diaz**, OASAS Downstate District Director; Manhattan Borough President **Mark Levine**; and City Council Members **Carlina Rivera** and **Christopher Marte**.