

New York State Budget Investments in vital mental health services

Mental health has been a focus of Governor **Kathy Hochul's** administration and is an important component of her \$1 billion, multi-year plan to strengthen New York State's mental healthcare system.

"The mental health crisis is the defining challenge of our time," she said. "I'm committed to expanding resources and support for New Yorkers who need a helping hand."

Supporting youth services

The 2025 state fiscal year budget builds on this investment with more than \$19 million to provide critical care to young people outside of school environments, including increasing resources for youth receiving treatment in their community or, when necessary, in residential care.

Key initiatives like Youth Assertive Community Treatment teams, which provide wraparound services and support to young people at risk of entering residential or inpatient psychiatric treatment, will be expanded with \$9.6 million to continue serving them at home and within their community whenever possible.

An additional \$4 million will support a loan-forgiveness program specifically for licensed mental health clinicians serving children and families.

Meeting in February with students, faculty and mental health professionals at the Mohonasen Central School District in Rotterdam, the Governor and OMH Commissioner **Ann Sullivan**, MD, detailed initiatives to expand mental health support for children throughout the state, protect them from harmful social media features, and ensure they're being heard.

This includes \$20 million in start-up funding for school-based mental health clinics, which will build on the \$5.1 million awarded in November to support 137 new school-based clinics, including 82 at-needs high school. To-date, more than 1,100 such clinics are either operating or under development.

Addressing complex behavioral health challenges

The budget allocates \$55 million to add 200 new inpatient psychiatric beds at state-operated psychiatric facilities, including 15 beds serving children and adolescents, 85 beds for adults, and 25 forensic beds.

This funding will also establish three new 25-bed Transition-to-Home units at state-operated psychiatric centers to expand this successful program to populations in need of specialized care, including individuals with a history of recurring criminal justice involvement.



Commissioner Sullivan and Governor Hochul discussing the expansion of school-based mental health services during a meeting at Mohonasen Central School District in Rotterdam.



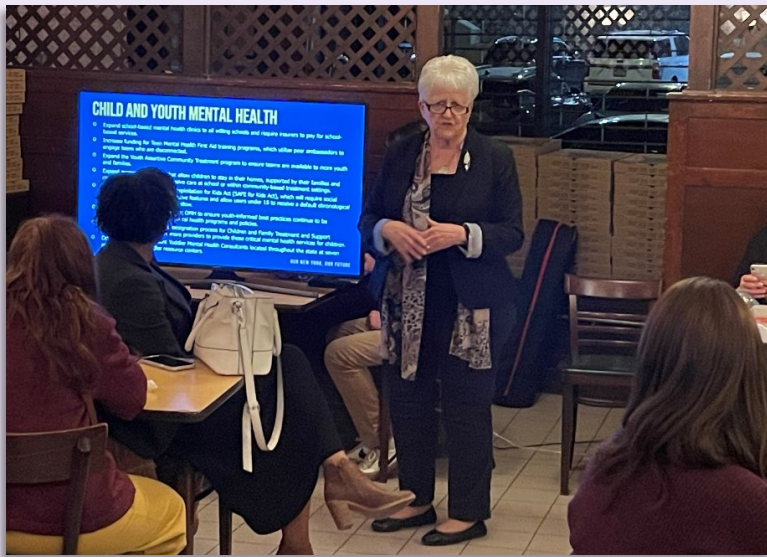
Mental Health Awareness Month was first designated in 1949 by the National Association for Mental Health – now called Mental Health America – to educate the public about mental health conditions and advocate for policies to improve the lives of the millions of Americans who are affected by mental illness.

Dedicating an entire month to this purpose provides a valuable opportunity to discuss the impact of mental illness on the well-being of individuals and families; to highlight innovative research and treatments; and to fight the spread of associated misconceptions and stigma so that people know they don't have to suffer in silence.

This edition of *OMH News* will discuss some of the current initiatives underway at our agency to address the many challenges our communities are facing – most of these initiatives are the result of Governor Hochul's \$1 billion multi-year plan to strengthen New York State's mental healthcare system.

As research since the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, it's more important than ever to focus on mental health, to start conversations, and to encourage those who need it to seek help.

We welcome your comments at:
omhnews@omh.ny.gov.



Commissioner Sullivan discussing the state mental health budget during a public meeting on Staten Island.

The Governor proposed regulations to guide the discharge of individuals from inpatient and emergency psychiatric settings and hospital emergency room settings. The budget allocates \$7 million to OMH for monitoring and compliance.

The budget includes \$33 million to improve engagement with individuals living with mental illness and involved in the criminal justice system. This funding will improve outcomes by ensuring that individuals with a history of mental health treatment, lack of engagement in treatment, or other mental health concerns connect with necessary services and supports.

Improving insurance coverage

The budget will require commercial insurance companies to pay for state-licensed outpatient mental health and substance use services at least at the Medicaid rate.

Previously, many commercial insurance rates were inadequate to cover the costs incurred to deliver services to patients. The budget invests \$84 million to increase Medicaid reimbursement for services provided at certain sites treating mental health conditions.

The Governor also recently proposed regulations to establish network adequacy standards for behavioral health services for commercial insurers. These regulations propose to establish appointment wait times for mental health and substance use disorder services, and when an in-network provider is not available within those standards, require insurers to allow access to an out-of-network provider at no additional cost. Similar behavioral health network adequacy standards were proposed for the Medicaid program.

The budget also includes \$90 million in opioid settlement funding. New York State continues to lead the nation in disbursing funds secured from settlement agreements with opioid manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies.

Listening to our youth

Initiatives to address social media, continuity of mental health care

Governor Hochul is continuing to advocate for the Stop Addictive Feeds Exploitation (SAFE) for Kids Act, which she included in her Executive Budget for the 2025 fiscal year.

This groundbreaking proposal would regulate unhealthy social media use by prohibiting platforms from providing addictive algorithmic feeds to kids without parental consent.

This legislation would require social media companies to restrict the addictive features that harm young users while still allowing access to the platform and empower the Office of the Attorney General to bring actions forward for violators.

Additionally, the New York Child Data Protection Act would prohibit online sites from collecting, using, sharing, or selling personal data of anyone under the age of 18 without their consent.

Youth Mental Health Advisory Board

Governor Hochul is in the process of forming a Youth Mental Health Advisory Board, which will include interested children and teenagers throughout the state. This initiative emerged following last year's statewide Youth Mental Health Listening Tour and Youth Mental Health Summit.



Commissioner Sullivan during one of last year's statewide Youth Listening Tour sessions.



Commissioner Sullivan and Governor Hochul listening as Mohonasen Central School District students discuss mental health issues.

HealthySteps

The Governor’s plan expands HealthySteps, an evidence-based program that pairs pediatric physicians with child development specialists to provide universal services for children up to the age of 3 and their families in pediatric healthcare settings. This winter, OMH awarded \$7 million to establish 46 new sites in 19 counties and \$10.7 million to expand 51 existing sites, with a goal of growing the program to serve roughly 354,000 children at 224 sites statewide by 2027.

Residential treatment

Governor Hochul is making \$30 million in capital funding available to develop three residential treatment facilities for children and adolescents who require on-site care. The new facilities will be in New York City, on Long Island, and throughout the Hudson River regions.

The program will make up to \$10 million available for service providers operating youth residential or psychiatric inpatient programs to acquire property, construct a new facility, or rehabilitate existing buildings

Expanding access to care

Reaching out to our communities

To help low-income New Yorkers on Medicaid access mental health care, the Governor allocated \$15 million annually to increase reimbursement rates for mental health services for children in Department of Health (DOH)-licensed facilities and private healthcare practices, in addition to \$27 million annually to support these same services for adults.

These investments are designed to help these providers recruit and retain mental health practitioners to increase access for Medicaid members.

Expanding the SOS program upstate

New York State has expanded the Safe Options Support (SOS) program, which has successfully rehoused hundreds of people experiencing chronic homelessness in New York City. Four new teams are serving Rochester and the Finger Lakes region; Albany, Schenectady and Saratoga counties in the Capital Region; Broome, Chenango and Otsego counties in the Southern Tier; and Orange and Dutchess counties in the Hudson Valley. These teams join three others that began serving communities in Erie County, Westchester County, and Long Island last fall.

The 14 SOS teams now operating in New York City have helped find permanent housing for more than 330 formerly homeless individuals of the roughly 2,000 individuals living with mental illness on the streets or in the subway system. These teams have had approximately 15,000 outreach encounters and enrolled more than 1,200 clients with serious mental illness into the program since its inception in 2022.

Specialized treatment

Nearly \$4 million has been awarded to 77 community-based providers to establish, enhance, or expand access to specialized treatment for New Yorkers with complex mental health care needs. Funding will allow healthcare providers on the front lines to increase outpatient engagement, provide effective group intervention, and fast-track access to behavioral health programs, including for groups not historically reached by traditional systems of care.

Programs receiving funding must provide complex care management and specific mental health outpatient treatments for individuals, groups, and families. These programs collectively serve more than 350,000 individuals annually, including many with a variety of high-risk or specialized mental health needs. The 77 community-based providers are located throughout the state. A list of recipients by OMH region is available [here](#).



Governor Hochul and Commissioner Sullivan discussing the successful investments in mental health care in the 2025 state budget.



Children's Mental Health

'What's Great in Our State' focuses on awareness

OMH held the 15th edition of its "What's Great in Our State" celebration in Albany on May 7, recognizing the work that New York programs, schools, providers, and individuals do every day to improve the lives of our children and youth.



A full house was in attendance to hear keynote speaker **Jen Marr**, founder and CEO of Inspiring Comfort, LCC and author of Showing Up. Workshops were offered on a variety of subjects, both in-person and online.



Presenting a proclamation from Governor **Kathy Hochul** of Children's Mental Health Week, was **Patrick K. Wildes** (right), Assistant Secretary for Human Services and Mental Hygiene, shown here with **Robert Moon**, LMSW, OMH Deputy Commissioner, Division of Community Program Policy and Management; and **Sarah Kuriakose**, PhD, BCBA-D, OMH Associate Commissioner, Division of Integrated Community Services for Children and Families.

The celebration honored the exceptional work of six programs and individuals for their innovation and ability to engage youth. Awards were presented by Moon and OMH Executive Deputy Commissioner **Moira Tashjian**, MPA.



Jennifer Fuchs – Family/Caregiver



Haley Amering – Youth/Young Adult



Lewis County System of Care – Systems of Care



Michael Orth – Lifetime Achievement

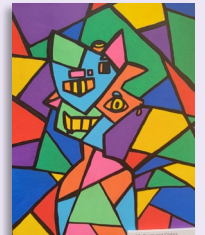
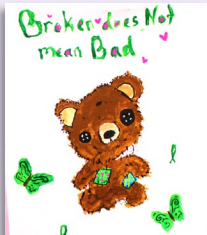
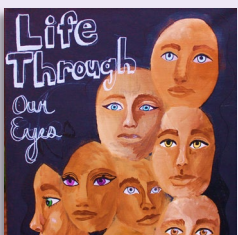


Solvay Union Free School District – School/School District



New York-Presbyterian Uptown Hub – Organization or Community Group

Some of the youth artwork on display.



Helping first responders

New York State to conduct needs assessment

The state budget for the 2025 fiscal year allocates \$2 million for suicide prevention efforts for first responders. This is in addition to the \$1 million allocated annually for suicide prevention efforts for veterans, first responders, law enforcement, and correction officers.

To better understand the mental health-related challenges facing the public safety community and strengthen programs and services for these professionals, New York State is conducting its inaugural first responder mental health needs assessment.

Stemming from a partnership between the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) and the State University of New York at New Paltz's Institute for Disaster Mental Health and Benjamin Center, the assessment will include results from a voluntary anonymous survey and input from a series of focus groups for first responders.

"Our state is only as strong as the network of individuals who keep us safe," Governor Hochul said. "This comprehensive needs assessment will help us provide them with the care and resources they deserve."

The needs assessment will gather input from law enforcement, the Fire Service, EMTs, 911 dispatchers and emergency managers. Officials from DHSES and SUNY New Paltz will deliver the results of the assessment at the 19th Annual Institute for Disaster Mental Health Conference at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park on May 14 and 15.

Developing a statewide response

In addition to these initiatives, OMH is partnering with the DHSES and the Institute for Disaster Mental Health to develop a disaster mental health response statewide. Disaster mental health responders may be activated to support disaster response operations and provide a compassionate presence, immediate psychological first aid, and additional support as needed to address the early and expected stress reactions to disasters.

OMH is leveraging federal funding to further develop and train the disaster mental health team, with plans underway to help develop and support local and regional teams. Likewise, DHSES has been working with OMH and the Institute to identify additional first responder mental health-related training opportunities, including peer-to-peer courses offered at the State Preparedness Training Center.

Peer support teams include individuals with lived experience to provide emotional, social, and practical support when needed. Peer support teams are often used within public safety organizations to help individuals deal with job-related stress and following critical incidents.

The training center has already hosted two peer support team training sessions – Assisting Individuals in Crisis and Group Crisis Intervention – in Oriskany. Both sessions reached capacity and additional trainings will be offered later this year.



The needs assessment will gather input from law enforcement, the fire service, EMTs, 911 dispatchers and emergency managers.

A promotional graphic for the 19th Annual IDMH Conference. It features the IDMH logo (Institute for Disaster Mental Health) and the text '19th Annual IDMH Conference' and 'Beyond the Call: Sustaining Resilience in the Responder Community'. It also includes the dates 'MAY 14-15, 2024' and the location 'CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA'. The graphic shows three first responders in uniform sitting on the ground. At the bottom, it lists sponsors: the Office of Mental Health, the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services, and the Empire State Center.

Disaster Mental Health Conference

The IDMH statewide conference on May 14 and 15 is for first responders, their leaders, and mental health professionals. This cross-disciplinary gathering unites individuals from police, fire, military, and EMS backgrounds to exchange valuable insights, forge vital connections, and equip themselves with tangible tools to fortify resilience and support that of their peers and colleagues.

First responder leaders and managers will gain profound insights into the intricacies of their teams' challenges and leave with the latest best practices to navigate and overcome them.

Meanwhile, mental health professionals will delve into the firsthand experiences of first responders, uncovering the hurdles they face in seeking mental wellness and honing their clinical expertise to provide tailored support. For information, visit: <https://www.newpaltz.edu/idmh/19th-annual-idmh-conference/>

Mental health on campus

State Universities expanding services

State University of New York campuses are investing nearly \$10 million to increase their mental health services and support for students, faculty, and staff.

This investment will expand services at 28 campuses, support more than 200,000 students, and build on its Statewide Tele-Psychiatry Network (STPN) and new telecounseling option for community colleges.

This funding was secured through the Governor's and the New York State Legislature's historic \$163- million recurring increase in direct operating aid to SUNY's state-operated campuses.

Investing in counseling

To build on the campus' model counseling operation that has long been at the vanguard of initiatives for SUNY and higher education in general, SUNY Oswego is investing its new state funding in:

- Hiring more staff to support students, such as staff who specialize in providing care to students from marginalized backgrounds.
- Entering telecounseling contracts to provide more access to therapy and practitioners from diverse backgrounds.
- Extending counselor contracts so they can provide services over the summer months.
- Being able to provide an increase in pay to per-diem staff who offer much-needed services.

Engaging the whole campus

At the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the Counseling Center staff provides therapy services for students, hosts outreach initiatives and training, and consults with campus members on how to best support students and connect them to resources. To expand the services provided for students, ESF will use the funding in:

- Hiring additional staff to support the campus community.
- Hosting a Mental Health Symposium to bring together staff, faculty, and students for an event that focuses on topics related to mental health.
- Launching a peer ambassador program to assist with programming initiatives on campus.

Expanding the use of telehealth

Other state-operated campuses will use their portion of the \$10 million to expand mental health services and support:

- At least 25 campuses will hire, retain, or extend the contracts of more than 90 mental health staff, including psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and other clinical staff. Many campuses will be able to increase their capacity to meet student mental health needs by extending clinical hours or focusing on targeted student populations.
- 14 campuses will leverage telehealth contracts to increase capacity and meet crisis and off-hours student needs. Telehealth contracts will also allow for several campuses to connect students to a more diverse clinical staff, both in terms of specialties and demographics.
- STPN has grown from four campuses making use of the service in 2018 to 56 campuses as of spring 2024. The entire network is run out of SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, and uses psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, case managers, and more. STPN primarily provides psychiatric services and medication management to SUNY students.
- The network may also provide diagnoses, mental health assessments, and short-term Cognitive Behavioral Therapy intervention to students. Since the spring of 2017, 2,085 students have been seen overall via the STPN, with around 13,430 appointments since that time.



State University campuses will increase mental health services to reach more students who are in need of help.

On the road

Transforming children's mental health

Officials from OMH met with a group of national experts to discuss strengthening the state's current strategic plan for transforming children's mental health care by paying close attention to research evidence for system redesign.

Coordinators for this Scientific Advisory Board were **Sarah Kuriakose**, PhD, BCBA-D, OMH Associate Commissioner for Children, Youth, and Families; **Kimberly Hoagwood**, PhD, New York University Professor and Research Scientist; and **Matthew B. Perkins**, MD, MBA, MPH Medical Director of OMH Children and Family Services.

The two-day meeting included experts in system design, health services, pediatrics, epidemiology, anthropology, and policy research. Recommendations from this board will be integrated into ongoing OMH state plans to improve mental health services for children, youth, and families.



Healthy New York Summit

Commissioner Sullivan once again participated in the Healthy NY Summit, sponsored by *City & State Magazine*. She discussed Gov. Hochul's historic investments to overhaul and strengthen the state's mental health system.

Joining the Commissioner on the panel were, from left: **Jessica Fear**, Visiting Nurse Service of New York Senior Vice President of Community Mental Health Services; **Chinazo Cunningham**, MD,

Commissioner of the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports; **Kristy-Lee Jean-Pierre**, The New York Foundling Senior Vice President of Mental Health Services; and **Linda Lee**, representative for the New York City Council 23rd District in Queens.

Cutting the ribbon in the Bronx

Commissioner Sullivan took part in the ribbon-cutting for River Avenue, a 245-unit affordable and supportive housing development in the Concourse section of the Bronx. The transit-oriented development includes more than 20,000 square feet of commercial space and offers on-site supportive services for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

There are 148 apartments reserved for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. On-site supportive services and rental subsidies are funded through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), administered by OMH.

Services include counseling, group activities, health and wellness workshops, harm reduction services, linkages with health care providers, crisis intervention, money management, and educational, vocational and employment referrals. State financing for the includes permanent tax-exempt bonds, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and a subsidy from New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). OMH is providing operating funding through the ESSHI program, as well as covering start-up costs of the supportive housing units. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development provided funding through the Supportive Housing Loan Program.





Breaking ground in White Plains

Construction has started on a \$40 million affordable housing development for seniors in the city of White Plains. Called “Mt. Hope Plaza,” the development will feature 56 affordable apartments, including 20 for individuals in need of supportive services.

The development is located on an underused property formerly owned by the Mt. Hope AME Zion Church, which agreed to make the land available for affordable housing.

OMH is providing annual operating funding for the 20 supportive housing units through the ESSHI program, as well as a program development grant to cover start-up expenses. Other funding is through HCR, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, Westchester County, Mt. Hope AME Zion Church, and the city of White Plains.

Resources

Funding for stigma reduction projects

OMH is making \$100,000 available through its Mental Illness Anti-Stigma Fund for projects to reduce the stigma often associated with mental illness.

The program will provide \$20,000 in one-time grants. Funding can be used for targeted messaging and advertising, producing printed materials, guest speakers, training, contacting individuals with lived experience, and multimedia productions. OMH intends to award one grant in each of the agency’s five regions statewide, with projects needing to be completed between July 2024 and June 2025.

To be eligible, organizations must have at least one year of experience serving individuals with mental illness and be recognized for their work serving underserved, under-represented, or minority populations.

Proposals must have one or more anti-stigma elements, such as a focus on dispelling myths and misconceptions around mental health conditions at educational settings, such as schools; being contact-based and incorporating individuals with mental health diagnoses sharing recovery stories; or being directed at underserved populations and communities.

Other criteria include activities aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination among housing-related audiences, such as landlords, homeowners, management companies serving landlords and owners, building superintendents, and billing or rent collection personnel; in the workplace; among parents with mental illness or families and caregivers of individuals with a mental health diagnosis; in the media; and in the health care system.

Proposals must be submitted to **Carol Swiderski** at OMH by email at carol.swiderski@omh.ny.gov by May 31. For information, visit: <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/providers/mh-stigma-reduction-funds-letter.pdf>.

Established in 2016, the Mental Illness Anti-Stigma Fund is entirely supported by voluntary contributions made by taxpayers through check-off on their state tax returns. The fund has distributed more than \$370,000, including roundtable discussions on mental health stigma, special issues of *Behavioral Health News*, and the McSilver Institute’s Special Initiatives Stigma site, Combating Mental Health Stigma.

The tax check-off program has funded a variety of programs in the past, including [roundtable discussions on mental health stigma](#), [special issues of Behavioral Health News](#), and the McSilver Institute’s Special Initiatives Stigma site, [Combating Mental Health Stigma](#).



Details on OMH’s anti-stigma initiatives funded through the program can be found in its [annual report](#).