

February 4, 2026

**New York State Office of Mental
Health Testimony**

2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing



**Office of
Mental Health**

Good morning. Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Brouk, Simon, and members of their respective committees, I want to thank you for the invitation to address Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget as it relates to mental health.

Since taking office, Governor Hochul, in partnership with the legislature, has made tremendous investments towards building a comprehensive mental health system focused on ensuring robust prevention services, increasing access to community-based treatment, and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable New Yorkers through the development of specialized services for those with complex needs. Since 2022, over 1,000 inpatient beds have been brought online for those individuals with the highest needs while there has been significant expansion of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), which are already serving 158,000 individuals each year, 50 Critical Time Intervention (CTI) teams that are a vital component of improved hospital discharge planning, and the expansion of Healthy Steps with a goal of serving more than 300,000 children and families in pediatric and family primary care practices across the state by 2028. And for 2025 Mental Health America rated New York as number 1 of all states in mental health, using 17 cross cutting measures.

These are just a few examples of the significant progress made in our mental health system under Governor Hochul's leadership. Given the Federal government's attacks on New York's health care and social services systems, they are more important now than ever. I thank you for your ongoing efforts to stand up for New Yorkers in need.

One of the most successful initiatives has been the launch of the Safe Options Support Program (SOS) in 2022 – a team-based approach focused on providing assistance to individuals who have been chronically unsheltered. SOS teams utilize an innovative manner of engagement, linking with specialized inpatient treatment when needed, and providing continued support, resulting in over 1600 individuals who have attained permanent housing, to date, who had previously lived years - and sometimes decades unsheltered.

Safe and affordable housing is crucial. Since taking office, Governor Hochul has invested more than \$520 million in operating funds and \$1.1 billion in capital funding to strengthen residential services for individuals with mental illness including the addition of 3,500 housing units. The Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget includes \$65 million to increase rates for OMH residential programs to ensure that providers have sufficient resources to maintain housing capacity, including stipends for scattered-site Supportive Housing units and funding to increase rates for Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units. By March 31st, there will be 51,619 operational beds in New York for individuals with mental illness and another 6,553 in the pipeline!

And, for the fifth consecutive year, the Governor has proposed funding for OMH community mental health providers with a 1.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) to address rising operating costs enabling them to offer more competitive wages to their staff, as well as the statutory minimum wage increase. This follows other successful workforce initiatives, such as the loan repayment program which has made awards to over 1,400 people in the behavioral health workforce. Workforce recruitment and retention will continue to be a priority issue.

Additionally, the proposed budget includes critical work force supports for first responders. OMH will work with OASAS to establish a First Responder Behavioral Health Center of Excellence. This builds on Governor Hochul's commitment and previous investment in CARES UP – an initiative that focuses on improving the mental health and wellness of uniformed personnel and veterans by providing a framework to assist community organizations to enhance their wellness and health models.

In response to many of the impacts of Federal actions taken this past year, Governor Hochul is supporting regulatory reform – directing the continued examination of regulations to reduce provider burden. To further improve integrated treatment, we will be working with OASAS on the development of a single joint license for providers who deliver both mental health and addiction services. OMH has been working collaboratively with OASAS on integrated behavioral health services through our continued efforts to build

and strengthen the crisis continuum as well as the expansion of the CCBHCs including the promulgation of new CCBHC regulations.

From the beginning of her tenure, Governor Hochul has made the health and welfare of children and youth one of her main priorities. This commitment to children and families has resulted in the development of Youth Assertive Community Treatment (YACT), expansion of Home-based Crisis Intervention (HBCI), new resources to expand suicide prevention programs for high-risk youth and enhanced partial hospitalization children's service rates. This year's proposed budget includes protections for high need populations, programs to educate and increase wellness, and initiatives that will ensure New York continues to be a leader in the mental health treatment of youth.

When Governor Hochul conducted Youth Listening Sessions across New York State in 2023, we repeatedly heard from young people that they wanted three things: services in schools, safe places to gather, and the ability to talk to friends.

Youth turn to each other when needing help and they want to know how to support the mental health of their peers. Building on existing annual funding for Youth Mental Health First Aid and Teen Mental Health First Aid, which have so far certified more than 7,400 adults and teens, this year's proposed budget includes an investment of \$17.5 million, allowing all 10th graders statewide to have the option to take this training, equipping a generation with life-saving skills to identify and respond to mental health challenges among their peers. This is an opportunity to reach more than 180,000 students per year and ensures mental health is a regular topic of discussion among our youth, helping to address the stigma that's long persisted in this space.

The proposed budget will also add funding for two additional community organizations to offer Youth Safe Spaces - a non-clinical, safe environment where teens and their families can discuss mental health. Connecting young people between the ages of 12 and 24 with mental health resources, positive peer relationships, and meaningful activities, this additional funding will bring the total number of sites to ten across New York State.

We have made great progress in strengthening school-based mental health services across the State and to date, there are nearly 1,300 school-based mental health clinic satellites. Building on this success, this year's budget provides \$100,000 for a *Schools of Distinction in Supporting Strong Mental Health* designation to be developed, recognizing and rewarding schools that have done an outstanding job providing strong mental health supports, preventing crises, and reducing substance abuse. A maximum of 10 schools per year will be awarded the designation by achieving the recognized standard of excellence and established key benchmarks.

At this moment in time, when the Federal Government is attacking many of the people we serve, and at the same time, risking the sustainability of behavioral health providers, Governor Hochul is once again taking action to strengthen our service delivery system. Responding to the Federal Government's sudden discontinuation of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's "press-3" option for the LGBTQ+ community in July, which was answering up to 60,000 calls monthly, the proposed budget includes \$1.8 million to support this population. OMH will work with a national crisis support center to provide young people with access to trained crisis counselors specialized in challenges facing LGBTQ+ community members. And, recognizing that people in need of that same understanding may reach out directly to 988, we will provide training to hundreds of 988 crisis counselors in addition to establishing the new legal hotline and website for the LGBTQ+ community.

To improve mental health outcomes and strengthen cultural support for Indigenous students, New York State will partner with all Nations to support Indigenous students' mental health in ways reflecting their cultures and communities - utilizing language, storytelling, song, and land-based education to build resilience and healing. Building on the Indigenous Mental Wellbeing Pilot Program, the State will expand the use of transitional support workers and peer advocates to all Tribal Nations and Indigenous-serving school districts with a government-to-government relationship with the State. The initiative also stands up an Indigenous School Mental Health Workforce Center to support SUNY students seeking careers in school-based mental health.

Making sure that New York Youth receive the very best quality care is a priority. To that end, OMH will publish a 10-year training roadmap to implement evidence-based practices in child mental health statewide to ensure all child-serving clinicians in agency settings are trained in evidence-based practices. OMH recognizes the need to both build a strong field of generalist mental health professionals to treat the wide range of the most prevalent mental health concerns for youth, as well as build a strong group of clinicians who can treat youth with more complex and special needs.

Finally, OMH will lead a three-year Suicide Prevention Action Plan to raise awareness of risk factors and help save lives by ensuring vulnerable New Yorkers are recognized before reaching a point of crisis. As suicide rates rise nationally, certain populations face heightened risk due to social isolation, discrimination, and a lack of culturally competent care. By taking a multi-agency approach, we will develop a collaborative approach to suicide prevention – addressing special needs and reaching high risk populations.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Executive Budget, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.