

Observing Suicide Prevention Month

OMH and SPCNY launch media awareness campaign for 988

It's all about saving lives.

Each year, New York State observes September as Suicide Prevention Month – to increase public awareness of this serious problem and to help state residents who are struggling with mental health challenges.

This month helps to shift public perception, spread hope, and share vital information to people affected by suicide. The goal is to ensure all New Yorkers have access to resources and supports to prevent suicide.

Help is available 24/7

Based on the volume of calls to New York State's crisis contact centers, OMH sees that demand is still high for mental health support. Rates of psychological distress among youth are at historic highs, according to a recent survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The percentage of New York high school students who reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless for at least two weeks during the past year were the highest recorded over the past two decades.

This is why OMH and the Suicide Prevention Center of New York this fall are starting **'We hear you,'** a marketing campaign to raise awareness about the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**.

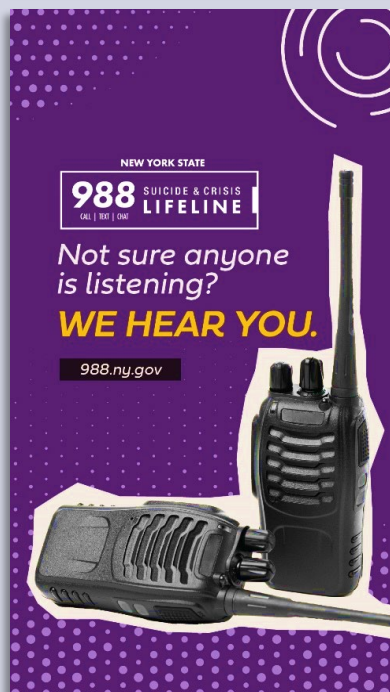
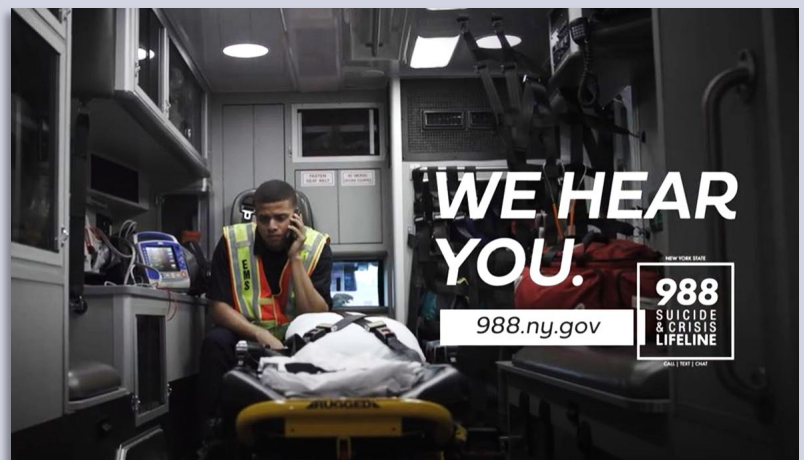
"The best way to prevent suicide is to ask for help early if you're feeling down, depressed, or troubled," said OMH Commissioner Dr. **Ann Sullivan**. "And one of the most effective ways to get help is to call 988 and speak with a trained counselor and get whatever assistance you may need. Governor **Kathy Hochul's** continuing support for this critical resource, is saving lives in our state."

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline was launched in New York State in July 2022 to provide an easy-to-remember, three-digit number to access mental health services. Residents of all 62 counties who are a mental health or substance use crisis can call or text '988' or visit 988lifeline.org/chat for a direct connection to care and support.



Dr. Ann Sullivan
Commissioner, Office of Mental Health

Suicide Prevention Month activities include online messages, such as the one above featuring Commissioner Sullivan, and 988 campaign advertisements on television and social media, below.



Numerous studies have shown that the Lifeline is working — most callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a counselor.

A targeted campaign

The media campaign will expand on the digital campaign that OMH has conducted during the past year to spread even greater awareness of this critical resource. Plans include advertisements on billboards, buses and subways, and convenience store screens; during public events; and on broadcast, cable, and streaming television.

As part of the campaign, OMH is making available a **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Education and Awareness Toolkit**, an interactive resource tool designed to support individuals facing suicide risk. OMH and SPCNY conducted extensive research to determine the best approach for the campaign – interviewing a wide scope of New Yorkers by age, ethnicity, and location. Messages will be adjusted to address specific audiences. The campaign will focus on the fact that 988 is confidential, free, and available around the clock.

Public events

OMH has scheduled a series of live events throughout the state as well – including training sessions at local school districts, talks at veterans' centers, presentations at professional conferences, candlelight vigils, community awareness walks, information tables at community events, and raising flags of hope.

Governor Hochul has provided budgetary support the past two years to significantly expand the capacity of 988 Crisis Contact Centers. More than 514,000 calls and 83,000 texts and chats have been directly routed to New York crisis call centers since 2022.

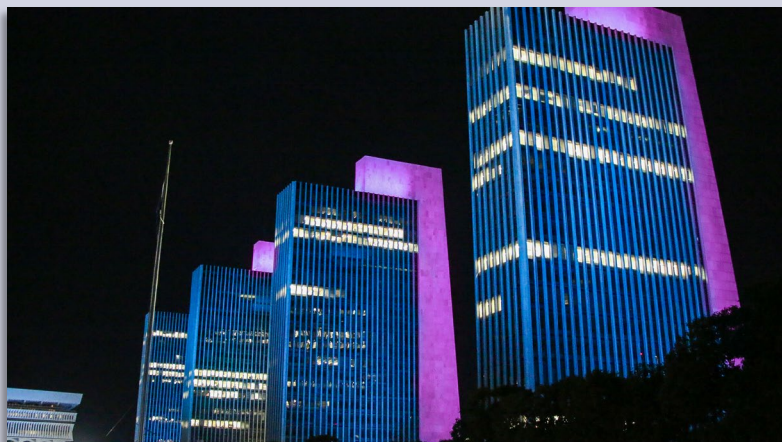
Lighting landmarks teal and purple

Governor Hochul ordered certain state bridges and landmarks to be illuminated in purple and teal (see photographs at right):

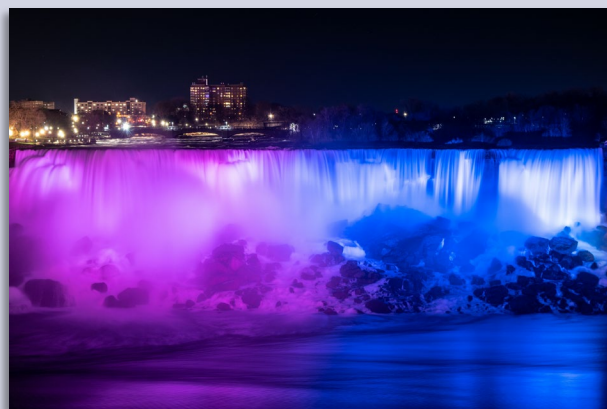
- Albany International Airport Gateway
- Alfred E. Smith State Office Building
- Empire State Plaza
- Fairport Lift Bridge over the Erie Canal
- Franklin D. Roosevelt Mid-Hudson Bridge
- Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge
- H. Carl McCall SUNY Building
- Kosciuszko Bridge
- Moynihan Train Hall
- MTA LIRR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

Suicide Prevention Task Force

Earlier this year, the **New York State Suicide Prevention Task Force** reconvened to work on strengthening public health approaches, enhancing health system competencies, improving data surveillance methods, and infusing cultural competency in the state's suicide prevention strategy. The Task Force is conducting six virtual sessions on a bi-monthly schedule.



State landmarks lit in purple and teal for Suicide Prevention Month.





Commissioner Sullivan and Executive Deputy Commissioner **Moira W. Tashjian, MPA** (center), met with the Capital Region SOS team in August and toured part of their outreach route through downtown Albany. Operated by Rehabilitation Support Services, this team canvases areas in Albany, Schenectady, and Saratoga counties, connecting with individuals experiencing homelessness in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Safe Options Support

Helping homeless individuals throughout the state

Ten new **Safe Options Support** teams are now at work in upstate New York and Long Island, helping individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness connect with the services and supports they need to bring them lasting housing stability.

The SOS program uses **Critical Time Intervention**, an evidence-based practice that helps connect vulnerable individuals in crisis to housing and supports, including critical mental health services. Multidisciplinary teams help these individuals to strengthen their skills and support network so that they can be successfully housed, and their care can be transferred to community-based providers.

The program was initially provided \$25 million for the 2023 state fiscal year to create teams in New York City. Governor Hochul expanded funding to nearly \$34 million last year to expand the program to upstate and Long Island. The program now serves 19 counties throughout upstate and Long Island, with teams canvassing communities in the Capital, Central, Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, Southern Tier, and Western regions.

An additional team is being developed to serve the Central and Southern Tier regions, with a launch expected this fall. The team will canvas areas in Cortland, Tompkins, and Tioga counties.

Here are some of the early statistics from the new upstate and Long Island teams:

- Outreach encounters: **7,833**
- Referrals received: **1,577**
- Enrollments into SOS program: **296**
- Total temporary bed placements: **209**
- Total individuals placed into stable housing: **87**



Members of the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless SOS team.



Catholic Charities of Cortland County Central/Southern Tier team.



Meet the Medical Director

The new Medical Director of OMH Housing and Homeless Services is **Carine Nzodom, MD**. She came to OMH from the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, where she worked as the Medical Director of Behavioral Health Homeless Services. Prior to that, Dr. Nzodom provided care in non-traditional settings, such as homeless shelters, ACT, food pantries, supportive housing, and street outreach. She completed her residency at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and public psychiatry fellowship at Columbia University.

Success stories

Even more inspiring are the stories teams are sharing of the individuals they've helped during the past several months. Here are just a few.

- A **50-year-old man** had been living in the wooded areas of his county for many years. Having regular interactions with this man during the team's outreach phase allowed them to form a connection. Over time, the man came to trust the team. One day, he confided that he was tired of walking the five miles to and from his usual panhandling spot. The SOS Team clinician took this opportunity to suggest that he should try out a shelter. After quickly coordinating with the local Department of Social Services, approval was given for the man to be placed at a nearby shelter. Since then, this man has been sheltered for more than 90 days.
- An individual that an SOS team met at a nighttime drop-in center had been **homeless for about 10 months**. She was frustrated, exhausted, and potentially putting herself in dangerous situations. The team was able to find placement for this individual in a safe, affordable, senior community where she's been living for more than six weeks. This individual has also been learning and improving her independent living skills and supports.
- An individual **living in his car** for more than 11 years had lost hope in getting help from the system. He was reluctant to receive services. However, team members wouldn't give up. After two months of trying to engage him, the man agreed to services. He's now waiting to move into supportive housing.
- An SOS team met an individual during outreach who was in his **mid-40s and homeless** and "had the look of a defeated man." One of the peers worked with him and placed him in a rooming house. The man is now going to school full-time, working toward his GED and he plans to get a job. Staff report he now is hopeful and happy and just looks different than when they first met him.
- A **61-year-old woman** had been living in her car with her 18-year-old dog for approximately four months. Diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and PTSD, the woman said she was unable to secure shelter because her dog was not certified as a service animal. She was adamant about not leaving her dog, describing it as her "only family."

The SOS Team worked diligently to find a solution, and researched the criteria required for service animals. They scheduled a fair hearing with the county Social Services Department and connected her with legal resources and animal advocacy groups that provided her with service-animal criteria. She was placed at a women's shelter with a service dog and is waiting lists for low-income housing. The woman has praised the SOS Team for their work and said that one day she will give back to the community.



Rehabilitation Support Services Ulster/Sullivan team.



Monroe Plan for Medical Care Southern Tier team.



Search for Change Westchester County team.



HONOR Orange County team.



*Liberty Resources Rochester team with **Harvey Rosenthal** (center), CEO of the Alliance for Rights and Recovery.*

Employment

CORE offers job services for individuals with behavioral health issues

OMH is making \$7 million available to fund and expand the use of **Individual Placement and Support**, an evidence-based program that helps individuals living with behavioral health issues work at regular jobs of their choosing.

This second round of state funding follows nearly \$3.4 million issued to seven providers earlier this year to help them to increase employment options at agency-licensed and designated outpatient rehabilitation programs.

“Employment can have a tremendously beneficial impact on an individual’s ability to recover from a behavioral health issue,” Commissioner Sullivan said. “By helping these New Yorkers find and maintain meaningful employment, we can help them to achieve financial independence and remove a key obstacle on their paths to recovery.”



Also known as **CORE Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services**, the program helps individuals living with behavioral health issues build skills and self-efficiency. CORE services promote community participation, personal recovery, successful community integration, and satisfactory quality of life for individuals who have behavioral health concerns.

Funding amounts

Providers located upstate are eligible to receive \$71,858 annually over five years. Upstate applicants maintaining an annual caseload of 100 individuals or greater in a single county or more than 70 individuals in two or more counties are eligible to receive a total of \$143,716 annually over five years.

Providers located downstate are eligible to receive \$77,567 annually over five years. Downstate applicants maintaining an annual caseload of 100 individuals or greater in a single county or more than 70 individuals in two or more counties are eligible to receive a total of \$155,134 annually over five years.

Earlier this year, OMH provided award to seven providers to offer these services:

- **Allwel**, New York City, \$775,670.
- **Association for Mental Health and Wellness**, Ronkonkoma and Suffolk County, \$775,670.
- **Family Residences and Essential Enterprises, Inc.**, Old Bethpage and Nassau County, \$387,835.
- **Fountain House**, Manhattan, \$387,835.
- **Intandem** (Cattaraugus Rehabilitation Center) Olean, \$359,290.
- **Pesach Tikvah**, Brooklyn, \$387,835.
- **The Neighborhood Center**, Utica and Oneida County, \$359,290.

A person-centered model

Individual Placement and Support is a model that supports working with the individual at any point during their recovery - regardless of their prior employment history or existing barriers. This initiative integrates evidence-based practices, clinical treatment, recovery, and rehabilitation in a single, person-centered environment, which allows employment specialists to work closely with rehabilitation and vocational staff.

This person-centered model requires agency-wide strategies to encourage and engage individuals around competitive, integrated employment, in addition to a high level of partnership with local employers. Individuals assisted by this model are linked to employment supports, helped with navigating work incentives, and provided follow-along supports that are continuous.

On the road



OMH outreach at the State Fair

The **New York State Fair** is an important part of OMH's education and outreach, providing vital information to thousands of fairgoers each year about mental health and wellness. Each year, our booth is staffed by volunteers from OMH offices and facilities throughout the state and various community mental health partners – who can direct visitors to counseling and referral services as needed. All information and services are provided free of charge. This year's booth featured an interactive art display to encourage visitors to look for “glitters” – signs of joy and positivity – in their lives and to share examples of their own personal glitters with others.



Mental health roundtable

Executive Deputy Commissioner Tashjian joined Governor Hochul in a **mental health roundtable** with local mental health providers at the office of Queens Borough President **Donovan Richards**. Local elected officials taking part included City Councilwoman and Mental Health Chair **Linda Lee**, Health Chair **Lynn Schulman**, State Senator **Leroy Comrie**, and State Assembly Member **Sam Berger**.

At the event, the Governor announced a \$1 million package to expand access to mental health care in Queens by partnering with five community-based providers including TCCNY, Charles Wang Community Health Center, Transitional Services for New York, Korean Community Services, and Venture House.



Supportive housing in Saratoga County

Commissioner Sullivan took part in the ribbon-cutting for the **Riverview Apartments**, a new 60-unit affordable apartment building in the town of Corinth. The development includes 30 supportive units with on-site services for eligible households. In the past five years, New York State Homes and Community Renewal has created or preserved more than 900 affordable homes in Saratoga County. Riverview Apartments continues this effort and complements Governor Hochul's \$25 billion five-year Housing Plan which is on track to create or preserve 100,000 affordable homes statewide.



Indigenous Nations Summit

Commissioner Sullivan joined Governor Hochul and other state agency leaders at New York State's inaugural **Indigenous Nations Summit** at the Executive Mansion in Albany in August.

The meeting with leaders and citizens representing their nations was held to build and extend conversations on topics such as health, education, environmental conservation, cannabis, transportation, gaming, mental health, and addiction services.

Turn the Page... Again!

This summer, Executive Deputy Commissioner Tashjian visited **Turn the Page... Again!**, a bookstore in Bayside supported by **Transitional Services for New York, Inc.**

The bookstore opened in 2010 with the goal of helping individuals with a mental health diagnosis acclimate to a work environment while gaining skills, confidence, and a purpose. With help from TSINY, OMH, the community, and the Queens Library, it's been able to grow and educate the community about the importance of recovery, as well as reducing the stigma of mental illness.



From left: **Nina Cassius** and **Sharlene Franklin** from TSINY; **Najwa Awad**, LMSW, Director of OMH's New York City Field Office; **Larry S. Grubler**, PsyD from TSINY; Executive Deputy Commissioner Tashjian; **Jeffrey Hewitt** from TSINY; and **Liz Breier**, MAHAP, CPRP, NYCPSP, Deputy Director of OMH's Office of Advocacy and Peer Support Services.

Resources

Understanding Long COVID

COVID has impacted all of us in one way or another, and has caused a great deal of stress, anxiety, and depression for many New Yorkers. This is especially true for people suffering from Long COVID, which can have an effect on every aspect of a person's life.

The New York State Insurance Fund has released an [educational pamphlet](#) to assist employers in understanding Long COVID. Long COVID is a multifaceted syndrome that causes new, returning, or ongoing symptoms in people for weeks, months, or years after their initial infection and can have significant limitations on their day-to-day activities. The publication provides background on Long COVID and identifies strategies that can assist employers in supporting employees who experience it.

The pamphlet outlines the most commonly reported symptoms of Long COVID, the number of people affected, and the consequences for the labor force and the economy. It encourages employers to communicate to employees that many people with COVID-19 go on to experience Long COVID, and that taking measures to protect themselves against COVID-19 can help avoid the potentially life-altering effects of Long COVID.

The document highlights ideas for supporting workers who have or care for someone with Long COVID and explains the importance of filing a workers' compensation claim when a worker contracts COVID-19 on the job.

