

Facing challenges

Responding to cuts under the new federal budget

The Congressional Budget Reconciliation Bill that was signed into law in July has many in New York's mental health care community anxious as OMH evaluates the impact it will have.

OMH already knows that these cuts will have a broad-reaching impact on Medicaid eligibility and funding for programs and institutions that rely on its reimbursements. This will likely have both immediate and long-term consequences for many of the programs OMH oversees.

Strategies to minimize impact

Governor **Kathy Hochul** has directed state agencies to prepare comprehensive strategies to help limit the long-term damage to vital programs facing federal cuts.

OMH is committed to minimizing the impact to our behavioral healthcare system, provider networks, Local Government Units, and individuals receiving mental health services. It will also seek opportunities to increase efficiency and decrease burdens on our system of care.

OMH will soon hold regional planning meetings with counties, providers, advocacy groups, and service recipients to develop strategies for addressing increasing need in response to the changing federal landscape. OMH will also hold meetings for the public to learn more about recent federal developments and potential impact on OMH programs and funding.

Questions and suggestions can be submitted at any time by e-mail to:
planning@omh.ny.gov.

Joining in the state's legal challenges

To date, New York State, through the Attorney General's office, has brought several lawsuits:

- **SAMHSA Grants:** Challenging the termination of U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration COVID-related grants, winning a permanent injunction to restore funding.



OMH urges cooperation, focus on strengths

"We've encountered formidable challenges before, and we've always been able to overcome them by relying on the strength of our collective partnerships," said OMH Commissioner Dr. **Ann Sullivan**, in a video town hall on July 21 with mental health providers and advocates.

The Commissioner and OMH leadership are conducting a series of video town halls to discuss the impact of recent federal actions and how the state can provide support during this challenging time.

"Our strength rests in the unrivaled talent and commitment of our agency's workforce," she added. "I have full confidence in our ability to continue delivering high-quality mental health care throughout our state."

She noted that New York State has a champion in Governor Hochul, who is deeply committed to strengthening our state's mental health system and advocating for the rights of all New Yorkers to have access to this care. "Under her leadership, we have seen unprecedented investments in mental health care throughout our state," the Commissioner said.

"As always, please accept our heartfelt thanks for all that you do and your dedication to the people we serve," she said. "We're proud to be standing with you during these uncertain times. I believe we are all stalwart in our commitment to promoting mental health for all New Yorkers and providing hope and recovery for anyone living with mental illness."

"Together, we will continue valuing diversity and serving our state equitably," she added. "Most of all, we will continue to support those living with mental illness, their families, our providers, counties, and countless other stakeholders."

- **Mental Health Research Grants:** Suing over National Institutes of Health grant cuts targeting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and LGBTQ research, resulting in a court ruling voiding the cuts.
- **School Mental Health Services:** In July 2025, the Attorney General sued the U.S. Department of Education over the termination of over \$1 billion in school-based mental health funding, arguing it was unlawful and harmful to students.
- **Essential Services Grants:** In June 2025, part of a challenge of the administration's cuts to billions of dollars in grants supporting law enforcement, environmental protection, food assistance, and other essential services.
- **ACA Amendments:** In July 2025, challenging the final rule introduced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to amend marketplace coverage, including stricter verification requirements for eligibility, shortened open enrollment periods, and eliminating coverage for gender-affirming care as an essential health benefit.

By the numbers

Potential impact on New York State of recent federal actions



- **2 million** New Yorkers could lose current insurance coverage.
- SNAP benefits in jeopardy for nearly **3 million** New Yorkers.
- **300,000+** households projected to lose some/all SNAP benefits.
- **41,000** noncitizens expected to lose all benefits.
- Combined fiscal impact for New York State: **\$14 billion** annually.

Access to care

Regulations to require insurers cover behavioral health services

A series of new consumer protections announced by Governor Hochul in July are designed to give New York state residents better access to mental health and substance abuse services.

The [network adequacy](#) regulations require plans to provide access to initial outpatient appointments for behavioral health care within 10 business days of initial requests and to post up-to-date, accurate lists of in-network providers on their websites, which will help to eliminate inaccurate or misleading directories.

Health care plans must also have dedicated employees who can help their members find in-network providers and provide a list of available in-network providers within three business days, following a member's request.

Removing barriers

These protections took effect on July 1, for New Yorkers covered by Medicaid Managed Care, Child Health Plus, and the Essential Plan. For New Yorkers covered by commercial health insurance plans, these wait-time standards will take effect on a rolling basis as their policies are renewed, modified, or purchased on and after July 1.

"New Yorkers in need of mental health or substance use disorder treatment should not be forced to wait months for essential care or to cover these costs themselves when their plan doesn't include any available providers," Governor Hochul said. "These new regulations will help remove barriers that often force individuals and families to pay out-of-pocket for care or forgo treatment altogether."

Plans must post an accurate and up-to-date directory of their provider networks, including health care professionals or facilities, providers' locations, telehealth options, languages spoken, any restrictions concerning the conditions treated or ages served, and facility affiliations, among other



information. Accurate directories will help to eliminate so-called ‘ghost networks’ – ones that give the appearance of offering in-network options, but instead list inaccurate information or providers that aren’t taking appointments.

Giving consumers recourse

The new regulations also provide avenues for consumers to file complaints against plans or insurers that are not in compliance. New Yorkers covered by Medicaid, Essential Plan, or Child Health Plus can contact the [New York State Department of Health](#); those with state-regulated commercial insurance coverage may contact the [Department of Financial Services](#).

For more information about mental health and substance use disorder treatment coverage requirements and protections, [visit the DFS webpage](#). New Yorkers who are unsure of their coverage should contact their insurer or employer. Those needing mental health or substance use disorder services should also check their health insurance policies for a list of what is covered.

Mental health parity

Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, New York is leading the nation in requiring health insurers to cover behavioral health services and continues to develop tools to ensure these companies are following all applicable laws.

New York State has been actively taking steps to ensure Medicaid managed care plans are complying with regulations and providing New Yorkers with the coverage they are entitled to receive under law.

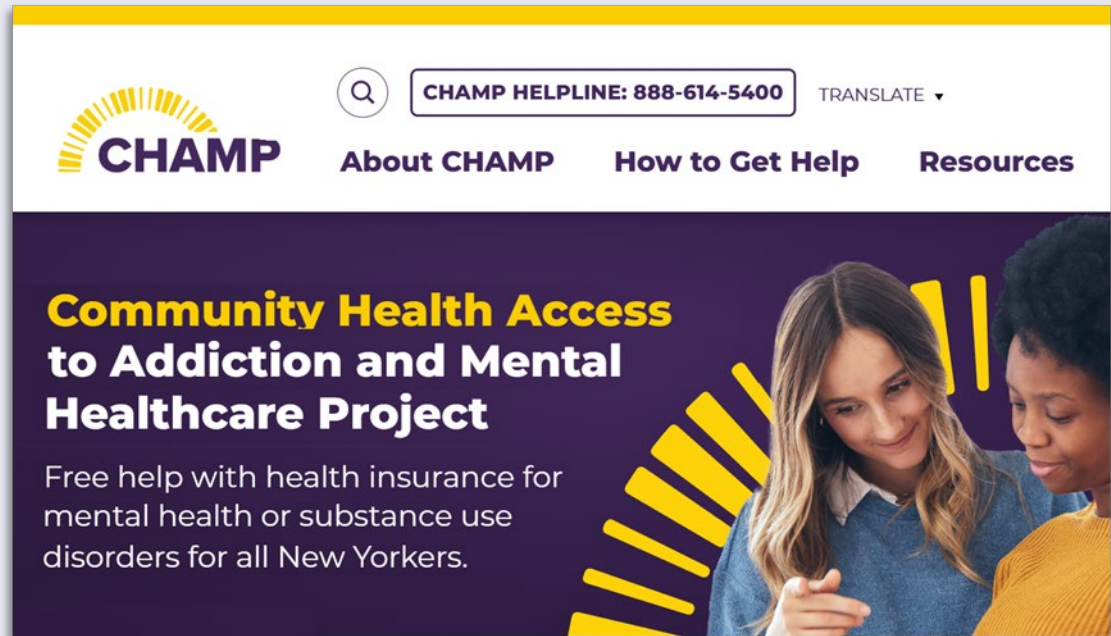
OMH reviewed six nonquantitative treatment limitations — provisions that are sometimes

manipulated by these plans to restrict access to necessary behavioral health care — and found all carriers in compliance. In addition, OMH’s comprehensive and rigorous examination also determined that both the Capital District Physicians’ Health Plan, Inc. and Excellus BlueCross BlueShield were fully compliant with all 19 nonquantitative treatment limitations.

OMH, however, also found that most managed care plans did not fully demonstrate compliance with other provisions with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. Some continually applied a different rate-setting process for behavioral health services and reimbursing providers for less than they would for medical and surgical services.

New York State has worked to hold managed care plans accountable for these violations. During a similar review of behavioral health claims filed between 2018 to 2020, OMH uncovered high levels of inappropriate denials for specialty services claims, including \$39 million between December 2017 and May 2018. New York State took enforcement action on all 15 Medicaid managed care plans, issuing a total of 95 citations between 2019 and 2021, resulting in fines to 11 carriers totaling more than \$1 million.

OMH continues to monitor managed care organizations on an ongoing basis to ensure they are properly providing behavioral health services to their members. The agency works in partnership with DOH, which has the legal authority to apply fines and enforce compliance in the Medicaid program.



Resulting fines were used to fund the [Community Health Access to Addiction and Mental Healthcare Project](#), also known as CHAMP. This program is the state’s independent health insurance ombudsman program for behavioral health care, which helps New Yorkers access treatment and insurance coverage for substance use and mental health treatment.

Celebrating the ADA

Making New York State a more equitable and inclusive place to live

In July, OMH joined its colleagues in celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act with a special commemoration ceremony at the Empire State Plaza in Albany.

The ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President **George H.W. Bush**. It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life - including jobs, schools, transportation, and in all public and private places that are open to the public. The purpose of the ADA is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

The ADA covers employment, state and local government activities, public transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications relay services. Any government messages on television also must have closed captioning, so that people can read what is being said.

"I may be too young to remember a time before the ADA – before people with disabilities had the same rights as everyone else," said OMH Youth and Young Adult Advocacy Specialist **Melanie Hecker**. "But that does not mean I do not have immense appreciation for the Americans with Disabilities Act."

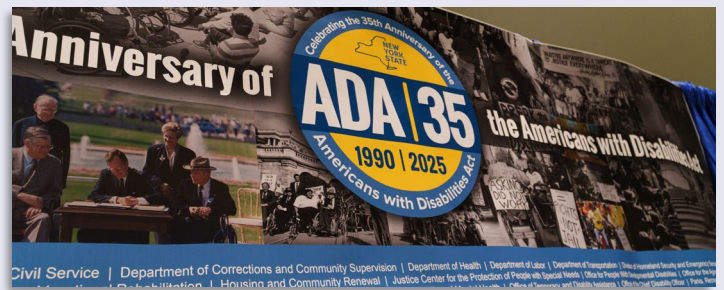
As an autistic woman living with co-occurring psychiatric disabilities, her family at one time believed she may never earn a college degree, gain employment, or live independently. "But I achieved all three, thanks in part to the ADA."

Melanie graduated *Magna Cum Laude* from the University at Albany's Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy Master of Public Administration Program, had original research published by the National Center for START Services, and received the Beacon Leadership Award from the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley.

"My job is to ensure that other young New Yorkers have the same opportunities I did," she said, "thanks to the pioneers who helped pass the Americans with Disabilities Act."

The event also featured remarks by Office of General Services Commissioner **Jeanette Moy**, state Chief Disability Officer **Kim Hill Ridley**, Office for People With Developmental Disabilities Commissioner **Willow Baer**, and advocates from the disabilities community. Entertainment was provided by Flame, a band from Gloversville whose members have disabilities. State agencies that joined OMH, OPWDD, and OGS as sponsors:

- Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Department of Civil Service
- Department of Corrections and Community Supervision
- Department of Health
- Department of Labor
- Department of Transportation
- Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services
- Education Department and its Adult Career & Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation
- Housing and Community Renewal
- Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs
- Office for the Aging
- Office of Addiction Services and Supports
- Office of Children and Family Services and its Commission for the Blind
- Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- Office of the Chief Disability Officer
- Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation



*"The Americans with Disabilities Act is what ensures people with disabilities the same life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness the founding fathers promised to all Americans," said OMH Advocacy Specialist **Melanie Hecker**.*





Living Museum

Giving the public a look at the gallery's works

In May, the Empire State Plaza in Albany played host to a public exhibition of work produced by artists from the [Living Museum](#), an internationally renowned hub of artists who are recovering from mental illness at OMH's Creedmoor Psychiatric Center.

Held as part of OMH's observance of Mental Health Awareness Month, the exhibition featured 60 high-quality reproductions of work from 16 artists working in the Living Museum, each living with mental illness, along with their portraits and a personal statement about themselves. OMH has made the works available for viewing in a [special online gallery](#). You can also watch [video feature](#) on the Living Museum, produced by OMH.

Located on Creedmoor's campus in Queens Village, the Living Museum provides an art studio dedicated to artwork produced by residents of Creedmoor programs. The studio was established in 1983 after Dr. **Janos Marton**, a psychologist at Creedmoor, invited Polish artist **Bolek Greczynski** to join the hospital staff to give patients an opportunity to see their mental illness as a creative advantage, rather than as a limitation. The two converted a dining hall in an older building into a studio and exhibition area. The program grew to be such a success, that it moved into its larger, current space in Building 75.

Today, the museum features 45,000 square feet of space, more than 10,000 individual pieces of artwork and includes a performance space for musicians. Its current director is Dr. **Mitra Reyhani Ghadim**, ATR-BC, LCAT, ATCS. She has worked as a museum art therapist at the Queens Museum and Nassau County Museum of Art, managing museum-based programs and establishing community art and health services through partnership with various organizations. Dr. Ghadim is interested in the application of the Living Museum approach in disadvantaged communities.

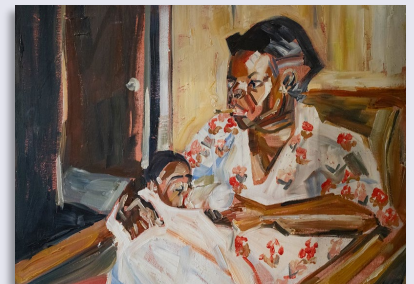
'A space of safety'

Research has shown that tapping into the creative process can help improve mental health by increasing focus, reducing symptoms of stress and depression, and improving mood. However, the Living Museum differs from traditional art therapy. Artwork that is produced during therapy is considered a part of the process and cannot be exhibited. At the Living Museum, art is produced for exhibition.

"Because of the stigma society associates with mental illness, the view that inpatients can have of themselves can be self-destructive," Marton said. "This can strip them of their humanity and reduce their identity to that of a 'mental patient.' The Living Museum program provides a space of safety, a space that belongs to them, in which participants can change their identity from a mental patient to a mentally ill artist – which can be a major step in their journey to recovery."



Commissioner Sullivan, visiting the exhibition with Office of General Services Commissioner Jeanette Moy.



A proud history

Whether it is painting, writing, or performing, the arts have long played a valuable role in mental health therapy.

Innovative mental health professionals in France and Germany recognized this in the early 20th century. Originally regarding inpatient art as something that could only be analyzed, they started encouraging its use in therapy and eventually celebrating its originality.

Artistic works by people with mental illness were considered part of the rebellious genre called 'outsider art,' 'art brut,' or 'raw art' – all of which refer to a style of art created outside an official institutional culture and without formal training that can express unconventional ideas, extreme mental states, or elaborate fantasy worlds.

Psychiatrists in New York were among the leaders in understanding the value of artistic expression in therapy. The monthly literary newsletter, *The Opal*, produced from 1851 to 1860 by inpatients at what was then called the New York State Lunatic Asylum at Utica, gave patients an outlet for their poems, essays, and news articles on their experiences.

'Caught by the bug to create'

Today, OMH facilities and programs offer many forms of art therapy. A second Living Museum opened about 15 years ago at Rockland Psychiatric Center in Orangeburg.

The Rockland museum includes a garden in which participants can grow vegetables and flowers, watch birds, and enjoy nature. It conducts art shows in local libraries and cafes where the artists can sell their work. It helps participants connect with their peers through discussions, art exhibits, and field trips to museums and galleries. It also promotes well-being through yoga and exercise programs.

Working through the Living Museums has helped some of the program's alumni to develop successful careers as working artists.

"Our artists-in-residence are here every day creating and they become incredibly good," Marton said. "Once an artist is caught by the bug to create, that gives them the something to look forward to – something satisfying and essential."

"In some, mental illness can provide the fanciful space that feeds the creative process," Marton added.

"The rejection and hardship experienced by people with mentally illness can be a motivating factor for expression." As Greczynski, who died in 1994, once told participants: "Use your vulnerabilities as a weapon."



The Living Museum at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center.



Housing

Mosaic Apartments in Schenectady continues statewide initiative

In June, Governor Hochul announced the completion of the Mosaic Apartments, a 60-unit affordable housing development in Schenectady's Mont Pleasant neighborhood.

Half of the Mosaic's apartments are reserved for individuals and families struggling with homelessness and in need of support services, including older New Yorkers.

Units are available to households earning up to 50 percent of the Area Median Income. Tenants living in the supportive apartments will receive services including case management, healthcare coordination, transportation, community integration, and independent living skills education.

Joining OMH in supporting the project were New York State Homes and Community Renewal, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, and the Capital Region Land Bank.

Operating funding for the supportive apartments is provided by the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative administered by OMH. DePaul Properties is the project's developer and DePaul Community Services is providing the on-site support services.

Increasing New York's housing supply

This project is part of Governor Hochul's \$25 billion five-year housing plan, which is on track to create or preserve 100,000 affordable homes statewide, including 10,000 with support services for vulnerable populations, and the electrification of an additional 50,000 homes. Nearly 60,000 homes have been created or preserved to-date.

As part of the 2025 fiscal year State Budget, the Governor secured a landmark agreement to increase New York's housing supply through new tax incentives, capital funding, and new protections for renters and homeowners. The 2026 State Budget built on this by including more than \$1.5 billion in new state funding for housing, a Housing Access Voucher pilot program, and new policies to improve affordability for tenants and homebuyers.

In the 2026 budget, the Governor is making \$45.9 million available through ESSHI, the first increase in funding for the program since its creation in 2016. Projects will serve adults experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, veterans and chronically homeless families, and individuals living with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

Developers can apply for up to \$34,000 annually per unit or qualifying individual in the New York City metropolitan area, which includes all five city boroughs, and Nassau, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk, and Westchester counties — an increase of \$9,000 over the previous rate. Developments in other areas of the state are eligible for up to \$31,000 annually per unit or qualifying individual, which is an increase of \$6,000 over the previous rate.

"Supportive services are a vital component of our efforts to ensure all New Yorkers have a safe, stable place to call home," Governor Hochul said. "By expanding the funding available through ESSHI, we can help individuals experiencing homelessness get the help they need to remain stably housed within their community."



*Above: The completed Mosaic Apartments.
Below: Project groundbreaking in 2023.*



Transitions

Moira Tashjian retires as Executive Deputy Commissioner

OMH wishes the best for **Moira Tashjian**, MPA, who retired in June as the agency's Executive Deputy Commissioner.

Moira has been a compassionate leader in advocating for the needs of New Yorkers with mental illness. She was instrumental in opening some of the first housing programs in the early 1990s for individuals who were homeless living with HIV/AIDS. For her tireless efforts to improve the lives of individuals with mental health needs, she was awarded the ACLAIMH Advocacy Award in 2016 and the Odyssey House Public Service Award this past May.

Moira leaves with more than 35 years of experience serving at the local, regional, and state levels of the mental health system. She came to OMH in 2001 after working in community residential services and as the Behavioral Health Systems Administrator for the Schenectady County Office of Community Service.

She held various positions at OMH, including Statewide Assisted Outpatient Treatment Coordinator, Director of Care Coordination and Assertive Community Treatment, Director of Housing, and the Associate Commissioner of Adult Community Services.

She has used her wealth of experience in program and policy areas as an adjunct at the University of Albany School of Social Welfare, teaching Master-level social welfare policy and mental health policy for more than 14 years. Moira is an active member of the Executive Committee for the Ride for Missing Children, supported by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. She holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from Marist College.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to be able to serve those in need," she said. "As we serve others, please hold true to your values and have them be at the forefront. Be curious, listen, be kind and accept others - however they show up. Lastly, create an environment of transparency and creativity where the needs and perspective of those we serve are paramount."

Ben Rosen has assumed the duties of Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner.



Gerald M. Engel retires as Chief Medical Informatics Officer

Gerald M. Engel, RPH, MBA, has retired as OMH's Associate Commissioner and Chief Medical Informatics Officer. Jerry had been with OMH since 2000 and served in various positions, including Pharmacy Director of Capital District Psychiatric Center, OMH Director of Pharmacy Services, and OMH Director of Health Services.

As Chief Medical Informatics Officer, Jerry was responsible for overseeing the expanded use of technology to advance clinical care within OMH and the larger public mental health system. He was the executive sponsor and clinical business owner for all OMH clinical IT systems, including the Empire State Vista, which is the largest Vista implementation outside of the Veterans Administration.

In addition, he led efforts for the OMH Health Information exchange for all OMH hospitals and clinics throughout the state. He served as the OMH liaison with the Office of Information Technology Services to ensure that technology resources are used most efficiently and effectively to meet OMH's mission.

Jerry received his Pharmacy degree from the Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and his MBA from the State University of New York Empire State.

Cody Catalfamo has assumed the duties of Associate Commissioner, Chief Medical Informatics Officer.



On the road

Visiting with JCCA's Youth ACT team

In May, Commissioner Sullivan visited with the staff of JCCA, a child welfare organization in New York City, which is the recipient of \$450,000 in start-up funding to establish a second Youth Assertive Community Treatment team in the Bronx.

The Youth ACT program provides a holistic approach to mental health care, offering intensive, highly coordinated, individualized services and therapeutic interventions aimed at keeping children in their homes, schools, and communities.

New York was the first state in the nation to adopt the Youth ACT program. JCCA's team is one of 10 new ACT teams in the state, adding to the current 20, serving 27 counties. JCCA's team includes a psychiatric nurse practitioner, a family peer support specialist, licensed mental health professionals, an educational support specialist, a clinical support specialist, a program assistant, and a team leader.



Photo by The Brooklyn Paper



NYSPI summer program provides valuable experience for young people

The 2025 Summer Youth Employment Program interns officially began their study at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in July. This internship offers a season of learning, growth, and meaningful impact — for interns and the teams they join.

“SYEP time is my favorite time of the year,” said **Wardell Duncan**, Director of Volunteer Services. “We get to impart wisdom, encouragement, and life lessons to our students throughout the summer. You never know what you say or do that might leave a lifelong impression — and NYSPI is the right place for this.”

Creedmoor psychiatry residents celebrate graduation day

In June, Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens graduated a new class of psychiatry residents — **Hunter Baudier**, MD; **Dana Lin**, MD; **Armish Salahudin**, MD; and **David Shoenfeld**, MD, MPH.

Welcoming graduates were Creedmoor Executive Director **Martha Sullivan**, DSW; and Medical Education Director **Andrew C. Chen**, MD, PhD. The keynote speaker was **Jay W. Carruthers**, MD, Director of OMH's Suicide Prevention Center of New York. **Matthew Erlich**, MD; Medical Director, State-Operated Services, gave the commencement address.

Ella Brodsky, MD, was presented with the Teacher of the Year Award. **Dana Lin**, MD, was named Resident of the Year. The Dr. **Caterina Grandi** Award was presented to **James E. McLean**, MD. Dr Grandi, in bright green, is Chief of Psychiatry at Creedmoor. She, herself, graduated from the residency program and has been working at Creedmoor for 59 years.

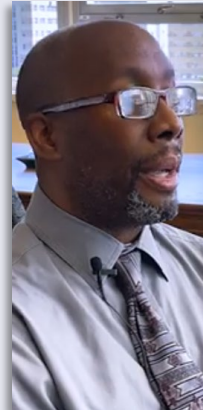
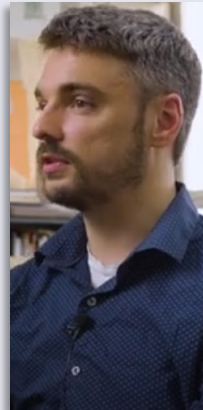




Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

Members of OMH's Advisory Committee for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access at their most-recent meeting in June in Albany. Members serve as volunteers and advise the Commissioner and OMH staff on policy, programs, procedures, and activities addressing the reduction of disparities in access, quality, and outcomes for members of historically underserved, disadvantaged, and marginalized populations.

Resources



Recovery Stories: Offering inspiration

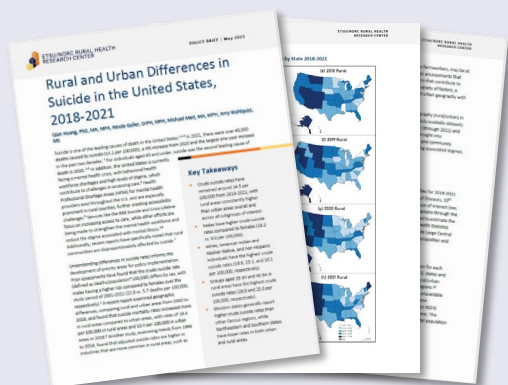
OMH has posted a series of videos online called "Recovery Stories," highlighting everyday New Yorkers, sharing their experience in overcoming mental illness and proving that recovery is possible. We hope that you find their stories to be a source of hope and inspiration. Look for links on our social media accounts or visit our YouTube page directly at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@NYSomh>.

Report: Rural and Urban Differences in Suicide in the United States, 2018 to 2021

This study by the ETSU/NORC Rural Health Research Center provides a detailed exploration of crude suicide rates for rural and urban areas from 2018 to 2021 at the national, regional, and state levels. Findings indicate that crude suicide rates in rural areas are higher than in urban areas across a variety of demographic characteristics and regions. For information, visit:

<https://www.ruralhealthresearch.org/publications/1716>.



OMH NEWS

OMH News is produced by the OMH Public Information Office for people served by, working, involved, or interested in New York State's mental health programs. Contact us at: omhnews@omh.ny.gov.