

Expanding Outreach: New initiatives to meet the mental health care needs of New Yorkers



Commissioner Sullivan, second from right, recently provided Governor Hochul and her Cabinet members with a briefing on OMH's initiatives.

Addressing the mental health care needs of New York State residents is a major focus of state government this year, with Governor **Kathy Hochul** announcing a series of initiatives to expand public mental health care outreach. This comprehensive program includes new crisis stabilization centers, crisis residential programs, additional mobile crisis teams, a 988 crisis hotline, increased coordination between law enforcement and comprehensive psychiatric emergency programs, and other intensive services for adults, children, and families experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

Safe Options Support

Initiatives announced in January are designed to address homelessness and provide intensive outreach, engagement, and care coordination services on streets and subways. The state will create specialized **"Safe Options Support"** teams of clinicians, nurses, social workers, and behavioral health specialists to help direct the homeless into shelters or housing. The state will coordinate with the **New York City Department of Homeless Services** and the **Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)** to deploy teams to areas with the most immediate and acute needs and will continuously evaluate whether deployments need to be adjusted.

Referral for services will be coordinated through the **SOS Referral Hub**, in collaboration with several city and state agencies. This will help ensure connections are made rapidly, services are broad and complementary, and duplications are prevented. Individual referrals can be made by numerous entities, such as outreach teams, hospitals, families and caregivers, community providers, police and the MTA. A citywide training collaborative will be conducted to include key stakeholders.

OMH is seeking to deploy up to 20 SOS teams this year — four teams in New York City by the early spring, eight more teams in New York City by the summer, and the final eight teams in high-need regions throughout the state by the end of the year. OMH has issued a request for proposals (RFP) to

create the teams, inviting eligible nonprofit organizations to submit applications. The state will invest \$11 million in 2023, increasing to \$21 million annually in the future.

Behavioral health crisis stabilization centers

More than \$100 million will be dedicated over the next five years to open 12 **Intensive Crisis Stabilization Centers** throughout the state. Crisis Stabilization Centers serve adults, children, adolescents, and families experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis. Crisis Stabilization Centers provide voluntary, 24/7 walk-in care. Services are offered in a safe, welcoming, and therapeutic environment provided in the community and will help divert individuals away from unnecessary emergency room visits.

There are two types of Crisis Stabilization Centers: **Supportive** and **Intensive**. **Supportive** Crisis Stabilization provides peer and recovery-oriented support services, in addition to referral and follow-up services to ensure people continue to receive the support they need after discharge. **Intensive** Crisis Stabilization includes peer and recovery-oriented support services and treatment services, including mild to moderate detox, as well as referral and follow-up services.

Crisis Stabilization Centers are part of a comprehensive crisis response system that includes mobile crisis teams, crisis residential programs, and other community services and supports. OMH and the **Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS)** are working together on supporting and developing these services throughout the state. Collaboration with local mental hygiene directors, schools, community providers, and law enforcement is crucial to providing a continuum of care

OMH and OASAS have issued a joint RFP to fund development of the centers. State contracts will be awarded that include \$20 million for start-up costs and more than \$80 million in operating funds. The purpose of the RFP is to establish three centers in New York City and nine throughout the rest of the state. The centers are to be jointly certified by OMH and OASAS and developed in collaboration with the communities they serve, including local mental hygiene directors, schools, community providers, law enforcement agencies, and other identified programs to provide a comprehensive continuum of care for referrals and follow-up.

Supportive housing



In November, the Governor announced the completion of the **Park Avenue Apartments** (ribbon cutting above) – a 115-unit supportive and affordable housing complex in the Bronx to serve individuals experiencing chronic homelessness – including those with a serious mental illness, veterans with disabilities, and the elderly.

The **Homeless Housing and Assistance Program**, administered by the **State Office of Temporary Assistance**, financed the project. OMH is providing annual funding for services and rent subsidies for the supportive housing units through the **Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI)**, and program development grants for 23 apartments serving people living with mental illness.

As part of its most-recent round of funding, ESSHI issued 192 conditional awards totaling \$35 million to housing agencies throughout the state to provide operating funding and support services for at least 1,400 units of supportive housing for homeless people with special needs, conditions or other challenges.

The Homeless Housing and Assistance Program also provided \$29.4 million to nine projects in seven counties:

- **CDS Monarch, Inc.** - Converting a two-story warehouse into 14 units of supportive housing in the town of Olean.
- **Mt. Olive Development Corp.** - Constructing a three-story building and 20 units of supportive housing for individuals 55 or older in Buffalo.
- **Community Services for Every1** - Rehabilitating a former community center and athletic facility to add 12 units of supportive housing in Buffalo.
- **Samaritan Daytop Village, Inc.** - Converting two apartment buildings into 86 units of supportive housing serving the chronically homeless in the Wakefield neighborhood of the Bronx.
- **New Destiny Housing Corporation** - Rehabilitating a former shelter into 30 units of supportive housing in the Bronx.
- **Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc.** - Building seven units of supportive housing serving homeless veterans and others in the town of Trumansburg.
- **STEL, Inc., and Options for Community Living, Inc.** - Developing a three-story building with 52 units of supportive housing serving individuals with serious mental illness in Nassau County.
- **Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc.** - Constructing a three-story building with 18 units of supportive housing serving individuals with substance use disorder in the town of Tyre.

Healthy food choices

OMH has started a program to increase access to healthy fresh produce for people living with mental illness. Using a \$200,000 grant from the **New York State Health Foundation**, the program will bring mobile farmers markets to congregate housing sites through the **Department of Agriculture & Markets'** successful mobile markets and **FreshConnect Checks Program**. In New York State, 45,000 people with serious mental illness live in congregate homes. People with mental illness often have significantly shorter lifespans than the general population, in large part because of chronic diseases related to an unhealthy diet. This program will allow OMH to teach them about buying and preparing fresh healthy foods and increase their access to farm-fresh foods.

Partners for the first phase of this program will be the **Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers** and **Rehabilitation Support Services (RSS)** in the Capital District. Both operate community residences and supportive housing programs that offer opportunities to support food access, as well as hands-on education about food and preparation. OMH will work with these agencies to develop a range of workshops including healthy meal planning, shopping for fresh produce at the mobile market, making healthy snack choices, and using healthier preparation techniques.

OMH will also develop a training module for housing agency staff, who are key to ensuring residents' access to and consumption of healthy foods. Experience from this pilot will help with possible expansion of OMH's mobile market program throughout New York State.

For information on the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, visit:

<https://otda.ny.gov/programs/housing/hhap.asp>.

For information on the FreshConnects program, visit: <https://veterans.ny.gov/content/freshconnect-checks-veterans-and-families>.

Staffing: Increasing the mental health care workforce in New York State



This past fall, **Moira Tashjian**, OMH Executive Deputy Commissioner (left); and **Emil Slane**, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Fiscal Officer; discussed OMH's efforts to increase staffing in mental health care before a New York State Assembly public hearing on the mental health workforce.

To effectively provide services to individuals with behavioral health conditions, it's vital that New York State retain experienced and dedicated employees while recruiting new ones.

New York's essential health and human services workers have seen the state through a once-in-a-century public health crisis and turned the state into a model for battling COVID. But many of these workers are still earning a wage far below what they need to sustain a household and a fair quality of life. As of June 2021, New York's healthcare workforce was still three percent below pre-pandemic levels, and 11 percent below where it would need to be by the end of 2022 to keep up with pre-pandemic projected demand.

OMH is working to address these challenges by assisting **community-based providers** in their recruitment and retention efforts. It's dedicating more than \$100 million in funding from a federal **Community Mental Health Block Grant** and the enhanced **Federal Medical Assistance Percentages** program to provide a combination of targeted rate increases to eligible programs and flexible workforce recruitment and retention funds.

OMH is also partnering with its stakeholders to develop strategies and opportunities to **strengthen the behavioral health workforce**:

- expanding and developing **institutional collaborations** to train and encourage students to pursue careers in health care.
- investing in efforts to expand **diversity, equity, and cultural competency** across the mental health workforce.
- expanding the **peer workforce**, helping providers address the needs of underserved and emerging populations in need of care.

New York's multi-year plan

These efforts are part of New York State's multi-year plan to invest \$10 billion in healthcare – the largest in state history – to rebuild and grow the healthcare workforce and strengthen the healthcare system.

Announced by Governor Hochul as part of the 2022 State of the State address, the plan will invest:

- \$2 billion to support **healthcare wages**.
- \$2 billion to support healthcare and mental hygiene **worker-retention bonuses**, with up to \$3,000 bonuses going to full-time workers who remain in their positions for one year, and pro-rated bonuses for those working fewer hours.
- \$500 million for **cost-of-living adjustments** to help raise wages for human services workers.
- \$2 billion for healthcare capital **infrastructure** and improved **lab** capacity.
- Other investments in workforce and healthcare **access** and **delivery**.

Health care career pipeline

The Governor's program to increase the number of people entering the health care field includes connecting immigrants to direct-support professions, allowing doctors and nurses to easily relocate to and practice in New York, as well as:

- **Increasing the training capacity** of medical institutions, attracting students into healthcare by **relieving** their financial burdens, and awarding **credit for prior learning** at the State and City Universities of New York.
- **Recruiting medical professionals** to work in under-served areas, such as increasing funding for the **Doctors Across New York Program**, which provides loan forgiveness for three years of service.
- Creating a **"Nurses Across NY"** Program based on Doctors Across NY.
- Expanding the **SUNY Pre-Medical Opportunity Program** and the **Diversity in Medicine Program**.
- **Expanding workforce development partnerships** to build a human services talent pipeline, including the SUNY for All Partnership and Direct Support Professional Career and Technical Education Program.
- **Building up home and community-based care** staffing through benefits and skills development, including:
 - **Home Care Workforce Initiative:** Enabling home care agencies to implement evidence-based programs that help them to recruit, retain, train, and support their direct-care workers.
 - **Workforce Transportation Incentive:** Overcoming transportation-related barriers related to home care worker recruitment and retention.
 - Improving wages for the **intellectual or developmental disabilities** workforce: Providing longevity and retention incentives to direct-support professionals.
 - **Direct Support Professional Workforce Development Grants:** Providing skill development for direct-support professionals.
 - **Workforce Recruitment Initiative:** Implementing data-driven strategies for effective recruitment of workers for the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities.
 - **Community Residence Program:** Increasing funding for rising direct-care staff costs.

Diversity: Reaffirming OMH's commitment to an inclusive and equitable workplace



*One of our nation's most influential and inspiring leaders, **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** advocated for equality and human rights for African Americans and all individuals facing injustices. His unwavering commitment and approach with nonviolent and peaceful protests led to some of the nation's most progressive legislation, including the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. OMH is committed to upholding Dr. King's legacy and continues to increase attention and focus on promoting racial justice.*

In observance of the birthday of **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** this January, and in celebration of Black History Month this February, OMH reaffirms its commitment to promoting an inclusive and equitable workplace for all.

OMH has been collaborating with other New York State agencies and is participating in several events including a food drive, volunteer fair, and career fair. OMH continues to engage in activities that are dedicated to advancing equity and reducing disparities faced by marginalized populations, particularly people of color. Through collaboration with the **Statewide Multicultural Advisory Committee**, OMH acknowledges the impact racism and racial inequality has on Black and people of color's mental health, and the quality of service these communities receive.

The [Nathan Kline Institute's Center for Research on Culture and Structural Equity in Behavioral Health](#) and OMH have embarked on an agency-wide structural racism organizational assessment. This comprehensive assessment is intended to identify systemic and organizational policies and practices that contribute to racial inequities in New York's mental health system.

Among its many efforts at reform, the agency is developing and implementing an online training curriculum to adopt and support mental health practices according to the [National CLAS Standards](#). Additionally, modules are being formulated to reduce racial and ethnic-based bias in clinical services delivery and provide culturally appropriate clinical services for the primary special population groups. In keeping with advancing racial equality, equity components were added to all agency RFPs, licensing, and funding requirements. These measures, grounded in the National CLAS Standards, ensure that organizations are prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion activities – particularly diversifying their workforce, understanding the role a person's culture plays in their recovery, and providing staff training on these vital topics.

OMH acknowledges that while efforts are being made toward promoting racial justice and equity, there is still much more to be done at both the institutional and personal levels. The agency is committed to holding the mental health practice and administration in New York State accountable.

Suicide Prevention: Preparing for the new national 988 lifeline

On July 16, 2022, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline will change from its current number (**1-800-273-TALK**) to an easier-to-remember "**988**." This simpler number will help the public to get in contact more easily with lifesaving behavioral health crisis services. Callers will still be able to use the original 10-digit number, but all calls will be routed to a 988 Lifeline crisis center.

The idea for a new code was first recommended in August 2019 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in consultation with US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the North American Numbering Council. The FCC designated the number in July 2020.

Vital help on the local level

The Lifeline isn't one single, national network. Rather, it's made up of more than 180 local crisis centers that respond to the calls in their areas. The Lifeline has been in operation since 2005 and its counselors help thousands of people overcome crisis situations each day. Studies have shown that, after speaking with a Lifeline counselor, callers have reported feeling less suicidal, less depressed, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful. When people call, text, or chat, they'll be connected to trained counselors that are part of the current Lifeline/988 network. Counselors will listen, understand how callers' problems are affecting them, provide support, and connect them to resources, if necessary.

“This investment in states’ crisis call center operations will help strengthen our partnership as SAMHSA works with states to meet the suicide prevention and behavioral health needs of people throughout our nation,” said **Miriam Delphin-Rittmon**, PhD, HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use and the leader of SAMHSA.

“Transformation of this scale is never easy,” she added. “But too many Americans are experiencing suicide and mental health crises without the support and care they need. The federal government cannot do this alone.” The project has received funding from multiple sources, including SAMHSA for the 2022 federal fiscal year budget and the American Rescue Plan.

New York’s vision for 988

In New York State, 988 is more than just a number. It’s an opportunity to reach millions of people in emotional distress while destigmatizing the need to seek help. New York State is providing substantial funding for the development and implementation of 988. The proposed Executive Budget for the 2022-23 state fiscal year includes \$35 million, increasing to \$60 million on a full annual basis, to significantly expand call-center capacity throughout the state. OMH provided one-time funding of \$10 million from a Federal Mental Health Block Grant to provide start-up funds for the call centers in the current year. Funds will be used to build statewide capacity, strengthen infrastructure, and to hire and train more staff.

“The Governor’s proposed Executive Budget is a significant step toward successfully implementing the 988 emergency call system,” said OMH Commissioner **Dr. Ann Sullivan**. “Healthcare providers, faith leaders, law enforcement officials, public health advocates and experts all agree that 988 will help to de-escalate dangerous situations, increase access to mental healthcare, protect people who are in distress, and help them to get the services they need.”

“The 988 hotline will have a significant impact on how people experiencing a substance-use-related crisis are engaged in our communities,” said OASAS Commissioner **Chinazo Cunningham**. “Together with OMH, we have an opportunity to destigmatize help-seeking while also shifting from a law enforcement and criminal justice system response to one of immediately connecting an individual to care through community-based referrals.”

New York’s plan for implementing 988 focuses on:

- Assigning in-state 988 coverage for the remaining uncovered counties through a request for application (RFA) process.
- Ensuring primary and back-up centers have capacity to operate 24/7 with capacity to meet the needs of callers, chatters, and texters.
- Ensuring all 988 call centers have access to a database of culturally and regionally competent resources spanning to help callers, regardless of location.
- Providing support for the anticipated growth of call-center volume and 988-related crisis services, and prioritizing the state’s focus on making funds for call centers available quickly.
- Ensuring that 988 is a service for all New Yorkers, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

The Lifeline will be a resource that people can use 24 hours per day, seven days per week – focusing on any mental health- or addiction- related health crisis. There are currently 12 operational Lifeline crisis centers in New York State, with another center just starting up. OMH has also issued an RFA to open centers to cover the Capitol Region and the North Country.

For more information, sign up for the 988 Updates and Education Listserv at listserv@svc.ny.gov?Subject=subscribe%20omh.ls.988updates.

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.