



For Immediate Release

Contact:

Glenn Liebman, CEO, MHANYS
518-360-7916 gliebman@mhany.org
Amy Dorin, President and CEO, The Coalition for Behavioral Health 917-545-0602
adorin@coalitionny.org

Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director,
NYAPRS 518-527-0564 harveyr@nyaprs.org
Andrea Smyth, Executive Director, NYS
Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health
518-795-5270 andrea@asmythadvocacy.com

Advocates Laud Governor Cuomo's Emphasis on the Mental Health Impact of COVID-19, Funding Needed to Strengthen the Safety Net to Address Mounting Stress and Trauma

Advocates for New Yorkers with ever growing mental health and addiction related needs and the service providers who support them across our state are deeply grateful for Governor Andrew Cuomo's heartfelt comments yesterday about the escalating emotional crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic is inflicting.

"COVID has caused tremendous stress on society and tremendous individual stress," the Governor said, and "the longer it goes on, the worse it is getting."

The advocates sent a [letter](#) to the Governor, agreeing that immediate action is needed to address the emotional pandemic we are facing, including increased funding or at minimum full restoration of any reductions or withholds to mental health and substance use related services.

Recent data underscores the cause of the Governor's call for action. The number of New Yorkers seeking assistance for their mental health and/or substance use related challenges has skyrocketed, opioid overdoses are up across the state and a national [study](#) confirmed that 11 percent have recently considered suicide, most notably people of color, children and youth.

"Governor Cuomo's strong leadership in helping New Yorkers to navigate through these terrible times has been accompanied by an undaunting sensitivity to the emotional toll that the virus is exacting across our society," **said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services**, a coalition comprised of New Yorkers with major behavioral health challenges and community providers.

"The Governor spoke today about the reality that our members are seeing every day in their programs: New Yorkers are hurting, with COVID causing trauma, anxiety, and increased substance use," **stated Amy Dorin, President and CEO of The Coalition for Behavioral Health**. "We look forward to working with the Governor to ensure full funding for behavioral health so that all New Yorkers have the mental health and substance use services they need."

The Governor expressed a commitment to addressing the crisis. "What do I do about it? We're trying to

increase services across the board,” he said.

Glenn Liebman, CEO of the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) said, “The mental health toll and long-term trauma impact of the pandemic has put a great strain on those who receive services, their loved ones and our dedicated workforce. Withholding twenty percent of the funding for mental health in this time of crisis only exacerbate the pain and suffering of individuals in desperate need of care. We understand that this fiscal crisis is not driven by New York State but in desperate times like these, we need Governor Cuomo to insure that there are no cuts to mental health funding and that the promised funding from the Cares Act is released”

“On demand access to care for any New Yorker who is experiencing a substance use disorders and/or mental health challenge must continue to be our benchmark”, **said Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.** “Our systems of care have been wrestling three public health crises simultaneously. We are at a breaking point and need state leaders to hear us on this.”

According to a CDC [study](#), across the US 13% of individuals started or increased substance use and according to [The New York Times](#) drug deaths have risen 13% this year compared to last year.

Allegra Schorr, President of The Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State (COMPA), said: “The coronavirus pandemic has collided with our existing opioid crisis in a lethal way, not only exposing weaknesses in response and funding for effective treatment, such as Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), but worsening them. We have a situation where, instead of bolstering the opioid crisis response to keep emergency rooms and hospitals as clear as possible, we are experiencing cutbacks. In brief, Mental Health and SUD providers are in crisis while, simultaneously, their budgets have been slashed and/or withheld by 20% leaving them without funds to pay their staff or incoming bills. We hope that there will be much-needed relief from the federal government, but we simply cannot wait. We urge the Governor to use every means at his disposal to keep our system providing mental health and essential SUD treatment that saves lives.”

The virus has not spared any sector or subgroup, including our children, youth, and their families.

“On behalf of the families we serve who have increasing anxiety regarding their loved ones with serious behavioral health issues, we were heartened to hear the Governor’s remarks today highlighting the devastating and long term impact this crisis will bring to bear on the collective mental health of society,” said **Paige Pierce, Executive Director, Families Together in NYS.** “While we understand there are also lasting fiscal implications of the crisis that is COVID-19 we would implore the Administration to spare providers from any cuts and instead, work with us to achieve a robust safety net.”

Mental health screening and evaluation are dropping by 44% according to the federal [Center for Medicaid Services](#).

“To avert a developing tragedy, there needs to be an immediate response to the plummeting number of childhood screenings that help identify emerging mental illness in children and adolescents,” said **Andrea Smyth, Executive Director of the NYS Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health.** “Unidentified and

untreated mental illness may have lifelong consequences for children. Not all children will develop a mental health illness when faced with adversity, but common sense tells us we MUST be evaluating our children in the face of the COVID economic and health impact on family members, racial unrest and disrupted educational circumstances."

By providing full funding for mental health and substance use disorders, the State will ensure that community-based providers are able to meet the behavioral health needs of New York's adults, children and families.

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