

## Mental Health Workforce Funding

**An 8.5% cost of living adjustment for human service workers is needed to assure a workforce that's able to fulfill the Governor's vision for mental health in New York.**

The Governor's proposed Executive Budget for 2023/24 includes an unprecedented, multi-year investment of \$1 billion in New York State's mental health system of care. Increases in psychiatric hospital bed capacity, new supported housing units, the expansion of school based services and crisis oriented treatment represents a bold and ambitious vision for mental health in New York.

But in order for the Governor's vision to be fulfilled, an adequate behavioral health workforce is needed that's commensurate with the planned expansion. The current workforce is not sufficient to implement the Governor's vision, due in part to historic under funding for nonprofit human service providers in New York. Wages have not kept pace with inflation.

In 2006, a law was passed to provide a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for human service providers (Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2006), including mental health workers. Unfortunately, most years since 2006, COLAs were not included in the state budgets. Had the law been followed in every year from FY 2007-08 through FY 2021-22, funding for human service workers would be 35.31% higher than they are today. Instead, only two small COLA increases and two modest salary increases were provided, which represents the withholding of approximately 30% COLAs from behavioral health providers, or over \$500 million. Thanks to Governor Hochul, the 2022/23 Executive Budget included a 5.4% COLA for human services workers along with retention bonuses for direct care staff of up to \$3000. This funding was sorely needed and helpful but represent only a small down payment on what's needed.

Nonprofit human service providers care for the most vulnerable people in our state. They provide services that no other entity is able to or willing to provide. Whether caring for people in need of mental health services or supportive housing, the elderly in nursing homes, at-risk children in after school care, people with addictions or those with physical or developmental disabilities, we need nonprofit human service providers. And we need them to be adequately funded so they can continue to fulfill their mission.

## Legislative Need

MHANYS strongly supports a budget that includes an 8.5% COLA based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In order to restore years of unrealized promised funding to OMH and OASAS providers MHANYS urges the Legislature and the Governor to add \$800 million for the mental health and addictions community in the State Budget. This COLA funding should become a permanent funding stream for every year, and should include Health Home Care Managers.

## Talking Points

- ✓ The current mental health workforce is not sufficient to meet a growing demand for mental health services and to fulfil the Governor's bold vision for enhancing New York's mental health system of care.
- ✓ The unfulfilled promise of Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2006 has resulted in a cumulative COLA funding deficit of 34.71%.
- ✓ Current funding levels for human service workers today are lower than they were in 1980.
- ✓ An 8.5% COLA for human services workers is needed in this year's budget to help keep pace with inflation and to recruit and retain workers.