



October 22, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
 Governor of New York State
 NY State Capitol Building
 Albany, NY 12224

*"I'm not a psychiatrist. I'm not a medical doctor. I'm telling you from talking to people and hearing their voice and hearing their concerns, **I'm telling you we have a serious problem of the emotional stress and anxiety that COVID has caused. And the longer it goes on, the worse it is getting.** There is an emotional toll - one day they will be talking about PTSD from COVID." Governor Cuomo 10/21/20*

Dear Governor Cuomo,

Through your leadership, and that of your Commissioners, you helped New Yorkers weather the unprecedented challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. From the beginning of your media briefings, when no one else did, you identified and gave voice to the rising mental health and substance use concerns. Now, a myriad of data and reports are validating your foresight, documenting the negative impact COVID-19 has had on New Yorker's well being as demonstrated by the following:

- The NYS Disaster Distress Helpline which provides crisis counseling and support to anyone experiencing emotional distress related to a disaster was up 697% from June 2019 – June 2020. Calls and text messages to NYC's mental health hotline increased by about 18 percent for the first weeks of April compared to 2019.
- According to a recent CDC study, over one third of New Yorkers experienced depression or anxiety from April-July 2020. Across the US, 13 % of individuals started or increased substance use, and 11 % stated they had considered suicide in the last 30 days.
- Drug deaths have risen an average of 13% this year compared to last year, according to mortality data from local and state governments collected by The New York Times.
- 4,200 children have lost a parent or caregiver to the pandemic since March, with a disproportionate impact on people of color. Black (1 per 600) and Hispanic (1 per 700) children experienced parental/caregiver deaths from COVID-19 at twice the rate of Asian (1 per 1,400) and white (1 per 1,500) children. (UHF Report)
- The SUNY Chancellor has called for the increase in services needed by college students, citing nationally in late June, 63% of 18-to-24-year-olds reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety



and depression, and the prevalence of depression among graduate and professional students is two times higher in 2020 compared to 2019.

In support of the upward trajectory of behavioral health issues collectively, we the undersigned representing statewide community-based behavioral health providers, who serve more than one million New Yorkers annually, recommend the following:

- To avert program closures and reductions in service availability, the State must immediately provide full funding for mental health and substance use disorder services, and cannot continue withhold and/or cuts to these essential services;
- Release federal CARES funds currently available to New York to support the mental health and substance use disorder needs of adults, children and families; and
- Target FEMA funding to community-based providers who have received less than 1% of available federal provider relief funds to date and require immediate funding to continue serving communities with the highest need.

While we recognize the significant fiscal challenges that the state faces, the budget simply cannot be balanced by cutting desperately needed behavioral health services to New York's adults, children and families. While we wait for Washington to meet its responsibilities, we ask that you to explore other options, including revenue raisers, to close the budget gap while maintaining full funding for behavioral health.

We appreciate your attention to these critical issues. By providing full funding for mental health and substance use disorders, you will ensure that our members are able to continue meeting the behavioral health needs of New York's adults, children and families. With this care, New Yorkers will begin their recovery from the impacts of the pandemic and will help the State to rebound.

Sincerely,

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Association for Community Living
Amy Dorin, President and CEO, The Coalition
for Behavioral Health
Allegra Schorr, President, Coalition of
Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and
Advocates of New York State
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