

CRAIN'S Health Pulse

Federal funding tops list of behavioral health concerns

As the House of Representatives [advances](#) a \$3 trillion coronavirus aid package, New York's behavioral health providers and advocates remain bullish on the need for more funding.

State Sen. Pete Harckham, chairman of the Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, on Friday stated concerns that the latest round of federal relief would allocate \$100 billion to hospitals nationwide, but only about \$3 billion for mental health support. He pointed to the discrepancy between the latter figure and the [nearly \\$40 billion needed](#) to help the already strained sector.

Behavioral health providers have been taking in less revenue from patient visits, transitioning as much business as possible to telehealth services and continuing to provide care to patients who have lost their health insurance, Harckham recently told *Crain's*. At the same time, they are responding to virus-induced fear, isolation and financial insecurity that is exacerbating mental health conditions and substance-use disorder.

Allegra Schorr, president of the Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State, concurred that federal funding tops her list of concerns.

"The opioid epidemic hasn't subsided," Schorr said. "The fear is that [the pandemic] has the potential to reignite this. And in combination with the virus itself, we are going to need to have more—not less—funding."

Though behavioral health providers have been hard hit by the crisis, along with other frontline workers, innovation has helped.

The use of virtual health and take-home doses of medication-assisted treatment drugs has increased, Schorr said.

It will be important to track data and patient outcomes tied to new behavioral health policies to see how they can and should be implemented post-pandemic, she said.

As for additional funding, it remains critical now and in the future.

Many individuals with substance-use disorder and mental health issues are already falling through the cracks due to the severe underfunding of providers, Harckham said, and the pandemic is only making matters worse