For Immediate Release
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PRESS RELEASE

Behavioral Health Advocates Rally for Increases in Rates and Contracts
Statewide Advocates Asking for 7.8% Increase in Investments in Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services and Supports

(Albany, N.Y.) – Eleven statewide advocacy groups spoke out in Albany asking Governor Hochul **to include a 7.8% increase in rates and contracts for mental health and substance use disorder services in her SFY 2025-2026 executive budget proposal.** The press event was held in Albany on Tuesday, November 12th at the NYS Capitol Building, between the LCA and Senate.

The group sent a letter to the Governor here and outlined concerns and data here.

Governor Hochul must include a 7.8% increase for mental health and substance use disorder rates and contracts in her proposed SFY 25-26 executive budget. **This investment will reduce staff vacancies, which are currently at an annual statewide average of 20- 30%, and turnover rates which are currently at a 35% annual turnover rate, depending on provider type (based on results of a statewide survey of behavioral health agencies, August 2024).**

The demand for mental health and substance use disorder services has never been higher, yet adults, children and families are facing wait lists, limited access to care and services and long stays in emergency rooms. New York must make meaningful investments to close treatment gaps, eliminate disparities, and improve access to services by investing in both the behavioral health workforce and addressing inflated operating expenses that services providers are struggling to pay.

While the previous year's budget was a huge step in the right direction to assist behavioral groups across the state, it hasn't begun to catch up with the decades of underfunding experienced by many of the service providers represented by these groups.

Agencies that provide services to the most vulnerable adults, children and families with mental health and substance use disorder need, must remain competitive with larger corporations who can pay well over minimum wage. But it's not just competitive pay that burdens providers; inflation has caused an increase in the cost of food, fuel, and other costs related to operations. These additional, unforeseen hurdles make it difficult to continue caring for our loved ones. A COLA and additional investments are a necessity to assist in leveling the playing field and securing a stronger workforce.

"We are calling for a 7.8% increase for mental health and substance use provider rates and contracts in New

York to reduce staff vacancies and meet the growing demand for services in our communities," said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO, **Alliance for Rights and Recovery**. "This funding is essential to ensuring every New Yorker can access the quality support they deserve whenever they seek it."

"With the reality of inflation and the evolving and growing intensive needs of our residents, our funding request is not just about supporting our programs—it's about sustaining the quality of life for thousands of New Yorkers facing serious mental health challenges," said Sebrina Barrett, Executive Director of the **Association for Community Living**. "Our members need the resources to provide safe, stable housing with compassionate, consistent care, but they can't do that if they're constantly worried about affording operating costs like food, fuel, utilities, health and property insurance, and cyber insurance--this year's funding request is an essential step toward that goal."

"Overdose deaths due to fentanyl continue at crisis levels in New York. There is an urgent need to expand access to effective treatment," said Allegra Schorr, President of the **Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates (COMPA)**. "Unfortunately, reimbursement to providers has not kept pace with inflation. There is a gaping hole between reimbursement and the cost of sustaining services. Program staff are overworked and underpaid, staff vacancies are currently 20%, and overall costs have increased significantly. Providers' ability to respond to the opioid crisis is severely hampered. A 7.8% investment in behavioral health care will allow providers to keep pace with rising costs and help them to address the crippling workforce shortage. This is essential to help providers increase access to treatment and reduce barriers for delivering care."

"A society that financially undercuts providers that administer care and healing to those who are struggling with emotional wellness and/or addiction is a society that devalues both the employees who do the work and the individuals, youth and families who need the help. Better, healthier communities start with better resources and investments in mental health and addiction services staff and programs, said Paige Pierce, CEO**, Families Together in New York State.** "That's why we support a 7.8% investment in behavioral health rates and contracts which will assist to eliminate waitlists, increase access to care and better serve New York's youth and families."

"Substance use disorder and mental health services are essential and lifesaving. However, providers in New York are grappling with how to meet the rising need for these services following years of chronic underfunding. Without funding that supports agencies' ability to provide timely access to services, we are witnessing daily, preventable tragedies in our communities — overdoses and suicides as well as missed opportunities to make a positive impact on people's lives. Our field needs an immediate investment to stabilize and expand our community-based services. This will ensure that all New York residents have equitable access to the full spectrum of mental health and addiction services. By investing now, the State will help us meet today's urgent needs while laying the groundwork for a healthier, more hopeful future for all New Yorkers," said Debra Pantin, MSW, MS, President & CEO, Outreach and Board Chair, **InUnity Alliance.**

"In order to contend with decades of disinvestment, rising operational and program costs, continued challenges with recruitment and retention of workers exacerbated by the ongoing workforce crisis among behavioral health and human services providers, New York must support a 7.8% increase in rates and contracts in the FY 2025-26 NYS budget," said Glenn Liebman, CEO of **MHANYS.** "This proposed increase would provide for wages for the hard-working staff of these agencies who are essential to the everyday work to care and provide for New Yorkers struggling with mental health and substance use disorders and also provide for agencies to meet inflationary costs of operations. There is no health without mental health and there are no services and supports without these vital agencies and staff."

"Despite the renewed focus on mental health, too many New Yorkers continue to face barriers when they try to access mental health services. A major barrier stems from the inability of non-profit community providers to hire and retain skilled and caring staff. This is why **NAMI-NYS** is proud to care for those who care for us and are asking Governor Hochul to provide a 7.8% investment in rates and contracts and invest in community providers. Doing so, we bring us closer to our vision of people with mental illness living healthy lives supported by communities that care," said Matthew Shapiro, Senior Director, Government and Community Affairs.

"Our care management agencies continue to provide front-line services and supports to adults, children and families, with mental health and substance use disorder needs, often in crisis. The proposed 7.8% increase will allow for agencies to meet inflationary costs, invest in their workforce and continue to support essential care management to those most in need," said Jackie Negri, Executive Director, **NYS Care Management Coalition.**

"Youth and families across New York are facing unacceptably long wait times—often months or more—just to access routine behavioral health services," said Kayleigh Zaloga, President & CEO of the **NYS Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health**. "Mental Health America's 2023 report revealed that more than half of New York's youth with major depression did not receive any mental health services in the past year. Without meaningful investment in our workforce and service delivery system, these gaps in care will only widen. The State must prioritize stabilizing and expanding the capacity of our behavioral health system, and this 7.8% increase is an essential step toward ensuring that every young person gets the care they need, when they need it."

"New York's public mental health and substance use disorder system is severely compromised. In local communities across New York waiting lists for services are extensive and as we know, the negative consequences associated with delayed or denied mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment can be devastating," said Lauri Cole, Executive Director**, NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.** "Our ability to recruit and retain the workforce we need is severely hampered by low salaries and reimbursement rates that don't keep up with the actual costs of providing these services. All New Yorkers deserve a robust continuum of care that is ready to meet the challenges faced by our family members, neighbors, and friends who are struggling to find services and support in their local communities.

"Over 200 not for profit supportive housing providers in New York State continue to lose ground against higher costs of doing business, even under the Hochul administration. While this governor has been better than most administrations, she is still not fully addressing real world inflationary pressures. Human service providers need and deserve a 7.8% increase on their whole contracts, to meet the rising costs of staffing, utilities, insurance and to catch up on long-deferred maintenance, said Stephen Piasecki, State Policy Director, **Supportive Housing Network of New York**. "Further, we ask that the Governor specifically address the long terms needs of the New York State Supportive Housing Program as part of a comprehensive Supportive Housing Modernization Act

The eleven agencies represented at the press event are:

Association for Community Living, Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State (COMPA), Families Together in New York State, InUnity Alliance, Mental Health Association in New York State, National Alliance on Mental Illness New York State (NAMI), New York State Care Management Coalition, New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health, NYS Council for Community Behavioral Health Care, Alliance for Rights and Recovery, and Supportive Housing Network of New York

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