

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## Kaleida Plans New Psychiatric Emergency Program at Olean General Hospital



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Kaleida Health is planning to develop a new psychiatric emergency program at Olean General Hospital, which would improve access to mental health services in Cattaraugus County and fit into efforts to bolster the ailing and under-resourced behavioral health care system.

And the project is getting a big boost from the state.

Olean General landed \$5 million in state funding to add a Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program, which will provide services to people experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

The funds are part of an expansive \$1 billion effort to fix the mental health care system statewide. A major part of that plan, which was born out of last year's state budget talks, is adding needed resources in underserved regions.

"I would say the need in the community, as well as the surrounding communities in other counties, is high," said Mary H. O'Leary, director of the Department of Community Services in Cattaraugus County. "So I would say that CPEP is an incredibly positive addition to our community."

The planned unit, which is part of a larger Emergency Department project at Olean General, would add another CPEP to Western New York.

The region's largest is at Erie County Medical Center, a 24/7 unit that sees an average of 25 patients per day and has an extended observation unit, mobile crisis outreach and children's services, including an inpatient adolescent unit. It is the lone safety-net mental health emergency department in the Buffalo Niagara region, aside from a much smaller unit at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

It's possible that adding another CPEP to Western New York could alleviate some pressure on ECMC's overburdened unit, which can get overwhelmed and lead some patients to wait more than a day to receive care.

Last year, 9,470 patients presented to ECMC's CPEP, with 128 of them – or 1.4% – coming from Cattaraugus County, said ECMC spokesperson Peter Cutler.

"Any additional state-supported emergency psychiatric services to patients in our community will help meet the significant, and sometimes overwhelming, mental health patient demand," Cutler said. "We also thank our partners at Kaleida Health for recognizing this demand and taking action to meet the needs of residents in the Olean area."

## A big project at Olean General

The new psychiatric emergency program at Olean General is one part of a broader emergency department project that Kaleida has planned for the aging hospital.

While the CPEP project is about \$6 million – mostly covered by the recent \$5 million award from the state – Kaleida also has submitted a separate \$17 million grant application through the Statewide Health Care Facility Transformation Program to overhaul its Emergency Department at Olean General.

"It will significantly improve the flow and the space of the Emergency Department at Olean," said Don Boyd, president and CEO of Kaleida. "That space is older, and it hasn't been touched and renovated as health care has changed."

Boyd said Kaleida expects to find out whether the larger grant will be awarded later this year. The outcome could determine if and when Olean General is able to move forward with the new CPEP.

"The two go hand in hand," he said. "We can't really do one without the other."

As part of the renovated Emergency Department, Boyd said the CPEP project would call for the creation of two units: one for adolescents (up to 18 years old) and one for adults.

As the need for mental health services has increased, Boyd said it made sense for Kaleida to include a CPEP as part of the broader Emergency Department project. He referenced a **recent community needs assessment report**, which found the percentage of adults in Cattaraugus County who reported poor mental health for at least 14 days in the past month was higher than the statewide percentage.

“If you review that community needs assessment and community health improvement plan, what it found was a need for expanded emergency mental health services,” Boyd said.

## A ‘safety net’

O’Leary has high hopes for a CPEP at Olean General and the role it can play in Cattaraugus County.

For one, she noted there are no children’s psychiatric beds in Cattaraugus County, which means children who arrive to an emergency room can sit and wait for a long time.

Adults who present to an emergency room in need of stabilization, O’Leary said, also can hit roadblocks if there are no beds available or if they’re not in “imminent risk” and not meeting the criteria for admission. If they are released from the hospital, that can leave officials scrambling to try to get services set up to help stabilize the patient.

CPEP provides psychiatric services to those experiencing a behavioral health crisis, including people with co-occurring disorders and substance use disorders.

The program, which receives referrals from providers, emergency medical services, police transport and walk-ins, involves an initial screening and then an assessment to determine a person’s mental health care needs. A CPEP also can admit patients for up to 72 hours if they need extended observation.

O’Leary sees a CPEP at Olean General as acting as a crucial “safety net” in the mental health care system.

The program, she said, should help reconnect patients to the care and services they need and also strengthen referrals and collaborations with community agencies.

“I think that’ll be a really wonderful thing about the CPEP,” she said.

## A larger state focus

Olean General was one of nine community hospitals to get a piece of \$39 million in state funding to develop a new CPEP.

Once the nine new units are open, there will be 31 CPEPs statewide, Gov. Kathy Hochul said in an announcement last week.

“Expanding hospital-based psychiatric emergency programs is a critical component of our efforts to strengthen New York State’s mental health care system,” Hochul said in a statement. “This funding will provide community-based hospitals with capital to establish new programs, so they can quickly evaluate and provide care to anyone experiencing a behavioral health crisis.”

The nine conditional awards, which will be administered by the state Office of Mental Health, went to five hospitals in New York City and four facilities in upstate New York. In addition to Olean General, Arnot Ogden Hospital in Chemung County and Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center in St. Lawrence County each got \$4.8 million and Faxton St. Luke’s Healthcare in Oneida County received about \$493,000.

The funding is part of Hochul’s \$1 billion plan to bolster the state’s mental health care system.

The plan, unveiled during last year’s state budget talks, includes \$60 million in capital funding and nearly \$122 million in operating funding to expand outpatient services across the state. Part of that money is going toward establishing 12 new CPEP units.