



Testimony of

Jason Lippman, Senior Associate for Policy and Advocacy  
The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.

Kimberly Williams, Director Geriatric Mental Health Alliance

Crissy Liu, Policy Analyst for Aging Issues at United Neighborhood Houses of  
New York (UNH)

Ellen Greeley, External Affairs Executive, Department of Government  
Relations, UJA-Federation of New York

At the Hearing on the  
FY10 Preliminary Budget Hearing

The Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation,  
Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services  
Hon. G. Oliver Koppell, Chair

The Committee on Finance  
Hon. David Weprin, Chair

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Koppell, Chairman Weprin, distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for affording us the opportunity to testify before you today on the Mayor's Fiscal 2010 Preliminary Budget. My name is Crissy Liu, Policy Analyst for Aging Issues at United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH). I am also joined by Kimberly Williams, Director of the Geriatric Mental Health Alliance, and Ellen Greeley, External Affairs Executive in the Department of Government and External Relations at UJA-Federation of New York, and Jason Lippman, Senior Associate for Policy and Advocacy at the Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies. Together – We represent over 250 community based human services agencies throughout the City of New York. During these tight fiscal times, we share many of the same concerns and interests, and today are presenting testimony in unison.

## **CITY COUNCIL INITIATIVES**

Over the last four years, the City Council has been committed to funding a number of mental health initiatives that have addressed shortcomings in the City's human service system: the unique needs of older New Yorkers who require mental health services, the distinctive needs of youth with autism, and the special needs of children under five who exhibit signs of mental illness. We thank you for your ongoing support to these vital programs.

### *Contracting and Allocation Process*

Unfortunately the City's contracting process continues to be problematic, causing significant delays in executing contracts and funding allocation, disrupting the delivery and scope of services to consumers. At this moment, two-thirds of the way into the fiscal year, the majority of providers have yet to receive their executed contracts, nor have they been allocated

any funding. Many community-based nonprofit service providers are dependent on timely funding allocations in order to fully operate their programs, and therefore are forced to hold off on service provision until funding is finally distributed. This year, we were hopeful that when agencies were identified in the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2009 for the Geriatric and Children Under Five Mental Health initiatives, that this would enable a more efficient process with positive results. This was not the case.

Beyond the challenges faced by the provider community, the delays mostly impact consumers in need of these essential services. We urge the City Council to continue their strict oversight over the contracting process.

#### *Geriatric Mental Health Initiative*

In Fiscal Year 2009, the City Council allocated \$2.4 million to fund the Geriatric Mental Health Services initiative. Each year, funding for this initiative becomes more crucial, as it is predicted that between the years 2005 and 2030, the population of older adults in New York City that will need mental health services will grow by 50% (from 200,000 to 300,000 individuals).

The Geriatric Mental Health initiative addresses the needs of older individuals who develop symptoms such as depression or dementia as they age, or who simply grow older and need specialized services for mental illnesses that are not part of the typical aging process. Funding allocated by the City Council has allowed 24 agencies to deliver services to older adults in settings where they already feel comfortable and receive other services. Agencies have worked with hundreds of older persons and family members to provide counseling in home or at senior centers. These providers offer mental health workshops, conduct depression

screenings and organize weekly support groups for family members of individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. We urge the City Council to continue supporting funding for this initiative.

*Wraparound Services for Youth with Autism*

Throughout New York City and beyond, there is much concern over the growing number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In Fiscal Year 2009, \$1.6 million dollars was allocated to fund the Wraparound Services for Youth with Autism initiative. 23 programs in all five boroughs received funding to give children opportunities for inclusion within their communities, support their educational and emotional development, and provide family educational and referral services. Take for example, sports and recreational programming for 14 participants at the Imagine Academy for Autism in Brooklyn, on Sunday mornings or an after-school academic coaching program for 15 moderate to high functioning students, or specialized sport leagues for 31 participants at the Samuel Field Y in Queens.

ASD affects 1 in 150 children from all economic, religious, and racial backgrounds. Regardless of where children fall on the spectrum, the demands on parents and families are overwhelming, unyielding and often unbearable. New York State provides some aid to families with children on the lower end of the spectrum, however, families often face significant hurdles in accessing the appropriate assessments, and quality care. Moreover, families with higher functioning children, who also need tremendous oversight and assistance, are not eligible for the state funding. Through the use of City Council funds, providers are able to operate programs that incorporate skills like self-regulation and purposeful communication

into educational and social recreational activities that help children with autism. We ask that the City Council sustain funding for this initiative.

*Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative*

We also support the restoration of \$1.6 million to fund the City Council's Children Under Five Mental Health initiative in Fiscal Year 2010. This program has been of immeasurable help for the 8 agencies throughout New York City that provide critical and timely assistance to children exhibiting behavioral and physical health problems such as depression, anxiety and aggressive behavior towards other kids. With the help of the City Council, providers can identify and assess children at an early age, offering interventions like individual, family and group therapy, art and movement therapy, and workshops for parents and grandparents. To the extent that symptoms of mental illness can be addressed in the first few years of life, we can help prevent the need for more costly treatment in the future. We now would like focus on the cuts to contracted providers in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) budget.

**DOHMH CUT TO MENTAL HYGIENE CONTRACTORS**

In the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2010 Preliminary Budget, DOHMH proposes to reduce funding to contracted behavioral health providers by \$1 million in FY 2010 and \$3 million in the out years. The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies has formally asked the Department to identify how they plan to implement this cut, and ask the City Council for further assistance in obtaining this information. Mental Hygiene providers are already operating on lean budgets and are expected to see increased caseloads as a result of the current economic crisis and the recent announcement of mental health cutbacks by the City's Health and Hospitals Corporation

(HHC). While we respect the Department’s stated intention to derive savings from programs that are expected to close or are underperforming, DOHMH has yet to confirm which programs are expected to close or are currently not meeting their contract-specific goals. We seek your help in making this process more transparent. We thank you for your time today, and we are available to answer any questions you may have.

### **The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies**

The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies is the umbrella advocacy organization of New York’s behavioral health community, representing over 120 nonprofit community-based mental health and substance abuse agencies in every locality of New York City and surrounding areas. Our members comprise a broad cross section of service providers – all sizes from very small to very large; treatment and rehabilitation oriented; outpatient and residential; focused on linguistically and culturally specific populations and on many special-needs – serving more than 350,000 individuals each day in the five boroughs of New York City and its environs.

### **Geriatric Mental Health Alliance & MHA of NYC**

The Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA of NYC) is a private, not for profit, organization whose mission is to provide direct services, access to services, community education, and advocacy for the benefit of people with mental illness. In January of 2003, The MHA of NYC (in collaboration with MHA of Westchester) created a new program—called “The Center for Policy and Advocacy”—to proactively advocate for mental health policies that anticipate changing needs over the next decade or longer. The Center founded the Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York in January 2004 in order to advocate for changes in mental health practice and policy that are needed to improve current mental health services for older adults and to develop an adequate response to the mental health needs of the elder boom generation.

### **United Neighborhood Houses**

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is the membership organization of New York City settlement houses and community centers. Rooted in the history and values of the settlement house movement, UNH promotes and strengthens the neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of New Yorkers in need and the communities in which they live. UNH’s membership comprises one of the largest human service systems in New York City, with 34 agencies working at more than 400 sites to provide high quality services and activities to a half million New Yorkers each year. UNH supports its members through policy development, advocacy and capacity-building activities.

### **UJA-Federation of New York**

UJA-Federation’s mission is “caring for those in need, rescuing those in harm’s way, and renewing and strengthening the Jewish people in New York, in Israel, and around the world.” We are a funding and coordinating body for more than 100 nonprofit health and human service and educational agencies in New York City, many of which are dedicated to serving the elderly.