**Budget Priorities**

**SFY 2024-25**

InUnity Alliance, the collective voice of addiction and mental health in New York State, acknowledges Governor Hochul's support for addressing New York State's escalating mental health crisis, yet expresses disappointment over the insufficient funding for addiction prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services amid a worsening overdose crisis.

Despite our appreciation for last year's unprecedented funding for the mental health sector – including youth mental health, higher commercial rates, and sustained crisis program funding – InUnity Alliance emphasizes the need for further action and increased resources.

InUnity Alliance is eager to collaborate with Governor Hochul, the Senate, and the Assembly to guarantee comprehensive access to mental health and substance use disorder services for all New Yorkers. We advocate for the inclusion of the following priorities in the SFY 2024-25 budget:

1. Support a 3.2% cost of living adjustment and a $500 million investment to mitigate the sector’s workforce crisis and help meet future demands. These investments must be included to address high levels of staff turnover, uncompetitive wages, and difficulty with staff recruitment, all of which exacerbate service delivery issues. The Legislature must ensure that any workforce investments are aligned with recommendations by OMH and OASAS provider workgroups to address staff recruitment and retention. While we are grateful for the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) investment in previous years and the 1.5% COLA in this year’s executive budget, it is not enough to fill the gap in pay and years of underfunding. The sector needs a 3.2% COLA that aligns with the CPI to ensure the continuation of these critical services.
2. Endorse the Executive's initiative for a new Medicaid managed care procurement process, which would involve competitive bidding to ensure the selection of qualified managed care providers and improve timely payments for service providers.
3. Back the Executive proposal to increase commercial insurance rates to at least the Medicaid rate for outpatient services to guarantee adequate provider compensation and uphold parity compliance.
4. Advocate for the inclusion of measures from S.5329-B (Harckham) / A.6813-A (Paulin) in the final state budget that would reform the Office of the Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG) audit process. This reform aims to protect providers from unfair penalties resulting from claims and processing errors and introduces safeguards that would enhance the transparency of the audit process.
5. Support the Executive’s new workforce initiatives like job marketing, a job bank, a behavioral health fellowship program, targeted rural community funding, and a credentialing program for paraprofessionals developed by OMH. The Executive budget provides $14 million to support these types of workforce initiatives across the board under mental health and substance abuse and $4 million in similar initiatives for children’s providers.
6. Support ongoing funding for the 988 hotline implementation and operation. The 988 hotline is a national hotline for people who are in immediate crisis due to a mental health or substance use disorder issue. Instead of engaging law enforcement through 911, 988 is designed to provide a clinical response through social workers and other behavioral health professionals. The 988 response is focused on stabilizing people and connecting them to treatment.

**Substance Use Disorder Specific**:

1. Support the recommendations of the Opioid Settlement Advisory Board and ensure that all new revenues received from settlement funds are used to supplement – not supplant – funding for addiction services.
2. Make the Opioid Stewardship Fund permanent to ensure OASAS has a stable funding source beyond its June 20, 2024 expiration.
3. Endorse the Executive’s proposal allowing substance use disorder service providers to dispense a 3-day buprenorphine supply for maintenance or detoxification treatment during transitions to a program.

**Mental Health Specific:**

1. Advocate for the "Children’s Outpatient Behavioral Health Rate Reform Proposal" from Healthy Minds Healthy Kids, seeking $195 million to increase clinic rates to keep pace with inflation and remunerate providers serving children and families. This investment is needed to improve service access and reduce wait times for children's community-based mental health services. We support the Governor’s proposal to increase school-based mental health services, but there is a need to bolster services in the community as well.
2. Endorse the $20.5 million proposal to bolster crisis stabilization services, including mobile, telephonic, and residential services, by raising provider rates.
3. Restore the Executive’s proposed $125 million cut to Health Home and Care Management (HHCM) agencies across New York State to ensure continued access to services and limiting emergency room visits.