



For Immediate Release

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Behavioral Health Advocates Support Governor Cuomo’s Proposed Legislation to Expand Access to Telehealth in Mental Health and Substance Use Services for All New Yorkers

Advocates for New Yorkers with ever growing mental health and addiction related needs and the service providers who support them across our state are supportive of Governor Cuomo’s proposed legislation to expand and improve access to telehealth. During COVID-19, telehealth has ensured that mental health and substance use providers were able to adequately meet the behavioral health needs of New Yorkers thru continued quality care and services. These proposed recommendations will allow behavioral health providers the flexibility needed to continue to ensure high-quality mental health and substance use services to our most vulnerable adults, children and families, including marginalized populations.

Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been an upward trajectory of behavioral health issues:

- According to a recent CDC study, over one third of New Yorkers experienced depression or anxiety from April-July 2020. Across the US, 13 % of individuals started or increased substance use, and 11 % stated they had considered suicide in the last 30 days.
- Drug deaths have risen an average of 13% this year compared to last year, according to mortality data from local and state governments collected by The New York Times.

These comprehensive reforms will assist New Yorker’s with needed access and the increased provision of services, through recommendations such as adjusting reimbursement incentives, eliminating outdated regulations, and establishing incentive innovations. These must be implemented in conjunction with the State providing full funding for mental health and substance use disorder services, as the system cannot continue withholds and/or cuts to these essential services.

"The NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare is deeply grateful to Governor Cuomo and his Blue Ribbon Commission for integrating the needs of behavioral health care recipients into his State of the State tele health proposal. This will broaden access and help mental health and substance use disorder providers to address increasing overdose and suicide attempt/completion rates by providing timely and direct care to the increasing numbers of New Yorkers who need it.", stated Lauri Cole, LMSW, Executive Director, NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare.

“Governor Cuomo has advanced a very strong set of proposals that will expand access to critically needed telehealth services in a broad array of settings and from a broad set of providers most notably including mental health peer specialists and recovery peer advocates, said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. “Increasing access to behavioral health supports and stabilizing their funding will provide to be even more critical as the traumatic effects of the virus become ever more evident.”

"Governor Cuomo's proposal to expand telehealth permanently is the right call for New Yorkers," said Amy Dorin, President & CEO, The Coalition for Behavioral Health. "Providers and clients report that telehealth is a convenient, effective service that removes barriers to accessing critical mental health and substance use services. The inclusion of rate parity and peers in the Governor's proposal are particularly important. As New Yorkers continue to process the trauma of the past year, these proposals will ensure access to necessary behavioral health supports."

"We strongly support Governor Cuomo's proposal to provide a comprehensive response to telehealth that is proposed in the State of the State. The emergence of telehealth during COVID has provided innovation and access to individuals in the community mental health system of care. We look forward to this continuing trend and the recognition of how important it is to ensure the relationship between providers and individuals with mental health issues remains an integral part of recovery and support", said Glenn Liebman, CEO, MHANYS.

"FTNYS is heartened to see the Governor's ongoing commitment to access to mental health and health services, including vital peer services via telehealth for our children and families.", said Paige Pierce, CEO of Families Together in NYS. "We are eagerly awaiting the details of his proposal and look forward to working with his administration and the legislature to assure the broadest possible access for all NY children and families."

"NAMI-NYS applauds Governor Cuomo for his efforts to expand telehealth services to all New Yorkers. Too many New Yorkers struggle to access quality services to support them and advance their recovery", said Wendy Burch, Executive Director, NAMI-NYS. Access to mental health therapies is always crucial, but it is all the more important as New Yorkers navigate through the negative psychological impacts of COVID-19, the economy, racial injustice and the political tension we are currently facing. There is no recovery without addressing mental health and we thank Governor Cuomo for including this initiative as part of New York's recovery efforts."

"Thanks to Governor Cuomo for his leadership and passion for re-invention. While COVID 19 has created new demands for mental health services, easy access to tele services has been an invaluable tool for families, adults, and children. We need continued partnership with the federal government to ensure the innovation is sustainable.", said William Gettman, CEO, Northern Rivers Family of Services.

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