



Oversight - ThriveNYC Update

New York City Council Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism
Substance Abuse and Disability Services

Testimony by

Christy Parque, President and CEO
The Coalition for Behavioral Health
212.742.1600 x115
cparque@coalitionny.org

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Thank you, Chair Member Cohen, for convening today's hearing of the Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services and allowing The Coalition for Behavioral Health to offer our thoughts on the Thrive NYC (Thrive) initiative.

The Coalition for Behavioral Health, Inc. (The Coalition) is the umbrella advocacy and training organization of New York's behavioral health community, representing over 140 non-profit community-based agencies that serve more than 450,000 consumers. Our members serve the entire continuum of behavioral health care in every neighborhood of New York City. Coalition members provide access to the range of outpatient mental health and substance use services, supportive housing, crisis intervention, peer support services, employment readiness, Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS), Club Houses, education and nutritional services, as well as many other supports that promote recovery. The Coalition also trains on average 175 human services providers monthly on cutting edge and proven clinical and best business practices through generous support from the New York City Council, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), New York State Office of Mental Health OMH), and in conjunction with foundations and leaders from the behavioral health sector.

We are grateful for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on Thrive, the \$850 million (over four years) package of 54 initiatives that is the first comprehensive compendium of municipal funded programs not only in New York City, but in the nation.

Firstly, we laud this initiative for its strong grounding in data to drive the identification of the needs and the development to appropriate services to create strong and healthy individuals and communities.

I will focus my testimony on a few key areas of Thrive.

Mental Health Service Corp

The commitment to target skilled staff and resources to underserved and high need areas is an important goal that we support. However, our members have raised several concerns that lead us to believe that Thrive is not taking advantage of the existing dedicated members of the behavioral health professions. Our member organizations are concerned with the capacity and division of supervisory roles. There are also concerns about how the Corp members and agencies using their services are funded that should be resolved.

We recommend Thrive and The City invest in our existing hardworking, loyal and dedicated staff to ensure continuity of care in our programs. Retention and recruitment in the field continues to be a serious problem due to low and non-competitive wages and competition for staff who leave to work for better paying jobs in City government, hospitals, insurance and managed care companies. We hear from our members that positions are vacant for as long as a year with turnover rates pushing up to 50% annually.

- **We recommend that the City invest in contracted provider staff by increasing contract salaries, offering loan forgiveness, free licensing tutorials and support, and the same opportunities for trainings and clinical hours being offered to the Corp Members.**
- **The Coalition strongly supports the commitment of Thrive by its inclusion of a Work Force Summit and we encourage the funding and support for our workforce not be contained by the restraints of the Thrive budget but be seen as support for strong community based businesses with a workforce of 15,000 big hearted New Yorkers.**

NYC Well

We are proud of the good work of MHA-NYC and Beacon Health Options in bringing the very comprehensive and innovative NYC Well program to fruition. We think the inclusion and embracing of technology is setting the

standard for accessing and receiving much needed services care. However, we must be mindful that as the City broadly embraces these innovative and technology based solutions, the infrastructure of the community based providers and their contracts have not kept up with the costs of these kinds of interventions.

- **Our contracts overhead must reflect the costs and supports needed to innovate and embrace changing delivery and financing systems. Not only do we need concrete capital investment in hardware, software and tech upgrades but this means that the sector now needs to attract new and forward thinking staff such a data scientists, technology officers and quality assurance and compliance officers.**

Shelter Newborn Home Visiting Program & Staff Training

The expansion of the Newborn Home Visiting program to the NYC shelter system is a great proactive effort to support vulnerable infants and new mothers. Maternal depression has a very real and negative impact on child development should the mother's depression go untreated. To have the desired impact of holistically helping the 39,557 individuals and 22,392¹ kids in shelter we must provide comprehensive mental health and substance use disorder services across the age and family composition spectrum in the shelter system. After screening for depression, we must ensure that there are easily accessible on site or nearby resources for shelter residents to access services with their families. Essential to the success of these services is including and making available resources for onsite childcare to support the adults while they attend appointment. Unlike many single adult shelters, family shelters do not by and large have onsite behavioral health services or access to staff who are trained in these areas.

We also strongly recommend that the City begin immediately training our shelter staff, from security and maintenance staff all the way up to social workers and housing specialists, in the evidenced based practices of Trauma Informed Care and Motivational Interviewing techniques. This would help to transform the culture of the shelters and better support this hardworking and underappreciated workforce.

- **Last year The Coalition's Center for Rehabilitation and Recovery trained 1,448 key staff.** Our Center focuses training on staff of Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS) programs. PROS is a comprehensive recovery oriented program for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. The goal of the program is to integrate treatment, support, and rehabilitation in a manner that facilitates the individual's recovery. Goals for individuals in the program are to: improve functioning, reduce inpatient

utilization, reduce emergency services, reduce contact with the criminal justice system, increase employment, attain higher levels of education, and secure preferred housing.

- The Coalition's other training initiatives like the Professional Learning Center, *thanks to Council support*, **trained 2,086 individuals in over 140 trainings on well over 50 different topics** all of which would benefit the homeless services sector.
- **Create a training institute for shelter staff.**

We have outreached state and city partners to offer our assistance to create a training academy, similar to our OMH funded training center for PROS providers, to facilitate the expansion of these trainings to include these homeless services sector.

Engagement With Community Resources & Maximizing Existing Services

While Thrive is a comprehensive program intended to support the range of mental illnesses, and the many populations it affects, Thrive is, for the most part, broadly applied across the City's population. Experience has taught us that mental health supports and the access to those supports, are more effective and more available when tailored to unique populations. And, while Thrive includes initiatives for special populations, such as new mothers, homeless families and homeless youths, and seniors, it has yet to target outreach and funds to other vulnerable populations, such as the LGBTQ of all ages, criminal justice and disabled communities. Fortunately, these populations are currently being served by existing programs and wisely, DOHMH and the Community Services Board has created subcommittees to address the needs of these communities going forward.

We must be wary of duplicating services or programs where similar existing programs may exist. We know that one of our member agencies has more than ten programs that they believe are comparable to Thrive programs. The Coalition believes coordination between the City and these community programs would be cost effective and ensure that culturally appropriate services remain in the community to serve specialized and often hard to reach populations. Also, several of our member organizations have been approached to receive referrals from Thrive initiatives but the referrals haven't happened.

- **We must strive to better use and engage underutilized and under resourced programs in the Thrive Initiative.**
- **We welcome the opportunity to engage with The City to identify opportunities to expand the already far reaching goals and vision of THRIVE.**

Community Services Board

I am happy to share that through my participation as a community services board member and chair of the LGBTQ committee, I have been impressed and inspired by the community stakeholders, including City agencies, in their commitment to addressing both short and long and long term needs. We will report out as we set our goals and develop our work plan.

Mental Health First Aid

The Coalition is proud to have Mental Health First Aid trainers on staff and to be offering these powerful trainings to our members and communities. We trained 126 people in 2016, and will facilitate at least 4 more classes through 2017. We laud the City Council’s commitment to combatting Stigma and becoming change agents by attending last year’s Council Mental Health First Aid training and encourage you to make this an annual summer traditions for members and their staff.

Finally, we congratulate First Lady, Chirlane McCray, Deputy Mayor Buery and Dr. Gary Belkin on creating the bold vision and roadmap for New York as it leads the way in addressing the broad needs of New Yorkers by creating the long term and concrete solutions contained in Thrive.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify this afternoon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christy Parque
President & CEO
The Coalition for Behavioral Health, Inc.

¹ <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>