



**TESTIMONY OF THE COALITION FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and  
Disability Services**

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**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2018  
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING  
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**Honorable Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, Chair, Committee on Finance  
Honorable Andrew Cohen, Chair, Committee on Mental Health**

Thank you, Chair Member Ferreras-Copeland and Chair Member Cohen, for convening today's hearing on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services and allowing The Coalition for Behavioral Health to offer our thoughts on the mental health infrastructure in New York City.

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.

The Coalition is grateful to Chair Persons Ferreras-Copeland and Cohen, and Council Member Johnson for their ardent support and continued funding last year of the City Council Mental Health Initiatives that enabled thousands of New Yorkers, particularly those with limited access to benefit from mental health support. We are here today to request the continuation of your

support. In doing so, the City Council has long recognized the needs of our most vulnerable citizens, including seniors, young children, people living with disabilities, immigrants and others who face greater barriers to accessing services. The Council's Mental Health Initiatives were designed specifically to reach deep into those communities and bring services to the individual, where they live, and where they feel most familiar and secure.

## CITY COUNCIL INITIATIVES

The Coalition is grateful for the support of the City Council. While we appreciate your continued support, we have described below the circumstances that lead us to ask for continued and increased support for several initiatives. In order to meet what we believe are urgent unmet needs, we would like to draw to your attention to initiatives that are essential for the health of New York's most vulnerable people.

- Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations
- Court Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative
- Medicaid Redesign Transition
- Geriatric Mental Health
- Children Under Five
- Developmental, Psychological and Behavioral Health Services
- Autism Awareness

### **Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations: \$1,093,000 (12 agencies)**

New York City is home to one of the country's largest immigration populations, and is the foremost point of entry into the United States. Yet, immigration policies are particularly hard on immigrants, especially when it comes to accessing health care services. In light of recent Executive orders, and re-evaluation of immigration policies, it will only become more difficult for immigrants to access health services. At the same time, these policy changes are having a sincere impact on the mental health of all immigrants. It is incumbent on the City Council to ensure New York stands by its reputation and declaration as a sanctuary city and ensures that immigrants have access to the mental health services that they need to thrive.

One of the most important services that The Coalition provides is the Professional Learning Center funded through the Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Population Initiative. It is through the City Council's support for almost 20 years that The Coalition has been able to provide critical education, technical assistance and training –unique learning opportunities – for staff and leadership of publically funded behavioral health agencies. The Coalition brings in experts from many fields to explore pivotal issues of organizational development, best practices, system transformation and regulatory concerns. Given the current changes to the delivery and financing of behavioral health, members of The Coalition are relying more and more on the trainings offered by the Professional Learning Center. This year, the Professional Learning Center will have conducted 18 workshops for more than 750 mental health and substance use clinicians.

The Coalition receives \$85,000 for the Professional Learning Center, although in other years funding had been more generous. We respectfully call on the City Council to return to earlier levels of funding.

**Court Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative: \$1,900,000 (16 agencies)**

The initiative's goal is to keep youth out of the criminal justice system, help them to better understand their motivators and effectively turn their lives around before the negative life altering impact of incarceration. The initiative supports the Cross-over Youth Practice Model, a cross sector model developed for youth who are involved with both the courts and with other city agencies such as foster care. Core to the effectiveness of this initiative is the learning and training assistance The Coalition provides through its allocation of \$145,000. The technical services provided by The Coalition, are tailored for both leadership and professional service staff. These services include: training and tools for juvenile risk assessment, engaging families in the court-involved youth sector and connecting community-based providers to other non-governmental organizations also working with the court and foster care systems.

We believe that our assistance to designated agencies, in providing better access to mental health care for young people and their families, will result in a better quality of life for those served and reduced recidivism. The Court Involved Youth Initiative is already showing promising results.

**Medicaid Redesign Transition: \$500,000 (9 agencies)**

The transformation of New York's Medicaid program was designed to have profound improvements in the quality and coordination of care by reforming the delivery and funding of health services to the Medicaid population. Among other changes to achieve the Triple Aim of good care, healthy populations and less costly care, is the integration of behavioral and physical health care, transition from fee for service to managed care and value based payment, which is payment based on the quality of care rather than the episode of care. These changes require profound changes in the way behavioral health organizations practice their business. The Coalition is grateful to the City Council for recognizing the burden, administrative and financial that these changes impose on providers, and requests that the funding be continued and enhanced to meet the ever growing demands of systemic reform.

**Geriatric Mental Health: \$1,827,000 (21 agencies)**

A disproportionate number of seniors and elderly people suffer from depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses. Loss of loved ones, social isolation and diminishing cognitive and physical abilities mar what are supposed to be the "golden years." Further, many seniors find themselves increasingly isolated because of physical degeneration and the difficulties getting around the City. The Geriatric Mental Health Initiative was designed to integrate services into the settings where seniors gather, such as senior centers and religious settings, as well as in their homes for those who are homebound. This initiative offers a wide range of services, including outreach, education, depression and substance use screening, assessment, individual and group counseling, referral to treatment and support for family caregivers. New York City has several Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, and as the baby boomer generation ages, the need for targeted mental health services for this generation will increase. We therefore request and increase to ensure every senior has access to the mental health support they need to continue the important contribution they make to our society.

**Children Under Five: \$1,002,000 (4 agencies)**

Through the Children Under Five Initiative, the City Council allows diverse agencies to serve a cohort of children who exhibit behavioral difficulties because of traumatic exposure. The initiative funds clinicians who are skilled in interventions for young children who may lack the verbalization skills to speak about their experiences. Instead, they utilize cutting edge treatment modalities, such as dance, art and movement therapy. Additionally, they offer workshops for family members on caring for their children. Unfortunately, there is a growing need for early intervention as evidenced by more and more children being identified as needing these services in nursery schools and kindergarten classes. Left untreated, children's mental health issues are likely to worsen with serious ramifications on future development.

**Developmental, Psychological and Behavioral Health Services: \$2,139,390 (20 agencies)**

This initiative supports a range of programs and services targeted to individuals with chemical dependencies, developmental disabilities and serious mental illnesses as well as their families and caregivers. Funding is used for medically supervised outpatient services, transition management programs, Article 16 clinics, psychological clubs, and recreation programs.

**Autism Awareness: \$3,315,386 (23 agencies)**

Autism Awareness supports after school programming for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, including social skill development, weekend programming, and supportive services for families and caregivers. These programs fill crucial gaps, including services for people who have aged out of State funded programs.

**NEW YORK CITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE: Thrive NYC & Healing NYC**

The Coalition would like to recognize the contributions of Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray to the behavioral health of New Yorkers. ThriveNYC is a \$850 million investment over four years that includes 54 initiatives designed to change the way people think about mental health and the way services are delivered. In the first year update, 80% of the initiatives under the Thrive NYC umbrella are up and running.

Mayor de Blasio and the First Lady announced a companion initiative last week, Helping NYC to combat the opioid epidemic. The City will invest \$38 million with the target of reducing opioid overdose deaths by 35% over the next five years.

Given historic underfunding by the City, the efforts by the administration are a very welcome signal that mental health and substance use are an important concern. For too long there has been a dearth of services in New York City. The Coalition looks forward to collaborating with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and offers the expertise of its 140 member organizations to achieve the best possible programs for our City.

## SECTOR STABILITY AND WORKFORCE

The Coalition firmly believes the non-profit human services sector plays an essential role to ensure resilient individuals and healthy communities and supports the efforts being led by the Human Services Council to stabilize the nonprofit human services sector through an across-the-board 12% investment. The mental health community must offer a richness of programs, provided by a robust, stable community of providers. Yet, many organizations are underfunded and staff underpaid. Our staff are the heart and soul of the work of non-profits yet we do not compensate them for their value and professionalism because of inadequately funded government contracts. We must renew our commitment to this dedicated workforce adequate salaries that reflect their education, skills and regular cost of living increases.

We urge the City Council and the Mayor to come together to invest in the safety net of New York by including an across the board increase of 12% for all human services contracts, and to ensure the contracts are executed in an efficient and timely manner. ***Financially stable organizations serve their communities and clients better.***

Chronic underfunding of contracts harms the fiscal ability of our member organizations in several ways:

- Contracts can be generally underfunded, requiring an outright match from providers for already stretched thin budgets and very little margin. Organizational funding should not be allocated for making up for inadequately funded contracts. Instead, it should be used to support our staff and to innovate and expand services.
- Contracts do not provide a sufficient indirect reimbursement rate. The Stanford Innovation Fund estimates that the average nonprofit indirect cost rate is between 15-25 percent. This is still substantially lower than the private sector, where the lowest rates start at 30 percent, but government contracts rarely even pay 10 percent, and often below that.
- Contracts neither provide for cost escalations on the OTPS (other-than-personal services) side, nor cost-of-living increases on the PS (personnel services) side. Contracts with government are often signed for five to seven year terms, and even longer when RFPs are delayed, but providers are unable to account for rising costs, such as a electricity and water prices, nor is there a mechanism to accommodate rising rent, health insurance, or other costs when contracts need to be extended.

## CONCLUSION

We look forward to working with the City Council to ensure that any individual in need can access services which are readily available and offer the individual the right solution. The initiatives cited provide core services that are essential supports for our most vulnerable citizens. Without the targeted approaches, and providers sensitive to the needs of consumers, these services would effectively be denied to those hardest to serve and most in need. Thank you for your dedication to creating healthy individuals and thriving communities.