



**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
On Mental Hygiene**

**Testimony by:**

**Executive Deputy Commissioner Sean Byrne  
NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse  
Services**

**Hearing Room B, Legislative Office Building  
Albany  
February 27, 2012**

## **JOINT BUDGET HEARING OF THE LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES**

**State Fiscal Year 2013-14 Executive Budget  
February 27, 2013**

**Executive Deputy Commissioner Sean Byrne  
NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services**

Good morning Senator DeFrancisco, Assemblyman Farrell, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means Committees. Good morning also to Senator Boyle, Assemblyman Cymbrowitz, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committees.

My name is Sean Byrne and I am the Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. I am representing Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez, who could not be here due to a family conflict.

I want to begin by thanking you for your support of our mission at OASAS and for giving me the opportunity to present Governor Cuomo's 2013-14 Executive Budget as it pertains to OASAS.

OASAS oversees one of the nation's largest addiction services systems, which includes nearly 1650 programs that assist over 100,000 New Yorkers on any given day and over 250,000 individual New Yorkers every year. In other words, 1.3 percent of all New Yorkers receive OASAS services each year.

Addiction is a medical condition, and it has been this country's most durable, intractable, and misunderstood public health problem for the last 50 years. Our goal at OASAS is to lead the nation in the prevention of, treatment for, and recovery from addiction disorders. The Executive Budget proposal for OASAS supports our continued commitment to improving the lives of New Yorkers affected by addiction.

Governor Cuomo has proposed a budget that preserves our funding and allows us to put as much of those resources as possible into our system of care. The Governor's Budget proposal gives us the flexibility to move forward on Commissioner Sánchez's key priorities:

- Helping adolescents and young adults, who are often overlooked by mainstream treatment providers
- Fighting prescription drug misuse
- Promoting the availability of housing for individuals and families struggling with substance-abuse-related issues
- Assisting veterans, and
- Expanding the screening that allows early intervention for those whose substance use is harmful but not yet at the level of addiction.

At OASAS, one of our most important priorities is helping as many young people as possible move into adulthood free of addictions that can impede them from building productive lives. We have recently selected two outpatient clinics for three-year grant awards designed to address the issue of addiction in adolescents. One is in Franklin County, where alcohol and marijuana use in grades 7 to 12 is above the national average. The other, in the Bronx, serves many adolescents with substance use disorders who struggle with numerous other issues simultaneously, including child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health issues.

We have also recently announced that we will be funding 50 additional beds to serve young adults battling prescription drug misuse and opiate addiction—two 25-bed facilities in regions that have been particularly hard hit, one on Long Island and one in Western New York.

Of course, the young people whose lives are touched by substance abuse are not limited to those who are themselves addicted. They include many children whose families struggle with some form of dependency. Commissioner Sánchez believes that stable housing is critical to recovery—and to the families of those in recovery. The Executive Budget provides 70 additional permanent supportive housing units in New York City for families with substance-abuse related issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, for a total of 205 such units.

Increasing the State's stock of permanent supportive housing was also one of the key recommendations of Governor Cuomo's Medicaid Redesign Team, since it is one of the best ways to control the cost of care and improve its quality for the neediest Medicaid patients. To date, \$75 million in funding has been allocated to expand access to housing for over 4,000 patients with chronic conditions. This Executive Budget commits \$5 million of that sum to OASAS, which will allow us to support 280 housing units.

Assisting veterans is another major priority of Commissioner Sánchez. Governor Cuomo has made it clear that after the sacrifices they have made for our country, our veterans deserve every support we can give them. The Executive Budget provides operational funding for 75 new residential treatment beds for veterans in Albany, Franklin, and Niagara Counties that will open by early 2014.

We are also using a five-year federal grant to offer SBIRT—or Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment—to over 100,000 service members, veterans, and their families in the vicinity of Fort Drum, and patients at STD clinics in New York City. Research has shown that SBIRT screening and early intervention reduces alcohol and illicit drug use—preventing addictions from developing.

As Governor Cuomo declared in his State of the State message, we are reconstructing after Hurricane Sandy and New York is rising. At OASAS, we are in the business of encouraging favorable trajectories and rebuilding lives. Commissioner Sánchez looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to prevent addictions, to offer treatment to all your constituents who need it, and to provide the support services that will enable them to achieve a lifelong recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez, and I welcome your questions and comments.

The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the plane was the humidity. It was a warm blanket, wrapping around me as I walked through the airport. The air was thick with the scent of tropical flowers and the distant hum of traffic. I had heard that the weather was perfect, and indeed it was. The humidity was just what I needed after a long flight.

As I made my way through the terminal, I noticed the friendly faces of the staff. They were all smiling, and it felt like I had entered a warm embrace. The atmosphere was relaxed and welcoming, a stark contrast to the busy, impersonal environment of a large airport.

The humidity was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was comforting, but on the other, it was a bit overwhelming. I had to take small sips of water to stay hydrated. The heat was a constant presence, reminding me of the tropical climate I had just arrived in.

Despite the heat, the humidity was a beautiful part of the experience. It was a reminder of the lush, vibrant life that thrived in this part of the world. The humidity was a testament to the resilience of nature, thriving in the most challenging conditions.

The humidity was a constant companion as I explored the city. It was a reminder of the tropical climate that had brought me here. The humidity was a beautiful part of the experience, a reminder of the lush, vibrant life that thrived in this part of the world.

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