



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

**Testimony of Arlene González-Sánchez, MS, LMSW
NYS OASAS Commissioner**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene
FY 2022 Executive Budget Proposal Testimony**

Friday, February 5, 2021 10:30 a.m.

Good morning Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Weinstein, Senator Harckham, Assembly Member Steck and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly. My name is Arlene González-Sánchez, and I am the Commissioner of the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports, or OASAS.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to present Governor Cuomo's Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget as it pertains to OASAS.

Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, OASAS has taken significant steps to improve access to addiction treatment; develop new and innovative models; and expand services in communities throughout New York State. The Executive Budget proposal allows OASAS to maintain these services, and our entire comprehensive system of prevention, treatment, and recovery programming.

The Budget appropriates \$919 million for OASAS programs, which includes \$147 million for State Operations, \$90 million for Capital projects, and \$682 million for Aid to Localities. This reflects an increase of \$94 million from FY 2021, which primarily reflects additional Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grants funds that we expect to receive from the Federal Government as part of the COVID-19 Relief Act.

The Executive Budget includes an increase in minimum wage funding for OASAS providers. In addition, it supports OASAS' commitment to expanding access to residential addiction treatment services through capital investments for community organizations. As a result of these efforts, more than 160 new residential treatment beds are expected to open by the end of Fiscal Year 2022.

Although the times pose numerous challenges for all of us, the Executive Budget continues Governor Cuomo's commitment to OASAS' many essential programs and services. These include critical treatment and recovery initiatives, such as mobile treatment, Recovery Centers, and youth clubhouses; expanding access to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT); increasing the number of Certified Peer Recovery Advocates; and providing training in the use of Naloxone in our ongoing effort to combat the opioid crisis.

The pandemic required swift action across the OASAS continuum of care, and our providers responded immediately. They rapidly expanded telepractice and mobile treatment services; modified inpatient and residential treatment to ensure social distancing and proper infection controls; and expanded take home dosing of MAT to protect our most vulnerable population. Throughout the emergency and continuing today, access to all levels of treatment remain safe and available.

Our recovery centers had over 41,000 contacts with individuals, and made 4,011 referrals, of which 95 percent resulted in engagement in treatment.

The OASAS prevention providers will continue services, despite the closure of many school buildings and the inability to have any community based social gatherings. These providers, like treatment and recovery providers, are providing virtual services wherever possible.

In 2022, OASAS will continue its public education and social media campaigns to make sure that people who need help know where to access it. Our campaigns address stigma; raise community awareness about addiction; highlight particular concerns related to the dangers of social isolation for individuals with addiction; and ensure New Yorkers know treatment is available.

The Executive Budget also includes several legislative proposals to enhance prevention, treatment, and recovery services. The Governor is proposing a comprehensive strategy to expand telehealth. This plan will authorize additional staff in OASAS programs, including peers to deliver telehealth services and allow services to be delivered in non-clinical settings.

In addition, the Governor is proposing the integration of OASAS and the OMH into a new Office of Addiction and Mental Health Services (OAMHS). This new Agency will better serve those in need, by allowing for the delivery of SUD and mental health services in a more coordinated and unified system of care.

The Budget also authorizes the creation of Comprehensive Outpatient Services Centers, which will be implemented by a single joint regulation

issued by OASAS, OMH and DOH. This comprehensive license will allow providers to deliver a full continuum of primary care, SUD and MH services.

To protect New Yorkers from predatory practices, the Governor proposes a bill that builds on the existing authority of OASAS to credential individuals who provide services to those suffering or at risk for an addiction. The proposal also would allow OASAS to create a publicly available list of authorized addiction professionals, to help individuals and families make informed decisions when choosing a practitioner.

As we continue to manage the system of addiction treatment, recovery, and prevention, our number one priority is to remain vigilant about the health and safety of the vulnerable populations we serve.

The Budget will support funding for all of the critical initiatives I discussed and allow OASAS to meet the needs of those we serve.

I look forward to working with you, as we continue striving to help all those who have been impacted by addiction throughout New York State.

Thank you.