

Your Health Voice

Protect Mental Health Services-Don't Cut Services, Officials Say

VNSNY Joins Coalition for Behavioral Health Rally to Support City Council Funding



HEALTH- The Coalition for Behavioral Health, its member agencies, UJA-Federation, United Neighborhood Houses, and the Citizens' Committee for Children held a rally on May 8th to show substantial support for the City Council's behavioral health initiatives. These programs provide vital services to thousands of New Yorkers, from children under five to older adults.

VNSNY and other community-based organizations that receive this funding have demonstrated track records of success. Additional funding is needed to expand services to more New Yorkers in need.

"Without this funding, thousands of New Yorkers will be unable to get the care they need, including family counseling, substance use disorder treatment, mental health services to children and autism programming," said Amy Dorin, President and CEO of The Coalition for Behavioral Health. "Our members are in the community every day, improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable New Yorkers. This funding is critical to their success."

There are nine behavioral health initiative in the FY 19 budget totaling \$16.6M. This level of funding is inadequate to meet the needs of the communities and individuals that depend on these vital services. In FY 20, we are asking that funding is increased to \$19.8M with increases for initiatives where demand has grown exponentially.

The Geriatric Mental Health Initiative provides funding to 23 organizations to serve older adults in non-clinical settings, such as senior centers, religious institutions and homes. Just one provider conducts over 500 screenings each year with this funding.

“More City Council funding is essential if we are to continue to meet the behavioral health needs of vulnerable New Yorkers over the age of 65,” said Neil Pessin, Vice President, Community Mental Health Services, Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY). “Last year, in just one of our Geriatric Mental Health Initiative programs, we screened 318 older adults in the Bronx for depression and substance or alcohol misuse, conducted 298 in-home treatment visits to homebound seniors, and coordinated 32 case management sessions and 21 phone sessions with individuals. This year, in the same program, we’ve already done 180 screenings, 233 in-home treatments and 16 case management sessions. The need is real, and our funded community outreach programs help at-risk New Yorkers get the care they need to avoid the downward health spiral that can accompany undiagnosed or untreated elder depression and other behavioral health issues—we can’t afford to look the other way.”

“Without funding from the City Council’s Mental Health Initiatives, UJA partners would not be able to sustain an array of critical, innovative services for diverse populations,” said Louisa Chafee, Senior Vice President, External Relations and Public Policy, UJA Federation of NY. “Specifically, the funding enabled UJA partners to run dozens of specialized workshops for individuals who care for children with autism, and, parents of especially vulnerable populations were set up with education and support during the early identification stages of their child’s autism diagnosis. Loss of this funding would imperil critical services that families desperately need, and we urge the City Council to continue to fund these essential mental health initiatives.”

“For years, the City Council’s mental health initiatives have effectively used innovative, community-based settings to help identify children and families in need and offer them developmentally appropriate services and support,” said Jennifer March, Executive Director of Citizens’ Committee for Children. “We urge the City Council to support and enhance programs like Mental Health for Children Under Five and Court-Involved Youth, which play such a critical role in combatting unmet behavioral health needs for children in our city.”

“Settlement houses across New York City rely on funding from the City Council to provide critical mental health services like screenings for young children, summer camps for autistic youth, and access to health professionals in senior centers,” said Tara Klein, policy analyst, United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). “UNH is proud to support the Council’s Mental Health Initiatives and we urge them to fully restore and bolster funding for these programs in this year’s budget.”

“Mental health illnesses can affect anyone, it is important to have programs in place that will help and support the people that need it the most. I will continue to work alongside the Council as well as advocates to ensure that these necessary programs receive the funding needed to run them,” said Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez.

In the midst of the opioid epidemic, the Opioid Prevention and Treatment Initiative is a critical source of funding to 10 organizations that provide neighborhood-based prevention and treatment efforts.

“In the last year, this funding has made it possible for us to distribute 2,500 life-saving Narcan kits, serve over 1,000 people in recovery, keep 300 people out of the criminal justice system by providing alternatives for low-level drug offenders, and create a training program to address the huge employment gap affecting people in recovery as they struggle to rejoin the workforce,” said Diane Arneth of Community Health Action of Staten Island. “Reduced funding impedes innovation and partnerships that benefit thousands of people who have chosen to change their lives. Our success depends on our ability to stay nimble and respond swiftly to the changing needs of the neighborhoods we serve.”

The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative allows 14 organizations to serve court-involved youth, providing screenings, advocacy, short-term counseling, long-term treatment services, and vocational skills training. The Coalition for Behavioral Health was able to provide expert training to 450 individuals with this funding.

“The Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative allows Safe Horizon to share our unique vision, expertise, and network of services by developing clinical guidance for screening traumatized youth who have been involved in the criminal justice system,” said Victoria Dexter, Vice President, Mental Health Treatment at Safe Horizon. “Based on our screening, many of the youth may in fact be trauma survivors who can now be linked to appropriate mental health

services. In addition, we have created training for our colleagues in the Initiative to effectively address some of the trauma reactions these youth exhibit that are often misinterpreted as pathology or criminality. We urge the City Council to fully fund this important mental health initiative in the FY20 adopted budget.”

The Developmental, Psychological and Behavioral Health Services Initiative allows 18 organizations to address the needs of individuals with chemical dependencies, developmental disabilities, and/or serious mental illness. The funding supports medically supervised outpatient programs, transition management programs, and other behavioral health services.

“With funding from the City Council’s Developmental, Psychological and Behavioral Health Services Initiative, Greenwich House serves the most vulnerable New Yorkers – children who have been victims of abuse or neglect through our Children’s Safety Project,” said Andrea Newman, Assistant Executive Director, Greenwich House. “The Council’s support is critical to the success of this program, which provides individualized therapy to hundreds of children and their non-offending family members each year, with an ultimate goal of ending the cycle of abuse and providing families with the skills needed to eliminate domestic violence in their lives. We urge the City Council to continue to fund these vital health initiatives.”

The Children Under Five Initiative allows four organizations to provide early childhood mental health services to children who develop psychosocial and educational issues, as well as to help children cope with trauma from witnessing violence or experiencing abuse. One organization used this funding to screen 700 children, provide consultations to 300 children, train 100 early childhood personnel, and more.

The Medicaid Redesign Transition Initiative provides funding to 13 organization to assist in the ongoing and complex State Medicaid Redesign. Many organizations must purchase additional technology and software, and significantly expand their software, data tracking, analytics, and reporting capacity. For community-based organizations, funding these changes is a challenge. This initiative is vital to these providers.

“The Medicaid Redesign transition funds were vital to BronxWorks, as this funding allowed us to implement a robust data system that will ultimately help us communicate the impact that our Medicaid programs are having on the clients we serve,” said John Weed, Assistant Executive Director of Bronxworks. “This is a vital source of funding for community-based agencies.”

The Autism Awareness Initiative allows 37 organizations to provide wraparound services for children with autism spectrum disorders. One organization uses this funding to serve 1000 young people on the autism spectrum, providing weekend programming that includes swimming classes, yoga, drama programs, music therapy, occupational therapy and more.

The Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations Initiative grants essential funding to 15 organizations, who provide a range of mental health services to some of our most vulnerable and marginalized populations, including HIV-positive people, suicidal individuals, and people with developmental disabilities. One organization used this funding to serve 138 Latina teens who have seriously considered or attempted suicide. This funding is critical to solving the suicide epidemic among Latina teens, for who suicide is the second leading cause of death.

“The Lifelong Enrichment Program, funded through the Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations Initiative, provides seniors living with developmental disabilities nutritional counseling and recreational activities to keep them active and engaged in their community,” said Janelle Farris, Brooklyn Community Services.

The LGBTQ Youth Mental Health initiative supports comprehensive mental health services for vulnerable LGBTQ youth, focusing particularly on youth of color, youth in immigrant families, homeless youth, and youth who are court-involved.

About the Coalition for Behavioral Health

The Coalition for Behavioral Health is the umbrella advocacy organization for New York's behavioral health community, representing over 110 non-profit community based behavioral health agencies that serve more than 400,000 individuals

in the five boroughs of New York City and its surrounding counties. Founded in 1972, The Coalition is membership-supported along with government and foundation funding for advocacy, training, and technical assistance.