



Written Testimony Submitted to the  
New Jersey General Assembly Budget Committee

Oral Testimony Delivered By:

Mary Abrams, MPP, Sr. Health Policy Analyst  
New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.  
3635 Quakerbridge Road, Mercerville, NJ 08619  
609 838-5488 Fax: 609 838-5489  
dwentz@njamhaa.org

March 11, 2024

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Dear Chair Pintor Marin and Assembly Budget Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the 164 members of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) whose 61,000 plus workforce provides treatment and support services to more than 500,000 of New Jersey's children and adults with mental health and substance use disorders annually.

As unprecedented numbers of children, youth and adults continue to experience anxiety, depression and other disorders, and with greater acuity, our suicide and opioid epidemics continue with great loss of life. Staff continue to carry larger caseloads and more responsibilities due to workforce shortages while recruitment and retention at community-based programs remain most difficult because providers simply cannot compete in the current marketplace.

In 2022, NJAMHAA presented to you our [\*Diverse Faces, Many Lives\*](#) campaign illustrating the profound, powerful, positive effects behavioral health services have on individuals' lives. In 2023 we shared our [\*Diverse Faces, Partners in Care\*](#) campaign, which highlighted how each successful recovery story includes a clinician, counselor, peer, case manager or other staff whom an individual connected with, opened up to, and trusted to help them on their path to recovery. This year, we wish to share with you [\*Diverse Faces, All Are Worthy of Full Investment\*](#) which continues to highlight the life-saving work of behavioral health staff and the need for more investment to ensure all New Jersey's diverse populations have access to the services they deserve.

### **Maintain, Strengthen and Expand the Behavioral Healthcare Workforce**

Unfortunately, so many individuals in our diverse communities do not have access to the services that have provided others the opportunity to achieve physical and mental well-being, as the capacity of the current system is limited by the workforce it employs, a workforce marked by unprecedented vacancies.

To ensure access to appropriate behavioral health services for all of our diverse vulnerable populations, reimbursement rates and contracts for mental health and substance use treatment and support services need to be increased to match the cost of care. Most importantly, increases must allow for competitive wages to be paid so the Partners in Care needed by the individuals served can be recruited and retained.

NJAMHAA makes the following recommendations for the FY2025 budget to stabilize and strengthen the behavioral health workforce so they will be available to serve every New Jerseyan – all of whom are worthy of these needed investments:

- Invest \$60 million (state and federal funds) in Department of Human Services' behavioral health care rates and contracts to allow for more competitive wages.
- Invest \$5 million for recruitment and retention bonuses for behavioral health staff.

**New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.**

- Invest \$5 million in incentives for behavioral health organizations to become field placement sites and provide clinical supervision of interns.
- Provide a 7% cost of living increase to behavioral health rates and contracts within the Department of Children and Families.
- Invest an additional \$32 million (state and federal funds) in Care Management Organizations.
- Invest \$1.8 million to bring School Based Youth Services Programs (SBYSPs) and other contracts within the School Linked Services budget line equal to the FY2022 increase the Legislature had provided.

The bottom line for the diverse children, youth and adults in need of services is that access to care requires a qualified, stable workforce to deliver timely, appropriate mental health and substance use treatment and supports. We ask that the FY2025 budget provide the significant investment in community-based behavioral health care that is needed to meet that goal - all New Jerseyans are worthy of such investment.

### **Improve Access to Care and Sustainability**

Investment is also needed to maintain and improve effective programs. Such investments will improve access to care; outcomes and the state's bottom line by reducing emergency room visits, hospitalizations and other more costly consequences when timely, appropriate, quality care is not available to all. Toward that end, NJAMHAA recommends:

- Invest \$1.7 million in dedicated funding for the Nurse Navigator program serving incarcerated individuals.
- Invest \$667,000 of additional funding to expand training opportunities at the Governor's Reentry Training and Employment Center.
- Invest \$20 million in capital funding for behavioral health providers to see to necessary repairs and improvements at their aging facilities.

Thank you for considering our recommendations and for your continued efforts to ensure access to high-quality mental health and substance use treatment and supports for all of New Jersey's diverse communities.

If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 609-838-5488, ext. 292, or [dwentz@njamhaa.org](mailto:dwentz@njamhaa.org).

Sincerely,



Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D.  
President and CEO