



Contacts: Megann Anderson Fischer, Executive Director, New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families, 609-586-9092, megann.anderson@njacyf.org; Shauna Moses, Vice President, Public Affairs and Member Services, New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, 609-838-5488, ext. 204, smoses@njamhaa.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 13, 2025

New Jerseyans Cannot Wait any Longer for Life-Affirming Care; Greater Investment Is Needed in Community Services

NEW JERSEY: Mental health care, treatment for substance use disorders and services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) enable people of all ages to not only manage these health conditions, but also achieve many other goals, including education, meaningful employment and positive relationships with family members and friends. However, despite ample evidence of this tremendous positive impact — as well as substantial savings for the state — funding has been inadequate for years and continues to be insufficient. This situation has resulted in reduced access to these life-affirming services and, therefore, lost opportunities for individuals to reach their greatest potential. Advocates are reinforcing that the FY2026 State Budget must not only avoid funding cuts, but also include significantly increased funding for the behavioral healthcare and IDD systems for children, youth, adults and families throughout New Jersey.

“While each of us serves a different group of providers of care, we face many challenges in common: systems that have been underfunded for many years and are facing more uncertainty than ever, including threats to federal funding streams that New Jersey relies on to deliver care; skyrocketing costs to provide services with no mechanism in place to automatically adjust contracts to cover these costs; a tremendous increase in the demand for services; and a dwindling workforce in a sector where consistency in staff can make all of the difference in the success and happiness of individuals in care and their families,” stated Megann Anderson Fischer, JD, Executive Director, New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families, during a recent press conference along with colleagues from other statewide advocacy organizations.

“Any and all cuts to funding for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities would have a real and significant impact, reducing quality of life and diminishing access to services,” said Arc of NJ Executive Director Thomas Baffuto. “The dollars currently in our system are the reason why people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can find employment, can live in group homes, can attend day programs and more.”

“Cuts would make it harder to recruit and retain members of our direct support professional workforce,” Baffuto added.

“The mental health needs of the IDD population must be addressed. Early intervention, day habilitation and support coordination are crucial services,” stated Cathy Chin, Executive Director, Alliance for

More

New Jerseyans Cannot Wait any Longer for Life-Affirming Care/Page 2 of 3

the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities. “We urge Governor Murphy to not balance the budget on the backs of infants, children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and delays.”

“We can’t lose — and instead must expand — the important ground we have gained by virtue of Governor Murphy’s vision and leadership,” Chin added.

“We are facing an unprecedented time. Potential cuts to Medicaid on the state and federal levels, and potential legislation that costs money, create a perfect storm,” stated Valerie Sellers, MHA, CHE, Chief Executive Officer, NJACP. “If we see cuts — and we’ve been told they are potentially catastrophic — individuals in nursing homes and developmental centers will continue to languish where they are and not have the opportunity to live within our communities.”

“Care Management Organization (CMO) services help prevent hospitalization and incarceration, keeping youth where they belong in their communities and homes. However, CMOs are facing an increasingly dire situation as annual budgets continue to erode, causing concerns about quality services and the ability to maintain this nationally recognized model,” said Suzanne Siverio Kreie, LCSW, Treasurer of NJCMO and Chief Executive Officer of Coordinated Family Care.

In addition to reinforcing these points made, Debra L. Wentz, PhD, President and CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA), and Shauna Moses, NJAMHAA’s Vice President of Public Affairs and Member Services, stated that increased funding is also needed because of higher operational costs associated with the carve-in of more behavioral health services into Medicaid managed care. “Staff have had to take on additional layers of administration, including credentialing, prior authorization and claims,” Moses explained. “Community-based behavioral healthcare providers in New Jersey already operate on razor-thin margins. The additional demands imposed by the carve-in threaten this fragile balance.”

“Everybody is waiting in suspense with the unpredictability of what is to come from the federal level and how that can impact people with any kind of disability,” Dr. Wentz stated. “We are asking Governor Murphy and the Legislature to make people a priority. The populations we serve are very vulnerable,” she stressed.

To watch the recording of the press conference, during which the advocates provide additional details on the funding levels needed and their importance, including the positive impact on individuals’ quality of life and on the state’s bottom line, click [here](#) and use the following passcode: !@Y5ubgd

The Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities’ mission is to influence the development and implementation of public policy and to support our members in improving the lives of people with complex physical and neurological developmental disabilities so they can achieve their highest level of purpose and dignity.

The Arc of New Jersey promotes and protects the human rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes; and is committed to enhancing the quality of life of those individuals and their families through advocacy, empowerment, education and prevention.

More

New Jerseyans Cannot Wait any Longer for Life-Affirming Care /Page 3 of 3

The New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families (NJACYF) is an advocacy organization representing child, youth and family serving organizations in every county in New Jersey. NJACYF is the voice of children, youth and families advancing holistic health and well-being. Its vision is for all children, youth, and families in New Jersey to have access to what they need to be healthy and thrive and its mission is to collaborate to shape practices and policies that drive excellence in care for children, youth, and families.

The New Jersey Association of Community Providers represents providers dedicated to advancing sustainable community-based services and supports that enrich lives and build futures for people with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities. Its mission is to assist member agencies as they provide quality supports and services for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) represents 164 organizations that annually serve more than 500,000 individuals in all of New Jersey's diverse populations who have mental illness and/or substance use disorders, and their families. NJAMHAA members may be found in every county and every community statewide.

NJCMO is a collection of all 15 Care Management Organizations in New Jersey. It was formed to encourage collaboration and cooperation among all CMOs; educate the community on the role of the CMO and how we help youth and families; assist youth and families connect to needed resources; and provide a broader voice across the state for CMOs. NJCMOs provide services for mental health, substance abuse, developmental disabilities, court involvement and trouble in school.