

NJAMHAA Applauds Gov. Christie's Budget Decisions

Based on news coverage over the past couple of weeks, the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) was pleased to anticipate that Governor Chris Christie's FY 2013 State Budget Address would focus on preserving funding for mental healthcare and substance-use treatment services. NJAMHAA is even more pleased that the Governor is also proposing \$34.6 million in new funding for the Department of Human Services (DHS), of which \$24.6 million would be dedicated to expanding community placements for individuals with developmental disabilities, as he announced today during his State Budget Address.

"We are delighted that DHS would receive this much-needed additional funding if Gov. Christie's budget is passed. This and several other elements of his proposal underscore his commitment to New Jersey's most vulnerable citizens, with not only funding but also a greater focus on community-based services, as opposed to institutions. We applaud these humane and fiscally sound decisions, and we urge the State Legislature to support these proposals that will benefit the state overall, as well as every resident," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer of NJAMHAA.

Dr. Wentz explained that community-based services pay for themselves. For example, a one-year stay for one patient at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital costs \$178,000, compared to \$600 for one year of community-based mental healthcare services for one person. Similarly, incarceration costs \$45,000 per person per year, whereas community-based substance-use treatment services require an annual investment of only \$25,000 for one client. "The savings from community-based treatment for the hundreds of thousands of adults and children statewide who rely on these services translate into billions of dollars in savings every year for the state," Dr. Wentz said.

As further testament to his understanding of the value of community-based services, Gov. Christie is also proposing \$2.5 million in initial funding for nonviolent drug offenders to receive treatment through the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and to ensure that every county has a Drug Court system in place. "NJAMHAA applauds the Governor's bold plan to mandate treatment for nonviolent drug offenders, which clearly illustrates his understanding that community-based treatment works," Dr. Wentz said. "Nonviolent drug offenders will gain priceless opportunities to rebuild their lives as a result of the treatment and support services they will receive. In addition, the state will benefit economically because high-cost incarceration will be avoided and the clients will be able to secure employment and pay taxes," she added.

Relating to the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Gov. Christie announced plans that NJAMHAA views as positive for improving the quality and coordination of services. "Having a single place to go for treatment and support services will be a tremendous benefit for children with developmental disabilities and their families. The challenges that are inherent in managing

disabilities can be daunting for any family, and any step taken to simplify access to these vital services is indeed a very important and valuable step to take,” Dr. Wentz said.

“This is an excellent example of dismantling silos, which impose tremendous barriers for everyone in need of services. Another admirable and much-needed effort along the same vein is the collaboration between DCF and DHS to plan for smooth transitions from youth-focused to adult services. Such partnerships are critical to give New Jersey’s youth every possible opportunity to manage health conditions and, therefore, maximize their potential to achieve goals and enjoy their lives,” Dr. Wentz added.