

NJAMHAA Supports Funding for Community-Based Services as State Budget Priorities

While Governor Christie's address on the FY 2015 state budget focused on a full payment toward pensions for state employees, the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) is pleased that his proposal includes increases of \$200 million for Medicaid; and increases of \$24 million and more than \$30 million for children and adults, respectively, for community-based mental health, substance use and developmental disabilities services.

"We are grateful to see a commitment in the Administration to support delivery of critical services for children and adults who have mental illnesses, substance use disorders, developmental disabilities or a combination of these illnesses," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., Chief Executive Officer of NJAMHAA. "We look forward to continuing to work with Governor Christie, his staff and the State Legislature to meet the massive unmet demand for treatment and support services, which have been proven effective for enhancing the quality of life for children and adults, as well as saving the state at least \$1 billion each year."

Dr. Wentz explained that community-based services enable individuals to manage symptoms and even recover from mental illnesses and substance use disorders, thereby avoiding the need for hospital care, which cost the state millions of dollars more than the community-based services. Additional savings result by avoiding lost productivity, and preventing homelessness and overcrowding in jails and prisons. These services also enable individuals to succeed in education and employment and contribute to the state's economy.

"The demand for community-based services is increasing as a result of the Medicaid expansion and federal healthcare reform. To meet this demand, provider organizations need to have annual Cost of Living Adjustments, or COLAs, of at least 3 percent," Dr. Wentz said. "COLAs will help providers to offer higher salaries that are more competitive with those in government and offer better benefits. If providers are able to attract and retain qualified staff, not only will the increasing number of people in need be able to receive services, but they will also be able to receive continuity of care, which is essential for them to achieve wellness and recovery."

NJAMHAA works to close the treatment gap in the publicly funded mental health and substance use service system. Currently, 31,145 adults willingly ask for substance use treatment and are not treated due to a lack of capacity, and less than one-third of New Jersey residents with mental health disorders are able to access care. Nearly 56,000 adolescents in need of substance use treatment are not able to access care. Adolescents with serious emotional disorders number 165,217, yet only 27,500 entered the Children's System of Care.

"Investing in mental health and substance use services saves money and saves lives," Dr. Wentz stressed.