

**New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.**  
**Innovating for Progress|Partnering for Solutions**

January 10, 2019

**FY 2019  
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The Honorable Shereef Elnahal M.D.  
Commissioner  
Department of Health  
P.O. Box 360  
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Elnahal,

Thank you for the opportunity to share recommendations for the FY 2020 State Budget from the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA). We would greatly appreciate your consideration of the following priority funding areas as you develop your budget and advocate for this funding with the Department of the Treasury and Office of Management and Budget.

New Jersey's community based behavioral health system of care remains in a fragile state due to increased demand, workforce shortages and system changes that continue moving forward without provisions to fully support providers' fiscal needs. Among those, is the need for electronic health records (EHRs) that are interoperable with other data systems, including billing systems. EHRs are not just a business model efficiency tool, they are critical to achieving the best outcomes for those we serve - they are part of the foundation that is necessary to developing truly integrated care and to battling the opioid crisis.

Quoting from the Department of Health's (DOH's) website, "the goal of health IT is to improve the quality of patient care" and "better information means better health care".

In the current (FY2019) budget, \$13 million of the \$100 million appropriated to battle the opioid epidemic was earmarked for infrastructure and data. Of this, \$10 million was dedicated to building infrastructure for the state's substance use treatment system. We understand that \$6 million of this was then specifically targeted to achieving interoperability. While appreciated, this one-time appropriation falls far short of the level of need to resolve the technology and data entry problems within the state and to make providers interoperable, as well as help those without EHRs get on board and others to upgrade. All of this work must continue if we are to properly support the fight against the opioid epidemic as well as an integrated system of care.

Again, looking to DOH's website, we find this truth: "adopting EHRs requires time and money, but the benefits outweigh the costs." NJAMHAA urges DOH to appropriate an additional \$13 million in the FY2020 budget to continue this work.



Funding must also be made available to provide fiscal support to providers of mental health and substance use treatment to bring primary care to their clients. New Jersey's behavioral health system is where those with the most serious behavioral health needs can be found. With a majority having many severe health comorbidities, they comprise a large portion of the population known as "high utilizers". Bringing behavioral health care to primary care sites for those with mild and moderate needs is a good idea. Failing to support the need to bring primary health care to behavioral health agencies ignores the greatest opportunities to best serve our residents and the state's bottom line. NJAMHAA recommends \$10 million be appropriated as an initial investment in facility and staffing resources for behavioral health providers to further develop integrated care.

Thank you for considering our recommendations and for your continued advocacy and efforts to ensure access to high-quality mental health and substance use treatment services for all New Jersey residents.

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

cc: Anthony DiFabio, PsyD, NJAMHAA Board Chair  
Greg Speed, MSW, LCSW, NJAMHAA Board Vice-Chair

