

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

**FY 2024
Board Members**

Chair

Jacques Hryshko, MS, LPC

Vice Chair

Anthony Comerford, PhD

Treasurer

Frank A. Ghinassi, PhD, ABPP

Secretary

Alan DeStefano, MSW

Immediate Past Chair

Susan Loughery, MBA

At-Large Members

Mary Gay Abbott-Young, LCADC

Mary Jo Buchanan, MPA, LCSW

Robert J. Budsock, MS, LCADC

Tara Chalakani, PsyD, LPC, RN

Anthony DiFabio, PsyD

Derry Holland, LCSW

Brigitte Johnson, Esq.

Erika Kerber, Esq.

Deborah Megaro, MBA

Kristine Pendy, LCSW

Louis A. Schwarcz, MA

Kathy White-Thomas, MS

Regina Widdows, MA

President and CEO

Debra L. Wentz, PhD

Department of Health Budget Listening Session

November 14, 2023

Written Testimony of

Debra L. Wentz, PhD
President and CEO

New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the FY2025 budget.

The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, known as NJAMHAA, represents 164 hospitals and other organizations that serve more than 500,000 children, youth and adults each year and directly and indirectly employ 61,000 members of New Jersey's workforce.

It is evident that more needs to be done to address the continuing increases in mental illnesses, substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders along with comorbidities, such as diabetes and heart disease. To address these growing areas of need and ensure equity in integrated health care, programs, projects, and initiatives within the Department of Health must be strengthened and expanded.

The Department of Health is not only directly responsible for many behavioral health services, such as inpatient psychiatric units and harm reduction centers, but it also has significant impact on many other behavioral health services. To meet the mutual mission of the Department of Health, hospitals and community-based behavioral healthcare providers, NJAMHAA is recommending continued and increased funding to meet staffing and safety needs throughout the health system, as well as significant increases for specific services and programs.

NJAMHAA fully supports the Department of Health in its efforts to hire more staff in the Division of Certificate of Need and Licensing which will assist in processing programmatic licensure applications quickly, as well as to approve and grant waivers when appropriate. This will increase access to the growing number of individuals in need.





New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.
Champions for Transforming Lives and Health Systems

Other recommendations to expand access to care include:

- Expedite the promulgation and adoption of the integrated license regulations.
- Further facilitate integrated, whole-person care by providing an additional \$5 million in funding for hospitals to attract and retain psychiatrists and advanced practice nurses in their inpatient units.
- Invest an additional \$8 million in Charity Care for a total of \$350 million to cover the increased uncompensated care delivered by hospitals.
- Continue to expand harm reduction centers to all 21 counties so that these life-saving services that meet people where they are become available to all New Jerseyans. To achieve this critical goal, the funding for harm reduction centers needs to be doubled to \$9 million in the FY2025 budget.
- Provide incentive funding for community providers to participate in the Quality Improvement Program (QIP). This initiative requires collaboration of hospitals with community-based behavioral healthcare providers yet funding for community providers is not included in the QIP framework. The Department should consider separate state funding to incentivize community providers to work with the QIP hospitals for the benefit of those served by these programs.
- Provide an additional \$5 million for the Graduate Medical Education budget line and an additional \$5 million for the Graduate Medical Education Supplemental budget to encourage an ongoing pipeline of future healthcare providers including behavioral healthcare providers.
- Provide funding to ensure that all healthcare providers continue to have personal protective equipment.

In addition to funding for these needs throughout the healthcare system, NJAMHAA recommends increased fiscal resources for the following specific services:

- Increase the number of inpatient beds, particularly for children and youth.
- Continue the hepatitis initiative, which currently includes \$3.7 million for hepatitis C treatment for offenders with substance use disorder and \$4.5 million for hepatitis C testing and treatment of state inmates, as well as an allowance for up to \$10 million more for the latter from the Institutional Program Support budget line.
- Continue at least level investment to combat the HIV epidemic.

All of these investments are necessary to deliver the timely and appropriate care that all New Jersey's residents need and deserve to thrive.