Talking Points

The Mental Health Budget and Article VII

A.3007/S.4007

I would like to share with you some proposals that I support in the mental health budget with some additional recommendations.

We support the proposal to expand residential beds by providing $890 million in capital to build 3,500 new residential beds for people with serious mental health conditions who need varying levels of supports.

Housing with proper support services is a critical need in mental health care. The lack of housing creates extensive delays in discharges from hospitals resulting in the occupation of hospital beds that would be better utilized for people in the acute phase of an illness.

In addition, supportive housing programs are a significant part of establishing stability and a pathway to recovery for individuals disabled by their condition.

We support the Governor’s proposal to add 26 more Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) to provide integrated behavioral health care, providing both mental health and substance use disorder services. OMH should work to ensure a geographical distribution of these programs includes rural areas.

We support the Governor’s proposals to expand mental health services for children and families by investing an additional $12 million in the HealthySteps program and Home Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI) teams, $5 million for High Fidelity wrap around supports, and $10 million to develop school-based clinics. We believe that the expansion of mental health services in primary and secondary education is essential to the health development of our children and an important investment in our future.
We support the Governor’s proposal of $7.7 million in additional State funding for incarceration and post incarceration community re-entry services, for a total of $11.5 million, to reduce crime recidivism rates by meeting the behavioral, health, employment and educational needs of individuals returning to their communities.

While we support the Governor’s proposal to restore 1,000 inpatient psychiatric beds across the State, we remain concerned that if the capacity and quality of community mental health services is not greatly reformed, a thousand beds will lead to a thousand revolving doors.

The shortage of qualified licensed mental health professionals and quality long-term rehabilitation and supportive day treatment programs needs to be addressed with much greater funding to attract and retain licensed mental health professionals. The proposed 2.5% cola for mental health workers does not keep up with the cost of living, and maintains uncompetitive salaries.

In addition, while the reimbursement rates for outpatient mental health programs have increased over recent years, they remain uncompetitive and unable to adequately staff outpatient mental health programs with licensed mental health professionals, especially professionals of race and culture that might meet the needs of many patients. These inadequate reimbursement rates result in less than effective treatment programs, and contribute to higher rehospitalization and lower recovery rates.

Occupational therapy is a licensed profession that provides mental health care by helping an individual through teaching, doing and practicing activities to recover function in their self-care (activities of daily living), their management of their home (instrumental activities of daily living), their social functioning, as well as their efforts to return to education or work.

Due to low reimbursement rates adults with serious mental health conditions now have limited access to occupational therapy services. much more must be done to improve the access to quality community mental health services that children and adults deserve.

The Assembly and the Senate should call on OMH to revisit the assumptions underlying their rate setting methodology for outpatient mental health programs for adults and children.