



Briefs Coalition

A SEMI-MONTHLY UPDATE ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW YORK

COLA and MA Hike a done deal

State leaders have agreed upon increases for community mental health. The community mental health sector will receive both a 10% Medicaid fee increase and a 3% cost of living adjustment, though additional complications are included.

In the context of diminishing State revenues, both increases were delayed until December 1st. Additionally, the COLA will only be on personnel costs and agencies will be required to submit a letter of attestation stating that the increases went to workers.

There were strong indications that these increases would be included when, late last week, leaders agreed on a framework for the upcoming budget. The budget is slated to top \$90 billion for the coming year, slightly higher than Governor Pataki's proposed budget of \$89 billion. Late for the 18th straight year, Legislators are hoping to complete and sign a budget by May 13th. If so, this could be the earliest budget in recent memory.

Also of concern is the expiration last September of the landmark Reinvestment legislation. Although the legislation will not be revived in this budget, there is some hope that it will be dealt with in the post-budget period. If Reinvestment had remained alive it would have captured \$35 million for community mental health. ■

Living with a 'living wage'?

Last week, the City Council held hearings on a 'living wage' bill that would require certain agencies contracting with the City to pay workers at least \$8.10 per hour. The Council has come out strongly in favor of the bill and it may be a point of contention with the Mayor.

Although community mental-health agencies would not initially be required to pay a living wage under the legislation, their contracts, upon renewal, would obligate them to pay up to mandated levels. Housing development agencies that receive land and property from the City at reduced costs would also be targeted under this legislation.

While agencies in general are highly supportive of 'living wage' legislation, this bill does raise a number of concerns which were voiced in a hearing on April 23rd. Namely, the bill does not require that the City increase current contracts to cover the cost. In essence, this would leave providers in the lurch, having to cover the cost of additional raises with no promise of remuneration from the City.

Agencies nonetheless remain optimistic that a compromise can be worked out and that hard working New Yorkers will get what they earn without leaving providers holding the bag. ■

Bush backs 'Parity'

On Monday, President Bush publicly endorsed insurance parity for mental hygiene. Appearing along with Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM), Bush was long on the support, but short on the details by leaving open the question of which illnesses are covered and other details.

Last year, a bill co-sponsored by Domenici and Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-MN) was passed by the Senate though it stalled in negotiations with the House. That bill, which has been re-submitted, closed a major loophole in the previous 'parity' legislation by eliminating service caps in addition to spending caps. It also provided an exemption for businesses with fewer than 50 employees, as well as insurance companies that could demonstrate cost increases greater than 1%. A study by the Congressional budget office indicated that the Domenici-Wellston 'Parity' bill would increase costs by 0.9%.

It is hoped that with President Bush's new support, 'Parity' will finally become a reality. ■

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This manual is available for only \$100 for Coalition members and \$150 for non-members. To view the complete table of contents, visit The Coalition's website @ www.cvmha.org/prof_learn_ctr/compliance-cd.html. To order the CD, contact Meggan Christman@ 212-742-1600x109. ■