

**The
Coalition**
of Voluntary
Mental Health
Agencies, Inc.

Coalition Briefs

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

Senate, Assembly pass 'Reinvestment II'

Earlier this week, the Senate and the Assembly passed new Reinvestment legislation. With language tailored to avoid the Governor's veto, the community mental health sector is hopeful that the legislation will be signed into law. Like the landmark legislation from 1993, this new incarnation will capture for the community mental health sector savings realized from the closure of State psychiatric hospital beds. However, it differs in some significant respects from the original.

To begin with, the 'bed price' was raised to \$70,000 per year, a

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City Budget Passes!

Late Wednesday night, City leaders announced that they had reached an agreement on the city's FY2003 budget. Despite a multi-billion dollar budget gap, the City Council fought long and hard on behalf of the mental health sector. As a result, many of Mayor Bloomberg's proposed cuts were restored. As part of his first budget, Mayor Bloomberg had proposed more than \$8.1 million in cuts which were targeted to all the City Council additions to mental hygiene since 1998. Although the City Council's initial position was to restore everything, the end result was a \$1.47 million cut.

Alcoholism prevention will be cut by \$250,000, while substance abuse and domestic violence will receive a cut of \$1.2 million. At this time, it is not yet known whether these cuts will be targeted towards specific programs or will be in the aggregate budget. Sadly, some of the City's MICA services are categorized as substance abuse services—including family-centered programs for adolescents with co-occurring disorders, and integrated treatments for adults with dual disorders.

Many had predicted that this would be a rough year for the mental health sector given the major budget issues facing the City. Largely due to the advocacy of the mental health sector and the persistent support of the City Council, the cuts were held to a minimum. Kudos to City Council Mental Health Chair Margarita Lopez and her colleagues! □

Coalition gives Mental Health Awards, celebrates 30 years

On Tuesday Night, the Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies was proud to honor four outstanding individuals for their contribution to raising awareness of mental illnesses by awarding them the Mental Health Award. A fifth long-serving member of the mental health provider community was given a Founder's Award.

Barbara Cook, a concert and cabaret singer who had battled depression and alcoholism, was the first recipient. She came public with her illness some years ago and is currently enjoying an acclaimed run of "Mostly Sondheim" at Lincoln Center. Presenting her award was newscaster Mike Wallace of 60 minutes. Mr. Wallace had interviewed Barbara Cook about her struggle with depression, an illness he, too, has experienced. After his presentation, he was again called on stage in order to receive an unscheduled Mental

Health Award.

Sylvia Nasar, author of *A Beautiful Mind* was also given a Mental Health Award. Her adroit telling of the life of Dr. John Forbes, Jr., and his struggle with schizophrenia was the basis of the award-winning film of the same name. The film and the publicity it generated have helped millions of

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Coalition President Alan Siskind with Mental Health Awardees Barbara Cook and Mike Wallace.

More kids need care; more get care

Crain's is reporting that New York City emergency rooms have been experiencing a rise in the number of children seeking psychiatric care. Although it is tempting to associate this with fallout from September 11, in fact the rise is continuing a pattern over the last few years.

However, there is no pattern to the kinds of illnesses, which suggests that the increase is the result of other factors.

At the same time, HRA is using a federal grant to provide school kids in lower Manhattan with services to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder. Six organizations will provide counseling services as part of an after-school program. Among the agencies are Coalition members **University Settlement, Henry Street Settlement, and Educational Alliance.** □

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MH Awards

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people to understand mental illnesses.

And finally, the Coalition was pleased to give a Mental Health Award to Dr. John Forbes Nash, Jr., Nobel Laureate in Economics and subject of the film *A Beautiful Mind*. Dr. Nash, developed the theoretical foundation of "Game Theory."

The Coalition also honored its own Joyce Pilsner, with the Founder's Award for her 30-year contribution to the mental health community as the Executive Director of the Riverdale Mental Health Association.

The event was held at the Con-Ed building and was sponsored by Pfizer. More than 300 people attended—including representatives from New York State OMH, New York City Department of Public Health, and many others. Thank you to all who came and congratulations to the awardees! ▣



(l-r) Award recipients Barbara Cook, Mike Wallace and Joyce Pilsner.



Past Mental Health Award recipient William Styron and his wife Rose.



(l-r) Thelma Dye, Alan Siskind, Sylvia Nasar, and Phillip Saperia



Dr. John and Alicia Nash arrive at the Mental Health Awards.

FEMA 2nd round approved

Late last month, the Federal Emergency Management Agency approved the second round of funding for services related to 9/11 in New York State. Known as Regular Services Plan, or RSP, this round of funding will cover an extended period beginning at the end of November, 2001.

Approved for a record \$132 million, more than \$112 M will come to New York City for Project Liberty-related activities.

The Initial Services Program, or ISP, was approved shortly after the disaster and brought in \$22.7 million for crisis counseling and other services immediately related to the disaster. These funds covered a period of approximately two months. Although the RSP typically covers a 10-16 month period, the magnitude of the impact of 9/11 will likely necessitate services for a longer period of time. Oklahoma City received services funded by FEMA for more than 2 years after the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building. ▣

Reinvestment II

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significant increase over the last approved level. The new legislation will also capture savings from the closure and consolidation of any State-run psychiatric facilities. This provision is much like a proposal included in the Governor's budget in for FY2001.

And in a nod to Assembly efforts for greater oversight of OMH's planning process, the legislation also mandates that OMH make a series of annual reports to the legislature. Among the topics for these are the long-term capital plan for the State psychiatric system, the methodology used to determine bed price adjustments, and the long term plan for the utilization of State employees in programmatic integration.

Despite efforts to preserve the first Reinvestment last year, the original legislation expired on September 30, 2001. Since then, the savings realized from the take-down of beds has not been reserved for the mental health sector. In the short time between the expiration of the old legislation and when the new Reinvestment legislation will take effect, 395 beds are slated for elimination.

Kudos to Senate Mental Health Chair Tom Libous and Assembly Mental Health Chair Marty Luster for their dedication and hard work on this important legislation! ▣

Tech Tip

Do you get a headache from staring at computer screens? Make sure that your monitor's *refresh rate* is set to 75 Hertz or greater. In Windows, find your Display Properties, select Settings, then press the Advanced button. Select the Monitor tab, and in the Monitor Settings box, there will be a drop-down menu under the heading, Refresh Frequency.

If it says 60 Hertz, change the setting to either "Optimal" or 75 Hertz. You can set the refresh rate higher than 75 Hertz, *if you're sure that your monitor can support it*. If you're not sure, just leave it at 75 Hertz. This will reduce flicker and eye strain, and should help reduce headaches caused by long periods of screen use. ▣