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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IPA NETWORKS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ENSURE HEALTH EQUITY AND INTEGRATED CARE TO UNDERSERVED NEW YORKERS THAT ARE REELING FROM THE EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC TOLL OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

{ALBANY} The NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare and a group of 17 Behavioral Health Independent Practice Association (IPA) Networks released a [White Paper](#) today documenting the critical role of behavioral healthcare in New York State's (NYS) post-pandemic recovery. To address the widespread post-pandemic increase in mental health and addiction prevalence and acuity, the groups urge state leaders to increase support for behavioral health services and the networks and infrastructure necessary to deliver effective services going forward.

NYS is in the midst of developing its post-pandemic Healthcare Transformation Agenda to further restructure New York's health care system. One aspect of the plan could facilitate the reinvestment of billions of dollars in current expenditures to remedy the inequities and gaps in healthcare that were exposed during the pandemic. The NYS Council and IPAs call on NYS to support further investment in IPA infrastructure development, improved access to healthcare data, and inclusion of behavioral health networks in Medicaid managed care value-based contracting.

Kevin Muir, EngageWell IPA Executive Director, summarized what experts have demonstrated in recent studies, "It simply will not be possible to bend the cost curve of healthcare without enlisting the behavioral health provider community in the effort."

Prior to the pandemic, NYS made a thoughtful investment to support the development of regional networks of mental health and addiction treatment agencies--behavioral health Independent Practice Associations (IPA)--throughout the state. The IPAs are now now poised to partner with medical networks in value-based contracts to expand access to, and integration of care, between behavioral health and medical services.

"IPAs enable community behavioral health providers to collaborate in order to establish a system of population health care, building the necessary technology infrastructure to capture, exchange, analyze and utilize data to improve quality and outcomes. IPAs are essential for community agencies to negotiate contracts with managed care plans to deliver value-based behavioral healthcare", points out Richard Tuten, CEO of Coordinated Behavioral Health Services (CBHS) IPA.

While there has been broad acknowledgement that NYS should improve access for low-income, Black and Hispanic residents to physical healthcare, the pandemic has exposed the erosion of behavioral health for New Yorkers who experience the worst health inequities. Across the state, experts have documented a higher prevalence and

severity of mental health and addiction issues post pandemic, especially in communities with disproportionately high infection and mortality rates. Andrea J. Wanat, Value Network of Western NY Chief Operating Officer, points out that “it is critical that access to behavioral health care improves immediately, or we will leave New Yorkers behind in the pandemic recovery.”

NYS’s behavioral health IPAs have already demonstrated their value during the pandemic in communities where IPAs have participated as integral partners in health care delivery. “Medicaid use data shows that thousands of New Yorkers with behavioral health conditions had improved clinical outcomes through the collaborative work of behavioral health IPAs,” reports Caroline Heindrichs, AsOne IPA Executive Director. A Health Management Associates study showed that, for New Yorkers served by an active IPA, thousands more received follow-up care after a hospital visit and over 1,100 high utilizers of health care reduced their service use.

“Up until now, managed care organizations that administer NYS Medicaid funds have not taken advantage of the opportunities for improvement in care that are made possible by including behavioral health IPAs and their agencies in the mainstream of healthcare contracting”, said Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. “Small successes and innovative programs are ready to scale up to tackle some of the biggest health care challenges, including care transitions, more effective care for people with complex needs, and supporting medication adherence. NYS must change that practice through stronger policies and funding,” said Cole.

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