



Office of Addiction Services and Supports

**Testimony of Chinazo Cunningham, MD
NYS OASAS Commissioner**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene
FY 2026 Executive Budget Proposal Testimony
February 5, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Pretlow, Senator Fernandez, Assembly Member Steck and distinguished members of the Legislature. My name is Dr. Chinazo Cunningham, the Commissioner of the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS). Thank you for the opportunity to present Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Executive Budget and how it supports our work at OASAS on behalf of those impacted by addiction.

This is my fourth year presenting the OASAS budget. Over the past three years, New York State experienced both the COVID-19 pandemic and a devastating overdose epidemic. We met these challenges by following our guiding principles of data-driven decision-making, harm reduction, and equity. Through these efforts, we are now seeing positive results. Most importantly, overdose deaths have declined by 17% statewide¹. That's roughly 900 lives saved through our combined efforts between 2023 and 2024.

We are optimistic about this trend; however, we must remain focused on saving more lives by bringing innovative prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services to those who need it. Today, I am proud to share some of our 2024 accomplishments—and detail how this year's Executive Budget helps us build on our **foundation of progress**.

From the start, New York has distributed more **opioid settlement funds** to localities and community-based organizations faster than any other state in the nation. OASAS is responsible for distributing 36% of the state's settlement funds—and does so with efficiency and transparency. A recent report noted that our state received and allocated the largest amount of settlement dollars received nationwide². To date, OASAS has made nearly \$400 million available to address substance use disorder and overdoses. This year's Executive Budget includes roughly \$63 million to help support our continuum of care across the state and in alignment with the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board's recommendations. That includes establishing initiatives to increase medication treatment availability, including expanding access to methadone treatment along with low-threshold buprenorphine treatment; scholarships to support the workforce; youth prevention programs; recovery center and transportation supports; enhanced outreach and engagement; and more.

I am extremely proud to report that our online portal continues to make free, lifesaving harm reduction supplies available to the public. Thus far, over 250,000 naloxone kits and nearly 22 million fentanyl and xylazine test strips have been distributed from OASAS alone to individuals and organizations across the state. Just recently, a Poughkeepsie high schooler successfully administered naloxone while at his local barber shop. The teen had ordered the naloxone online through the OASAS portal after receiving a lesson on how to administer it during Health class³.

Our outreach and engagement work has served over 90,000 New Yorkers. In addition, the state now has three **Mobile Medication Units** up and running. These units bring addiction services, including methadone treatment, and other medical care directly to underserved communities. As Governor Hochul has highlighted, additional funds will help us roll out more units in 2025.

The FY 2026 Executive Budget will allow OASAS to continue these critical initiatives and enhance support of our provider system and the individuals they serve. In all, the proposed OASAS budget contains nearly \$1.3 billion—including roughly \$190 million for State Operations, \$964 million for Aid to Localities, and \$94 million for Capital projects. It continues **Opioid Stewardship funds** that allows OASAS to support harm reduction services, and medication and treatment affordability.

¹ "Percent Change in Reported 12 Month-ending Count of Drug Overdose Deaths, by Jurisdiction: July 2023 to July 2024"; <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² <https://kffhealthnews.org/opioid-settlements/>

³ <https://hudsonvalleypress.com/2025/01/15/student-saves-life-using-lesson-learned-in-school/>

Workforce recruitment and retention remains a priority across the OASAS continuum of services—especially as we strive to increase service capacity. To address this challenge, OASAS has made historic investments into the addiction workforce to support and expand a skilled, compassionate network of professionals. This includes a partnership with SUNY and other colleges, universities and community-based organizations, which has resulted in over 1,000 individuals receiving scholarships for addiction training—and more than 80 medical and behavioral health fellows at four medical schools across the state. The Executive Budget includes \$12 million in additional support for a 2.1% Targeted Inflationary Increase to provide fiscal relief for service providers, as well as an additional \$6.4 million minimum wage increase. This action builds upon OASAS workforce initiatives, including a new Leadership Institute, enhanced peer supports, scholarships and paid internships, and an online addiction credentialing portal.

Treating individuals with **co-occurring substance use and mental health conditions** calls for close collaboration between OASAS and the Office of Mental Health (OMH). The budget supports ongoing efforts to triple the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics to better address individuals’ complex needs—regardless of their ability to pay. It also includes an additional \$3 million to expand support for joint street outreach activities to connect vulnerable people with needed services. Further, OASAS and OMH continue to rollout **crisis stabilization centers**—which provide support, assistance, and urgent access to care. We are also jointly seeking to improve access to services for homeless youth.

A 2022 state law required medication treatment for all substance use disorders in carceral settings. It is no small achievement that all 42 prisons and all 58 jails have implemented all forms of FDA-approved medication for substance use disorders. We are a **national leader** in this work—representing the largest such implementation in a state carceral system nationwide. In the first year of implementation, the number of people who received medication treatment for substance use disorder increased more than 5 times in prisons and more than 3 times in jails.

State revenues from casinos and mobile sports betting help empower OASAS prevention efforts to promote and encourage **responsible gambling**. Our ‘Take a Pause’ public awareness campaign is airing throughout the NFL playoffs and Superbowl—asking people to examine their betting habits. Our Problem Gambling Bureau has also worked to eliminate barriers to training; collect and study data on gambling behaviors; and enhance problem gambling prevention, treatment and recovery supports.

With the legalization of **Adult Use Cannabis**, OASAS is raising awareness for its responsible use through a new Cannabis Prevention Toolkit that is available in English and Spanish—giving parents and mentors practical tips and guidance on how to talk to teens about the risks of underage cannabis use. In addition, we are gathering important data from youth about their cannabis behaviors and attitudes—while training providers and schools on the prevention and treatment of cannabis use disorders.

The OASAS continuum of services include programming and supports to help individuals achieve and maintain their personal health and **recovery goals**—including new OASAS-certified recovery residence regulations. This represents the first recovery support service to be certified in the state and allows recovery residences to voluntarily apply for OASAS certification. I urge those interested to visit our new Recovery Residences webpage to learn more.

Lastly, the proposed budget includes **ongoing support for a 5-year capital plan** to ensure the health and safety of individuals, and proper maintenance of facilities.

As outlined today, the proposed Executive budget allows OASAS to build on a proven foundation of progress based upon an equitable person-centered, data-driven approach. OASAS will continue providing a full continuum of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery programming and services—all towards our goal of further reducing overdose deaths, improving lives, and preventing addiction. We appreciate your ongoing support and look forward to working with you to better serve those in need.

With that, I welcome any questions. Thank you.