



45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2022 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, & Addiction
Council Member Farah Louis, Chair**

**Submitted by Tara Klein, Senior Policy Analyst
March 15, 2021**

Thank you for convening this important Preliminary Budget hearing. My name is Tara Klein, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing 44 neighborhood settlement houses, including 40 in New York City, that reach over 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.

Settlement houses have been on the frontlines of serving their communities during the COVID-19 crisis, and will remain critical partners in our City's recovery. The pandemic has resulted in enormous new mental health needs, including across-the-board increases in anxiety, depression, isolation, and grief. It is more critical than ever that the City invest in mental health services. Since before the pandemic, UNH members have provided a wide variety of mental health and substance abuse services to their communities, such as Article 31 mental health clinics, Article 32 substance abuse treatment programs, PROS programs, Geriatric Mental Health, and many others. Thirteen UNH members provide services through City Council Mental Health initiatives.

In FY 2022, UNH recommends the City Council restore and enhance funding to all eight of its DOHMH Mental Health initiatives. We greatly appreciate the Council's long-standing support for these programs that bring mental health services to vulnerable populations in their own communities. Year after year, these initiatives provide crucial funding to nonprofit providers to offer mental health services in non-clinical community settings, including community centers, senior centers, and early childhood programs. While many mental health programs were baselined by the City several years ago, particularly ThriveNYC programs, these Council initiatives continue to be important because several of the new programs changed scopes of services and were structured in a way that prevented existing providers from applying.

Unfortunately, many of these initiatives were significantly reduced in FY 2021 due to the poor economic outlook related to COVID-19. It is crucial that the Council at a bare minimum restore these cuts to their FY 2020 levels (\$19.3 million total). Given the urgency of COVID-19 and the related mental health needs, we also urge targeted increases to several initiatives that settlement houses utilize (\$22 million total) as laid out below:

- **Geriatric Mental Health Initiative: Fund at \$2.86 million**
 - FY21: \$1.62 million
 - FY20: \$1.91 million
- **Children Under Five: Fund at \$1.2 million**

- FY21: \$852,000
- FY20: \$1 million
- **Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations: Fund at \$3.48 million**
 - FY21: \$1.99 million
 - FY20: \$2.32 million
- **Autism Awareness: Fund at \$3.25 million**
 - FY21: \$3.25 million
 - FY20: \$3.25 million
- **Developmental, Psychological, & Behavioral Health: Fund at \$2.26 million**
 - FY21: \$1.92 million
 - FY20: \$2.26 million
- **Court-Involved Youth Mental Health: Fund at \$3.4 million**
 - FY21: \$2.9 million
 - FY20: \$3.4 million

UNH also encourages increasing the **Opioid Prevention and Treatment initiative to \$4.38 million** and restoring the **LGBTQ Youth initiative at \$1.2 million**.

Geriatric Mental Health Initiative

UNH is a long-time supporter of the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative (GMHI). GMHI funds mental health services in community spaces where older adults gather, such as senior centers, NORCs, and food pantries. GMHI increases the capacity of community-based organizations serving older adults to identify mental health needs, provide immediate mental health interventions, and refer clients for further psychiatric treatment when necessary. By placing mental health services in nonclinical settings, GMHI providers are able improve access to mental health services in the community, and providers can adapt their programs to meet the needs of the community they serve without stigma. GMHI currently supports 22 organizations, 7 of which are UNH members.

During COVID-19, GMHI providers have indicated tremendous increase in demand for telephone-based counseling due to increased depression, anxiety, and isolation. One provider has reported reaching 381% more individuals than predicted; another has indicated a two-to-threefold increase over previous years. Group counseling and screenings continue to operate remotely. Before the pandemic hit, the aging network expressed an overwhelming demand to expand mental health services for older adults, especially at senior centers and NORCs and in multiple languages. Given patterns of increased demand over the last year, it is prudent to consider expansion of this program in order to reach older adults in need of mental health supports.

Unfortunately, in FY 2021 GMHI was cut by about 15% per program, leaving providers struggling to do more work with less. Many expressed a direct impact on staffing and capacity due to these cuts. At a bare minimum, the Council must restore this initiative back to FY 2020 levels of \$1.9 million. It should also **expand GMHI by 50% above that level – investing an additional \$950,000 for a \$2.86 million total program cost**. This would allow GMHI to expand to at least 10 new sites, plus allow modest increases for existing programs to allow them to meet increased demand and provide much-needed cost of living increases for staff. Such increases would support program staff who face low salaries and high turnover, allow some programs to hire multi-lingual program staff, and expand to meet new demand.

Children Under Five

The Children Under Five (CU5) initiative provides early childhood mental health services to infants, toddlers and pre-school aged children and their families in community-based settings. The program allows organizations to work with children to develop psychosocial and educational skills, as well as to cope with trauma resulting from witnessing or experiencing domestic violence, sexual abuse, or physical or mental abuse. Using a trauma-informed lens, providers are able to provide screening and clinical evaluation, individual, small group, and child-parent psychotherapy, and consultation to

pediatricians, teachers, and child welfare workers. For years, CU5 providers have been testing new interventions and models of providing care, greatly contributing to the City's understanding of the most appropriate ways to treat this population. Their expertise is essential in both working on complex cases and in putting forth new treatment options. CU5 currently supports four organizations, including one UNH member. These programs have continued to operate with regular participation levels throughout COVID-19.

In FY 2022, we ask the Council to **restore and enhance CU5 above its FY20 level of \$1.002 million to a total of \$1.2 million.** This increased funding would support additional program staff (especially to address service needs in multiple languages), allow raises for staff that are in need of a cost of living adjustment, and allow programs to enhance their innovative approaches to early childhood mental health interventions.

Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations

The Mental Health for Vulnerable Populations initiative supports community-based behavioral health programs that provide a range of programs, services, trainings, and referrals to support vulnerable and marginalized populations, including people who may be HIV-positive, suicidal, schizophrenic, or have developmental disabilities, as well as broader population groups such as children and youth, immigrants, homeless individuals, and at-risk seniors. This program currently supports 21 organizations including one UNH member. As a somewhat broadly defined initiative, we recommend expanding Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations by **50% above FY20 levels to \$3.48 million total.** This will help more community-based providers offer mental health services and respond to the increased needs observed in communities during COVID-19.

Autism Awareness

The Autism Awareness Initiative supports wraparound services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at 35 organizations across New York City, including 3 UNH member organizations. Services offered include after-school programs, summer camps, social skill development, and weekend programming, as well as supportive services for families and caregivers of children with ASD. These programs often fill crucial gaps in services, such as extended support beyond State services under the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities Services (OPWDD), weekend and summer programming, and supports for young adults who have aged out of the OPWDD system but still need support around vocational and life-skills coaching. Autism Awareness providers also offer family support and coaching, so that parents of children with ASD have resources to care for their children, and supports for themselves to prevent against caregiver burnout. In FY 2022, we ask the Council to **restore Autism Awareness at \$3.25 million.**

Developmental, Psychological, & Behavioral Health

Developmental, Psychological, & Behavioral Health supports a range of programs and services that address the needs of individuals with substance use disorder, developmental disabilities, and/or serious mental illnesses, as well as the needs of their families and caregivers. The funding may support medically supervised outpatient programs, transition management programs, Article 16 clinics, psychological clubs, recreation programs, or other behavioral health services. This initiative reaches 18 organizations including 2 UNH members. In FY 2022, the Council should **restore the Developmental, Psychological, & Behavioral Health initiative to \$2.26 million.**

Court-Involved Youth Mental Health

The Court-Involved Youth initiative supports programs that help identify teenagers with criminal justice involvement who require mental health services. The initiative provides assessments, family services, counseling, and respite services, and connects participating youth and families with additional services. This initiative supports 21 organizations including one UNH member. In FY 2022, the Council should **restore the Court-Involved Youth Mental Health initiative at \$3.4 million.**

Thank you for your time. For questions, I can be contacted at tklein@unhny.org.