



**Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services**  
**Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update**  
**Goals and Objectives**

Issue Category	Applicable State Agency	Applicable Population
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Case Management / Care Coordination	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Crisis Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Cross Systems Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Employment/Volunteer (Client)	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Forensics	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Inpatient Treatment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Non-Clinical Supports	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Outpatient Treatment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Prevention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Problem Gambling	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Refugees and Immigrants	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Residential Treatment Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Respite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Transitional Age Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Workforce Recruitment & Retention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Other 1: Adult Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Other 2: Harm Reduction	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults



**Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services  
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Goals and Objectives**

**Goal 1: Timely Access to Care**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Niagara County's high risk / high need individuals will have timely access to appropriate services to support them in the least restrictive level of care.**

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

1. Case Management/Care Coordination
2. Residential
3. Other 1 (ACT)

**Objective 1: Adult ACT Expansion**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will advocate for funding to expand the number of adult Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) slots in Niagara County that will serve both Medicaid and non-Medicaid eligible individuals.

**Objective 2: Transition Between Levels of Care**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with stakeholders to develop innovative processes, programming and/or models of care that will allow individuals to be admitted to and transition between levels of care in a timely manner.

**Objective 3: Residential Programming**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will monitor availability of and access to residential programming through available data sources and support expansion and/or new program development where need is clearly demonstrated.

**Objective 4: Promote Recovery for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will support the development and implementation of strategies / programming that will enhance services available to individuals with co-occurring disorders in order to promote recovery in multiple realms.

**Objective 5: Improve Timely Access to Community Based Support Services**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will evaluate available data and engage in targeted activities that will help improve timely access to HCBS Waiver Services, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), CCO/HHs and HH+, HARP, HCBS, CORE and CFTS services for eligible individuals and prevent / reduce unnecessary utilization of higher cost / level of services.



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### Goal 1 Objective Updates

#### **Objective 1: Adult ACT Expansion**

- NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) has provided opportunities for the expansion of ACT Team from 48 to 65; however the expansion requires movement from a traditional ACT Team to Forensic ACT. In late 2024, the LGU in partnership with Spectrum Human Services ACT program leadership advocated with NYS OMH on a hybrid model to meet the current needs of Niagara County individuals; however NYS OMH was unable to approve the request. Future funding opportunities will be explored to expand ACT to meet the complex needs of Niagara County residents who may benefit from this service.
- The wait list for Spectrum Human Services Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program, managed through the Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Adult Single Point of Access (SPOA) Program, had an average of three (3) individuals in 2024 as compared to 11 in 2023. In 2024, SPOA and ACT providers worked collaboratively to vet, ongoing, the wait list. Additionally, Health Home Plus care management services (as step-down) were more accessible as staffing stabilized. This allowed movement between levels of care and thus a reduced waiting list. A need remains for increased ACT slots to ensure timely access to care at time of need. In previous years, entities stopped referring potentially eligible individuals for ACT services due to a lack of service availability and the anticipated lengthy wait for services.

#### **Objective 2: Transition between Levels of Care**

- The Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Single Point of Access (SPOA) program approved 79% and 84.5% of the referrals received to the Adult and Children's SPOA Programs respectively in 2024, resulting in 369 total linkages to housing, residential, Adult / Youth ACT, care management, and / or other types of community based supports through the SPOA program in 2024. Primary reasons for SPOA applications not being approved is due to lack of ability to determine program eligibility based on incomplete applications and lack of response from referral sources and/or applicants to complete the application requirements.
- NCDMH SPOA staff remain active participants in cross-system and other collaborative provider meetings. For example, they attend the Western Region SPOA meetings as scheduled; facilitate monthly separate Children's and Adult SPOA meetings via WebEx; engage in weekly cross-systems collaborative calls facilitated by ECMC CPEP staff to discuss discharge planning needs of Niagara County youth presenting to the hospital; participate in both ad-hoc and regularly scheduled meetings for particular youth who may be experiencing systemic barriers to accessing appropriate levels of care and/or community-based resources; and attend monthly Community Network of Care (CNOC) for Children & Families in Niagara County meetings. SPOA staff routinely elevate high risk/need cases and system-related issues to Department Leadership as they arise in order for appropriate courses of action to be determined, further direction to be provided and/or administrative action to be taken.



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- In fall 2024, SPOA staff participated in a collaborative meeting facilitated by WNY Office of Mental Health Children's Division leadership that included staff from ECMC CPEP, Erie County SPOA and other local providers for the purpose of reviewing and the currently weekly CPEP cross-system provider meeting process and determining any necessary revisions to make it most beneficial. Outcomes of this meeting included the following:
  - ECMC will begin to provide county Children's SPOAs with a list of all youth that have been in CPEP in the past week, not just the youth experiencing discharge barriers. The intent is to allow CSPOA's to enhance coordination efforts with families post-discharge from CPEP and assess further for appropriate services to meet their unique needs. A schedule was determined for when lists will be sent.
  - ECMC discussed the possibility of opening a children's help center, similar to their adult help center that could potentially reduce presentations in CPEP that may be more appropriate for intervention in a less restrictive level of care.
  - SPOA staff "revived" a previously utilized School to Hospital Communication Form devised by NCDMH Deputy Director in collaboration with local school districts and the previous Eastern Niagara Hospital Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit personnel as part of the County's System of Care initiatives as a request was received from a local school district to reinstate utilization of this form with local hospitals (as it had not been utilized since ENH's children's unit close in late 2019). ECMC and WNY OMH staff provided their feedback on use of the form and were receptive to this mode of communication in the event a youth is transported directly to CPEP from a school either voluntarily or under Mental Hygiene Laws.
    - Following this meeting, NCDMH Deputy Director updated this form with current local hospital contact information and distributed it local school districts through CNOC for utilization as schools see fit.
  - NCDMH Deputy revised and distributed to local hospitals and system of care stakeholders a comprehensive directory of points of contacts at Niagara County schools; psychiatric hospital emergency departments and inpatient units; mental health, school-based satellite and substance abuse treatment clinics; and an array of community-based services provider agencies.
- In 2025, the Local Governmental Unit (LGU) and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC) leadership began routine collaborations to improve hospital-community communications, facilitate timely access and reduce barriers to care for children, adolescents and adults presenting to the psychiatric emergency department.

### Objective 3: Residential Programming

- According to the NYS CAIRS reporting system for adult residential services for 2023 – 2024 data, Niagara County based program occupancy rates were as follows:
  - Community Residences: 87.6% occupancy
  - Apartment Treatment Program: 75.4% occupancy

Some reasons for lower occupancy rates in higher level of care include referred individuals' desire to reside independently in the community or without a roommate. Construction on one



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the community residences in Niagara County will occur in 2025 to create single rooms for individuals.

- OASAS funded residential programs in Niagara County occupancy rates based on local reports were as follows:
  - Community Residential: 97% occupancy
  - Residential Rehabilitation: 99% occupancy
  - Residential Reintegration: 100% occupancy

Four (4) out of five (5) residential rehabilitation programs had wait lists averaging 46 people waiting per month with an average length of stay on the waitlist of 22 days.

Cazenovia Recovery Services is in process of construction on the Community Residential Program for women, including pre and postnatal and women with children up to age five (5) which will increase capacity by five (5) women and one (1) additional child.

- Several changes occurred in the past year, and more are in process of occurring this year, with NYS OPWDD residential programming in Niagara County. A total of three (3) Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) closed, resulting in a loss of 34 ICF beds, while supervised Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) opportunities will be increased by a total of 30 between 2024 and 2025. Changes include the following:
  - People Inc. increased capacity at the supervised IRA located at 4632 Miller Rd. in Niagara Falls, NY from four (4) to five (5) from a relocated opportunity from 2496 Delaware Ave, Buffalo, NY to 4632 Miller Rd., Niagara Falls, NY.
  - People Inc. relocated one (1) opportunity from the supervised IRA at 4696 Creek Rd., Lewiston, NY to 520 Englewood Ave, Buffalo, NY, which reduced bed capacity.
  - People Inc. is in process of relocating three (3) Free Standing Respite (FSR) opportunities from 6828 Townline Rd., N. Tonawanda, NY to 80 Acacia Dr., Amherst, NY and suspending the operating certificate and two (2) remaining FSR opportunities. The agency indicates the new location will be more centralized and accessible for families in Erie and Niagara Counties. Additionally, the agency is in process of relocating a total of six (6) supervised IRAs from 80 A and B Acacia Dr., Amherst, NY to 6828 Townline Rd., N. Tonawanda, NY expanding the supervised IRA opportunities in Niagara County.
  - NYS OPWDD operated supervised IRA decreased capacity from six (6) to five (5) beds at 6228 Dale Rd., Newfane, NY to comply with Life Safety Code.
  - NYSARC Inc. Cattaraugus Niagara Counties Chapter (DBA InTandem) closed and decertified the ICF located at 115 Mead St., N. Tonawanda, NY and transitioned individuals in this location to supervised IRAs within Niagara County to better meet their current needs.
  - NYSARC Inc. Cattaraugus Niagara Counties Chapter (DBA InTandem) converted the ICF located at 6821 Sy Rd., Niagara Falls, NY (12 opportunities) to a supervised IRA at the same location to reduce the administrative burden and reinvest time into staffing efficiencies and individual care and to increase fiscal long-term fiscal health of the agency and program. The agency indicates the conversion would not



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negatively impact clients in care as they are all able to be served appropriately in the IRA.

- NYSARC Inc. Cattaraugus Niagara Counties Chapter (DBA InTandem) converted the ICF located at 3076 Saunders Settlement Rd., Sanborn, NY (12 opportunities) to a supervised IRA at the same location to reduce the administrative burden and reinvest time into staffing efficiencies and individual care and to increase fiscal long-term fiscal health of the agency and program. The agency indicates the conversion would not negatively impact clients in care as they are all able to be served appropriately in the IRA.
- Heritage Christian Services is in process of relocating five (5) opportunities from 4441 Tonawanda Creek Rd., N. Tonawanda, NY to 7237 Townline Rd., N. Tonawanda, which will be a new supervised IRA, and adding an additional one (1) opportunity to bring capacity to six (6). The new supervised IRA is a one-story home providing individuals to age-in-place more effectively.

More OPWDD licensed / certified residential opportunities are needed in Niagara County to meet the needs of individuals awaiting these services. The CRO list continues to be lengthy, often having individuals waiting for several months to years to access residential services.

### **Objective 4: Promote Recovery for Individuals with Co-Occurring Disorders**

- Through NYS OMH funding, Spectrum Health and Human Services Assisted Community Treatment (ACT) Program added an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) employee, who predominately works on securing employment for clients enrolled in the program. IPS is aimed at increasing the use of evidence-based supported employment in OMH licensed and designated outpatient rehabilitation programs, including Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Teams and Community Oriented Recovery and Empowerment (CORE) Psychosocial Rehabilitation (PSR) designated providers.
- On average in 2024, 55% of the Spectrum ACT roster consisted of individuals on an Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) court order or enhanced monitoring contract. This rate is significantly lower than the average in 2023, when 77% of the Spectrum ACT roster consisted of individuals on involved with AOT.

### **Objective 5: Improve Timely Access to Community Based Support Services**

- Sisters of Charity Care Management Program, which serves Niagara County, sought NYS OMH designation as a Specialty Mental Health Care Management program in December 2024.
- Due to program underutilization the Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services closed their Community Oriented Recovery and Empowerment Services (CORE) Community Psychiatric Support and Treatment (CPST) Program effective April 1, 2025. Currently, Allwel and Venture Forthe remain designated to provide CORE CPST services to Niagara County Residents.



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- In 2024 and continuing into 2025, Child and Family Services Youth Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Program paused acceptance of new referrals at times during the year due to ongoing staff recruitment and retention issues; however this did not significantly impact the ability of youth accessing the program services in a timely manner when such was needed.
- Hillside Children's Center Children and Family Treatment and Support (CFTS) Services discontinued all CFTS services as of June 2024 due to lack of staffing and fiscal viability. Access to services for children and youth remained very challenging for any CFTS services in Niagara County due to program staffing issues and long wait lists.
- Based upon local report data, waitlists continue for all CFTS Services due to such factors as staffing vacancies and potential duplicated individuals on multiple agency wait lists.
- Targeted trainings were offered to local providers who offer HH+, HARP, HCBS, CORE and CFTS services. These trainings included a Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) workshop with 10 providers trained and multiple Adult Mental Health First Aid (AMHFA) workshops with 41 providers trained.



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Goals and Objectives**

**Goal 2: Expanded Access to Treatment**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Niagara County residents across the lifespan will have expanded access to quality treatment at time of need.**

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

- 1. Inpatient Treatment
- 2. Outpatient Treatment
- 3. Workforce

**Objective 1: Expansion of Treatment Options**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

Utilizing available data sources, the LGU will monitor availability and access to inpatient and outpatient treatment and support expansion and/or new program development when need is clearly demonstrated.

**Objective 2: Stabilization and Recovery**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will support the development and implementation of strategies and/or program expansions that promote the stabilization and recovery of individuals with co-occurring disorders when need is clearly demonstrated.

**Objective 3: Building on the Workforce**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with local providers to improve accessibility to mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability trainings through the development of a training network and evidence-based curriculum to ensure baseline competencies in behavioral health programming.



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**Goals and Objectives**

**Goal 2 Objective Updates**

**Objective 1: Expansion of Treatment Options**

- Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center closed its Continuing Day Treatment (CDT) program in October 2024 due to decreasing census and lack of fiscal viability. This is a loss of services to the Niagara County community who were diagnosed with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and benefited from this older model of care.
- In 2024, Horizon Health Services was awarded the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Demonstration Program for their Niagara County clinic locations in Niagara Falls and Lockport, NY. CCBHCs aim to provide coordinated outreach and care to individuals who have complex mental health, substance use, and co-occurring medical and other related concerns. This expands the availability of CCBHC services from two (2) to four (4) locations in Niagara County as Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Counseling and Wellness Services Clinics are established CCBHCs in Lockport and Niagara Falls, NY. <https://horizon-health.org/press-release-horizon-health-services-awarded-ccbhc-demonstration-designation-by-omh-and-oasas-for-niagara-county/>
- NCDMH Niagara County Counseling & Wellness Services Lockport Clinic is in process of relocating to 475 South Transit Road in Lockport. This location is on a bus-route, is more accessible, and will have the opportunity to expand capacity with an additional licensed clinician position.
- In 2025, Catholic Charities Monsignor Carr Institute expanded population served to include adults at their Lockport and Niagara Falls clinic locations.
- In the past year, three (3) new NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) school-based satellite clinics were established, while one (1) school based satellite clinic closed due to inability for agency to staff the site and one (1) other clinic satellite closure due to lack of demonstrated need at the location. Additionally, three (3) school-based satellite clinics reduced hours due to both workforce challenges and lack of demonstrated need.
  - This year, currently proposals are pending approval from NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) for expansion of one (1) OMH licensed MHOTRS satellite clinic in Niagara Falls, NY, and five (5) school-based satellite clinics as well as the closure of one (1) satellite clinic co-located at a pediatric office due to the office no longer requesting these services.
- In 2024, Recovery Center of Niagara expanded their NYS Office of Addiction and Support Services (OASAS) licensed medically supervised withdrawal (detox) services from 15 beds to 21 beds, and their Inpatient Rehabilitation Services from 25 beds to 79 beds.



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### **Objective 2: Stabilization and Recovery**

- For those seeking substance use treatment in Niagara County in 2024, denial rates for inpatient detox were 28% and 56% for inpatient rehabilitation. Declinations were often due to individuals' high acuity mental health concerns. Facilities state they are unable to manage in "traditional" inpatient programs.

### **Objective 3: Building on the Workforce**

- The Community Network of Care (CNOC) for Children & Families in Niagara County is reimagining CNOC University into a full-day skill building workshop for community providers to help enhance skill sets from a cross-systems perspective.
- NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) rolled out the "OMH Funded Training for Providers" platform in 2024, a database of over 3,300 trainings available **free of charge**. While this will improve workforce competencies, awareness of this platform is limited and many of these trainings are virtual. The LGU is actively sharing this resource with local service providers.



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**Goal 3: Increase Access to Housing**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Niagara County residents will have increased access to and retention in safe and affordable housing that supports long term stabilization and recovery.**

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

1. Housing
2. Transitional Age Services

**Objective 1: SRO / Supportive Housing Expansion**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will advocate for the expansion of single room occupancy and supportive housing opportunities and support proposals that expand these affordable housing opportunities where need is clearly demonstrated.

**Objective 2: Landlord and Community Education**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with stakeholders to provide education to local landlords and the general community about mental illness, substance use disorders, I/DD and available resources to support individuals with these disabilities in order to increase housing opportunities and the retention of individuals in housing.

**Objective 3: Support Housing Stability**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will promote community education efforts related to homeownership opportunities and the resources available to remain housed.

**Objective 4: (NEW) Expansion of Transitional Aged Youth Housing Options**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will advocate for and support the expansion of housing options for transitional age youth, ensuring access to short-term, transitional, and permanent housing, which is safe and accessible by high risk/high need youth where need is clearly established.



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### Goal 3 Objective Updates

#### **Objective 1: SRO / Supportive Housing Expansion**

- 2024 NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) funded supportive housing updates include the following:
  - Living Opportunities of DePaul was awarded 10 Scattered Site Supportive Housing beds in Niagara County.
  - Community Missions Inc. had a loss of 10 supportive housing beds (five scattered site and five long-stay). Based on NYS OMH slot reconciliation/research it was determined that Community Missions is only funded for 96 Supportive Housing Community Services beds through Direct Contract with NYS OMH, and two (2) psychiatric center (PC) long stay beds through State Aid Letter. Community Missions was stretching the funds to cover the additional beds. NYS OMH clarified that this is not allowable.
  - Recovery Options Made Easy Inc. (Formerly Housing Options Made Easy, Inc.) Supportive Housing Provider received an additional two (2) long-stay supported housing beds. While looking at funding and bed counts, NYS OMH found that ROME is funded for five (5) PC long stay beds, not three (3) and were instructed to increase the capacity from (3) to (5) to rectify this.
  - Overall supportive housing occupancy rates were 112%, over 100% due to capacity exceeding funded beds for a period of time until this was reconciled. **The demand for supportive housing continues to exceed availability.**
  - DePaul Community Services Packet Boat Landing Single Room Occupancy (SRO) program had an average occupancy of 94.2%; **the demand for this housing program well exceeds availability with the current wait list anticipated to be years at this point.**
- In 2024, the LGU provided a letter of support to Living Opportunities of DePaul to build and operate affordable housing with support services in the town of Wheatfield in Niagara County. There is a high unmet need for supportive housing that prevents homelessness in Niagara County, and DePaul's proposal to provide housing with supports for adults with serious mental illness (SMI), Veterans, frail seniors, and the chronic homeless will help address critical gaps in services in Niagara County.
- Based on local data reports received by the LGU, the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) funded supportive housing program in Niagara County had an occupancy rate of 66.7%. Based on the reimbursement model, fiscal viability of the program is not possible.
- In 2024, The LGU hosted a planning session on the service system for co-occurring mental health (MH) and substance use disorders (SUD), with 24 providers from local agencies attending. The LGU and providers examined barriers for people with co-occurring MH/SUD and what gaps exist in the housing continuum of care for individuals with co-occurring MH/SUD. Information gathered from this session is being utilized to identify potential funding opportunities for proposals that will meet needs of individuals in Niagara County.



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**Goal 4: Crisis Services Continuum of Care**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Niagara County residents experiencing a mental health and/or substance use related crisis will have expanded access to a coordinated crisis response system and continuum of care that addresses an individual's immediate safety and needs.**

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

- 1. Crisis Services
- 2. Cross-Systems
- 3. Respite

**Objective 1: Community Resources Awareness and Utilization**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU, in collaboration with stakeholders, will provide community education through various mediums to increase the community's awareness and use of available resources.

**Objective 2: Community Education and Training**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU, in collaboration with stakeholders, will facilitate and/or coordinate education and training opportunities that equip both providers and the general public with the knowledge and skill sets to recognize and appropriately respond to individuals in crisis.

**Objective 3: Expand Options within the Crisis Continuum of Care**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will support proposals that expand options and/or enhance services within the crisis continuum of care where need is clearly demonstrated in order to serve individuals in the least restrictive setting.

**Objective 4: Cross System Planning and Intervention**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with cross-system providers to identify and implement strategies that support a coordinated response to effectively intervene with and guide high risk / need individuals, and their families, in crisis.

**Objective 5: HBCI or Like Services for Children/Adolescents**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will evaluate the need for Home Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI) or like services (children's hospital diversion services) and support proposals for implementation when need is clearly demonstrated.

**Objective 6: Access to Respite**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will support the expansion of respite opportunities that address the unmet needs of individuals, and their caregivers, where need is clearly demonstrated.



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**Objective 7: Crisis Intervention in Schools**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU, in collaboration with local school districts, will facilitate the training of school personnel and equip them with the knowledge and skills to recognize and appropriately respond to students experiencing a mental health and/or substance use related crisis.



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**Goal 4 Objective Updates**

**Objective 1: Community Resources Awareness and Utilization**

- The number of answered calls on the local Niagara County Crisis Services 24/7 line increased by 14% from 2023 to 2024 while the number of answered calls on the 988 line increased by 96.7% for the same time period. With the implementation of 988, initial assumptions were that calls to the local Niagara County Crisis Services line may decrease; however the opposite occurred. Calls to the 988 line tend to be higher acuity, more intensive cases. The call volume increases demonstrate greater community awareness and utilization of these vital services.
- The Well Niagara app and corresponding webpage launched on 10/19/2023, providing Niagara County residents with immediate access to local resources at the touch of their fingers. Currently, the Well Niagara app downloads exceed 1,000. In the past six (6) months of 2025, the top five (5) features accessed were: Counseling Menu (outpatient treatment), Basic Needs, Community Services, my Safety Plan and the Calendar of events. The text to the Crisis Text Line 741741 and call for help to the Niagara County Crisis Services features are also utilized in app.
- You Matter Coffee Sleeve Project: In September 2024 during Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month, approximately 9,600 coffee sleeves were utilized by 14 different coffee shops / stops around Niagara County with the Niagara County Crisis Services 24/7 Crisis Number and 988 as well as a QR code to access the Well Niagara App and Webpage for information on community resources and supports. Some shops also shared their efforts on social media which got some attention from the community.
- The LGU continues to advertise the Niagara County Crisis Services and 988 phone numbers on seven (7) bus benches throughout Niagara Falls, NY. Student Designs are utilized on the benches to engage youth in community involvement and resource awareness activities.
- NCDMH staff provided various presentations and participated in numerous community and school tabling events to share information and resources about services, supports and treatment available in Niagara County.
- At the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, the LGU distributed Niagara County Crisis Services and 988 phone number Tear-Off flyers to every public and private junior and senior high school in Niagara County, including 22 public schools, eight (8) private schools, 16 ONBOCES locations, and three (3) colleges. These flyers were created with students' designs from the Orleans and Niagara Career and Technical Center's Graphic Communications Program.
  - Throughout 2024 – 2025, these flyers were distributed throughout the Niagara County community and in the NYS Park in Niagara Falls.
  - At the request of a NYS Parks representative, the flyers were tailored for distribution throughout all NYS Parks with only the 988 number listed.



## Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Goals and Objectives

### Objective 2: Community Education and Training

- Thirty-nine (39) participants completed the Soul Shop for Leaders training on 9/18/2024 with many of them being faith-based leaders. The one-day workshop was designed to equip leaders to minister to those impacted by suicide. This includes the creating of worship resource, training congregation members in suicide awareness and basic conversation skills, and then how to extend the invitation to those who have been suicidal in the past to share their stories.
- In 2024, numerous trainings were offered by Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Trained Staff on crisis de-escalation, suicide prevention and intervention to a wide range of individuals in Niagara County. This includes, but was not limited to the following:
  - Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and Adult Mental Health First Aid (AMHFA) Workshops were offered to Niagara County residents by NCDMH trained staff. Trainees included provider agency staff, first responders, and NYS Park staff inclusive of Park Rangers, Tour Guides, Maintenance personnel, Horticulturalists and Park vendor cashiers. The MHFA trainings teach people how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. The training providers the skills needed to reach out and offer initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis. The Well Niagara app and corresponding webpage is shared with trainees to increase awareness and utilization of local resources when connection to care is needed.
  - Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for law enforcement which teaches law enforcement to effectively respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises. The training is designed to enhance the ability of law enforcement to interact with individuals in crisis, fostering partnership between law enforcement, advocacy and mental health communities.
- In 2025, an NCDMH staff member was trained by the Suicide Prevention Center of NY (SPCNY) in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), which aims to help caregivers learn to recognize and review risk, and to intervene to prevent imminent risk of suicide. It also offers 15-contact hours for social workers (LMSWs, LCSWs) and licensed mental health counselors (LMHC). This training will be added to the cadre of training offerings provided to the Niagara County community.
- Throughout 2024 – 2025, the Niagara County PATH (Presenting Alternatives to Treatment and Healing) Program Quick Response Team provided information and resources on PATH services which provide a bridge between the crisis and a safer future with “Knock and Talk” post overdose follow up; increasing access to supports and treatment; preventing future drug overdoses; and reducing the number of drug overdoses.

### Objective 3: Expand Options within the Crisis Continuum of Care

- Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) is in process of supporting the implementation of the Navi App in four (4) Niagara County school



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districts within the Niagara/Orleans Trauma, Illness and Grief (TIG) Consortium. Navi is a Tier 1 wellness program for students ages eight (8) and up. Navi provides evidence based, single-session, mental wellness supports to students in their critical moments of need, including skills development, action plans, and in the moment solutions to everyday problems. Navi integrates school and local crisis resources and expands service availability, and this resource will address the need for students to have more immediate access to supports in-the-moment of need, assist in reducing social stigma and uncertainty around the process of help-seeking therefore increasing help-seeking behavior, and increase students' knowledge and skill sets to make a positive impact on their lives to abate the opioid epidemic.

- BestResponse is expected to open in 2025 in Erie County, serving Niagara County residents. BestResponse will operate 24/7, providing Niagara County residents with immediate crisis support without the need for prior medical clearance. Services will be accessible in-person and through telehealth options as needed. Individuals may seek assistance through walk-in visits, referrals, or arrival via emergency services. BestResponse will be equipped to offer and coordinate a range of services, including mental health and substance use support, as well as medication management. The center is designed to address immediate needs and support long-term recovery and reintegration into the community.

### **Objective 4: Cross System Planning and Intervention**

- Beginning in 2024, Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH), in partnership with the Orleans/Niagara BOCES and their 13 component districts, established the Niagara/Orleans Trauma, Illness and Grief (TIG) Consortium. Training and implementation efforts are supported by Coordinated Care Services Inc. (CCSI). The TIG approach is based on trauma-informed response model that teaches participants how to be aware of trauma, illness and grief with evidence-based crisis response skills, resources, and ongoing technical support to help students with trauma, violence, illness, death and grief in the school setting. TIG incorporates prevention, intervention and recovery response. Currently, there are almost 150 TIG trained responder, with additional trainings being offered in 2025 to up to 100 more participants.
- The Niagara County Departments of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, Emergency Management and Public Health are working collaboratively to establish the Niagara County Critical Incident Support Team. The CIST is a program developed to provide timely professional assistance after major incidents to minimize stress-related injury/illness to all Niagara County Emergency Services personnel, County first responders and their family members.

### **Objective 5: HBCI or Like Services for Children/Adolescents**

- In 2025, New Directions Youth & Family Services was awarded funding through NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) to establish Home Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI) Traditional services, serving both Niagara and Erie Counties. HBCI is a community-based, short term, intensive crisis program designed to avert psychiatric hospitalizations and



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placements for youth ages five years to 20 years 11 months, experiencing an acute mental health crisis.

### **Objective 7: Crisis Intervention in Schools**

- The Creating Suicide Safety in Schools Workshop was provided by NCDMH staff to school districts in Niagara and Erie Counties; one on 11/5/2024, with 45 school staff participating and another on 2/3/25 with 12 participants. The Workshop is for school administrators, school psychologists, social workers and school counselors who may be involved in prevention initiatives.
- NCDMH staff presented to over 500 school staff on 8/28/2024 and 8/29/2024 on Suicide Awareness, Intervention, and available community resources.



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**Goal 5: Cross-System Services**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

Increase accessibility to integrated, coordinated care and services across the lifespan for individuals with co-occurring needs through innovative multifaceted cross-systems collaborative approaches.

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

1. Cross System Services

**Objective 1: Systems of Care**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will lead the Niagara County Systems of Care (Community Network of Care – CNOC- for Children & Families in Niagara County) to engage cross-system providers in strategic planning, implementation activities, and continuous quality improvement efforts to effectively respond to identified system needs and service gaps.

**Objective 2: Resources to Support Collaborations**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will identify additional resources and funding opportunities that can support sustainable cross-system engagement and collaborations in areas where need is demonstrated.

**Objective 3: Service System Navigation and Education on Community Resources**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in partnership with cross-system providers to increase awareness of existing system platforms, which connect youth, families and adults to community resources that improve and sustain mental, emotional, behavioral, and physical wellness.



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**Goal 5 Objective Updates**

**Objective 1: Systems of Care**

- The Community Network of Care (CNOC) for Children & Families in Niagara County Coalition participated in the study conducted by a University at Buffalo School of Social Work Ph.D. candidate, “Understanding and Enhancing Collaboration across Outpatient Children’s Mental Health Care Service Delivery Models in a County-Level System of Care.” The study provided recommendations on how to enhance collaboration in Niagara County, including re-engagement efforts, hosting CNOC University, utilizing Basecamp for project communications, the co-location of services, continuing efforts to engage pediatric integrated care (PIC) stakeholders, and identifying current service gaps.
- The CNOC Coalition partnered with NYS Project TEACH to virtually offer the “Bridging Gaps in Perinatal Mental Health: Strengthening Suicide Prevention and Crisis Response” presentation by Dr. Joshna Singh on 5/9/2025. Dr. Singh shared important topics and her recent study related to perinatal mental health. The event aimed to create awareness, provide support, and share resources for providers who are working with individuals experiencing mental health challenges during pregnancy and postpartum. Dr. Singh specializes in the evaluation and treatment of psychiatric disorders across the female life cycle and how hormonal fluctuations during different phases of women’s life span including perinatal period, menstrual cycle, and perimenopause affect their mental health. Currently, Dr. Singh is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, and this year will complete 10 years with the department. She primarily practices at the outpatient clinic where she treats all adults between the ages of 21-65 years. She also works at Buffalo General Hospital as a consultation liaison psychiatrist. In the past few years, Dr. Singh had the opportunity to become involved in two research projects involving women’s mental health.
- A CNOC University event was held on 6/5/2025 with a focus on four (4) different skill building sessions, bringing together cross-systems providers. Sessions included: Hidden Mischief by Northpointe Council which provides a lifelike teenage room to search for hidden drugs and paraphernalia while learning about concealment methods and drug culture references; Safety and Conflict Resolution while working in the community and de-escalation techniques presented by Niagara County Sheriff Office Deputy Samantha Jones; In Her Shoes by Pinnacle Community Services which focuses on empathy building as participants move, act, think, and make choices as a person experiencing an abusive relationship; and an Engagement with Young Children presentation by Pinnacle Community Services utilizing the NYS Pyramid Model which teaches skills and techniques to use with parents to support positive parent/child interaction for children ages 0 to 7 years.
- The CNOC Coalition membership increased from 95 to 161 members with increased effort to form more strategic, intentional partnerships rather than just new members. This membership has increased partially due to success of CNOC University events.



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- The CNOCS Advisory Council returned to incorporating in-person meetings to improve collaboration amongst providers.

### **Objective 2: Resources to Support Collaborations**

- The CNOCS Coalition is reimagining CNOCS University to further increase cross-systems collaborations and pool available resources. CNOCS University intends to enhance cross-system staff training needs by supporting skill development, cultural humility and workforce retention.

### **Objective 3: Service System Navigation and Education on Community Resources**

- The Well Niagara app was utilized to send push-notifications about upcoming events in the community, spreading awareness of local training opportunities.
- Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) personnel provided over 25 tabling/presentations at events in Niagara County, sharing information about mental health, Narcan, Well Niagara app and corresponding webpage, Niagara County Crisis Services and 988, and NCDMH services.



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**Goal 6: Workforce Recruitment and Retention**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

The Niagara County Mental Hygiene service system will strengthen the workforce and establish a continuous pipeline of qualified staff to meet the demand for services in a timely manner.

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

1. Workforce
2. Employment/Volunteer (clients)
3. Non-Clinical Supports

**Objective 1: Culturally Competent and Diverse Workforce    Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will evaluate available data sources, best practices and innovative strategies to engage in workforce development initiatives that recruit and retain culturally competent and diverse personnel that are responsive to the needs of the populations served.

**Objective 2: Integrating Emerging Paraprofessionals/Professionals in the Workforce**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with local providers to identify and implement strategies that will increase the integration of emerging paraprofessionals and qualified health professionals in the workforce through innovative means.

**Objective 3: Engage in Cross-System Collaborations to Increase Workforce**

**Development and Job Placements**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will engage in cross-system collaborations to identify resources and link people with opportunities that promote cultural competency, skill development, marketability, and increase job placements.

**Objective 4: Increase Number of Peers in the Workforce    Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with local providers to identify and implement strategies that will increase the number and retention of credentialed peers in the workforce to meet people “where they are at” when needed.

**Objective 5: Integration of Individuals with IDD in the Workforce**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU, in collaboration with stakeholders, will promote community education efforts related to employment skills training for individuals with I/DD to increase opportunities for integration into the general workforce.

**Objective 6: Development of Standardized Training Practices**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in partnership with stakeholders to develop an evidence-based orientation training curriculum, to support the recruitment and retention of paraprofessionals and behavioral health personnel.



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**Goal 6 Objective Updates**

**Objective 1: Culturally Competent and Diverse Workforce**

- In 2025, the LGU will distribute two Local Services Planning Workforce Surveys. One will assess workforce challenges among mental hygiene agencies in Niagara County and compare data from the last survey in 2021. The second will evaluate the Human Services Workforce county-wide, gathering insights from both job seekers and current employees. Findings will inform Community Network of Care (CNOC) for Children & Families in Niagara County Coalition efforts and help shape workforce recruitment and retention strategies for the NCDMH Annual Local Services Plan.

**Objective 2: Integrating Emerging Paraprofessionals/Professionals in the Workforce**

- Niagara University received a grant in early 2024 to begin supporting students in clinical mental health counselling programs. The grant from the Patrick P. Lee Foundation, establishes up to five scholarships for full-time students in the program. Scholarship recipients will receive up to \$10,000 per year for the three-year program, for a total award of \$30,000.
- The State University of New York (SUNY) and Office of Mental Health (OMH) established a Scholarship Pipeline Program expanding and diversifying the mental health professionals' pipeline. The Program offers paid internship and is intended to attract, retain, and graduate students trained in the various mental health professions and who demonstrate potential for positively affecting the quality of mental health care for all NYS residents, with a focus on service to those individuals who may have historically lacked quality mental health care <https://www.suny.edu/diversity/mentalhealth-scholarship/>. Beginning in spring 2025, SUNY Niagara is a participating school and is partnering with mental health provider agencies in Niagara County, including the Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH), for this pilot program.

**Objective 3: Engage in Cross-System Collaborations to Increase Workforce Development and Job Placements and Objective 6: Development of Standardized Training Practices**

- As described in Goal 4, CNOC University will promote cultural competency and skill development. The goal of CNOC University is that it will become a standardized training practice for all new hires working at a human service agency in Niagara County.



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**Goal 7: Expand Prevention Activities**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Expand prevention activities across the lifespan, with an emphasis on high-risk, historically marginalized and underserved populations, to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of Niagara County residents.**

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

- 1. Prevention
- 2. Cross System Services

**Objective 1: Commitment to Zero Suicide Model**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in partnership with the Suicide Prevention Coalition and stakeholders to make a formal commitment to, and establish benchmarks for, the adoption of the Zero Suicide Model.

**Objective 2: Promotion of Healthy Living**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

To promote healthy living, the LGU will work in partnership with the public health and prevention providers to implement evidence-supported / based approaches to prevent and/or reduce alcohol and substance use and related consequences as well as mental, social-emotional, intellectual/developmental and behavioral disabilities.

**Objective 3: Expand Early Intervention Activities**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work with cross systems providers to expand early intervention activities where need is clearly demonstrated to prevent the development of long-term negative health outcomes.

**Objective 4: Expansion of Trauma Response in Schools**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will collaborate with local school districts to develop a comprehensive training and crisis response network for grades K – 12 education and beyond.



## Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Goals and Objectives

### Goal 7 Objective Updates

#### **Objective 1: Commitment to Zero Suicide Model**

- The Niagara County Suicide Prevention (NCSP) coalition is partnering with the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) to gather quantitative data to better understand the prevalence of suicide and suicidal behaviors in Niagara County. With improved data, the NCSP Coalition can establish benchmarks to track trends related to suicide, and work towards achieving the Zero Suicide Model.
- In September 2024 the NCSP Coalition coordinated several public awareness activities spread the message of help and hope during Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month:
  - You Matter Coffee Sleeve Project: Approximately 9,600 coffee sleeves were utilized by 14 different coffee shops / stops around Niagara County with the Niagara County Crisis Services 24/7 Crisis Number and 988 as well as a QR code to access the Well Niagara App and Webpage for information on community resources and supports. Some shops also shared their efforts on social media which got some attention from the community.
  - Suicide Prevention Flag Raising: Niagara Falls High School had approximately 20 students participate in raising the NCSP Coalition flag and shared the event on their Instagram page. Lockport High School had approximately 50 students participate in raising the NCSP Coalition flag during a flag raising ceremony and were featured on a local news station highlighting the importance of suicide prevention activities.
  - Lighting of the Falls: the US and Canadian sides of Niagara Falls were lit up in purple in Teal on 9/2/24 for a 15-minute direction; a live feed of the event was available for the community at large to view.
- Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Leadership engaged in collaborations with NYS Parks leadership in Niagara Falls, NY as well as with Kevin Hines, an International Suicide Prevention Spokesman, to obtain guidance on where to begin to make change with suicide prevention efforts at Niagara Falls. Mr. Hines' advocacy efforts were pivotal in the net installation at the Golden Gate Bridge. Mr. Hines provided valuable insights and connections to others to begin this work; the Department anticipates continued collaborations with Mr. Hines in the near future. NCDMH and NYS Parks leadership are working together to create and execute actionable steps for increased suicide prevention efforts at Niagara Falls, NY. Additionally, NCDMH Leadership engaged in conversation with a member in the Governor's Office to further discuss suicide prevention ideas that may need consideration for future funding for suicide prevention efforts in Western NY and across the state.

#### **Objective 2: Promotion of Healthy Living**

- Well Niagara app and corresponding webpage continues to increase awareness of and connection to a variety of resources that assist with improving and sustaining mental, emotional, behavioral, and physical wellness.



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- In 2024, Horizon Health Services was awarded federal funding through SAMHSA to support the agency's Substance Abuse-Free Education/Intervention & Referral (SAFER) Program targeted at serving adolescents and young adults ages 10 to 25 to identify those at risk for substance abuse and in need of substance use intervention.  
<https://kennedy.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1128>
- Horizon Health Services also is building upon its licensed school-based clinician capacity to deliver Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) services to adolescents in Niagara County (as well as in Erie and Genesee Counties). Attention is being given to underserved, minority and marginalized populations including LGBTQ+ youth. The program aims to increase screening for underage drinking, tobacco, opioid, and other substance use; improving timely access to treatment services; and ultimately reduce alcohol and substance abuse early before it leads to adult alcohol and drug related disorders.  
<https://kennedy.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1128>

### Objective 3: Expand Early Intervention Activities

- The Healthy Moms Healthy Babies (HMHB) Coalition, which operates under the umbrella of the Community Network of Care (CNOC) for Children & Families in Niagara County, partnered with the Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) and the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC) P3 Center for Teens, Moms and Kids to offer Fresh Air Fridays from July 5, 2024 to August 30, 2024. A total of 388 people attended the events, with 56 Baby Bundles/surveys distributed with the Bundles which resulted in 12 referrals to the HMHB Coalition and 17 referrals to Healthy Neighborhoods. The most popular sites were the Lockport Housing Authority and the Kenan Center in Lockport.
- In 2025, the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) Healthy Steps Grant awards were awarded to two (2) pediatric practices in Niagara County, Dr. Beney and Wheatfield Pediatrics. The Healthy Steps program is an evidenced-based program that integrates mental health and physical health screening and support in pediatric offices for children, and their families, ages 0 – 3.
- In August 2024, the Western New York Integrated Care Collaborative (WNYICC) was selected as one (1) of nine (9) entities statewide to receive \$500 million in combined funding over the next three (3) years to create a new Social Care Network (SCN) program. WNYICC will receive up to \$36.8 million over 2.5 years with an anticipated contract that would end at the close of March 2027, which includes Niagara, Erie, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties. The program will address health disparities in low-income communities by leveraging federal funds to help Medicaid members' access nutrition, housing, transportation and other social services that can impact one's health in a positively.

### Objective 4: Expansion of Trauma Response in Schools

- In 2024 and continuing the Niagara/Orleans Trauma, Illness and Grief (TIG) Consortium was established and is growing in the number of TIG trained responders. TIG is a comprehensive training and crisis response network for K-12 education and beyond. The innovative TIG program model trains networks of school-based professionals to meet the



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holistic needs of students and equips them with evidence-based crisis response skills, resources, and ongoing technical support to help students cope with trauma, violence, illness, death, and grief in the school setting. The goal of TIG is to strengthen and grow an organization's internal capacity to prepare to have appropriate support for students and staff in place to help minimize risk for crisis, respond more effectively and efficiently, and recover quickly by promoting health recovery strategies in the event of a traumatic incident.

- The Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) leads in partnership with Orleans/Niagara BOCES and the 13 component districts. A formal agreement was established in 2025 between NCDMH, ONBOCES and the 13-component districts. Infrastructure development continues to achieve a sustainable TIG network.
- Four (4) TIG training cohorts occurred between April 2024 and May 2025, with close to 150 school and NCDMH staff becoming TIG-trained. Coordinated Community Services Inc. (CCSI) is providing training and technical assistance to the N/O TIG Consortium to revamp school district crisis response plans, threat assessment process and suicide prevention and postvention interventions. The following school districts participating in the Niagara/Orleans TIG Consortium include:

### **Eastern Region – Niagara/Orleans**

- Albion Central School District
- Barker Central School District
- Lyndonville Central School District
- Medina Central School District
- Newfane Central School District
- Orleans/Niagara BOCES (Burt, Medina, Newfane, Roy-Hart Locations)
- Royalton Hartland Central School District
- Wilson Central School District

### **Western Region – Niagara**

- Lewiston Porter Central School District
- Lockport Central School District
- Niagara Falls Central School District
- Niagara Wheatfield Central School District
- North Tonawanda Central School District
- Orleans/Niagara BOCES (Niagara Wheatfield, North Tonawanda and Sanborn Locations)
- Starpoint Central School District

- There are two (2) additional TIG training cohorts scheduled in the summer and fall 2025.



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**Goal 8: Tackle the Opioid / Drug Epidemic**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

Increase the availability of, access to, and awareness of harm reduction options in a manner that demonstrates humility and compassion towards people who use drugs (and their loved ones) to reduce overdoses and other negative health outcomes.

**LSP Issue Categories goal is applicable to:**

- 1. Other: Harm Reduction
- 2. Non-clinical Supports

**Objective 1: Public Awareness/Engagement Opportunities      Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in partnership with stakeholders to analyze data and other reliable resources to inform public awareness/engagement activities that will reduce stigma and barriers to care while increasing awareness of and linkage to community resources.

**Objective 2: Expand Harm Reduction Options**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will support the expansion of harm-reduction programs, activities, supports and services that focus on meeting the basic needs of persons who use drugs, creating a safe space and developing/establishing trust as an entry point to care.

**Objective 3: Education and Training Opportunities**

**Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU, in partnership with stakeholders, will identify and facilitate access to education and training opportunities that equip the public with life-saving skills and harm reduction resources.

**Objective 4: Expand Access to trained Peers / Family Peers      Target Date: 12/31/2026**

The LGU will work in collaboration with stakeholders to expand the reach of trained recovery peer advocates and family peer specialists/advocates to areas that will “meet people where they are at” and engage them “when they are ready”.



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### Goal 8 Objectives Updates

#### **Objective 1: Public Awareness/Engagement Opportunities**

##### **In 2024 the following activities occurred:**

- In 2024 – 2025, multiple tabling events were participated in by Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services and the Niagara County PATH (Presenting Alternatives to Treatment and Healing) Team at churches, schools, and general community events providing information on available resources and Narcan training to interested attendees including family members of students and school staff. NCDMH also presented on the opioid/drug crisis, current trends and stats, local efforts to address the crisis, harm reduction strategies, and available resources and supports to high school staff.
- Two End Overdose Rally occurred on International Drug Overdose Awareness Day – 8/31/24, one in Lockport for the eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) year and one in Niagara Falls for the first (1<sup>st</sup>) year. Members of the community came together to remember loved ones who passed from a drug overdose, provide messages of hope and recovery, receive Narcan Training and a kit, and information on available community resources.
- A subset of the Niagara County OASIS (opioid) Task Force Public Awareness / Involvement Advisory Panel established a work group to begin identifying available data sources and to analyze the data on drug overdoses in Niagara County in order to establish spike alert protocols using a tiered approach. This workgroup's activities are ongoing.
- “Inspire a Well Niagara” Campaign sought to have community members submit their own unique encouraging, uplifting and hopeful messages via a Survey Monkey link to be included in a daily push notification to Well Niagara App users beginning during May as Mental Health Awareness Month. Community members who submitted messages had them appear on the Well Niagara App.
- “Project ART-C” (Art Restores Transforms and Connects) sought to engage the community in a creative manner; encourage dialogue and reflection, particularly in the context of recovery; familiarize individuals with the array of community services available; and to promote effective communication, healthy personal expression, and the power of choice. The Project collected community member artwork submissions that will be compiled into a booklet incorporating thought provoking questions under each art piece and on the opposite page of each art piece a different community agency's contact information to help share information about available local resources and ways in which people can connect to them. This Project is extending into 2025 to complete.

[https://www.niagaracounty.gov/news\\_detail\\_T8\\_R745.php](https://www.niagaracounty.gov/news_detail_T8_R745.php)

##### **In 2025 the following activities occurred or are planned:**

- In the spring, the Niagara Career and Technical Center Graphic Communications Student created new designs to assist the Niagara County OASIS (Opioid) Task Force Public Awareness / Involvement Advisory Committee in its public awareness activities. New graphics will be utilized to update the seven (7) bus bench signs located on bus benches



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across Niagara Falls, NY, to update tear-off flyers to be distributed through the County, and social media messaging with the Niagara County Crisis Services 24/7 phone line and 988 phone number to connect people to care.

- Community Conversation, “Hope Speaks”, forums are currently being planned by the Niagara County OASIS (opioid) Task Force Public Awareness / Involvement Advisory Panel for summer – fall 2025 in the three (3) main cities in Niagara County to engage the community in conversations with cross-systems providers (e.g. first responders, court personnel, peer advocates, mental health and substance abuse provider agencies) on the impact drug overdoses are having on our communities, strategies being implemented to help save lives, and the plethora of resources available for individuals and their families impacted by substance use and/or mental health issues.

### **Objective 2: Expand Harm Reduction Options**

- The Niagara County PATH (Presenting Alternatives to Treatment and Healing) Team monitors to keep stock filled in 51 Narcan mount/stand locations in Niagara County. Through events, trainings, and mounts, over 2,000 Narcan kits were distributed by the Niagara County PATH team in 2024.
- The Niagara County PATH Team Quick Response to Overdose Team (QRT) followed up on and addressed 419 overdose reports through referral by law enforcement in 2024. The PATH Team’s Probation Response Team (PRT) piloted a five (5) week jail program providing 64 group sessions at the Niagara County Jail for inmates with substance use issues, including 47 females and 70 males, to tackle issues to prevent recidivism in 2024.
- In 2024, Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) became an Opioid Overdose Program to provide Narcan Training and harm reduction supplies to the community. As of mid-May 2025 the NCDOH reports training 370 individuals and more than 1,400 Narcan kits distributed.
- In 2024, WNY Independent Living in Niagara County reports training 1,066 people on opioid overdose prevention and response and distributed 782 Narcan kits. In 2025 the agency continues to provide Narcan training at local inpatient and residential substance abuse treatment programs, schools, and in the community.
- Save the Michaels of the World, Inc. Recovery Community Center in Lockport initiated a Syringe Exchange Program along with other harm reduction services including distribution of Narcan, Xylazine and Fentanyl test strips in 2024 and is expanding street outreach initiatives in 2025.
- Partner agencies in the Niagara County OASIS (Opioid) Task Force Public Awareness/Involvement Advisory Panel tabled at the 2024 Niagara County Fair providing Opioid Overdose Prevention and Response (Narcan) training to fairgoers.



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- In the past three (3) years of the grant, BestSelf Behavioral Health Virtual Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program served 1,500 Niagara County Individuals out of the 4,800 callers with callers from Lockport, NY identified as having the highest call volume to the Program of all eight (8) counties served.
- In April 2025, CHANT (Community Health Alliance in North Tonawanda) organized a Vape Take Back event with a pledge at the North Tonawanda High School.
- On 5/20/25, Northpointe Council organized a speaking event at the Niagara Falls High School for students and community members, with Laura Stack from Johnny's Ambassadors. Laura Stack's son, Johnny, died by suicide after becoming delusional from dabbing; he began vaping THC at a party at age 14 five years earlier. Laura started a nonprofit organization, Johnny's Ambassadors, educated parents and teens about the dangers of THC misuse.
- In May 2025, Community Missions Inc. (CMI), in partnership with Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) and M&T Bank, opened its Lantern Project. Co-located within the agency's emergency housing shelter at 1570 Buffalo Avenue in Niagara Falls, NY, the Lantern Project is a two-bed safe place reserved for individuals ready to engage in substance abuse treatment. The Lantern Project will fill a gap in the time between when individuals may choose that they would like to engage in rehabilitation for substance use until their admittance to treatment. This provides a safe space for individuals during the time until they are able to access such services. <https://www.communitymissions.org/news/article/featured/2025/05/12/100156/cmi-unveils-lantern-project-helping-individuals-struggling-with-substance-abuse>
- Horizon Health Services received a Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) grant which assists clients in accessing a MAT provider within the first five (5) days of request, a peer within 48 hours, and a first counseling appointment within two (2) weeks.

### Objective 3: Education and Training Opportunities

- Throughout 2024, multiple providers offered substance use trainings to Niagara County residents, who were trained in opioid overdose recognition and reversal with naloxone.
- Northpointe provides evidence-based substance use and violence prevention interventions “Too Good for Drugs” and “Too Good for Violence” beginning in kindergarten in school districts across Niagara County.

### Objective 4: Expand Access to trained Peers / Family Peers

- As summarized in Objective 2, the PATH Team's Probation Response Team (PRT), which includes a trained Peer, piloted a five (5) week jail program providing 64 group sessions at the Niagara County Jail for inmates with substance use issues to tackle issues to prevent recidivism in 2024. Of those attending groups, 47 were female and 70 were male.



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- Addict2Addict Niagara continues to host Tossing and Testimonies events through the County. These events are focused on sharing hope, inspiration, building new relationships in recovery, networking, resource sharing, and collaboration with agencies to serve people in recovery to help them sustain their recovery.



## **Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Goals and Objectives**

### **Glossary**

ACEs – Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACT – Assertive Community Treatment

AMHFA – Adult Mental Health First Aid

AOT – Assisted Outpatient Treatment

ASIST – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

ART-C – Art Restores Transforms and Connects

CCBHC – Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic

CCSI – Coordinated Care Services Inc.

CDT – Continuing Day Treatment

CFTS – Child and Family Treatment Services

CHANT – Community Health Alliance in North Tonawanda

CIST – Critical Incident Support Team

CIT – Crisis Intervention Training

CMI – Community Missions Inc.

CNOC – Community Network of Care for Children & Families in Niagara County

CORE – Community Oriented Recovery and Empowerment

CPEP – Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program

CPST – Community Psychiatric Support and Treatment

ECMC – Erie County Medical Center

ENH – Eastern Niagara Hospital

FSR – Free Standing Respite

HARP – Health and Recovery Plan

HBCI – Home Based Crisis Intervention

HCBS – Home and Community-Based Waiver Services

HH+ – Health Home Plus

HMHB – Health Moms Healthy Babies Coalition

ICF – Intermediate Care Facilities

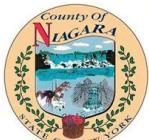
IPS – Individual Placement and Support

IRA – Individualized Residential Alternative



## **Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Goals and Objectives**

I/DD – Intellectual/Developmental Disorder  
LCSW – Licensed Clinical Social Worker  
LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning  
LGU – Local Government Unit  
LMHC – Licensed Mental Health Counselor  
LMSW – Licensed Master Social Worker  
LSP – Local Services Plan  
MAT – Medication Assisted Treatment  
MH – Mental Health  
MHOTRS – Mental Health Outpatient Treatment and Rehabilitative Service  
NCDMH – Niagara County Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services  
NCDOH – Niagara County Department of Health  
NC OASIS – Niagara County OASIS (Opioid) Task Force Public Awareness / Involvement  
    Advisory Panel  
NCSP – Niagara County Suicide Prevention Coalition  
NFMMC – Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center  
NYS – New York State  
N/O TIG – Niagara/Orleans Trauma, Illness, and Grief Consortium  
OASAS – Office of Addiction Services and Supports  
OMH – Office of Mental Health  
ONBOCES – Orleans Niagara Board of Cooperative Educational Services  
OPWDD – Office for People with Developmental Disabilities  
PATH\* – Presenting Alternatives for Treatment and Healing  
PC – Psychiatric Center  
PSR – Psychosocial Rehabilitation  
PRT – Probation Response Team  
QRT – Quick Response to Overdose Team  
SAFER – Substance Abuse-Free Education/Intervention & Referral  
SBIRT – Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment  
SCN – Social Care Network



## **Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Goals and Objectives**

SMI – Severe Mental Illness

SPCNY – Suicide Prevention Center of New York

SPOA – Single Point of Access

SRO – Single Room Occupancy

SUD – Substance Use Disorder

SUNY – State University of New York

TEACH – Training and Education for the Advancement of Children's Health

THC – Tetrahydrocannabinol

TIG – Trauma, Illness, and Grief Consortium

WNY – Western New York

WNYICC – Western New York Integrated Care Collaborative

YMHFA – Youth Mental Health First Aid



**Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services**  
**Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update**  
**Needs Assessment**

Issue Category	Applicable State Agency	Applicable Population
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Case Management / Care Coordination	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Crisis Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Cross Systems Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Employment/Volunteer (Client)	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Forensics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Inpatient Treatment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Non-Clinical Supports	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Outpatient Treatment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Prevention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Problem Gambling	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Refugees and Immigrants	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Residential Treatment Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Respite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Transitional Age Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Workforce Recruitment & Retention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Other 1: Adult Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OMH <input type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults
Other 2: Harm Reduction	<input type="checkbox"/> OMH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OASAS <input type="checkbox"/> OPWDD	<input type="checkbox"/> Youth Only <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both Youth & Adults



## Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Needs Assessment

### Goal 1: Timely Access to Care

Target Date: 12/31/2027

**Niagara County's high risk / high need individuals will have timely access to appropriate services to support them in the least restrictive level of care.**

#### Needs Description:

The overall service system in Niagara County remains understaffed and under resourced, particularly with regard to services for individuals while high needs. The need for services and supports grew dramatically beginning in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the Opioid Epidemic. Increased need still remains and those children/youth whose lives were severely impacted with disrupted schooling, family, and social lives, have begun to reach adulthood. The service system is seeing a disproportionately greater number of transition age youth/young adults in need of support and services, including those with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders and those with co-occurring mental health disorders and intellectual /developmental disabilities.

Evidence of a crises for young adults and individuals with co-occurring disorders can be found in the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program. The AOT program is designed to support individuals diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI), who live in the community are at the highest risk for adverse events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals experienced difficulty accessing services, particularly face-to-face and in-home services, and reported experiencing an increase in mental health symptoms and substance use. The average monthly caseload for the AOT program increased by 46.8% from 2019 – 2024. In 2024, individuals ages 18-29 had the highest number of AOT court orders, with 30.6% of individuals involved with the AOT program within this age range. Additionally, over 34.6% of referrals to the AOT program in 2024 were for individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

Some limited progress has been made, particularly related to staffing for adult Health Home Care Management, thus opening up movement between levels of care in community settings. In other settings, workforce shortages have continued to make needed services unavailable and created lengthy waiting lists for others.

On average in 2024, 55% of the Spectrum ACT roster consisted of individuals on an Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) court order or enhanced service contract monitoring. This rate is significantly lower than the average in 2023, when 77% of the Spectrum ACT roster consisted of individuals on an AOT court order or enhanced service contract. As Specialty Mental Health Care Management agencies who service the AOT population in Niagara County have been able to hire and retain qualified staff, movement between ACT and Health Home Plus levels of care have improved, thus impacting the number of AOT individuals served in the ACT program as the goal is to serve individuals in the least restrictive level of care.

The wait list for Spectrum Human Services Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program, managed through the Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services (NCDMH) Adult Single Point of Access (SPOA) Program, had an average of three (3) individuals in 2024 as compared to 11 in 2023. The reduction in the wait list in 2024



## Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Needs Assessment

is correlated to SPOA and ACT providers working collaboratively to vet the wait list as well as Health Home Plus care management services being more accessible due to staffing availability, allowing movement between levels of care. A need remains for increased ACT slots to ensure timely access to care at time of need. In previous years, entities stopped referring potentially eligible individuals for ACT services due to a lack of service availability and the anticipated lengthy wait for services.

Child & Family Services Youth Assertive Community Treatment (YACT) remains challenged with workforce recruitment and retention having to pause acceptance of new referrals multiple times since its inception in October 2023. In May 2025, the agency placed new referrals on pause again and does not anticipate being able to serve new referrals for approximately three (3) months. Additionally, the agency has rejected various referrals to the program due to the high risk / need presented that were not conducive with the structure of the program and with recommendations for residential or other types of community based services to meet the youths' needs.

Access to other community based services such as NYS OMH and OPWDD Home & Community Based Waiver services and CFTS Service remains limited due work force challenges and lengthy waitlists. As the Single Point of Access Programs (SPOAs) are not utilized to process these applications and maintain the wait lists, the Local Governmental Unit is challenged in monitoring and assisting with prioritization of individuals seeking these services. It would be of great benefit to centralize the referral process and maintenance of a wait list to county SPOAs who are well-versed in these processes.

In an effort to improve timely access to care, the LGU and Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services SPOA, AOT, Community Based-Services, Clinics and Crisis Services programs are actively working on enhanced collaboration and coordination with schools through the family support centers and other school-based contacts and with local hospitals' CPEP, emergency departments and inpatient units. In 2025, the LGU developed and shared a comprehensive listing of cross-systems points of contacts and local resource information including the Well Niagara App and corresponding web-page which houses a wealth of resource information on community based services, supports, treatment and other pertinent information, to improve cross-system collaborations and transitions within and between levels of care. Further state efforts are required to support seamless transitions between levels of care. During Local Planning meetings, providers identified the need for NYS OMH, OASAS and OPWDD to develop a mechanism to allow licensed, certified and funded programs operating under these state entities to exchange information cross-systems without the barriers often presented by the requirement to obtain patient consent. Development of guidance that is similar to the Guidance for OMH providers that was released in 2024 is requested.

Creation of a mental hygiene service system "road map" has been identified as a high need for providers as well as youth, adults and their families alike who do not know where to start when seeking services; this will be developed in the coming year with the LGU taking lead in this initiative. Another idea was generated during local planning efforts for is to broaden the reach of SPOA services, through additional personnel who, when integrated into the System of Care, can



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assist youth/families who may not yet met SED criteria with navigating the service system. The concept expands the reach of our SPOA and Systems of Care and effectively can prevent the need for higher intensity services. This concept will be further explored on how to potentially incorporate it into existing structures and funding sources that is not duplicative of current resources.

Timely access to residential services, remains a high unmet need in Niagara County. Though the LGU does not have access to the number of individuals on the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) Certified Residential Opportunities (CRO) wait list, it is understood that the wait list is extensive and can take months (if deemed an emergency) to years for people to get served. At times, individuals get stuck in emergency departments, CPEPs or psychiatric inpatient settings awaiting access to an appropriate placement as they are unable to have their needs met in another setting that can assist with maintaining their safety and security. This is unfair to the individual and to the settings who are doing their best to manage and to prioritize individuals in need of their level of care. Due concerns with the reimbursement model, administrative burden and long-term fiscal viability of Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs), one agency serving Niagara County closed all through of their ICFs between 2024 – 2025 resulting in a loss of 34 beds at this high level of care. Although a total of 30 supervised Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) beds are expected to be gained by the end of 2025, there remains a loss of beds to serve individuals in need who remain on extensive wait lists.

Waitlists for NYS OASAS programs in Niagara County persist, with four (4) out of five (5) residential rehabilitation programs averaging **46 people per month** on the wait list and an average of a **22-day wait** for admission in 2024. These delays create a bottleneck in care transitions, putting individuals at risk for adverse events when timely substance use treatment is unavailable. In **2024**, NYS OASAS licensed residential programs in Niagara County operated at **98.7% occupancy**, limiting access further. Furthermore, New York no longer has NYS OASAS licensed adolescent residential program, making intensive treatment for youth with severe substance use concerns increasingly difficult. St. Joseph's Rose Hill Adolescent Treatment Center in Messina, NY and BestSelf Behavioral Health's Renaissance House in Buffalo, NY closed and the Villa of Hope Living in Freedom Early Life (LIFE) program was redesigned to no longer serve adolescents in 2025. Niagara County substance abuse outpatient treatment providers report being significantly challenged to meet adolescents' unique treatment needs within the current system. At a crucial stage in development, youth require accessible, timely and appropriate intensive care to prevent adverse outcomes.

Children and adolescents also do not have timely access to NYS OMH licensed residential care due to lengthy referral and admission determination processes as well as wait lists. One Niagara County Community Residence program has not been able to accept referrals or keep the program open consistently due to work force shortages for a number of years. For children and adolescents with co-occurring mental health and intellectual/development disabilities, access to specialized residential care is severely limited. Additionally, transitional-aged youth struggle to find programming to meet their unique needs, including those transitioning out of the foster-care system.



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Furthermore, individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, as well as those with co-occurring mental health and intellectual/developmental disabilities experience significant challenges with accessing residential care to meet their complex needs. Often times they are denied access to care with agencies citing an inability to meet their needs due to regulatory and/or program expertise limitations and recommend services be pursued in another service system. Until NYS Office of Mental Health and NYS OASAS restructures regulations for residential programs to allow for integrated care and treatment and better equip the work force to provide integrated care, timely and appropriate access to residential care will remain a critical unmet need.

As the only NYS OMH licensed Apartment Treatment Program in Niagara County only offers double-room apartments, the occupancy rates remain around 75% over the past few years. Referred individuals often decline that level of care due to not wanting to reside with a stranger or wishing to remain living independently with increased community based supports. Changes are needed to the Apartment Treatment Program in order to meet the current needs of individuals seeking service at this level of care.

Agencies providing community-based support services face workforce shortages and inadequate reimbursement rates, limiting timely access to care. Child & Family Treatment Support Services (CFTSS) wait list extensive, with some agencies pausing referrals or closing their programs that serve Niagara County. Individuals with co-occurring mental health and intellectual/developmental disabilities needs are unable to access both Specialty Mental Health, Health Home Care Management and Care Coordination services, forcing them to choose between systems that lack integrated care expertise and often the knowledge to navigate both service systems. Advocacy is needed to improve provider competency in navigating both systems or to allow Medicaid to support coordinated, dual-service access without duplication, ensuring comprehensive care for individuals with complex needs.



**Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services  
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Needs Assessment**

**Goal 2: Expanded Access to Treatment**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Niagara County residents across the lifespan will have expanded access to quality treatment at time of need.**

**Needs Description:**

It is essential for the mental hygiene service systems to reimagine the work force structure and traditional treatment approaches to respond to the changing landscape. Beyond simply increasing staff and service expansion, the system requires enhanced care continuity, innovate treatment methods, and improve staff expertise in mental health, substance use, and intellectual/developmental disabilities in order to provide integrated treatment for those with co-occurring disorders when necessary.

Inpatient treatment facilities must enhance care options for individuals with co-occurring mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities. Many seeking care find themselves caught between mental health and developmental disability service systems, with each disputing which would better serve them. In Niagara County in 2024, denial rates for inpatient detox and rehabilitation were 28% and 56%, respectively—often due to severe mental health concerns. Among those who received care, both program types had a 71% average successful discharge rate (e.g. met goals). To improve integrated care, regulations, reimbursement rates, and staff training must evolve.

Since Eastern Niagara Hospital's inpatient unit closed in 2019, Niagara County has lacked dedicated child and adolescent psychiatric inpatient care. As a result, children in need of inpatient treatment often wait days in emergency departments or CPEP, causing additional stress for them and their caregivers. When no inpatient bed is available, they are often discharged into the community with limited support, as existing services are not readily available to adequately meet their intensive needs during this critical time.

Outpatient treatment is concentrated in Niagara Falls, Lockport, and North Tonawanda, leaving rural areas underserved. For children and adolescents, full-service outpatient clinics are only available in Niagara Falls and Lockport. To address these gaps for school-aged youth, NYS OMH promoted school-based mental health satellite clinics. While these clinics could improve rural access, providers face challenges in establishing and sustaining them. Success often depends on a supportive school administrator advocating for behavioral health services as well as recruiting and retaining clinicians, especially when the location is in a rural setting. Clinicians in the school-based satellite settings tend to feel isolated and require additional supervision compared to those in traditional outpatient clinics.

NYS behavioral health providers face challenges with employed LMHCs and LMFTs needing to obtain their diagnostic privilege due to strict education and credentialing requirements. Many seasoned licensed practitioners, particularly those who graduated before 2010, lack the 60-credit-hour coursework needed to qualify. Limited post-graduate programs offering required courses further restrict access. While NYSED allows individuals until June 2027 to fulfill deficits, many struggle with limited opportunities for completion. Without diagnostic privileges, practitioners face scope-of-practice limitations, requiring additional



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supervision to perform diagnostic evaluation and assessment based treatment planning, which strains provider capacity in an already understaffed system. Furthermore, providers face significant challenges in hiring mental health professionals who require supervision to perform diagnostic evaluations and assessment based treatment planning due to a shortage of available LCSWs who are able to supervise LMSWs and other mental health practitioners.

As NYSED limits LMHCs and LMFTs with their diagnostic privilege to only supervising others with the same degree, this places significant burden on LCSWs within an agency who are already stretched thin, making it difficult to accommodate supervision needs. Additionally, NYSED imposes limits on the number of individuals an LCSW, LMHC-D or LMFT-D can supervise at one time if they lack diagnostic privilege, further restricting the ability to onboard new staff. These constraints create bottlenecks in workforce development, slowing the availability of qualified clinicians and limiting access to timely care. Without expanded supervision capacity or adjustments to regulatory limits, providers will continue to struggle to maintain adequate staffing and ensure comprehensive diagnostic and assessment based treatment planning services for clients.

Niagara County providers report increased youth involvement in serious crimes and risky behaviors, driven by COVID-19-related school disruptions and changes in NYS juvenile justice laws since 2018. Key laws include:

- **Raise the Age Law (2018):** This law changed the age of criminal responsibility, ensuring that 16- and 17-year-olds are no longer automatically prosecuted as adults. Instead, most cases are handled in Family Court or the Youth Part of the Supreme or County Court.
- **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (2021 & 2022 Updates):** These updates raised the lower age of juvenile delinquency jurisdiction from 7 to 12 years old, limited detention for violations, and reinforced protections for youth in the system.
- **Youthful Offender Status:** Allows certain juveniles to avoid permanent criminal records if granted this status by the court.
- **Family Court Jurisdiction Expansion (2019):** Extended Family Court jurisdiction to include 16- and 17-year-olds charged with misdemeanors under the Penal Law, treating them as Juvenile Delinquents.
- **Adolescent Offender Classification (2019):** Established a separate category for 16- and 17-year-olds charged with felonies, initially heard in the Youth Part of the Supreme or County Court.
- **Probation Case Plans (2018):** Requires probation departments to assess juvenile offenders and adolescent offenders for individualized programming and referrals.

While these laws promote rehabilitative and developmentally appropriate responses for juveniles rather than punitive measures, youth often struggle to engage in treatment and support services due to their voluntary nature, accessibility and motivation barriers. When individuals with substance use disorders cannot access timely care, particularly youth, they are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. Strengthening the OMH, OASAS, and OPWDD service systems would improve access to more appropriate support than reliance on the criminal justice system.



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Niagara County SPOA faces challenges with community awareness of services available through referral and incomplete referrals received from providers, negatively impacting potentially eligible individuals from accessing needed services. According to PSYCKES data (April 2025), less than **42%** of individuals (**ages 6–64**) discharged from inpatient mental health care at the local 9.39 hospital received five or more follow-up visits within 90 days. In **2024**, only **36%** of NYS OMH licensed MHOTRS clinic program discharges were successful. Additionally, in **April 2025**, nearly **40%** of individuals (**18+ years old**) discharged from the hospital's emergency department did not attend an outpatient mental health visit within **30 days**.

To effectively address Niagara County's evolving mental hygiene challenges, service systems need to reimagine workforce structures, treatment approaches, and care integration for individuals with co-occurring disorders. Persistent gaps in inpatient and outpatient services, especially for youth, highlight the urgent need for expanded access, regulatory reform, and strengthened provider capacity. Workforce constraints, including challenges to obtainment of diagnostic privileges and supervision bottlenecks, further strain the system, delaying timely intervention. Additionally, changes in juvenile justice laws, coupled with unmet behavioral health needs, have contributed to increased youth involvement in risky behaviors. By improving regulatory flexibility, reimbursement rates, and service coordination across OMH, OASAS, and OPWDD, Niagara County can build a more responsive, equitable, and accessible mental health system.



## Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Local Services Plan 2024 – 2027, 2026 Update Needs Assessment

### Goal 3: Increase Access to Housing

Target Date: 12/31/2027

Niagara County residents will have increased access to and retention in safe and affordable housing that supports long term stabilization and recovery.

#### Needs Description:

Niagara County faces a critical shortage of safe, affordable housing for individuals and families with mental illness, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities, and including specialized housing to meet the unique needs of transition-aged youth. These populations are at higher risk of homelessness, yet providers report insufficient housing slots to meet demand. The number of unhoused individuals is rising, while increasing rent costs and strict landlord requirements, such as credit checks and large upfront payments, create further barriers to securing housing.

In 2024, 13 new beds were allocated to supportive housing providers serving Niagara County, while one agency lost 10 supportive housing beds due to reconciliation on the number funded. Despite the net addition of three (3) beds, the demand for supportive housing far exceeds availability, preventing access for many. NYS OMH funded supportive housing programs combined had a 112% occupancy rate due to more beds filled than allotted and were later reconciled. The one Single Room Occupancy (SRO) program had an average occupancy of 94.2% and the current demand for this housing program well exceeds availability with the current wait list anticipated to be 12 – 15 years at this point. For NYS OASAS funded supportive housing, the 2024 occupancy rate was 66.7%. Based on the reimbursement model, fiscal viability of this program is not possible and will lead to its closure.

Niagara County providers highlight the need for landlord education on mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities. Better awareness could reduce unnecessary police involvement and evictions, equipping landlords to connect tenants with local services. Providers stress the need for more landlords in North Tonawanda. and rural Niagara County, where affordable and safe housing options are even more limited.



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### Goal 4: Crisis Services Continuum of Care

Target Date: 12/31/2027

Niagara County residents experiencing a mental health and/or substance use related crisis will have expanded access to a coordinated crisis response system and continuum of care that addresses an individual's immediate safety and needs.

#### Needs Description:

Awareness of mental health and substance abuse resources has grown across the United States, with 988 being a key initiative. Niagara County Crisis Services (NCCS) affiliated with 988 in September 2022 and saw a 97% increase in calls to the dedicated 988 line from 2023 to 2024, rising from an average of 239 to 471 calls per month. Calls answered on the 988 line tend to be higher acuity, more intensive cases than those received on the local County Crisis Services line. Initial assumptions were that calls to the local Niagara County Crisis Services line may decrease with the implementation of 988; however the opposite occurred. This surge highlights increasing mental health and substance use challenges and awareness of the crisis line. Despite these efforts, suicide remained the 2nd leading cause of death in the U.S. for individuals aged 10-14 and 25-34 in 2023 (according to the CDC fatal injury report) and New York (excluding NYC) saw a 27.8% rise in suicide-related emergency visits from 2019 to 2023.

Without sufficient staffing, crisis response systems cannot meet the growing demand, leaving individuals in urgent need without timely care. Expanding the number of qualified and prepared workforce is essential to ensure rapid, effective intervention and prevent worsening mental health and substance use crises.

Youth mental health concerns continue to rise. For example, Niagara County Crisis Services has seen mental health evaluations for youth increase 202% from 2023 to 2024. Hospitalizations and ER visits for self-harm have also risen. According to Poison Center data, in 2024 43% of intentional substance ingestions in Niagara County involved individuals ages 13-29. In 2023, 2.7% of ER visits in Niagara County were suicide-related, with ages 10-19 having the highest suicide-related ER visits in New York (excluding NYC). In 2021, this age group accounted for 42.7% of self-harm ER visits. In 2023, 56.7% of suicide-related ER discharges involved patients at high risk for another attempt, as studies show risk is highest within 30 days of ED or inpatient psychiatric discharge.

To address rising youth risks, Niagara County implemented Trauma, Illness, and Grief (TIG) in Schools model, a comprehensive training and crisis response network for K-12 education. TIG equips school professionals with evidence-based crisis skills, resources, and support to help students cope with trauma, violence, illness, and grief. Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services, in partnership with Orleans/Niagara BOCES and its 13 component districts established the Niagara/Orleans TIG Consortium, building an infrastructure to support schools and respond to TIG needs in a coordinated and competent manner. Through the support of Opioid Settlement funds received by the County to abate the opioid epidemic, NCDMH contracted with Coordinated Care Services, Inc. (CCSI) to provide the TIG trainings and technical support 2024 – 2025. Continued investment in the N/O



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TIG Consortium is necessary to equip NCDMH crisis responses team members and all school district staff in with the skills and resources necessary to respond effectively in times of crisis.

Niagara County needs more community-based crisis stabilization options to reduce reliance on higher-level services, such as emergency rooms, for individuals with mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities. Limited respite options strain caregivers, increasing reliance on emergency responders, crisis services, and inpatient care. Funding for expanded respite services would strengthen the crisis continuum by providing short-term relief, preventing escalation, and supporting recovery. Respite care reduces hospitalizations, helps caregivers manage burnout, and improves long-term stability, ensuring timely intervention and a more effective crisis response system.

Investing in evidence-based training like Adult, Teen, and Youth Mental Health First Aid, ASIST, Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), and Critical Incident Support Teams (CIST) is essential to equip professionals and community members with the skills to recognize, respond to, and de-escalate mental health crises, furthering early intervention and reducing long-term consequences. CIST plays a vital role in providing immediate support to first responders and others after major incidents to minimize stress-related injury/illness. These programs enhance early intervention, reduce stigma, and improve outcomes by ensuring timely, appropriate support. Expanding access to such training strengthens crisis response systems and helps prevent unnecessary hospitalizations, justice system involvement, and long-term mental health deterioration.



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### Goal 5: Cross-System Services

Target Date: 12/31/2027

Increase accessibility to integrated, coordinated care and services across the lifespan for individuals with co-occurring needs through innovative multifaceted cross-systems collaborative approaches.

#### Needs Description:

Niagara County service systems remain siloed and despite at least 14 active coalitions working to fill service gaps, there are often duplicate efforts and efforts focus on urban areas while overlooking rural communities. Improved and streamlined cross-system collaboration is needed to improve resource awareness, as both providers and residents struggle to navigate available services. The Well Niagara app and corresponding website was designed to centralize information, but marketing reach has been challenging.

A major barrier to collaboration is the limited ability for counselors, physicians, nurses, etc to receive reimbursement for time spent in cross-system coordination efforts. Even when schedules allow the time for case conferencing, mechanisms to achieve reimbursement for these critical functions are complex or non-existent. Providers often struggle to engage in partnerships that improve care because these activities are unfunded, limiting their ability to dedicate time and resources to joint initiatives. Expanding funding or alternative support for non-reimbursable coordination is vital to breaking down silos and strengthening the crisis response network. Furthermore, overreliance on virtual meetings post-pandemic due to busyness of schedules has also weakened engagement. A return to in-person meetings could foster stronger collaboration and more effective service coordination if people can afford such in their schedules.



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#### Needs Assessment

##### Goal 6: Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Target Date: 12/31/2027

The Niagara County Mental Hygiene service system will strengthen the workforce and establish a continuous pipeline of qualified staff to meet the demand for services in a timely manner.

#### Needs Description:

Immediate action is needed to address the crisis-level shortage of direct care workers, paraprofessionals, peers, and licensed professionals in New York State. Niagara County faces severe workforce shortages, limiting service availability and increasing reliance on higher levels of care, especially in underserved rural areas.

Key priorities include:

- **Enhancing recruitment and retention** by improving wages for entry-level direct care jobs, many of which require a bachelor's degree but start just above the county's living wage.
- **Expanding workforce development** to meet rising behavioral health needs, particularly for individuals with co-occurring disorders.
- **Investing in workforce stabilization**—OPWDD allocated 76% of ARPA funds to support direct care professionals in its 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Similar initiatives from OMH and OASAS are essential to address vacancies and improve retention.
- **Strengthening outpatient care** to reduce reliance on emergency services, inpatient admissions, and crisis evaluations.
- **Supporting paraprofessionals, peers, and licensed professionals** who play a critical role in behavioral health care but face barriers related to training, supervision, and adequate reimbursement for provided services.

For reference, the number of Niagara County licensees by discipline as of 1/1/25 based on data from the NYS Office of Professions are as follows:

- LMHC 131
- LMFT 3
- LCAT 6
- LMSW 178
- LCSW 128
- RN 3,385
- LPN 1,025

According to County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2025 Annual Data Release, which tracks mental health provider shortages across the U.S., the current ratio of population to mental health provider in Niagara is 626:1 compared to NYS, 281:1.

Without urgent investment across all levels of the workforce, service gaps will persist, worsening access to care and straining crisis response systems.



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### Goal 7: Expand Prevention Activities

Target Date: 12/31/2027

Expand prevention activities across the lifespan, with an emphasis on high-risk, historically marginalized and underserved populations, to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of Niagara County residents.

#### Needs Description:

Niagara County must reexamine prevention strategies to improve health outcomes, as according to County Health Rankings & Roadmaps data, Niagara ranked 52nd in health outcomes out of 62 counties in NYS in 2024 and had a mortality rate 32% higher than the state average (excluding NYC) in 2022. Life expectancy from 2020-2022 was 75.4 years, ranking 57th statewide while 2019 – 2022 data indicates several areas, including Niagara Falls, Lockport, North Tonawanda, Tuscarora Nation Reservation, and rural communities, saw over 20% of residents dying before age 65.

From 2017–2019, the NYS Suicide and Self Harm Dashboard data indicates Niagara County had 72 suicide deaths, with the highest rates among individuals ages 35–44 and 55–64, followed by 45–54. Most cases involved White Non-Hispanic individuals, never-married individuals, and non-veterans.

For self-harm emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations, individuals aged 10–19 had the highest numbers, followed by those aged 25–34. More females than males sought treatment, with overdose/drug poisoning being the most common method. The most frequent discharge outcome was a return home. This data underscores the need for focused prevention efforts, especially for youth and middle-aged adults.

According to the NYS Opioid Dashboard, Niagara County's 2022 opioid-related overdose rates were significantly higher than regional and state averages. The county had 41.8 overdose deaths per 100,000, exceeding the region by 3.6 and NYS by 9.3. Emergency department visits for drug overdoses were 253.7 per 100,000, 27.4 higher than the region and 61.5 higher than NYS. Hospital discharges for overdoses were 63.7 per 100,000, slightly above the regional average (by 1.4) but below the NYS average (by 5). This data highlights a pressing need for enhanced prevention, treatment, and harm reduction strategies in Niagara County.

According to the NYS Maternal and Child Health (MHC) Dashboard, Niagara County's 2022 data on newborns with neonatal withdrawal symptoms and/or affected by maternal use of drugs of addiction (any diagnosis) indicates 38.3 newborns per 1,000 discharges affected by neonatal withdrawal symptoms or maternal drug use, significantly exceeding regional data (21.5 newborns per 1,000 discharges) and state averages (6 newborns per 1,000 discharges). The data highlights a critical need for enhanced prenatal care, substance use interventions, and maternal support services to address rising neonatal exposure to addiction-related complications.

To strengthen prevention, efforts must reduce stigma, address barriers to care, and improve service awareness. The current fragmented system requires individuals with co-occurring disorders



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to engage with multiple providers, often making it overwhelming for those in crisis to access the right care. A more integrated approach is critical to ensuring timely and effective support.

### **Goal 8: Tackle the Opioid / Drug Epidemic**

**Target Date: 12/31/2027**

**Increase the availability of, access to, and awareness of harm reduction options in a manner that demonstrates humility and compassion towards people who use drugs (and their loved ones) to reduce overdoses and other negative health outcomes.**

#### **Needs Description:**

Niagara County remains disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis, consistently exceeding NYS opioid-related rates. Designated as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) in 2017, the county faces severe drug trafficking and opioid-related activity, with opioid overdose deaths increasing by 89.8% from 2019–2022. Overdoses have more than tripled since 2014, and 79 individuals died from an overdose in 2023. Niagara Falls (zip codes 14301 and 14303) faces rates 3-4 times higher than the NYS average.

Stigma and misinformation related to substance use disorder (SUD) prevent individuals from seeking treatment, worsening health inequities. According to PSYCKES data, in April 2025, over 60% of discharged individuals with a new SUD diagnosis did not initiate treatment within 14 days, and over 81% failed to engage in sustained care. Limited access to traditional SUD treatment creates major gaps in care, increasing reliance on crisis services. An alarming trend in Niagara County is the early use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs. Early use of these substances delays youth from learning positive coping strategies and may impact youth development.

To prevent individuals from falling through the cracks, Niagara County must continue to invest in harm reduction programs, which eliminate barriers, reduce stigma, and save lives. These initiatives need expansion and stronger outreach, particularly for youth, older adults, and rural communities, as early substance use disrupts healthy coping development. Without greater investment, the growing youth mental health crisis may drive more young individuals toward self-medication, increasing overdose deaths in the future.

### **Additional High Need Not Addressed on the Current Local Services Plan:**

#### **Forensics: Forensic Services and 730 Competency Restoration**

#### **Applicable to OMH, Adults**

#### **Background:**

There is a growing need for coordinated services for individuals with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) who interact with the criminal justice system.



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Over the past five (5) years, the number of requests for 730 Competency evaluations has steadily increased. In 2019, there were 41 such requests, compared to 65 in 2024 – an increase of 58.5% in requests for 730 competency evaluations in five (5) years. During the same period, the costs of inpatient competency restoration also escalated significantly, rising from \$630,414 in 2019 to \$1,367,863 in 2024. Both the costs and lengths of stay in inpatient settings for competency restoration continue to grow. A review of competency evaluations indicates a higher prevalence of individuals presenting with co-occurring conditions, including mental health in combination with substance use disorders and/or I/DD, thus requiring more complex care.

#### **Needs Description:**

High needs exist for the following:

- **Enhanced Communication and Coordination:** Strengthen communication and coordination between the local governmental unit (LGU) and State psychiatric centers (PCs) to understand and facilitate access to timely care and efficient/effective restoration services.
- **Comprehensive Discharge Planning:** Establish early and thorough coordinated discharge planning between the LGU, State PCs, County Jails, and Courts to ensure seamless transitions. This includes connecting individuals to essential supports such as housing, treatment services, medications, and other resources to promote continuity of care and the progress in care to be maintained.
- **Community-Based Training and Support:** Expand training opportunities for a wide range of community providers to build capacity in addressing the unique needs of individuals with behavioral health conditions involved in the criminal justice system.