

For Immediate Release

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Community Access Responds to Mayor’s Announcement Regarding New Yorkers Living with Mental Health Concerns, Questions Expansion of Involuntary Treatment

(New York, NY, 12/23/19) – Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access, one of New York City’s leading supportive housing providers and a mental health advocacy organization, released the following statement in response to Mayor Bill de Blasio’s announcement after the 30-day review of mental health services in New York City:

“We commend the de Blasio Administration for taking on this review of mental health services in New York City and its acknowledgment that the system is broken. We applaud the additional investment in mobile treatment teams and the emphasis on intra-agency coordination. However, we are deeply concerned about any increased use of involuntary treatment, a move we fear will result in more frequent interactions between people living with mental health concerns and police officers. These encounters are traumatizing, and all too often, they are fatal.

“The use of involuntary treatment orders and coercion often drive people away from seeking care. In New York, Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) orders have disproportionately impacted people of color, a community already vulnerable to over-policing and monitoring by the state. Increasing NYPD involvement in the enforcement of AOT will only result in further mistrust between police, healthcare providers, and those in need of services. Rather than increase the application of Kendra’s Law to maximize the use of AOT, we should double down on our efforts to adequately resource our existing, voluntary services proven to more effectively engage people disconnected from care. Many people are under the misperception that AOT is needed because those in mental health crisis do not want care. That is just not true.

“In the wake of violence, we are accustomed to looking for solutions in the criminal justice system. But mental health professionals, researchers, and those with lived experience know that individuals with mental health concerns are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. We can preserve public safety along with everyone’s right to self-determination and dignity by better meeting people’s most basic needs for housing, financial resources, food, stable health care and social connection.”

About Community Access:

Community Access' mission is to expand opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

www.communityaccess.org

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