

NYC mayor proposes millions in new mental health services

May 5 2015, by Jennifer Peltz

Over 80 schools would get mental health clinics, every police precinct would have a victims' advocate and social workers would arrange psychological care for thousands of families in homeless shelters under Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to invest tens of millions of dollars in mental health, his wife's signature issue.

The proposal, which first lady Chirlane McCray unveiled Tuesday, comes as New York seeks to become a national model for cities to address mental health needs. She's spearheading an effort to draw a full-fledged plan, expected this fall.

For now, de Blasio's administration wants to add over \$54 million in mental health programs next fiscal year, rising above \$78 million in the following years. It's part of a budget proposal that will head into negotiations with the City Council; a final budget is due by the end of June.

The city Health Department already spends about \$300 million a year, much of it state money, on mental health. But the administration and mental health advocates say the proposal marks a new and notable commitment to incorporating care in an array of settings, including senior citizens' centers and runaway youth shelters. Planned services will include crime victims' advocacy and art-therapy sessions for young people in the city's Rikers Island jail complex.

While some officials elsewhere are weaving [mental health care](#) into

schools and other locales, "New York City is really setting a standard for other cities in the country. ... They're really focusing on intervening and improving people's lives and outcomes," said Katrina Gay, a spokeswoman for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, an advocacy group.

The number of school-based mental health clinics would grow by 60 percent, and the plan also calls for placing 50 new drug-abuse prevention counselors in some 70 troubled schools that don't have such counselors now.

Some 72 family [homeless shelters](#) would get [social workers](#) to coordinate what would ultimately become \$27 million a year in city- and state-paid mental health care for 8,900 families. The administration couldn't immediately provide a comparison to services provided now.

McCray announced in January that the city would work on a more comprehensive approach to [mental health](#), which is both a policy aim and a personal cause for her family. The de Blasio's college-age daughter, Chiara, has struggled with depression, anxiety and substance abuse, and McCray has said her own parents experienced depression.

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Citation: NYC mayor proposes millions in new mental health services (2015, May 5) retrieved 14 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-05-nyc-mayor-millions-mental-health.html>

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