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CONTACT: LAURI COLE
518-461-8200 (cell)

NYS COUNCIL RESPONDS TO PRESIDENTIAL DECLARATION OF OPIOID NATIONAL HEALTH EMERGENCY

ALBANY, NY – The NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (NYS Council) recognizes that an important first step was taken in addressing the heroin and opioid overdose epidemic with the President’s declaration of a national opioid health emergency on October 26. However, immediate and significant funding which is essential to ending this epidemic was not addressed.

In the President’s remarks announcing the health emergency declaration, he suggested relaxing the Institutes of Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion, a rule barring Medicaid from paying for services in substance use inpatient facilities that have more than 16 beds, in order to expand access to treatment. He also discussed instituting safer prescribing practices of opioids. In addition, the White House fact sheet on the declaration calls for expanded use of tele-medicine in rural areas to expand prescriber capabilities for medication-assisted treatment. The NYS Council supports these proposals as important tools to broaden access to treatment services, but alone they do not go far enough to end the epidemic of opioid and heroin related addiction and overdose.

John Kastan, Board President of the NYS Council, said, “The opioid epidemic is indeed a national emergency and needs to be treated by all levels of government as such. The Federal government can and should go farther. Incentivizing states to offer Naloxone training and to make Naloxone available in a wide variety of public settings would go a long way in educating the public and giving them the tools to prevent and reverse an overdose.”

“The President’s national health emergency declaration needs immediate follow-up and appropriate funding to be effective. Doubling the funding for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant would help ensure significant expansion of prevention and treatment capacity nationwide to meet the demands of communities struggling with this crisis,” said Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the NYS Council.

In the United States, nearly 175 people die every day from a drug-related overdose. We need to do more to save those lives and end the cycle of preventable loss of life. The actions of our leaders need to reflect the urgency this crisis demands.

The NYS Council is a statewide non-profit membership association representing the interests of 100 behavioral health (mental health and substance use) prevention, treatment and recovery organizations across New York.