

Lifting Up the Voices of Our Youth

Understanding Youth Behavioral Health Challenges

Hosted by Comunilife



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Program Agenda and Speaker Biographies



COMUNILIFE, INC.

About Comunilife: Comunilife has been committed to providing vulnerable communities with housing and service for 35 years. Our programs include affordable and supportive housing, medical respite services, and Latina adolescent suicide prevention activities. In 2023, we served over 4,000 low-income and vulnerable New Yorkers. 90% of our clients were African American or Latino; and 50% have Spanish as their primary (or sole) language. Comunilife develops programs to meet emerging community needs and service gaps, such as Medical Respite and Life is Precious Suicide Prevention Programs.

About the Life is Precious™ (LIP) Program: Established in 2008, LIP is the only suicide prevention program developed specifically for vulnerable Latina teens. In 2023, 265 Latina teens and their families accessed LIP's treatment adjacent services at four NYC Program sites (Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens) as well as in Poughkeepsie and Yonkers. With additional funding from the NYS Office of Mental Health, Comunilife will open two new sites in 2024: Amsterdam, in upstate New York and Hempstead, on Long Island. It has become a model for the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate suicide prevention programming.

Its success lies in tailoring interventions to address the stigma surrounding mental illness, acculturation stress, and the limited availability of culturally competent mental health providers. However, the urgency of LIP's mission is underscored by alarming statistics. **Latina adolescent suicide rates in New York State** have reached **epidemic proportions**. According to the **CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey** released in **April 2023**, **21.6% of NYS Latina teens** and **22.8% of NYC Latina teens** seriously considered suicide in 2021. Additionally, **12.2% of NYS Latina teens** and **12.6% of NYC Latina teens** attempted suicide in **2021**, figures that are more than **20% higher** than pre-COVID statistics from **2019**.

The impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic** on the mental health of Latina teens remains a concern. Those who joined LIP after **March 2020** continue to grapple with **severe forms of depression and suicidal behaviors**, with **inpatient psychiatric admissions** surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Despite these challenges, LIP remains steadfast in its commitment to saving lives and promoting well-being among Latina adolescents.

Program Outcomes

In the past 16 years, more than 750 Latina teens have taken part in the Life is Precious™ program, and none of them have completed suicide. The program's success is measured by the positive impact it has on the girls. Research has shown that each month of participation in Life is Precious™ leads to a decrease in suicide ideation and depression among Latina teens. Furthermore, early findings from control group comparisons indicate that teens in the program experienced greater improvements in these areas compared to those receiving traditional therapy at outpatient mental health clinics. We know that LIP is achieving these successful results for the following reasons:

- 1) LIP is a community defined program which directly addresses the risk factors associated with Latina adolescent suicide
- 2) LIP provides culturally competent services that integrate cultural norms into all program development
- 3) LIP incorporates the entire family to reduce the risk of suicide among Latina teens.

Symposium Agenda

- 9:30 AM Registration opens and continental breakfast served
- 10:00 AM **Welcome**
Blanca Ramirez, Comunilife President and CEO
The Honorable Yvonne Flowers, Mayor, City of Poughkeepsie
- 10:15 AM **Keynote Remarks**
Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, PhD., Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, US HHS and the Administrator of the SAMHSA
- 10:35 AM **Panel 1: A discussion of issues/policies related to behavioral and mental health challenges**
Moderated by Dr. Rosa Gil, President Emeritus, Comunilife
Michael Orth, MSW, Commissioner, Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health
Dr. Livia Santiago, Commissioner, Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health
Dr. Ann Sullivan, Commissioner, NYS Office of Mental Health
- 11:30 AM **Panel 2: A Discussion on Innovative and Creative Programming**
Moderated by: Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino
Dr. Maeva Rich Kennedy, Director of Guidance, Port Chester School District
Blanca Ramirez, President and CEO, Comunilife
Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, Superintendent, City of Poughkeepsie Schools
Steve Miccio, CEO, People USA
- 12:15 PM Questions by Hudson Valley Youth
- 12:30 PM Symposium panel closes





SPEAKER'S BIOGRAPHIES



Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
**HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and
Substance Use, SAMHSA Administrator**

Dr. Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon is currently Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). She previously served as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and served in this role for six years. Prior positions held at DMHAS include Deputy Commissioner, Senior Policy Advisor and Director of the department's Office of Multicultural Healthcare Equity. In her role as Commissioner, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon was committed to promoting recovery oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion.

In addition, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon served on faculty in Yale Department of Psychiatry for 20 years, most recently as Adjunct Associate Professor and previously as Assistant Professor, Assistant Clinical Professor, and Instructor. While at Yale Dr. Delphin-Rittmon also served as the Director of Cultural Competence and Health Disparities Research and Consultation with the Yale University Program for Recovery and Community Health.

In May 2014, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon completed a two-year White House appointment working as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of SAMHSA with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. While at SAMHSA, she worked on a range of policy initiatives addressing behavioral health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform.

Through her 23-year career in the behavioral health field, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has extensive experience in the design, evaluation, and administration of mental health, substance use, and prevention services and systems and has received several awards for advancing policy in these areas. Most recently, she received the 2023 Human Values Award from the Art of Living Foundation, the 2023 American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Children's Mental Health Champion Award, the 2022 Distinguished Public Service in Psychology Award, from the National Register of Health Service Psychology and The Trust, Washington, DC, and the 2019 State Service Award from the National Association of State Drug and Alcohol Directors.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon received her B.A. in Social Science from Hofstra University in 1989, her M.S. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Purdue University 1992 and 2001, respectively, and completed a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical community psychology at Yale University in 2002.



Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino, Associate Commissioner for the Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives, NYS Office of Mental Health

In January of 2023, Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino was appointed by the NYS Office of Mental Health to the position of Associate Commissioner for the Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives. For almost thirty years, she has focused her career on improving the mental health and well-being of individuals across the lifespan, with a particular focus on improving conditions for Black and Latinx communities. She has worked tirelessly in community-based settings in New York City and the Hudson Valley, both in direct service and in administration, to champion equitable access of mental health service delivery for those most vulnerable. As a bilingual and bicultural psychologist, Dr. Erazo-Trivino is highly familiar with the barriers related to effective mental health practice in minoritized communities and actively engages in anti-stigma work to reduce those barriers. Her research interests include qualitative research that examines the effects of trauma on education, the family dynamics that lead to such trauma, and the culturally-adapted/responsive interventions needed to effectively intervene.

Dr. Erazo-Trivino has been a certified school psychologist for over 20 years and holds a Doctorate Degree in School Psychology. She is the past recipient of the New York Association of School Psychologists' Ted Bernstein Award, given to those individuals who exemplify outstanding professional practice as a school psychologist and demonstrate a commitment to improving the lives of children and their families. On a personal note, Dr. Erazo-Trivino was born and raised in Yonkers, New York and is proud to be the daughter of parents who immigrated from South America to the United States.



**The Honorable Yvonne D. Flowers
Mayor, City of Poughkeepsie**

Yvonne D. Flowers, a lifelong resident of the City of Poughkeepsie, is a dedicated community leader and the first African American Mayor of the City of Poughkeepsie. With over 33 years of service at Dutchess Community College, she excelled as the Grants and Contracts Finance Officer while actively participating in various committees and boards, earning her the esteemed SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence.

Beyond her professional achievements, Mayor Flowers's commitment to her community is evident through her extensive involvement in local boards and committees. As a former four-term 5th Ward City Councilwoman, she spearheaded initiatives to improve community-police relations, enhance park facilities, and provide vital COVID-19 resources.

Mayor Flowers's passion for community service is deeply rooted in her family's legacy of promoting unity and hope. Continuing her father, John Flowers's impactful work, she co-organizes numerous community events, including holiday dinners and celebrations, exemplifying her dedication to fostering a stronger, more connected Poughkeepsie.

When not serving her community, she cherishes time with her family, including her seven grandchildren. Her unwavering dedication and tireless efforts have made her a respected leader and advocate for positive change in Poughkeepsie.



Rosa M. Gil, DSW
President Emeritus, Comunilife

Dr. Rosa M. Gil, Comunilife's founder, served as its President and CEO until March 2024. Dr. Gil, who is now Comunilife's President Emeritus, has had a distinguished career in New York City's health, mental health, supportive housing, social service and higher education sectors. Since Comunilife opened in 1989, she has centered her work on the intersection between health and housing with the goal of addressing the critical social determinants of health and enhancing the health outcomes of New York City's underserved communities.

Under Dr. Gil's stewardship, Comunilife has developed 3,016 units of affordable and supportive housing for the City's hardest to reach residents: the chronically homeless, mentally ill, and people living with HIV/AIDS and other health conditions. Under her leadership, Comunilife created *Life is Precious*[™], a nationally recognized equity mental health program for Latina teens at risk of suicide and the City's premiere *Medical Respite Program* that provides short-term housing for homeless and unstably housed New Yorkers.

In addition to her tenure at Comunilife, Dr. Gil was, among many positions, Chairperson, Board of Directors, NYC Health & Hospitals Corporation, Policy Advisor to the Mayor, Executive Director of Woodhull Medical Center and Metropolitan Hospital, Executive Deputy Commissioner for Families and Children Services at the NYC Human Resources Administration and the University Dean for Health Sciences at CUNY.

Dr. Gil has been appointed to numerous Federal, State and City commissions and boards including serving as the former Chairperson, Board of Directors, Federal Reserve Bank of New York. She also serves on the NYS Suicide Prevention Council; the NYC Board of Health (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene); the NYS Vaccine Equity Task Force; NYS Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness; the Commission of Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century (The Berger Commission), and the Minority Women Panel on Health Experts (U.S. Public Health Services). Dr. Gil is a member of Emblem-Health's Board of Trustees and a member of the President Carter Mental Health Task Force

Dr. Gil has published numerous articles on mental health, ethnicity, and child welfare and gender issues. She is the co-author of the "Maria Paradox," the first authoritative book on self-esteem and Hispanic women. Dr. Gil is one of the founders of the Urban Institute for Behavioral Health of New York City, Latino Commission on AIDS, the Association of Hispanic Mental Health Professionals and 100 Hispanic Women.



Steve Miccio
CEO, People USA

Steve Miccio, People USA's Chief Executive Officer is a pioneer, visionary, and expert in the field of mental health, substance use, criminal justice, and crisis response. Inspired and driven by his personal lived experience, Steve has spent over two decades creating, providing, and advocating for innovative behavioral health services that transform systems of care across the United States and internationally. He is proud to promote services that are trauma-informed and person-centered with positive expectations for recovery and wellness outcomes. Steve shares his expertise through delivering keynotes, participating on panels, and publishing articles. Steve's unique models and approaches significantly reduce hospital utilization, incarceration rates, and overall healthcare spending. Because of this success, People USA's program models have been studied and replicated across the United States and Europe. Steve earned his BA in psychology from SUNY Plattsburgh.

Some of Steve's innovative programs include: The Rose House model of peer-operated crisis respites; The first peer-run Crisis Stabilization Center in the world, The first in the United States to embed peers in a hospital psych. ER., and The first peer-run criminal justice-focused mobile team in the United States

Steve is the Chair of the National Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (PRA) and a former board member of CIT International. He is also a Member of the Crisis Residential Association, Member of New York State Suicide Prevention Council, Executive member of the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council (DCCJC), Chair of the Dutchess County Criminal Justice Council Diversion Committee (DCCJC), Member of the Dutchess County Police Reform and Modernization Collaborative, Advisory Board member of the Northeast Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, and a Curriculum writer for the New York State Academy of Peer Services.



**Michael Orth, MSW
Commissioner, Westchester County Department of
Community Mental Health**

Michael Orth, who has worked in the human services sector for over 35 years, joined the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH) in 1993, and was appointed Commissioner January 2018 after serving as Deputy Commissioner from 2009 to 2017. The Department of Community Mental Health, a branch of county government, is responsible for planning, oversight, education and coordination of services and supports for individuals, and their families, with mental illness, developmental/intellectual disabilities and substance use challenges. Under the general direction of the County Executive and in accordance with New York State Mental Hygiene Laws, Michael serves as chief executive officer and is responsible for the operation and administration of the department.

In 2020, Michael was appointed by the Governor to serve on the New York State Behavioral Health Services Advisory Council, he holds the position of 1st Vice Chair of the NY State Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors (NYS CLMHDS) Executive Board, Chair of the NYS CLMHD Children and Families Committee. Locally Michael serves as Co-Chair of Westchester County's Suicide Prevention and Awareness Task Force, Co-Chair of the Westchester County Opioid Response and Overdose Prevention Initiative (ORI), and Co-Chair of Westchester County's Coordinated Children's Services Initiative (CCSI) Planning Committee.

He has previously held several positions in Children's Mental Health Services at DCMH since 1993 assisting in the development of Westchester County's System of Care for children with emotional, social and behavioral challenges, and their families. This includes working collaboratively with other child-serving systems at a federal, state and county level.

Michael graduated from the Iona College BSW program and MSW at Fordham's Graduate School of Social Service.



Blanca Ramirez
President and CEO, Comunilife

Blanca Ramirez serves as the President and CEO of Comunilife Inc.

With over 20 years of experience in the supportive/affordable housing and community development sectors, Blanca has served as a Developer, Senior Manager, and Director for non-profit development organizations at local, regional, and national levels.

Throughout her career, Blanca has demonstrated expertise in the development of supportive and affordable housing, leveraging tools such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and mixed-income models to foster inclusive living environments. She has spearheaded initiatives encompassing housing preservation, new construction, and comprehensive neighborhood revitalization efforts, recognizing the transformative impact they hold.

Blanca's experience includes running financial analysis to assess a project's viability and to identify the best financial tools to help make difficult projects a reality – including, the thorough examination of financial statements, models, and underwriting of LIHTC projects. This has helped to ensure the fiscal viability and sustainability of numerous development projects that she has help bring to fruition.

Blanca has been a staunch advocate, engaging stakeholders on city, state, and federal levels to enact policy changes and secure essential resources. She has managed and led compliance with contracts from numerous governmental entities, including the NYC Department of Mental Health and Hygiene, NYC Department of Homeless Services, and various state-level departments.

Throughout her career, Blanca's commitment to the well-being of impacted communities has focused her work on creating enduring solutions to New York's housing crisis. Blanca remains steadfast in her resolve to advocate for equitable housing opportunities and vibrant, thriving communities for generations to come.



Dr. Maeva Rich Kennedy
Director of School Counseling, Port Chester School District

Dr. Maeva Rich Kennedy currently serves as the Director of School Counseling with the Port Chester School District. Prior roles include special education administration and direct service as a New York State Certified Bilingual School Psychologist in Westchester County as well as with the New York City Department of Education. Utilizing a psychodynamic approach with cognitive-behavioral treatment interventions, Dr. Rich Kennedy has worked with children and adolescents who experience anxiety, depression, ADHD, executive function deficits, specific learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, children/adolescents of divorce as well as children and adolescents with autism.

In addition to providing therapeutic intervention, Dr. Rich Kennedy has extensive experience in administering comprehensive psycho-educational assessments which include required testing for school based special education services. Dr. Rich Kennedy is well-versed in special education law, individualized education plans, school level services, special education/IEP meetings and parent rights.

Dr. Rich Kennedy's career spanning over 15 years also includes the development and facilitation of various professional workshops for school psychologists in training as well as teachers and support staff. Such workshops have included best practices in conducting bilingual assessments, the evaluation and transition of students entering Kindergarten, strategies and techniques to address behavioral management in the classroom, recognizing the social emotional needs of students, trauma informed approaches and language acquisition versus learning disability.

A New York State Licensed Psychologist and Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP), Dr. Rich Kennedy holds a Doctorate in Psychology from Fairleigh Dickinson University. She received her Masters in Education, Advanced Certificate in School Psychology and Bilingual Extension from Brooklyn College. Dr. Rich Kennedy obtained a second masters in Educational Leadership and Administration from Queens College and received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Hunter College. In addition, Dr. Rich Kennedy holds NYS certificates as a School Building Leader and School District Leader.

Dr. Rich Kennedy's research interests include the impact of clinical supervision on school based mental health providers, the role of implicit bias in school discipline and use of growth mindset through a restorative practice lens. Dr. Rich Kennedy is a contributing author in *(Re)Building Bi/Multilingual Leaders for Socially Just Communities*.



Dr. Livia Santiago-Rosado
Commissioner, Dutchess County Department of
Behavioral and Community Health

Livia Santiago-Rosado, MD was appointed as Commissioner of the Dutchess County (NY) Department of Behavioral and Community Health in December 2021. Following completion of a BA *summa cum laude* in Biological Anthropology from Harvard University, she attended medical school at Columbia University and has been in New York ever since. Including residency training at Mount Sinai and Elmhurst Hospitals, she has practiced Emergency Medicine in New York for over two decades and holds an academic appointment as Distinguished Visiting Professor at New York Medical College. Dr. Santiago has dedicated her career to working with and enhancing the care of underserved populations. She spent 15 years as a clinical leader in New York City's public hospital system, Health + Hospitals (H+H), where she helped found a novel ED Care Management program for highly vulnerable patients and the first ED-based observation unit in H+H, followed by a two-year stint as Vice Chair for Education in Emergency Medicine at Nassau University Medical Center. Prior to her current appointment, Dr. Santiago was the Medical Director and Chair of Emergency Medicine at Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie, NY.

Dr. Santiago is an active member of the New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) and chairs its Emerging Issues committee. She also currently serves as a Councilor representing New York at the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) and has served two terms on the Board of Directors for the New York Chapter of ACEP. Throughout her career, she has led and participated in policy development, education, informatics and data analytics, quality improvement, change management, and research in Emergency Medicine, social determinants, and population health at the local, state, and national levels.

Dr. Santiago lives in Lagrangeville with her husband of 22 years and two children.



Dr. Ann Marie T. Sullivan
Commissioner, New York State Office of Mental Health

Since her confirmation in 2014 by the New York State Senate as Commissioner for the State Office of Mental Health, Dr. Ann Sullivan has overseen a large, multi-faceted mental health system that currently serves nearly 900,000 individuals each year. The Office of Mental Health (OMH) operates 24 psychiatric centers across the State, and has oversight of more than 5,000 community programs, including inpatient and outpatient programs, emergency, community support, residential and family care programs.

As Commissioner, Dr. Sullivan is guiding the implementation of Governor Hochul's comprehensive \$1-billion multi-year plan to transform the continuum of mental health care and drastically reduce the number of individuals with unmet mental health needs throughout the State. This plan includes transformative investments across the entire mental health continuum of care, from expanded school-based mental health services to additional psychiatric inpatient beds, thousands of new residential units, and new community-based programs that meet New Yorkers with mental health challenges where they are and provide services when they need it most. This plan will triple the number of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), significantly increase wrap-around services for high need individuals, and support the 988 crisis line and services throughout the State. It will also close gaps in insurance coverage for behavioral health services.

Under Dr. Sullivan's leadership, New York has undergone a major expansion of community-based treatment, enabling people living with mental illness to live successfully in their own community. She has directed the implementation of major initiatives focused on integration, including an emphasis on prevention, wellness, and the social determinants of health in service delivery, and the integration of treatment for mental health, physical health, substance use disorder, and intellectual and developmental disabilities. During her tenure, Dr. Sullivan has worked to expand the OMH Office of Diversity and Inclusion with an expectation that program development and implementation be driven by data with a goal of decreasing disparities in care and improving equity and inclusion. She has also supported service enhancements in the criminal justice system that divert individuals living with mental illness from jails and prisons and prevent their return.

Previously, Dr. Sullivan was the Senior Vice President for the Queens Health Network of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation. As Senior Vice President, she was responsible for Elmhurst and Queens Hospital Centers, two public hospitals which serve a community of over 2 million New York City residents

Prior to being appointed Senior Vice President of the Queens Network, she was the Director of Psychiatry at Elmhurst and Queens Hospitals where she was responsible for and developed a comprehensive psychiatric service system that included 200 adult, child & adolescent and forensic beds, two Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Programs and over 100,000 ambulatory behavioral health visits.



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