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Interview with Jihoon Kim

Chief Executive Officer, InUnity Alliance

NYC native Jihoon Kim took up his position as inaugural Chief Executive Officer of InUnity Alliance in 2024, effective July 1, having devoted more than three months orientation to this new non-profit established by the merger of ASAP and its mental health system counterpart, the Coalition for Behavioral Health. Kim joins the non-profit sector following a public service career of nearly two decades, most recently as Deputy Secretary to the Governor for Human Services and Mental Hygiene.

What are your policy and operational priorities for IUA?

As the IUA CEO, my overarching policy priorities are to ensure that providers in the SUD/MH sectors can thrive with reliable and adequate reimbursement rates from government and can support their workforce with adequate wages, to fight for true parity so that no one with insurance is denied access to care, and to advocate using a health equity lens that prioritizes the needs of vulnerable populations, including individuals entangled in the criminal-legal system.

Operationally, we are working through the operational complexities of merging two statewide associations and incorporating the best of both ASAP (SUD) and the Coalition for Behavioral Health (MH) to make IUA an efficient and effective association that serves New Yorkers and our members through our three pillars: (1) IUA Policy Center; (2) IUA Center for Workforce Support, incorporating the New York Certification Board; and (3) IUA Business Center (planned).

What attracted you to taking on these challenges?

My personal and professional north star is to ensure that every New Yorker has access to affordable, person-centered SUD and mental health services, from prevention to treatment to recovery, when they need it. As an LCSW who has dedicated my career to helping people, macro-level studies through the Community Organizing and Policy track at Hunter College opened me to a career in public service. Leading the State's efforts around mental health and addiction was a dream come true and it was a privilege to serve under Governor Hochul. The IUA opportunity to lead an association that represents more than 200 SUD and MH organizations throughout New York State came at a critical point while I was looking for a way to have an even greater impact.

What is the biggest difference between working in government and in the non-profit sector?

The biggest change has been the fact that I am no longer working for a politician. Now one of my primary roles is to try to influence politicians! Day to day, I find that my life feels more balanced and predictable. But don't get me wrong, this job is no walk in the park! It's a deep and demanding commitment. We must find way of providing an adequate and timely response to the growing rates of suicide, overdoses, and unmet need.

How will peer recovery professionals participate in IUA?

One of the privileges of working at InUnity Alliance is to be able to work with the talented team of the New York Certification Board and support their excellent credentialing and training approval work. We are exploring ways to grow the peer workforce, including raising public awareness of addiction and mental health recovery. By Recovery Month 2025, we will definitely be honoring the commitment and strength of the peer recovery community.

What can we expect from the upcoming inaugural IUA conference?

You will not want to miss our inaugural conference in Saratoga Springs from November 17-20! This year's theme is **Beyond Barriers: Building a Unified Approach to Care**, which will provide attendees the opportunity to hear from experts in the SUD and MH sectors about serving the whole-person, often despite regulatory and bureaucratic silos. We will have a Veterans Pre-Conference on November 17, which will pick up where the long-standing annual ASAP Veteran Summits left off after nine years, followed by two and a half days of plenary speakers and engaging workshops. We're still planning and finalizing details. We will be sure to share more about the conference in the weeks ahead. Registration is open, so please visit www.iuanycconference.org and stay in the loop.

Do you have time for extracurricular activities and what are they?

In my free time I love to spend time with my wife, daughter, and THREE cats. I didn't grow up (in Queens) with household pets, but we adopted three kittens in 2020. I also love to run. Running is a way for me to stay physically and mentally healthy; it is my oasis. I hope to run a marathon one of these days!