



NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Envisioning Healthy People in Healthy Places

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall Park
New York, New York 10007

November 30, 2022

Dear Mayor Adams,

I am reaching out on behalf of the New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA), the New York State affiliate of the American Public Health Association (APHA). As a leading public health organization in the state, we offer our recommendations and assistance for addressing the major public health issues facing NYC. Our Statements of Policy on various issues of public health importance can be found [here](#) for your future reference.

In this letter, we lay out our recommendations regarding behavioral health services, the opioid crisis, banning the sale of menthol cigarettes, gun violence, homelessness, and the continuing COVID-19 health crisis.

NYSPHA recommends the following:

1. Increase access to crisis and behavioral health programs and services. Mental health-related incidents have been on the rise in all boroughs of NYC, especially since the onset of COVID-19. NYSPHA supports the following:
 - a. Increased funding to promote the use of 988 and Crisis Text Line among all communities within New York City
 - b. Creation of an easy-to-use three-digit dialing code for the NYC Well helpline similar to 988
 - c. Universal behavioral health screening and brief intervention for substance misuse, depression, anxiety, and suicide risk in primary care settings according to the evidence-based Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and Suicide Care models
 - d. Implementation of the evidence-based Sources of Strength upstream suicide prevention program in high schools across NYC
 - e. Mandatory training for teachers and other school staff in the identification of suicide risk and how and where to refer those at risk for care
 - f. Creation of barriers on bridges and high-rise buildings

- g. Promotion of lethal means safety efforts including safe firearm storage, prescription medication storage, and counseling patients on access to lethal means
- 2. Take additional steps to address the opioid crisis; deaths by opioid overdose continue to rise and have reached record levels. NYSPHA supports the following:
 - a. A campaign to recruit eligible healthcare providers to become buprenorphine prescribers and to combat stigma and promote health equity in providers' approaches to persons who use drugs
 - b. The expansion of harm reduction policies in many settings to reduce drug use and prevent overdose deaths, including naloxone training and distribution and implementation of SBIRT in primary care settings
 - c. The addition of new overdose prevention sites in NYC. The two existing sites have dramatically reduced the number of fatal overdoses in their clients.
 - d. Screening all individuals with opioid use disorder for suicide risk and providing appropriate intervention as necessary. Opioid overdose and suicide are closely linked.
 - e. Treatment for all incarcerated persons with Opioid Use Disorder. More than 60% of incarcerated people have a substance use disorder and more than 25% of incarcerated people report opioid use disorder.
 - f. Decriminalization of the possession of controlled substances for personal use
- 3. Reduce access to tobacco and tobacco-related products for youth and young adults. Tobacco use remains the single largest cause of preventable premature illness and death in the population. Specifically, we support a ban on the sale of menthol-flavored cigarettes and other tobacco products, which is now being considered by the City Council. Historically, the African American community has been targeted by Big Tobacco promoting menthol cigarettes and is disproportionately impacted by the adverse health outcomes that result from the use of these products.
- 4. Address the increase in crime and gun violence. NYSPHA supports the following:
 - a. Data-driven violence interrupter interventions delivered by community members with lived experience which aim to prevent gang-related shootings in communities at risk for violence
 - b. Community-led rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings and vacant lots and creation of communal green spaces to decrease violent crime, including gun violence
 - c. Educational efforts to increase public awareness of gun safety
 - d. More than half of firearm deaths are suicides. As such, NYSPHA supports:
 - 1) Partnerships with behavioral health providers, clinical providers, public health professionals, gun retailers, and those in the gun-owning community to share resources on suicide prevention
 - 2) Training for health and behavioral health providers in the evidence-based Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) training
 - 3) Inclusion of suicide prevention and firearm safety in medical, behavioral health, and nursing school curricula

- 4) Educating gun owners and retailers on safe storage of firearms and providing free gun locks or other safe storage devices
 - 5) The Extreme Risk Protection Act, which enables temporary removal of firearms for people in crisis
5. Address housing and homelessness as public health issues. NYSPHA supports the following:
- a. Increase the provision permanent supportive housing with support services for people with mental illness, HIV/AIDS and serious health problems
 - b. Increase access to mental health care and addiction programs for individuals with housing insecurity.
 - c. Increase street outreach to bring homeless New Yorkers indoors
 - d. Increase child assistance services for homeless children and aid their families finding permanent housing in their communities
 - e. Ensure children have access to schools and continued education opportunities and avoid disruptions in education due to their housing status
 - f. Provide COVID-19 vaccination sites that are accessible to individuals with housing insecurity
 - g. Increase access to emergency services, such as local food pantries and other social services
 - h. Keep individuals in permanent housing supported by federal assistance programs, such as Housing Choice Vouchers
6. Increase access to COVID-19 vaccinations and other immunizations. Vaccine hesitancy is a continuing problem in some regions in NYC. The Bronx and Staten Island have the lowest COVID-19 vaccine rates when compared to other boroughs. The Bronx has higher proportions of Black, Asian, Latinx, and immigrant populations with limited access to vaccination and health care, higher multi-generational and crowded housing, and other health equity challenges which make them more vulnerable to the adverse effects of COVID-19. Improving access to health care and immunizations for all communities requires creating programs to dispel distrust and myths surrounding the health care system and immunizations. Access to culturally sensitive information can aid in these efforts.

NYSPHA stands ready to support you in attaining these public health goals and in creating a safer and healthier NYC for all its residents. We can be reached at advocacy@nyspha.org.

Sincerely,



Brett Harris, DrPH
President, New York State Public Health Association