



TESTIMONY

Presented by

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Commissioner**

on

FY 2024 Executive Budget

before the

**New York City Council
Committee on Aging
and
Finance Committee**

on

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10:00am**

Good morning, Chair Hudson, Chair Brannan, and members of the Aging and Finance Committees. I am Commissioner Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez and am joined this afternoon by Jose Mercado, our Chief Financial Officer. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the New York City Department for the Aging's (NYC Aging) Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

NYC Aging administers a wide range of programs that enhance the independence and quality of life for the City's older adult population. Our services include older adult centers (OACs), home delivered meals (HDMs), case management (CMA), homecare services, transportation services, caregiver services, mental health, workforce development programs, and an array of other programs. The Fiscal Year 2024 Executive Budget supports operating expenses of \$469 million, of which \$302.1 million are City funds. In addition, the Department's Ten-Year Capital Plan, including discretionary dollars from Council is \$83 million.

NYC Aging's Fiscal Year 2024 Executive Budget addresses the challenges faced by New York's aging population during the post-pandemic and lays important foundations for the future. Our partnership with City Council ensures we can build on essential service needs, through the ongoing funding support of the City Council. In FY 23, NYC Aging was awarded over \$43.2 million in discretionary funding, allowing us to make even greater investments in communities.

Uplifting and supporting our city's growing older adult population is a key priority for this administration. As we all know, in the Executive Budget, nearly every agency had to achieve savings in response to unprecedented fiscal and economic conditions—including a projected \$4.3 billion spend by next year to support over sixty-thousand asylum seekers—along with the need to fund labor contracts for the city's workforce, while managing the reality of slowing growth in tax revenue.

All of the savings NYC Aging has achieved in this round were due to less than expected demand, which allowed us to participate in this citywide savings initiative, and will not affect the department's current service capability. Our goal is to ensure we can serve as many older adults as possible, primarily those who have are in communities that historically have been underfunded or underserved. the most. Given the current financial strains, and the request to help address this financial situation, NYC Aging found savings with a careful review of programs and proposed to meet the 4% reduction in areas where client participation was below contracted levels, and thereby would not result in significant service reductions to older adults.

Despite these fiscal realities, we are proud of the work NYC Aging continues to address the essential needs of older New Yorkers, while continuously innovating and upgrading services approaches. I am happy at this time to share some recent successes, at this time. They include:

- This past year we saw the launch of the *NYC Cabinet for Older New Yorkers*. We are fortunate that the Mayor is committed to an age-inclusive city and supports the continued development of interagency collaborations which promote government efficiency and further help to serve the needs of older New Yorkers. We are proud of the work and projects that 20 city agencies are completing through the subcommittees of the Cabinet such as Health, Intergenerational, Transportation and Housing. This work has included developing trainings for professionals in the City's Public Health Corps so that partner agencies are able to effectively refer older adults to the city services they need. Additionally, the Cabinet has established an intergenerational relationship building program within NYCHA communities connected older adults and high school students to create understanding and trust while

fighting ageism. We are excited for the work coming out of the Cabinet and are looking forward to sharing a detail update in the near future.

- In fall 2022, NYC Aging launched the “Join Us” campaign, a multi-media public service announcement encouraging older adults to return to their local Older Adult Center (OAC) following the isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are happy to share that this campaign resulted in a 1,859% increase in website traffic at NYC Aging. While some older adults are still hesitant to return to congregate settings for meals or programming at Older Adult Centers (OACs) we are seeing steady increases for in-person participation. We were pleased to see the ad in a few subways just this past week. Thank you to the MTA for your partnership.
- Lastly, in June 2022 we launched Silver Stars, a work program for retired city municipal employees who can return to work at city agencies and support business needs while still receiving income from their city pensions. We have seen nearly 100 positions developed and placed across 16 agencies or elected official offices. I want to thank participating agencies, including the Office of the NYC Comptroller for their commitment to employing Silver Star participants. I ask every Council member to consider hiring a Silver Star worker in your local office. You will not only be showcasing the value and assets of the older worker, you will also be combating ageism by your actions and creating an upward trend, age-inclusive workplace.

Case Management

Case Management Agencies (CMA) connect homebound older adults to resources and benefits so that they may continue to live independently and safely in their homes. Case Management is the gatekeeper for NYC Aging funded in-home services such as home delivered meals, home care, and friendly visiting. Case managers provide assessments to identify the strengths and needs of older adults and work with clients to plan and coordinate services. Many older adults are referred to case management providers from older adult centers, meal providers, hospitals and other community-based social service and health care agencies, or through Aging Connect the NYC Aging in-house help line. We know the need is greater than the resources available and we continue to experience wait list for assessments and services, other than the need for Home Delivered Meals which are addressed immediately. I am proud to say that we have developed several strategies with CM providers to continuously review and mitigate the wait list. In FY 2024, \$44.1 million will support case management services for approximately 35,000 clients annually.

OACs & NORCs

In 2021, we completed the Older Adult Centers (OAC) and Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) RFP which added 31 new sites to our network. Currently, our OAC network includes 311 centers and our NORC network has 36 NYC Aging funded sites and an additional 17 sites which are funded through Council discretionary dollars. Recently, NYC Aging participated in the grand opening of a new center, CPC Brooklyn Older Adult Center, as well as other recently opened or expanded centers. The continued construction of new centers bolsters New York City’s commitment to older adults and increases their ability to access vital city services.

Home Delivered Meals

The Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program is another vital component in NYC Aging's network of services. HDMs not only provide sustenance to homebound older adults across the five boroughs, the interaction with the delivery person—which for many of our clients may be the only direct human interaction for the day—support our ongoing effort to combat social isolation.

Over 85% of case management clients benefit from home-delivered meals services five to seven days a week. NYC Aging contracts with community-based providers to home-deliver nutritious meals to homebound older adults, age 60 and older, and their dependents if they have a disability. Participants can choose if they would like frozen, fresh-chilled or hot meals as well as from a variety of cultural meals. In FY 2024, \$55 million will support 4.8 million home delivered meals.

Mental Health Supports

NYC Aging's Geriatric Mental Health (DGMH) has been expanded to 88 sites across the city. We know that access to mental health services has a positive impact on the individual and their family and other relationships. We are currently in the process of making awards for the DGMH RFP and a new contract period for providers will begin on July 1, 2023. The RFP recently closed on March 9, and we look forward to completing awards for providers across select catchment areas serving the five boroughs.

Through this program, licensed mental health clinicians use engagement and workshops on mental health topics to de-stigmatize mental health, screen participants for depression and anxiety, provide on-site counseling, and give referrals. Overall, participation in this program has led to self-reported reductions in depression and anxiety. The Fiscal Year 2024 budget for this program is \$6.4 million.

Caregiver Services

The pandemic has been challenging for everyone, and the strain on caregivers has been significant. NYC Aging's caregiver support program offers support groups, counseling, trainings, outreach, and information services to unpaid caregivers. Many older adults are caretakers for their aging parent. Many are caregivers who also have full time jobs. The program aims to educate, supply or connect to the wide range of supports caregivers might need. The caregiver program offers options for respite care through home care or participation in social adult day care. Without the respite care, many of these caretakers would not have the financial means or ability to leave the care receiver in someone else's care while they take a needed break from their caregiving responsibilities. Caregiver supports not only allow the older adult to remain safely in their home, but they are also significantly less expensive, with higher positive outcomes, than institutionalization.

We know that the cost of maintaining an older adult in institutionalized care is far higher when compared to the cost of community-based care options such as supporting caregivers. Not only is it more beneficial to the long-term health and well-being of an older adult to remain at home and age in place, but it makes financial sense as well. It costs, on average, \$160,980 to house an older adult in institutionalized care whereas the average cost of community care services is roughly \$32,000 per person per year. In FY 24, funding for the caregiver program is currently \$8.1 million. Caregiver supports positively impact the health and wellbeing of older adults while aligning with the cultural background of the individual. As the aging population continues to diversify and age in place, investments in caregiver supports are important and beneficial. This too is a priority service area in FY 24.

Conclusion

I continue to be proud of the great work that NYC Aging and our providers accomplish with the resources we have. The last few years has highlighted the resiliency of older adults, as well as the system gaps that should be strengthened to fully allow people to live in their communities as they desire. I look forward to continuing to explore ways to match services to the increased demands. We are excited to continue to innovate services and respond to the changing needs of our city. The last year has challenged us to do more with our existing resources, but I continue to be proud of the work that NYC Aging has done, including in partnerships with our network of providers dedicated to serving older New Yorkers.

As always, we are grateful to the Chairs and the Committees for your advocacy and continued partnership to support our older New Yorkers. Thank you.