



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner

Testimony

of

**Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

Before the

New York City Council

Committees on Finance, Health, and Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction

on

Fiscal Year 2022 Executive Budget

May 19, 2021
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New York, NY

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Good afternoon Chairs Dromm, Levine and Louis, and members of the committees. I am Dr. Dave Chokshi, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined today by Dr. Torian Easterling, First Deputy Commissioner and Chief Equity Officer and Mr. Sami Jarrah, Deputy Commissioner for Finance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's Executive Budget for fiscal year 2022 (FY22).

Since the Preliminary Budget hearing, the Department has remained focused on our response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, particularly the City's Vaccine for All effort. As I have said many times before, the vaccines are safe, effective, and lifesaving, and I am thrilled to see the progress that we have made on vaccination. To date, over 7.6 million doses have been administered in New York City, and over 3.2 million New Yorkers have been fully vaccinated. We are also already seeing the positive impact they are having in preventing serious illness. These trends are promising, and though we remain as cautious and vigilant as ever, we know vaccines will help to restore normalcy to life in New York City and end this devastating pandemic. Today, all New Yorkers 12 and older are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine; no appointment is necessary at many sites citywide, and New Yorkers can find a site near them at vaccinefinder.nyc.gov or by calling 877-VAX-4-NYC. Since this is a budget hearing, I would be remiss if I did not point out that every dollar dedicated to our vaccination campaign is an investment in the future of New York City—and shows how public health and the economy are inherently intertwined.

As vaccine supply has increased, we have doubled down to make it easier for New Yorkers to access them and to share information about the vaccines, keeping our focus on equity. We are meeting New Yorkers where they are - through our homebound program, mobile vaccination buses, or at one of the many pop-up vaccination sites at community centers and faith-based organizations. We have located most City-run sites in the 33 Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity neighborhoods, and we are working in those communities and others to address vaccine confidence in the voices and languages that people need to hear.

Before I discuss the Executive Budget, I'd like to provide an update on the State budget, and federal activities.

During the Preliminary Budget hearing, I expressed significant concern with the Governor's proposed FY22 budget, as it included approximately \$50M in annual cuts to critical public health funding for New York City. I am very pleased to say that the majority of those cuts were not enacted. Most importantly, New York City's Article 6 rate was not further reduced from 20% to 10%, as Article 6 is a crucial source of funding for public health services, from environmental health to maternal health. However, the rest of the state continues to receive a 36% Article 6 match, almost double that of NYC. The State has a responsibility to fund public health in New York City, and going forward we must continue to advocate for a full restoration of New York City's Article 6 match and equitable state public health funding. Overall, this year's State Budget maintained state investment in public health in NYC; we thank the State legislature for their support and advocacy in ensuring the proposed cuts from the executive were rejected in the final budget, and we are grateful for the support of the Council and public health partners across the city.

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Turning now to the federal level, the American Rescue Plan has provided billions of dollars of relief for New York City. The plan also included much needed funding for public health. I'd like to thank President Biden and the New York City Congressional Delegation for their support of the American Rescue Plan, and for their commitment to the health and economic recovery of New York City. I would also like to acknowledge the enhancements made by the Biden Administration to the Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention Block Grants, which provides about \$151 million in additional funding to New York State for the next two years.

As our state partners make allocations of this funding to localities, we encourage them to allocate a reasonable proportion to New York City to address the behavioral health needs of New Yorkers. Funding for public health has been systematically cut over the last decade, and COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for renewed investment in the systems that prepare and respond to public health threats. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Biden Administration, and urge them to continue to prioritize public health investments, including investments to address mental health and substance use needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I will now turn to the FY22 Executive Budget. The Health Department currently has approximately 7,000 employees and an operating budget of \$2.05 billion for FY22, of which \$980 million is City Tax Levy (CTL). The Executive Budget added \$144 million CTL to the Department's FY22 budget. One-time savings of \$3.5 million in CTL was taken from the current FY21 budget only, with no impact to out-years.

The additional funding for the Health Department in the Executive Budget will support several new initiatives and allow us to expand other key areas of work. This includes resources for maternal and child health, and an additional \$1.4M in CTL for lead poisoning prevention to support DOHMH's expanded role in inspecting school facilities as part of our Elevated Blood Lead Level (EBLL) investigations, and new staff who will contact families to ensure that children who were previously identified with an EBLL continue to have access to services, such as health care and developmental monitoring.

The Executive Budget also makes important investments in behavioral health services, including raising awareness of mental health supports at vaccination sites. In FY22, a \$6.5M CTL expansion of HealingNYC will support fentanyl testing and awareness campaigns, increased harm reduction outreach and drop-in services, and expanded access to medications for opioid use disorder. We are seeing troubling trends in the opioid overdose epidemic, and we are focusing this investment in neighborhoods and for the communities that need it most. And, there are further investments to support New Yorkers with serious mental illness, including \$4M for clubhouses, and \$22.6M for new mobile treatment teams.

I'd like to thank the Mayor for the resources dedicated to the Department in the Executive Plan to support public health for all New Yorkers. Now is precisely the time to be investing in public health. And thank you to the Speaker, Chairs, and members of the committees for your partnership and continued commitment to public health. I want to again acknowledge my leadership team, who are here with me today, and all the Health Department employees for

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their tireless work and dedication to serving the people of New York City. I will close with a reminder that vaccines are our single greatest weapon in the fight against COVID-19. If you've already been vaccinated, please think about a family member, friend, or neighbor who may still be on the fence—and share your story with them. We have a chance to not just turn the corner on this pandemic, but to crush the COVID curve. With that, I am happy to take your questions.