



Testimony

of

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Commissioner

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

before the

**New York City Council Committee on Health
Jointly with the Committee on Finance and the
Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism,
Substance Abuse & Disability Services**

on the

FY 2019 Executive Budget

**May 18, 2018
City Hall – Council Chambers
New York City**

Good morning Chairpersons Dromm, Ayala and Levine, and members of the committees. I am Dr. Mary Bassett, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined today by First Deputy Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot and Sandy Rozza, Deputy Commissioner for Finance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our Executive Budget for fiscal year 2019.

The Department has once again had a tremendously productive year defending the health of New Yorkers. We have been busy implementing the comprehensive package of tobacco bills signed into law last summer, expanding our internal racial justice reform efforts, scaling up citywide efforts under ThriveNYC and rolling out elements of the Mayor's Neighborhood Rat Reduction Initiative. We reopened the Chelsea Sexual Health Clinic, worked with our sister agencies to enroll 80,000 New Yorkers in health insurance through GetCoveredNYC and engaged New Yorkers through the "Help Me Quit" app, which is designed to help people quit smoking. The Department launched "Living Sure," the City's campaign to promote pre-exposure prophylaxis – or PrEP – to women, and recently announced that New York City's air is the cleanest it has been since monitoring began in 2008.

And earlier this month, New York City reinforced its status as one of the most progressive cities in the country with Mayor de Blasio's support for a one-year research pilot for Overdose Prevention Centers, or OPCs. The pilot would open Centers in up to four existing syringe exchange programs that can operate an OPC without City funding. We are pleased with the leadership of the Mayor and this Council in supporting this demonstrated lifesaving overdose prevention method. We are standing on the right side of history with this decision. If the requirements to proceed with OPCs are met, and we take action here in New York, others across the country will follow. We look forward to further discussions with our sister agencies, elected officials and community members about this critical program in the coming months.

We are able to do all of this and more thanks to continued support from the Administration and Council. We are grateful to the Mayor for the addition of over \$11 million a year in the Executive Budget. With this funding, we will continue to tackle the City's opioid crisis. Since the launch of HealingNYC, the Department has distributed over 70,000 naloxone kits – contributing to the City's goal to distribute 100,000 kits, engaged providers and pharmacists and have implemented innovative care linkage approaches. We have conducted public media campaigns, naloxone trainings and targeted neighborhood-based education efforts to ensure that New Yorkers are aware of this epidemic and that this is an all-hands-on-deck effort.

We are proud of the great progress made under HealingNYC, but we recognize the need for additional services for those most at risk for overdose. This new funding will allow us to expand our Relay program, from 10 to 15 hospitals. This program utilizes Peer Wellness

Advocates in hospital emergency departments for counseling and linkage to care after a nonfatal overdose. We will also establish an End Overdose Training Institute to serve as a technical assistance center to help increase overdose prevention capacity and naloxone distribution. And we will implement a new naloxone leave-behind program with the FDNY so first responders can leave naloxone kits with people at risk of future overdose. Additionally, we are expanding the capacity of our HEAT and Co-Response units in order to provide behavioral health expertise for individuals with a mental health or substance misuse crisis. These newly funded efforts will enable the City to provide proactive, health-oriented interventions to people who need them most.

Turning to other budget updates, while we were pleased that proposed cuts at both the state and federal levels were not included in final spending legislation, we are concerned that the consistent attacks on public health funding will lead to future reductions that will force the Department to reduce vital services. We were relieved to see that the state budget cut to tuberculosis prevention and control funding was rejected in the final budget, as were proposed reductions to other critical public health services, such as School Based Health Centers and Poison Control Centers. At the federal level, we were cautiously happy to see that the Omnibus spending bill passed by Congress did not include the severe cuts to the Department of Health and Human Services proposed in the President's Budget. Perhaps this is an indication that Congress recognizes that public health is a bipartisan, critical area of work. And although we were spared significant budget cuts, our programs are otherwise jeopardized by federal policy shifts outside of the budget process that are not based on science, including those that would allow LGBTQ discrimination in health care settings, endorse abstinence-only sexual health education and threaten the status of immigrants. It remains clear that the Trump Administration does not share the values of our City's Administration nor its legislators, and we will continue to fight back against proposals that would widen disparities and put New Yorkers at risk.

I hope you never tire of hearing me say that we are fiercely committed to health equity, and that we are deploying the most evidence-based, skill-driven and expert-led strategies to do so. We have made progress in the past year, but racial disparities in life expectancy, disease burden and infant and maternal mortalities remain. This is unfair, unjust and preventable, and addressing these inequities must remain a top priority throughout all of our work; our staff is taking this challenge head-on.

I want to thank the Mayor for the resources dedicated to the Department in the Executive Plan. And thank you to the Speaker, Chairs Levine, Ayala, and Dromm, and the members of the committees for your partnership and shared commitment to protecting and promoting the health of all New Yorkers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I will gladly take questions.