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## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

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February 22, 2021

Dr. Dave A. Chokshi  
Commissioner  
Department of Health & Mental Hygiene  
42-09 28<sup>th</sup> St.  
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear Commissioner Chokshi:

At its Full Board meeting February 18, 2021 Community Board #2, adopted the following resolution:

### **A resolution critiquing New York City's system for distributing vaccines to protect against the COVID-19 virus.**

#### **WHEREAS:**

- 1) As of this date, the US Government has authorized two vaccines to prevent COVID-19. One is manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech and the other by Moderna, and both require a series of two doses to be effective. The federal government “oversees a central system to order, distribute, and track COVID-19 vaccines”<sup>1</sup>; and
- 2) The federal government allocates vaccines to the states on the basis of their population over 18.<sup>2</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issues recommendations for eligibility, but states are allowed to develop their own systems of prioritization for distribution. As of late January, 2021, New York City had received 546,775 doses of vaccine and had distributed 75% of them, or 409,403.<sup>3</sup> Phase 1-a of eligibility was essentially limited to healthcare workers and those in similar professions. Phase 1-b began on January 11, 2021, and extended eligibility to those over age 65 and workers in certain high-risk sectors;<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>

<sup>2</sup> Natasha Singer, “Where do Vaccine Doses Go, and Who Gets Them? The Algorithms Decide.” *New York Times*, Feb. 7, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/07/technology/vaccine-algorithms.html?searchResultPosition=2>

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Governor, New York State. “Governor Cuomo Updates New Yorkers on State Vaccination Program.” Jan. 19, 2021. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-updates-new-yorkers-state-vaccination-program-79-first-doses-delivered-have-been>

<sup>4</sup> New York State, “Phased Distribution of the Vaccine.” February 2, 2021. <https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/phased-distribution-vaccine>

- 3) The vaccines are currently in short supply. According to state authorities, New York State has been allocated roughly 250,000 doses per week to distribute among 7,000,000 people who are currently eligible for it.<sup>5</sup> The total number of doses administered in New York City as of February 9, 2021, was 1,032,158, which includes 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> doses. Fewer than 42,958 doses were on hand for NYC providers and facilities to use.<sup>6</sup> 413,006 adults were partially vaccinated; 182,697 were fully vaccinated; and
- 4) According to data published by the city<sup>7</sup> the distribution of vaccines has been marked by great racial disparities throughout the city: as of this writing, the first vaccine dose has been distributed to 5% of whites but just 2% of Blacks and 5% of Latinos. For example, while the Black community represents 24% of the city's population it constitutes just 11% of the vaccines distributed as of January 31;<sup>8</sup> and
- 5) NYC's vaccine distribution is led by the NYC COVID-19 Vaccine Command Center, "a dedicated interagency effort created by the Mayor's Office"<sup>9</sup> that has designed a website for scheduling appointments to receive the vaccine.<sup>10</sup> With certain exceptions (such as those eligible to receive the vaccine through the Veterans' Administration), NYC residents rely on the website to schedule their appointment; and
- 6) NYC's Vaccine Finder is described as a "one-stop" site to the sites of individual providers. That is, it is a portal to individual provider websites. Patients select a location by zip code and the website generates a list of authorized providers. Patients then apply to a provider for a vaccine appointment once they have established that they are eligible to receive it;<sup>11</sup> and
- 7) As the home page of the Vaccine Finder states, "each [provider] site manages its own schedules and appointments. This tool is intended to help make site information – including scheduling options – easily accessible to New Yorkers";<sup>12</sup> and
- 8) In fact, in an environment where vaccines are in tight supply, the Vaccine Finder tool makes finding an appointment anything but "easily accessible." Members of Community District 2 report many experiences that increase their anxiety: providers canceling appointments and directing patients back to the Vaccine Finder to seek the vaccine elsewhere; difficulty finding a telephone number, as an alternative to the website, to schedule an appointment; patients spending hours refreshing the website or waiting on the phone in the hope of finding availability; rumors circulating of patients who have circumvented the system, or who were able to get an appointment at the last minute while others have had long-scheduled appointments cancelled; providers posting appointments once they've received supply, only to see them all taken within five minutes of posting; patients being required to complete an eligibility form before they are able to learn if the provider has available appointments, and being required to complete a new eligibility form for each attempt at finding a provider; and
- 9) The result is that many patients are confused and anxious about a system that creates inequities to access. Seeking a vaccine is particularly challenging, for example, for those who are homebound; those with language barriers or wi-fi barriers; those who lack fluency using the internet; those who are working or caring for a child and who can ill afford to spend hours on the telephone or on the website seeking an available appointment; and

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<sup>5</sup> New York State, "Am I Eligible?" <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov>

<sup>6</sup> NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), "COVID-19: Data." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data-vaccines.page>

<sup>7</sup> NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), "COVID-19: Data." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data-vaccines.page>

<sup>8</sup> Emma Fitzsimmons, "Black and Latino New Yorkers Trail White Residents in Vaccine Rollout." *New York Times*, January 31 and February 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/31/nyregion/nyc-covid-vaccine-race.html>

<sup>9</sup> NYC Covid-19 Citywide Information Portal. "Vaccine Command Center." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/vaccines/covid-19-vaccines.page>

<sup>10</sup> NYC Covid-19 Citywide Information Portal. "Vaccine Command Center." <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/vaccines/covid-19-vaccines.page>

<sup>11</sup> NYC DOHMH, "COVID-19 Vaccine Finder." <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov>

<sup>12</sup> NYC DOHMH, "COVID-19 Vaccine Finder." <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov>

- 10) Patients awaiting a vaccine – who are already vulnerable to the health effects of the virus - would experience less stress if they were reassured of being on a central list to receive one as soon as one became available, and if the process for seeking a vaccine were less time-consuming; and
- 11) These problems do not appear to be inherent to a distribution system but rather the failure to create a central tracking system. Just as many supermarkets create one line for checkout and then distribute shoppers to the next available cash register, New York City should be able to preserve each patient’s place “in line” and distribute him to the next available appointment, even if those appointments are with individual providers and independent healthcare systems, and even if availability continues to be limited for the near future.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT COMMUNITY BOARD 2, MANHATTAN**

- 1) Appreciates the efforts of New York City leadership, and the hard-working staff at DOHMH and the Vaccine Command Center, to respond quickly to the unprecedented emergency created by the COVID-19 virus, and appreciates the wealth of data that is shared on the city’s COVID-19 website, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>; and
- 2) Expresses disappointment and frustration in the city’s failure to create a vaccine distribution system that assures patients, even in the face of temporary vaccine shortage, that once they apply for a vaccine their place in line will be protected until a vaccine becomes available; and
- 3) Maintains that a central tracking system with an API (application programming interface) or provider portal managed by city government is not incompatible with a distribution system that relies on a multitude of individual providers to actually administer the vaccine; and
- 4) Recommends the city address the difficulties not only in acquiring a vaccine but also in obtaining a COVID-19 test, which remains difficult almost one year after COVID-19 first struck our city’s residents; and
- 5) Appreciates the efforts of the city’s health department workers to improve the Vaccine Finder as the department receives ongoing feedback from the public, and hopes that this resolution will prompt improvements in the design of the Vaccine Finder.

**Vote: Unanimous, with 44 Board Members in favor.**

Please advise us of any decision or action taken in response to this resolution.

Sincerely,



Carter Booth, Chair  
Community Board #2, Manhattan



Susanna Aaron, Chair  
Social Services Committee  
Community Board #2, Manhattan

CB/EM

- c:
- Hon. Jerrold L. Nadler, Congressman
  - Hon. Carolyn Maloney, Congresswoman
  - Hon. Nydia Velasquez, Congresswoman
  - Hon. Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator
  - Hon. Brian Kavanagh, NY Senator
  - Hon. Deborah J. Glick, NY Assembly Member
  - Hon. Yuh-Line Niou, NY Assembly Member
  - Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
  - Hon. Corey Johnson, Council Speaker
  - Hon. Margaret Chin, Council Member
  - Hon. Carlina Rivera, Council Member