



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

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Manhattan Community Board Four
424 West 33rd Street, Suite #580
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Dear Manhattan Community Board 4,

Thank you for your letter regarding potential solutions to serious mental illness (SMI) in New York City. We wholeheartedly agree with the solutions identified in your letter and are happy to share that they mirror our recently released mental health plan: [Care, Community, Action: A Mental Health Plan for New York City](#).

Ensuring that all New Yorkers living with SMI have access to evidence-based and trauma informed care and supports is a central component of our plan to address SMI. As your letter notes, this means expanding access to not only mental health care, but also stable housing, rehabilitative supports and the other social determinants of health that have an inordinate impact on mental health outcomes.

Our mental health plan centers four main pillars of action: health, home, community and response. Specifically, we aim to improve access to specialty SMI care; expand the stable housing available to New Yorkers with SMI; expand City infrastructure for rehabilitative supports, education and employment for people with SMI and their families; and serve New Yorkers in mental health crisis through a health-led response.

As your letter notes, SMI is not a siloed issue, and New Yorkers living with SMI often have complex medical and social service needs. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) recognizes this and we have centered our plan around addressing the many complex issues that New Yorkers living with SMI face. Below, we have outlined how we plan to address Manhattan Community Board Four's recommendations through the implementation of the City's Mental Health Plan.

Increase the number of and access to stable beds

Access to housing is an important social determinant of health for New Yorkers living with SMI. The NYC Health Department will work alongside our State and City partners to increase stable housing options available to New Yorkers with SMI, including transitional housing units

for people with SMI coming out of hospitals, jails or prisons. Additionally, we will open 8,000 units of permanent supportive housing for people with SMI and preserve existing supportive housing units for people with SMI while accounting for increasing costs.

Expand Intensive Mobile Treatment and Assertive Community Treatment Teams

The NYC Health Department aims to expand access to treatment by ensuring coordinated access to a range of specialty care from intensive community-based behavioral health services (such as ACT and IMT) to appropriate care in a hospital. In order to accomplish this, the NYC Health Department is collaborating with the NYS Office of Mental Health to implement a single-access system to consolidate and streamline how New Yorkers with SMI access services. We will also expand mobile treatment capacity over the next year to serve more than 800 additional people with high service needs through Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT).

In addition to expanding treatment options for people with SMI, we will also expand rehabilitative supports for people living with SMI and their families. This includes substantially expanding the capacity of clubhouses to provide New Yorkers living with SMI with critical social infrastructure, including opportunities to build meaningful relationships and find education and employment supports.

Expand crisis mental health interventions such as B-HEARD

The City is committed to expanding health-led crisis response options so that New Yorkers experiencing a mental health crisis have access to trauma-informed and evidence-based. This includes expanding the B-HEARD program, as well as adding two peers to every mobile crisis team to divert people in mental health crisis from unnecessary hospitalizations or to follow up with them after hospital discharge to connect them to community care.

Increase staffing and fill vacancies in the mental health field

The NYC Health Department is working with the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health and our New York State counterparts to address the mental health workforce shortage. We agree with the assessment that there are serious shortages when it comes to trained mental health workers and we are advocating for many of the solutions highlighted in your letter including increased loan forgiveness and scholarships for those entering the behavioral health field, cost of living adjustments and increased pay and benefits, among others.

Expand harm reduction programs

Harm reduction is at the center of the City's strategy to reduce overdose deaths and improve the lives of people who use drugs in New York City. Through the implementation of the City's Mental Health Plan, the City aims to make sure that people who use drugs have access to high-quality harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services. This includes enhancing the scope and reach of harm reduction services, primarily delivered through 15 Syringe Service Programs citywide, and expanding Overdose Prevention Center services to additional sites in neighborhoods with high rates of fatal overdose.

Increase access to care for personal hygiene

Thank you for the recommendation to specifically increase access to personal hygiene services. While this is not explicitly listed as a strategy in the City's Mental Health Plan, increasing access to basic needs services, including personal hygiene services, is an important component of service expansion. For example, the City aims to increase the capacity of Syringe Service Programs to provide basic needs such

as food and hygiene services, starting with programs in neighborhoods with the highest rates of fatal overdose.

The [Care, Community, Action: A Mental Health Plan for New York City](#) lays out a framework for transforming our mental healthcare system and improving the mental health of New Yorkers, including New Yorkers living with SMI. We look forward to implementing this plan alongside our City and State partners.

Thank you again for your letter and please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maura Kennelly". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Maura Kennelly
Deputy Commissioner

MK/BMH
IQ#843475