



New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA)

November 8, 2021

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor-Elect, New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor-Elect Adams,

Congratulations on being elected the next Mayor of New York City!

As you prepare to take office in January, the New York State Public Health Association (NYSPHA) is writing to offer our assistance and our recommendations for addressing the major public health issues facing New York City.

NYSPHA is the New York State affiliate of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and serves as the statewide organization for members from all disciplines across the spectrum of public health professionals and organizations. Our mission is to improve the public's health through advocacy, education, networking, and professional development. NYSPHA makes public health policy recommendations (<http://www.nyspha.roundtablelive.org/Statements-of-Policy>) at the state and local levels to support the state, city and local health departments, strengthen chronic disease prevention, increase tobacco control, address public water supply protection, and address other issues of public health importance.

NYSPHA has a focused policy and advocacy sub-committee dedicated to support New York City (NYC) public health initiatives to improve the physical and mental health of all NYC residents. We stand ready to support and assist you in pursuing policies to support the ability of NYC's public health system, led by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) and its commissioner, to protect and improve the health of NYC residents.

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to demand urgent attention, it has heightened the already existing health disparities and exposed the challenges faced by the public health infrastructure in the most populous metropolitan area in the United States. The pandemic resulted in an unprecedented loss of lives, loss in jobs, closing of businesses, increase in mental health issues, and an increase in domestic violence. The boroughs of The Bronx and Queens, which have the most racially diverse communities, were the worst hit. The elderly, vulnerable and marginalized populations were at highest risk. Racism itself has been a public health crisis for generations, only to be exacerbated during the pandemic. We applaud the recent resolution by the New York City Board of Health declaring racism to be a public health crisis and urge you to take concrete steps with the Board to address this long-standing issue.

Additionally, as you know, the underlying conditions in which people are born, live, grow, work, and age are strong predictors of health. To lead New York City during the next stage of the pandemic, and to focus attention on the social determinants of health, the city needs a robust NYC DOHMH, led by a strong, independent leader with expertise in public health. The city needs to appoint a strong and experienced leader as Commissioner of Health who can be the city's chief health strategist and increase its investment in the department to ensure the NYC DOHMH can lead efforts to address both the current public health challenges as well as create health policies that strengthen and improve the health of the most marginalized communities in New York City.

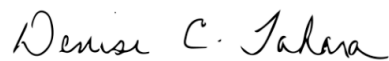
Achieving health equity for all New York City residents irrespective of race, gender, socio-economic background, and age and supporting a reenergized NYC DOHMH are our major goals. In addition to appointing a strong Commissioner of Health and strengthening the NYC DOHMH to focus on health equity, we also have specific policy recommendations related to:

- **Improving access to physical, mental, and behavioral health for all NYC residents:** Mental health problems have been on the rise across the spectrum of the NYC population. The creation of new programs and expanding existing programs to address the mental issues that have gotten worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, improving access to immunizations for all communities requires creating programs to dispel myths surrounding immunization. Vaccines save lives, and the lowest vaccination rates in NYC are in boroughs with higher Black, Asian, Latinx and immigrant populations. Access to culturally sensitive information can aid in improved vaccination rates.
- **Addressing the Opioid epidemic:** Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic we were experiencing record levels of overdoses in NYC and nationally, which have worsened during the pandemic. As such, we should ensure free and/or easy access to naloxone (a lifesaving medication to reverse opioid overdoses) and treatment (e.g., buprenorphine and methadone). In addition, the establishment of supervised injection sites across the city should be supported as they have been shown to decrease the rates of overdoses and disease transmission (i.e., HIV/AIDS, and Hep C) as well as syringe litter, and have not been shown to lead to increased crime or community disturbance. When supervised injection sites are approved, city and state lawmakers should work with the federal government to ensure that they are not subjected to federal laws that would prohibit such spaces.
- **Strengthening policies to prevent obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease:** NYSPHA is in support of establishing a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB). As demonstrated in Philadelphia and elsewhere, sugar-sweetened beverage taxes are an effective policy tool for reducing sugary drink purchases among at-risk populations. SSB taxes can be especially effective when some of the revenue collected is reinvested in the low-income communities who are especially at risk for obesity and for increased SSB consumption. In addition, increasing tobacco taxes will have the benefit of decreasing smoking, especially among youth.
- **Addressing gun violence:** A [recent study](#) found that a focused investment in the physical attributes of neighborhoods – including planting trees, regular maintenance of green spaces, and even simply picking up garbage, resulted in a drop in crime rates of up to 29%, and that neighbors felt safer and more inclined to socialize. Improving the physical attributes of marginalized communities would be one step you could take to reduce crime and address gun violence.
- **Housing:** The NYSPHA advocates for preventing homelessness through solution-oriented programs, policy initiatives and eliminating the causes of homelessness. We encourage coalitions

with federal, state and local governments and non-profit organizations to address the issues of homelessness and encourage and support the following: 1) View housing as a public health issue and a major social determinant of health; 2) Prevent evictions through rental assistance programs, legal aid, landlord mediation, renter/tenant education, and connect tenants to income support services; 3) Ensure children have access to schools and continued education opportunities and avoid disruptions in education due to their housing status; 4) Advocate for protections against income discrimination and increase in vouchers for housing to increase housing stability; 5) Keep individuals in permanent housing supported by federal assistance programs, such as Housing Choice Vouchers; 6) Advocate for providing permanent supportive housing along with support services for people with mental illness, HIV/AIDS and serious health problems, such as the New York/New York Agreement.

The COVID pandemic has tested all of us. We urge you to use this extraordinary moment in New York to take bold actions to restore the NYCDOHMH to its standing as the premier local health department in the country and to prioritize public health policies and programs to improve the health of our communities and address health disparities. We are ready to help you in reaching these goals. Please contact us at advocacy@nyspha.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise C. Tahara".

Denise C. Tahara, PhD
President
New York State Public Health Association
advocacy@nyspha.org