

AGENDA ITEM 1: General Agency Funding Discussion

The purpose of holding the Borough Budget Consultations is to provide Community Boards with important information to assist in drafting their statement of District Needs and Budget Priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. As you know, Community Board Members are volunteers who may not be familiar with the budget process and how agencies' programs are funded. At the same time, Community Board members are very knowledgeable about local service needs.

This year's Manhattan agendas have three sections:

I. Agencies previously faced unprecedented cuts and new funding requirements due to COVID 19. The Federal Government recently provided relief funds to states and municipalities as part of COVID relief stimulus.

1. What programs are restored by this funding for the current fiscal year and what further changes are planned for FY 23 when an estimated \$4 billion budget gap reemerges?
2. What changes in federal funding have been instituted for FY 22? Will those changes continue into FY 23? What portion or percentage of the FY 21 and FY 22 budgets consisted of non-recurring federal funding?
3. What is the overall budget increase or decrease for FY 22 adopted budget compared to FY21 budget? Does the Agency anticipate a budget shortfall for FY 22, FY 23 or further out years after the non-recurring federal funding has been exhausted?

II. Then, the agenda continues with Community Boards asking about program funding.

1. What programs will see a significant increase or decrease in funding? To what extent, if any, is the increase or decrease in funding related to non-recurring federal funding allocations?
2. Which programs will be new or eliminated entirely?
3. What are your benchmarks for new and existing programs and what are your benchmarks/key performance indicators for measuring success?
4. What are your priorities, operational goals, and capital goals for FY22 and projected priorities, operational goals, and capital goals for FY23?
5. What expense or capital needs would ACS recommend or encourage Community Boards advocate be funded or expanded?

III. Lastly, the agendas include Boards' requests on district-specific budget questions. We request that the agency respond in writing, but have any further discussions on these items with the Community Boards outside of the consultation.

For the first section, please present on the four topics below for 10-15 minutes at the beginning of our Consultation. Also, please provide written responses or even a PowerPoint presentation that we can use to fully and accurately educate our Board Members.

1. Which Manhattan community districts will see the largest increases or decreases in applied operational or capital funding for programmatic goals in FY 22 and FY 23?
 - a. What indicators do you use to direct these funds according to perceived need?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

I. The City faced challenges in Fiscal 2020 and 2021 including budget deficits as a result of the pandemic along with simultaneous extraordinary needs as a result of COVID 19. The Federal Government recently provided relief funds under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to states and

municipalities as part of COVID stimulus to help restore economic stability and provide needed services

1. What programs are restored by this funding for the current fiscal year and what further changes are planned for FY 23 when an estimated \$4 billion budget gap reemerges?

[See answers to #2 below.](#)

2. What changes in federal funding have been instituted for FY 22? Will those changes continue into FY 23? What portion or percentage of the FY 21 and FY 22 budgets consisted of non-recurring federal funding?

[The total DHS FY22 Federal budget, as of Adopt 2022, is \\$639M.](#)

[Federal budget changes:](#)

[Federal money, as part of the American Rescue Plan and other COVID-related relief, was added to the DHS budgets in the Exec 22 plan for Administration priorities, such as Homeless Street Outreach programming, among others.](#)

[Federal budget \(ARP\) funding highlights include \(FY21-FY25\):](#)

- [\\$125M for Journey Home and Street Homelessness programs](#)
- [\\$3.5M for the DHS Clean Up Corps.](#)
- [\\$48m was added for indirect costs for DHS not-for-profit providers.](#)

3. What is the overall budget increase or decrease for FY 22 adopted budget compared to FY21 budget? Does the Agency anticipate a budget shortfall for FY22, FY23 or further out years after the non-recurring federal funding has been exhausted?

[As of the 2022 Adopted budget, the FY22 DHS budget is \\$2.2B \(\\$1.4B City\).](#)

II.

1. What programs will see a significant increase or decrease in funding? To what extent, if any, is the increase or decrease in funding related to non-recurring federal funding allocations?

[New funding included in the Adopted budget:](#)

- [Street Homeless Solutions \(\\$7M in FY22\):](#) this funding provides for street outreach program expansion beyond what was funded in Exec 22 plan.
- [Prevailing Wage for Shelter Security \(\\$40.5M; FY22\)](#)

2. Which programs will be new or eliminated entirely?

[The agency has not eliminated any programs.](#)

3. What are your benchmarks for new and existing programs and what are your benchmarks/key performance indicators for measuring success?

[The agency produces key statistics and performance matrixes. Please see 2021 Mayor's Management Report.](#)

4. What are your priorities, operational goals, and capital goals for FY22 and projected priorities, operational goals, and capital goals for FY23?

Some of the Department's priorities and goals are:

- Ensure that individuals and families have access to emergency shelter and are immediately connected to appropriate mainstream resources.
- Coordinate and/or provide support services to help individuals and families who are homeless exit shelter as quickly as possible.
- Reduce the number of unsheltered homeless individuals.

5. What expense or capital needs would DHS recommend or encourage Community Boards advocate be funded or expanded?

None at this time.

III.

1. Which Manhattan community districts will see the largest increases or decreases in applied operational or capital funding for programmatic goals in FY 22 and FY 23?
 - a. What indicators do you use to direct these funds according to perceived need?

Collaborating with other public agencies and nonprofit partners, DHS works to prevent homelessness before it occurs, reduce street homelessness, and assist New Yorkers in transitioning from shelter into permanent housing.

See below for reports and statistics available on our website:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/stats-and-reports.page>

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 2: Safe Havens

1. We have seen an increase in people experiencing homelessness accepting services--placement for beds. It is reported in my district this has been for stabilization beds and safe haven beds and hotel rooms that were made available instead of offering beds in congregate settings. Are all stabilization beds remaining available and is there funding to create more of this type of housing that people will accept. In line with this--last year my board had additional safe havens as a budget priority. This is a citywide priority that impacts all CBs. However, the response to the budget item in the adopted budget was that this had already been funded. This is not an appropriate answer--there is clearly a need for additional beds as long as we have people who are living on the street. What are the plans to fund more safe havens?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

Since the start of HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive outreach program in the nation, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new investments and a tripling of the size of those teams. As part of the City's 24/7/365 outreach efforts, hundreds of highly-trained not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed social workers, canvass the streets, proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, offering services and assistance, working to gain their trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issues that may have caused or contributed to their homelessness in order to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets.

- Since 2014, the City has redoubled outreach efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to outreach programs and providers:
 - Tripling the number of outreach staff canvassing the streets engaging New Yorkers 24/7/365 since 2014, from fewer than 200 to more than 600, with those dedicated staff canvassing the streets every day, building relationships over weeks and months through regular contact and concerted engagement with New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, focused on encouraging them to accept services and transition off the streets.
 - More than quintupling the number of emergency 'safe haven' and 'stabilization' beds dedicated to serving unsheltered New Yorkers citywide since taking office, with thousands of these specialized beds opened during this Administration, bringing the total up from 600 in 2014 to more than 3,000 open today (which are currently helping thousands of New Yorkers who previously lived unsheltered get back on their feet) and hundreds more of these specialized beds opening in the coming months and years.
 - Increasing joint outreach operations to engage more New Yorkers and offer more supports, including expanding joint outreach operations with partner Agencies such as DOHMH, the Parks Department, Department of Sanitation, and the MTA to address conditions as they occur and provide alternative pathways to permanence.

DHS has recently released an Open-Ended Request for Proposal (RFP) for proposals from not-for-profit providers to operate stabilization bed sites. Stabilization beds are sites that help get homeless clients off the street and into safe secure temporary shelter while working towards permanent housing. These sites typically have single and double rooms, case management services, meals and other support services that help move clients off the street and into permanency.

For those individuals living outdoors for an extended period who agree to accept services, stabilization beds provide a less restrictive alternative to traditional shelter. In this way, stabilization beds provide shelter to individuals who are unsheltered and help facilitate ongoing coordinated services with DHS contracted outreach teams to help individuals who were previously residing in the subway and other public spaces get back on their feet.

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 3: Shelter Security

1. What are the benchmarks/results of community engagement teams at shelters? (this question was asked last two years but we did not receive any information specific to the community engagement

program.) Is the funding for this program threatened? What is the funding specific to shifting training to DHS? who is contracted to implement training. What are the benchmarks to determine if training is successful?

2. Last year you reported decrease in overall security presence, but we consistently hear that people will not accept placement in shelters because adult men’s shelters are not safe. From the 911 calls, especially involving drugs, we know this is true. We understand that the shelter residents should be treated with respect but they must also feel safe. Has there been a decrease in funding for security for FY 22 and what is planned for FY 23?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

A safe and secure environment is critical to the success of any program facility – and DSS-DHS is committed to prioritizing the safety of clients, staff, and community members alike. Throughout this Administration, with the help of our not-for-profit social service provider partners, we’ve been focused on developing a more client-centered and trauma-informed approach to our work ensuring the safety and security of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness – and we are implementing policies and procedures that take a more holistic and nuanced view of what it means to provide safety and security, especially as relates to serving and supporting some of our City’s most vulnerable residents.

Throughout this process, we have worked to develop training materials for security staff that reflect and promote these values. For example, we are implementing this approach/ training on security-related topics to security staff, including training on de-escalation, access control, understanding mental health and disorder, victimization and trauma, domestic violence, crisis communication, physical training, tactical training, scenario-based exercises, and naloxone administration. We’ve also strengthened our monitoring and reporting procedures. These efforts to continually improve how we serve and support our clients are vitally important to our ongoing work to raise the bar for client services across DSS-DHS.

We have also made several important internal changes that we are confident will continue to shift the paradigm for how we provide services—and as part of this ongoing reform process, in collaboration with our not-for-profit provider partners who do this work every day on the ground, we are analyzing need and deployment systemwide, working to streamline/consolidate where possible and add clinical support staff where necessary:

- We stood up an internal management team at DSS-DHS to take on this responsibility, putting our client-centered and trauma-informed approach to engagement front and center in all that we do.
- We also made changes to our on-the-ground provision of security. These changes are both a reflection of the move away from the enforcement methods of the past and towards a focus on providing clients with tailored clinical services, as well as the need to reduce City spending during this challenging fiscal period - all while ensuring the continuation of core shelter services, including safety and security measures.
- To that end, there are several primary changes on the ground:
 1. Security at intake and assessment sites will be wholly/solely staffed by DSS-DHS-managed Peace Officers, instead of the mix of Peace Officers and contracted security staff that had been in place.
 - Recognizing that the period when an individual or family may seek shelter with DSS-DHS often reflects the height of the individual crisis for many, we believe the presence at intake and assessment of DSS-DHS Peace Officers, managed and trained by DSS-DHS to work more seamlessly with social services staff, will ease the

transition into shelter and appropriately level-set the balance between responsibilities and supports while in shelter.

2. Conversely, security at select shelters that serve individuals experiencing mental health challenges will be wholly/solely staffed by contracted security, instead of the mix of DSS-DHS Peace Officers and security that were previously in place. At the same time, we will be adding clinical staff at these locations, reinforcing our efforts to move towards a trauma-informed, client-centered approach that prioritizes social services responses to those experiencing mental health challenges.
3. Again, by right-sizing overall security presence and shifting away from the hybrid model at these sites that at times created counterproductive overlap, and by ensuring more standardized staffing and clear/consistent roles and responsibilities within sites, we will re-prioritize the role of social services staff and social services responses, including positive engagement, and de-escalation, with security playing a supporting role as a backstop.
 - And we will also be implementing these changes according to differing security needs to coincide with social services staffing levels.
 - Additionally, none of the changes outlined above will result in a decrease in the current overall headcount of DSS-DHS Peace Officers.

We are confident that this ongoing development in our approach to security will help foster a welcoming environment focused on personal engagement. And, from a financial perspective, these changes will also help us keep in place robust social services, even in the midst of unprecedented budget constraints.

Additionally, our top priority is ensuring all our facilities are integrated seamlessly into the community so that our clients are welcomed as neighbors. In service of these goals, we are committed to maintaining open lines of communication and engagement, and keeping up ongoing, productive dialogue with communities across the five boroughs. Furthermore, at shelter locations, we implement a “Good Neighbor Policy,” outlining expectations for client behavior while residing at the facility.

In addition, at all DSS-DHS shelter facilities, our not-for-profit partners provide on-site security around-the-clock, who oversee access control; and these facilities also include security cameras installed throughout the building and across the shelter grounds, which allow security officers to continually monitor compliance with house regulations and good neighbor policies both in and around the facility, acting as a deterrent for inappropriate or illegal activities.

To further maintain open lines of communication with communities, as part of our commitment to being good neighbors and ensuring any concerns are addressed as soon as they arise, at all DSS-DHS facilities opened under the *Turning the Tide* initiative, our not-for-profit partners provide 24-hour open lines for the community to provide feedback in a timely manner and to immediately address any concerns as they arise.

With regards to COVID-related protocol, we continue to encourage all New Yorkers, including the clients who we serve and the staff who serve them, to wear masks—and we provide PPE masks/face-coverings to staff and clients alike, including and especially for anyone who doesn’t have one, to ensure they are able to do this.

The FY22 Adopt plan shelter security budget is \$247M. The funding for shelter security for FY22 did not decrease. The budget will be monitored to continue to support the security need for the outyears.

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 4: Capital funds for shelters

FY 21 sees a decrease in capital funding for shelters. A large part of capital funding is for reconstruction. Some of our shelters are in very old buildings that are repurposed but not appropriate for shelters and are not accessible and do not have outdoor space. Does DHS plan to continue this decrease for FY 23 and why is there a decrease instead of upgrading shelters?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

The FY23 DHS capital budget, as of the Executive 22 Financial Plan, is \$85M.

Please see attached listing of DHS capital projects in Manhattan.

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 5: WiFi

Please give an update into the number of family shelters and all other shelters and safe havens that have wifi available year-round.

AGENCY RESPONSE:

Led by DOITT, the City is working with Charter and Altice to provide WiFi service to all apartments in existing DHS shelters that serve families with children that are expected to be in use beyond 2021, as well as planned new families-with-children shelters that are opening under the *Turning the Tide* plan. In addition, the City is providing WiFi service to all apartments in more than 40 HRA domestic violence shelters, which also serve families with children. In total, this represents over 200 sites, comprised of approximately 10,500 units.

To date, the City has completed the work to provide in-unit WiFi in almost all of the DHS and DV shelters for families with children that will be in use beyond 2021, with work underway at the remaining sites. In accordance with the City's plan, in-unit WiFi will be provided in all new DHS and DV shelters for families with children.

For context, under normal circumstances, a massive build-out like this could easily take over two years to complete because of the required infrastructure work. The City has been able to get this done in less than half the time.

To further ensure students experiencing homelessness were supported during these challenging times, from the outset of the pandemic, DSS-DHS also worked closely with partner agencies, including the

Department of Education, to bring cellular-enabled learning tablets and remote learning options to students in shelter citywide. The City distributed more than 450,000 LTE-enabled iPads to students (including those in shelter) and enabled all central iPads as hotspots, allowing families to connect multiple devices to the iPad to access the internet.

To ensure that every student had immediate access to the tools they needed to support remote learning, DOE committed to swapping carrier service from T-Mobile to Verizon for any shelter student reporting connectivity problems with their iPad. Furthermore, a dedicated Help Desk for students and families experiencing homelessness was created by DOE, providing quick feedback and assistance to any families experiencing technological challenges.

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 6: Removing Homeless Outreach from NYPD

Is there any need to replace NYPD homeless outreach headcount or can it be covered by existing DHS peace officers and MOC outreach teams?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

- The primary role of DHS peace officers is to ensure the safety and security of intake and assessment shelter sites and everyone in it.
- DHS has hired additional nurses which engage unsheltered individuals when their health/safety is at risk – since our outreach teams know that doing so can have an effect on the overall, long-term effort to build trust with individuals living unsheltered in order for them to voluntarily accept services.
- Citywide outreach efforts for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness continue to be led by DSS-DHS.
- Since the start of HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive outreach program in the nation, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new investments and a tripling of the size of those teams. As part of the City’s 24/7/365 outreach efforts, hundreds of highly-trained not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed social workers, canvass the streets, proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, offering services and assistance, working to gain their trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issues that may have caused or contributed to their homelessness in order to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets. All unsheltered outreach in NYC is led and conducted by DSS-DHS and contracted not-for-profit social service providers.
 - Since 2014, the City has redoubled outreach efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to outreach programs and providers:

- **Tripling the number of outreach staff canvassing the streets engaging New Yorkers 24/7/365 since 2014**, from fewer than 200 to more than 600, with those dedicated staff canvassing the streets every day, building relationships over weeks and months through regular contact and concerted engagement with New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, focused on encouraging them to accept services and transition off the streets.
- **Increasing joint outreach operations to engage more New Yorkers and offer more supports**, including expanding joint outreach operations with partner Agencies such as DOHMH, the Parks Department, Department of Sanitation, and the MTA to address conditions as they occur and provide alternative pathways to permanence.

MEETING NOTES:

AGENDA ITEM 7: COVID Virtual & Digital Initiatives

What virtual and digital initiatives introduced because of COVID do you expect to continue? If some are continued, will there be a cost savings? Is a waiver or state legislation required?

AGENCY RESPONSE:

DSS

In response to this unprecedented crisis, we've taken unprecedented steps at DS, HRA and DHS to increase access to vital benefits and resources for New Yorkers in need. This included implementing sweeping reforms at a scale and speed never before seen to ensure the 3-million-plus New Yorkers who count us to make ends meet were able to remain connected to essential benefits and didn't have to worry about losing services, which has been more important than ever. Applications can be made on-line and interviews can be conducted by phone, so no one has to leave their home to come into an office. We remain committed to doing everything we can to meet the needs of as many people as we can—we know New Yorkers are counting on it.

For example, since day one, the de Blasio Administration has fought to make SNAP benefits more easily accessible for eligible New Yorkers, with any New Yorker applying for or already receiving public benefits, including SNAP, now able to apply or manage their benefits online via our innovative AccessHRA application. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DSS-HRA built on the effective blueprint we developed for increasing access to food assistance in order to set up a similarly accessible, remote platform for cash assistance – and we eliminated all adverse case actions during the COVID pandemic period so that our clients need not worry amid the unprecedented challenges. These actions represent sweeping changes/reforms in how we provide benefits, making it easier for clients to access and stay connected to them.

Across the board, to meet the moment, our Agency shifted as many benefits as possible to an online platform and strategically redeployed staff to process applications, ensuring that vulnerable New Yorkers were provided with the resources and services needed to make ends meet during this challenging period.

The sweeping reforms we have implemented and actions we have taken to adapt to this unprecedented pandemic include:

- **In-person appointments/requirements?** At the onset of the outbreak, we advocated for and were granted State waivers, waiving the need for in-person appointments and extending recertifications for SNAP and Cash Assistance so that no client would lose their benefits for not coming into an HRA office for an appointment and no recipient or applicant had to leave their home to come to an HRA office to apply or recertify for benefits.
- **Evictions?** At the onset of the outbreak, working with the courts and advocates, we successfully advocated for a moratorium on evictions — and we also were granted a moratorium on utility shutoffs — so no one had to come into an HRA office to receive rent arrears or utility arrears grants.
- **Food assistance?** When the pandemic hit, this Administration’s previous efforts to make SNAP/food stamps available online via our ACCESS HRA platform became more vitally important than ever before, standing us in good stead for transitioning more clients to this state-of-the-art, easy-to-use online platform, (a shift in benefits usage that had already been underway through our efforts over the past several years, with the vast majority of applications now conducted electronically) and serving as a model for effective remote-access benefits platforms.
- **Food services?** Throughout the height of the pandemic, we worked with the Food Czar’s team, which led the citywide effort to address all New Yorkers’ food needs, including working with providers on delivery routing during these unprecedented emergency times, arranging volunteers for providers that need them, monitoring trends to continually evaluate funding needs, etc.
- **Cash assistance?** At the outset of the pandemic, we were granted a State waiver that we had been seeking for many years, and in less than one week’s time in March, we immediately stood up a system for New Yorkers to apply for Cash Assistance online and by phone, following the successful, effective blueprint we developed as we pioneered remote/mobile access to SNAP/Food Stamps via our ACCESS HRA platform. This sea-change on behalf of our clients is a resource and platform we have sought to provide for many years that makes it easier than ever before to access Cash Assistance anytime, anywhere without having to come into an office, which is also more important than ever before. For new applications for Cash Assistance, New Yorkers used to have to apply in-person – now they don’t have to; and for existing Cash Assistance clients, recipients used to have to attend in-person appointments, i.e. for recertification – now they don’t have to.
- **Rent assistance?** When the pandemic hit, this Administration’s previous efforts to make rent arrears grants available online was also key (accessible online since June 2019) and we built on our efforts in March 2020 by establishing a temporary process so that any New Yorker (including those not already receiving public assistance) can apply for a rent arrears grant online.

As a result, all of our public benefits are available online, making it easier for clients to access and stay connected to them, ensuring there is no reason for clients currently receiving benefits to visit our offices:

- **All benefits available online!** Now, New Yorkers applying for or already receiving public benefits like food stamps, cash assistance, and rent payments, no longer need to seek help in-person for any reason. Food Assistance and Cash Assistance can both be handled online and by phone, and New Yorkers can request emergency rent assistance grants online and by phone -> visit

ACCESS HRA at www.nyc.gov/ACCESSHRA to see if you qualify for SNAP/food stamps, Cash Assistance, and/or rent grants, and/or call [311](tel:311) to find your local pantry or kitchen.

- **Apply for Medicaid via NYS.** New Yorkers can also apply for Medicaid via the State directly online and via the phone -> visit <https://info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/> or call the NYS State of Health at [1-855-355-5777](tel:1-855-355-5777) to see if you qualify for Medicaid and/or other free and low-cost health insurance.

Changing how we provide benefits, deliver services, and support our clients has also enabled us to protect our staff in this process:

- **Brick-and-mortar vs mobile platform?** As a result of all these initiatives, we saw significant increases in applications for benefits online at the outset of the pandemic alongside a significant and continued decrease in foot traffic in our offices throughout CY2020. As part of continually adapting to these changes, redeploying staff where necessary, while guaranteeing essential services and supports continue, we consolidated locations so that there is typically one program site per borough. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/locations/locations.page>
- **Helping staff work from home where possible.** Additionally, these reforms/actions/consolidations have also enabled us to follow the guidance of the City and health experts, strategically transitioning as many staff as possible to performing essential Agency work from home and helping them avoid unnecessarily leaving their homes where appropriate. Staff are prepared to provide assistance to anyone who needs to manage their case or apply by phone, including to talk through or help senior New Yorkers navigate the process.
- **Keeping our doors open no matter what.** Of course, we are a lifeline Agency, so our staff are essential workers and ‘social services’ first responders on the frontline, supporting New Yorkers throughout this pandemic without skipping a beat – same as first responders, grocery store staff, and other employees citywide and statewide who have been deemed essential because of the vital services they provide. To that end, select individuals have reported for duty throughout this pandemic and continue to report for duty every day at our consolidated locations where they can assist anyone who chooses to visit a center in-person, ensuring an in-person accessibility option is available in the event that there are questions that cannot be resolved on the phone/online. For offices that remained open, in consultation with union partners, we have implemented appropriate social distancing measures for the remaining staff as well as our clients.

Staffing/redeployment shows a strategic effort to meet the need:

- While we consolidated the footprint of our brick-and-mortar centers during the height of the pandemic, shifting the vast majority of staff to working from home, and making our services available online/remotely, with in-center foot traffic dropping dramatically as the City and State directed New Yorkers to stay at home as much as possible, we, of course, had to ensure that several centers remained open throughout the City to support individuals who had no other option and needed to visit centers in person. So, while many staff shifted to working from home during the pandemic, as a vital lifeline Agency that must keep our doors open 24/7 no matter what, it was our mission and responsibility to ensure our centers were appropriately staffed throughout this emergency period to meet need (implementing best Health practices and social distancing guidelines, in partnership with our Union colleagues, every step of the way).
 - Overall, through this Agency’s comprehensive efforts to follow the science/data and quickly implement best practices, we were able to strategically shift a high point of approximately 84% of our total approximately 14,000 staff to performing essential work duties from home. Staff who were working completely from home were/are given Agency devices, as well as necessary training.
 - Additionally, as New Yorkers have made significant progress combatting COVID-19 in the past year-plus, positivity rates have remained low, and the City recovers and reopens, NYC

DSS-HRA staff have been returning to work, with the Agency phasing out fully remote work for employees and staff now reporting to physical locations on a hybrid basis.

Assessing need: Cash Assistance:

- **Changing how clients access benefits**
 - Prior to COVID, New Yorkers could only apply for Cash Assistance (CA) in-person at one of DSS-HRA's Job Centers. At the outset of the pandemic, DSS-HRA was granted a State waiver that we had been seeking for many years, and in less than one week's time in March 2020, we immediately stood up a system for New Yorkers to apply for CA online and by phone, following the successful, effective blueprint we developed as we pioneered remote/mobile access to SNAP/Food Assistance via our ACCESS HRA platform.
 - This sea-change on behalf of our clients is a resource and platform we have sought to provide for many years that makes it easier than ever before to access CA anytime and anywhere without having to come into a physical DSS-HRA facility – which is more important than ever before.
 - To that end, since this policy shift was enacted, more than 80 percent of CA applications have been submitted electronically since the pandemic began (83% submitted electronically from March thru December 2020; increasing to ~85% in January thru May 2021)
 - At the beginning of March 2020, DSS-HRA advocated for and was granted waivers by the State allowing for the launch of a platform that permitted New Yorkers to apply for CA remotely, making it easier than ever before for individuals in need to apply for assistance.
 - In addition, DSS-HRA also advocated for and was granted waivers by the State temporarily suspending many of the ongoing engagement requirements, which are generally necessary to remaining enrolled/continuing to demonstrate eligibility for benefits, such as program participation requirements like employment programs and/or substance use services – and which, in the past, would have led to more cases closing in the normal course.
- To that end, with CA cases closing at historically low rates over the past year-plus (alongside the overall application increases at the outset of the pandemic), there has necessarily been a steady increase in the CA caseload since the beginning of the pandemic.
 - In particular, from March through June 2020, DSS-HRA experienced a significant increase in applications for CA benefits, with CA application volume returning to slightly higher-than-normal levels in the second half of 2020 through the first half of 2021.

Assessing need – SNAP benefits:

- **Summary trends show increased demand at outset of pandemic**
 - Since the stay-at-home order began in mid-March 2020 and the economic impact of the pandemic became evident, DSS-HRA experienced record increases in applications for SNAP benefits in CY2020.
 - In particular, from March through June 2020, DSS-HRA experienced a significant increase in applications for SNAP benefits, with SNAP application volume returning to slightly higher than normal levels in the second half of 2020 through the first half of 2021.
- **Changing how clients access benefits**
 - In February 2020, 76% of SNAP applications were submitted electronically outside of centers, with this figure increasing significantly to approximately 98% in May and June 2020 and remaining in the mid-90s (94.2%) since then/thru CY2021 YTD (January thru May 2021).

DSS-DHS

As part of our pandemic-related response, DSS-DHS implemented a range of reforms and initiatives to strengthen the remote delivery of services and supports for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, including offering remote options and further streamlining the intake process for families with children experiencing homelessness and New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and doing everything we can to ensure that key rehousing and social service supports were also remotely accessible to clients in shelter:

- **Re-housing supports:** At the outset of the pandemic, DSS-DHS and our provider-partners switched to virtual apartment viewings and inspections when working to connect clients with suitable permanent housing opportunities. In addition to this, once clients identified suitable housing, we ensured the timely submission of housing applications and rent payments using remote tools so that clients faced the least-possible barriers when exiting shelter during these unprecedented times.
 - o Notably, despite the significant obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and reasonable/expected related rehousing challenges, more New Yorkers were able to secure housing in FY20 compared to FY19 using CityFHEPS, which is just one of the wide range of rental assistance and rehousing programs we offer (recognizing there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing homelessness). We have continued to make significant progress in FY21 (through March) -- on track to meet or exceed FY20.
 - o During this period, no matter the circumstance, pandemic or not, all individuals and families were free to move into permanent housing they have identified, and our committed staff worked hard to assist them throughout the process.
 - o Housing specialists and case managers are essential workers: social services 'first responders' and staff on the frontline, who continued throughout this crisis to connect New Yorkers in need to the vital resources that can help them make ends meet, which was even more important during this unprecedented emergency period.
- **Remote re-application at PATH intake for families with children experiencing homelessness:** At the outset of the pandemic, we implemented reforms to the shelter intake process for families with children, including streamlining the shelter application process back in March 2020 through the use of telephone interviews and conferences, and submission of documents by email, fax, and other tools that enables remote access:
 - o Re-applicants were not required to come to the intake centers and were able remain in their shelter placement. They had the opportunity to re-apply by phone. Required documents could be submitted remotely, via phone, email, or fax to our intake staff. Applicants who had follow up appointments with NoVA (No Violence Again), DHS legal, and HDU (HRA's Housing Diversion Unit) could conduct their assessments via phone.
 - o While new applicants needed to make an initial visit to PATH to apply, children need not accompany the parent, and parents are able to use FaceTime or Skype to confirm the children. Follow up documents and assessments could be conducted remotely.

- **Expedited intake processing for single adults experiencing unsheltered homelessness:** As part of our intensified outreach efforts at high-priority end-of-line stations citywide during the MTA’s pandemic-related overnight subway closure, we not only redoubled our comprehensive outreach efforts while aggressively expanding dedicated resources for New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, but also implemented reforms to the intake process for this population by equipping our outreach staff with new tools, and giving them the ability to conduct abbreviated/expedited intake with clients directly on the platform, with the goal of bringing more unsheltered New Yorkers off the subways amid the COVID-19 crisis. Through this process, New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness interested in receiving services went through an abbreviated assessment and were directly transported to shelter services/placement. Throughout this outreach process, we ensured that placements were expedited.
- **Option to remotely access social services/supports across DSS-DHS shelter sites:** During the pandemic, DSS-DHS offered remote options (such as FaceTime/Skype/phone) for conducting appointments/meetings wherein case managers and client care coordinators work closely with each client to help them re-stabilize their lives.
 - These meetings/supports entail case management, individual and group counselling, permanency planning and housing placement assistance, biopsychosocial assessments and wellness checks, referrals to medical and mental health services, support groups, independent living and life skills workshops, and residential services and support in finding and securing employment.
 - Additionally, as part of our commitment to ensuring the stability of families and children experiencing homelessness during the pandemic, DSS-DHS also used these remote platforms as an opportunity to pilot targeted interventions, such as the ‘Strong in Shelter’ initiative which seeks to address postpartum depression in mothers. The initiative was developed in partnership with New York University and the Robin Hood Foundation and worked particularly well as the virtual element allowed for more diversified/substantial group participation including mothers across different shelter sites.

MEETING NOTES: