

Older Americans Month: Communities of Strength

May is Older Americans Month and this year's theme, "Communities of Strength", is fitting since we had to rely on community more than ever during this pandemic. In the early stage of this unprecedented pandemic, we relied on our community of first responders to provide safety and comfort and we were united in our celebration of their efforts every day at 7pm – the true essence of community. And in a year in which strength and resilience were required, older adults led the charge. They maintained community ties by quickly adapting to this "new normal" and learning new technology that kept them connected to friends and family. They were also among the first populations to roll-up their sleeves and get vaccinated, protecting themselves and those around them.

It is important to recognize and honor older adults' contributions by keeping communities strong and vibrant. And as such, we need to ensure they can thrive and live in the same communities they built in a safe, supported and dignified manner. The Department for the Aging (DFTA) and the Mayor are working to do just that by creating and investing in a breakthrough five-year Community Care Plan that will help older adults age-in-place with their family, neighbors, and friends while receiving an array of vital community support.

New Yorkers prefer to live in their home rather than go to institutions or nursing homes. Those who do remain in their community experience better health and mental outcomes than those who live in nursing homes. Equally important, they shop, worship, volunteer and continue contributing to the community. In this first year of the five-year Community Care Plan, the Mayor provided \$49 million to increase the number of Older Adults Centers (OAC) and Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) and meet the needs of the city's growing multicultural older adult population. There will be 25 additional centers. This is the first expansion and largest investment in 20 years. We are very excited about this plan because it adds more adults centers and NORCs, which are the hubs of all community services. It addresses today's needs, looks into the future, and lays a pathway for future community care investments.

In years two to five, it will increase case assistance services, home delivered meals and home care assistance that provide a safety net for those older adults who remain in their homes.



Older adults at the E. Roberts Moore Neighborhood Senior Center in the Bronx in 2018. This month, some senior centers began offering grab-and-go meals as a low-risk, outdoor activity.

It also increases caregiver services, such as respite, counseling and transportation for the family and friend caregivers of older adults.

New York is the leading age friendly city in the nation, it now is the leading age-inclusive city where older adults can age-in-place.

One recurring question during this past month has been when will senior centers open? I am very pleased to report that in close partnership with Dr. Dave Chokshi, the City's doctor, DFTA received the green light to resume grab-and-go meal service at senior centers as the first low-risk, outdoor activity. This is an important first step towards fully reopening.

Resuming grab-and-go meal service will provide a gradual safe approach to reopening senior centers. To successfully reopen, we need to ensure that most senior center staff and older adults are vaccinated. With grab-and-go service, we are launching a new vaccination effort to provide vaccines for center staff

and participants that have not been vaccinated. Grab-and-go service will provide us with the opportunity to help even more older adults get vaccinated, such as by having mobile vaccination sites or on-demand transportation services available at centers where vaccination rates are lower and require more direct outreach and support. We are working with the Health Department and the Vaccine Command Center in a drive to get senior center staff vaccinated. This effort, along with our partnership with FDNY to provide in-home vaccinations to homebound elders and our continued work with the Vaccine Command Center, ensures that we can reach all older New Yorkers.

As we all know, vaccination remains critical in our fight against COVID-19. We implore that you, your family, and especially your elders to get vaccinated.

We are resilient. We are a community. Together, we will defeat this and reopen strongly and safely.



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