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Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s (NYC Health Department) Chief Medical Officer (CMO) quarterly newsletter, *The Bridge*!

This newsletter is to help keep health care delivery partners updated, informed and connected with the work of the NYC Health Department. Each newsletter will provide:

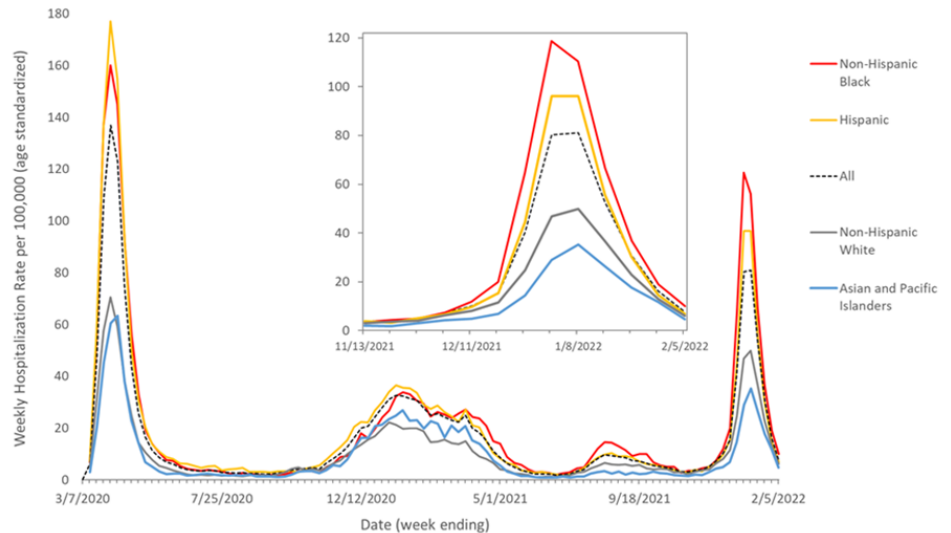
- Highlights and updates on the CMO Strategic Plan
- Recent data findings and publications
- New tools and campaigns
- Information on upcoming events
- Updates on recent community events
- Spotlights on NYC Health Department programs and staff doing innovative community work

Your input and collaboration are vital to the NYC Health Department’s mission of protecting and promoting the health of New Yorkers. You can share feedback on what you would like to see in future issues of this newsletter or ask how to connect with NYC Health Department work by emailing chiefmedicalofficer@health.nyc.gov.

Message from the CMO

In January 2022, the NYC Health Department released a report on the omicron wave in NYC. While conducting our analysis, we identified that COVID-19 hospitalizations were two times greater among Black New Yorkers than White New Yorkers. This finding was the impetus for a newly released Black report on why Black New Yorkers were disproportionately hospitalized during the omicron wave. The figure below shows weekly hospitalization rates in NYC by race from March 2020 to February 2022.

Our analysis of omicron-related hospitalizations also revealed that neighborhoods with high percentages of Black residents had disproportionately more hospitalizations. These inequities are rooted in structural racism and led to increased COVID-19 exposure due to use of public transportation, limited remote work options, delays in COVID-19 diagnosis and a four-year lower life expectancy among Black New Yorkers.



The new report intends to describe the inequities that likely contributed to the higher hospitalization rates among Black New Yorkers during the omicron wave and offer critical interventions to address the structural racism that primes Black New Yorkers to experience avoidable poor health outcomes. These critical interventions emphasize a place-based approach, an intentional and deliberate investment in neighborhoods and settings with the worst health outcomes. A place-based approach to mitigating COVID-19 inequities includes investing in community- and faith-based organizations to distribute masks and at-home test kits, and partnering with health systems to expand access to monoclonal antibodies, antivirals and inpatient COVID-19 treatments. The NYC Health Department calls on our health care delivery partners, health care plans, providers and community-based organizations to invest in critical anti-racist and equity COVID-19 practices such as:

- Improving race and ethnicity data collection at point-of-care to at least 80% accuracy
- Integrating COVID-19 vaccination into routine inpatient and outpatient operations
- Investing in and partnering with community- and faith-based organizations to distribute masks and at-home test kits
- Improving access to monoclonal antibodies and antivirals in communities at high risk of severe covid due to longstanding inequities such as non-White and Hispanic groups

To read the white paper, visit on.nyc.gov/racial-inequities-omicron.

CMO Strategic Plan Updates

Read below to learn more about each domain of the CMO Strategic Plan.

Domain 1: Bridging Public Health and Health Care

NYC launched the Public Health Corps (PHC) in September 2021 to expand the public health workforce by engaging community groups, including community health workers (CHWs), and eliminate COVID-19 disparities. This landmark initiative is one of the largest municipal investments in public health workforce in the U.S. and aims to address pandemics parallel to COVID-19 that currently impact NYC.

- CHWs in 85 community-based organizations and 17 community health centers serve their communities through health education, health navigation, and health and social needs assessment.
- Community engagement is grounded in transformative, adaptive and anti-racism approaches to reduce the unfair and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and advance recovery in the most impacted communities.
- The PHC has contributed to the improvement in COVID-19 vaccination rates in the 74 Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity (TRIE) ZIP codes across NYC. As of February 10, 2022, at least 70% of adults in 71 TRIE ZIP codes are fully vaccinated and at least 70% of all residents in 41 TRIE ZIP codes are fully vaccinated.

For more information about the PHC and our partner organizations, email nhc@health.nyc.gov.

Domain 2: Advancing the NYC Health Department's Commitment to Anti-racism in Public Health Practice and Policy

The upcoming New York State (NYS) Medicaid 1115 waiver is a historic opportunity to take anti-racism and community-engaged approaches to payment, equity and delivery improvements. The NYC Health Department will work with the NYS Department of Health to implement the waiver once it is approved. The CMO has convened leadership across the NYC Health Department to identify programmatic priorities over the coming months such as:

- Supporting a rigorous, equity-focused and community-engaged implementation of social determinants of health networks with our community-based and provider partners
- Supporting equity-focused and value-based arrangements with payors, providers and community-based organizations

Domain 3: Building Institutional Accountability

Maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity (SMM) remain major health equity concerns in NYC due to racial disparities. Structural racism and discrimination have been shown to significantly contribute to these disparities. To address this, the NYC Health Department launched the Maternity Hospitals Quality Improvement Network (MHQIN), which works with 14 maternity hospitals to enhance maternity care and reduce maternal mortality and SMM across NYC. Since 2019, MHQIN has implemented the following strategies to address racial bias, structural racism and access to health-promoting resources:

- **Trauma-informed care and implicit bias trainings:** More than 1,100 maternity providers were trained in implicit bias and trauma- and resilience- informed concepts to learn how to raise awareness of personal biases, promote strategies that mitigate bias and transform hospitals into anti-racist institutions.
- **Enhanced SMM surveillance:** Hospitals identified and reviewed over 500 SMM cases using MHQIN data collection tools that promote in-depth quality improvement committee reviews.

- **Quality improvement strategies:** Additional funding was provided to all hospitals to implement chosen quality improvement projects that address drivers of SMM disparities in their patient populations.
- **Doula-friendly hospitals:** The MHQIN provided technical support to seven hospitals to develop and implement doula-friendly policies and practices, established formal referral pathways to community-based doula programs, and supported the training of 59 community-based doulas to provide birth and postpartum support.
- **Promoting respect in maternity care settings:** Over 600 maternity staff were trained in reproductive justice history and concepts. Over 6,000 copies of the NYC Standards of Respectful Care at Birth posters and brochures were distributed to all hospitals. Report cards are being developed to show hospitals on a continuum of respectful maternity care.
- **Chronic disease prevention and self-management:** Together with clinical and community organizations, the NYC Health Department held nine chronic disease prevention and self-management workshops and six women’s health empowerment seminars to support self-advocacy and teach self-management techniques to over 250 women of reproductive age.

CMO Spotlight: “A Call for Antiracist Action”

A recent article published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* highlights the ineffectiveness and potential harmful impact of “colorblind” medicine as an approach to address inequities. The authors claim that a race-conscious approach is critical to dismantling structural and medical racism. Furthermore, the authors, to fight the backlash of race-explicit medicine and implement equity practices, urge all health care providers to:

- Publicly support those who have been targeted by racist groups, such as Drs. Michelle Morse and Bram Wispelwey
- Focus and implement on race-conscious, multilevel approaches in addressing inequities among marginalized patient populations
- Publicly report anti-racist and equity work and progress

To read the article, visit [nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2201950](https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2201950).

Program Spotlight: New Family Home Visits Program

After a delayed rollout due to COVID-19, the NYC Health Department has announced the opening of the New Family Home Visits Program. This initiative leverages existing community-based newborn programming to provide tailored services to first-time families in public housing or engaged with child welfare. Services provided through this new program include breastfeeding support, creating a safe home, mental health screenings and doula services.

To read the press release, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://www.nyc.gov/health) and search for **new home-visiting services**.

New Releases, Updates and Recent Events

Racial Inequities in COVID-19 Hospitalizations During the Omicron Wave in NYC

In response to the increased hospitalization rate among Black New Yorkers in NYC during the omicron surge, the CMO published a white paper examining the available data and offering an assessment of the underlying roots of this inequity.

To read the white paper, visit on.nyc.gov/racial-inequities-omicron.

Integrated Pest Management With Allergen Reduction (IPM-AR) Project

The NYC Health Department is working with the Medicaid and Child Health Plus-managed health care plans in New York City on a multi-year pilot program to provide IPM-AR to children who are hospitalized with asthma and have an allergy to pests as soon as possible after discharge to reduce subsequent hospital use. The project aims to show the cost-effectiveness of this intervention so health plans support it as a standard Medicaid benefit for children. The key role for hospitals is identifying potentially eligible children and referring them to a nonprofit organization that provides the service on behalf of all the health plans. All NYC hospitals are welcome to refer.

For more information, email healthsystems@nyc.health.gov.

Plan to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis as a Major Public Health Threat in New York City by 2030

In December 2021, the NYC Health Department released this plan after a yearlong collaboration with key stakeholders from Hep Free NYC, including community health providers, researchers, advocates and New Yorkers with lived experience of hepatitis B or C. Strategies were developed to expand and increase accessibility to stigma-free, culturally and linguistically responsive care, and indicators to measure progress over time.

To read the plan, visit on.nyc.gov/viral-hepatitis-plan.

Health of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas Living in New York City

In December 2021, the NYC Health Department released an Epi Research Report describing key health indicators of NYC's Indigenous communities. This report revealed inequities in health care access and chronic conditions. Like many marginalized communities, COVID-19 has caused a convergence of existing health and economic inequities that have resulted in an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure, morbidity and mortality among Indigenous people.

To read the report, visit on.nyc.gov/indigenous-peoples-health.

NYC Health Department Commemorates 100-year anniversary of the Neighborhood Health Action Centers

November 2021 marked the 100-year anniversary of the East Harlem Neighborhood Health Action Center, originally called the East Harlem District Health Center. This center was the first place-based public health approach in NYC for health and social services. After the success of the East Harlem District Health Center, the NYC Health Department created district health centers in all five boroughs. Today, the NYC Health Department's three Action Centers (East Harlem, Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx) carry on the legacy of these critically important public health establishments. The Neighborhood Health Action Centers continue to be key entities in the NYC Health Department's major initiatives.

To read the press release, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **100 year anniversary of neighborhood health action centers**.

Upcoming Events

First CMO Quarterly Convening

On Friday, March 4, 2022, at noon, Dr. Morse will hold her first quarterly convening, bringing together partners representing all sectors of the NYC health care landscape. These quarterly convenings will focus on updating partners on progress for initiatives described in the inaugural CMO Strategic Plan, strategizing on citywide equity endeavors and listening to stakeholder priorities and challenges in advancing health equity in health care delivery.

To register, visit bit.ly/3M9Qoz3.

Third Coalition to End Racism in Clinical Algorithms Meeting

On Friday, March 25, the Third Coalition to End Racism in Clinical Algorithms will hold its third meeting.

To learn more or join, email ajoseph4@health.nyc.gov.

For more updates, follow [@nyhealthy](#) and [@nyhealthcmo](#) on Instagram and Twitter.