



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
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Acting Health Commissioner

Testimony

of

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New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

before the

New York City Council
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction

On

Oversight: Examining New York City Opioid Settlement Fund Investments

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Good afternoon, Chair Lee, Chair Narcisse and members of the Committees. I am Dr. Rebecca Linn-Walton, Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (the Health Department). On behalf of Acting Health Commissioner, Dr. Michelle Morse, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am pleased to be here to discuss how the Health Department is utilizing the funds obtained through litigation efforts and settlements secured from manufacturers and distributors of prescription opioids by both the New York City Law Department and the Office of New York Attorney.

New York City is still facing a devastating overdose crisis, and addressing this crisis is at the forefront of the Health Department's strategic priorities and planning. A central goal in HealthyNYC, the city's roadmap for increasing average life expectancy, is to reduce overdose deaths by 25% by 2030. We work closely with our partners in the Mayor's Office, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Health + Hospitals, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, New York State, and community-based organizations to make progress towards this goal. I am proud to be a part of this work.

First, I want to address some common questions regarding the allocation of opioid settlement funding across New York State. We have included, as Appendix A, a pie chart to show the distribution of funds. As you can see New York City was allotted 20% of the opioid settlement funds that were secured as a result of the New York City and New York State Attorney General's lawsuits.

The Mayor's Office and OMB oversee these funds and determine how they are spent across city agencies as part of the city's budgeting process. Appendix B outlines the flow of opioid settlement funds to the city and the breakout of funding by agencies represented here today. The city developed a phased approach to deploying the opioid settlement funds to address this crisis. With the New York City allocation, we are expanding, improving, and modernizing the entire spectrum of substance use care and support, from harm reduction to treatment and recovery, so that we can meet people where they are and support their health goals. The Health Department's role in addressing this crisis and supporting New Yorkers with substance use disorders is part of this continuum.

At the Health Department, we start with the data. The data gives us insights on the prevalence of substance use and its associated health impacts. This creates a foundation for the City to make informed programmatic decisions and investments. In October, we published the annual summary on overdose deaths in 2023. The number of overdose deaths was 3,046 — a 1 percent decrease from 2022 — marking the first decline since 2018. Additionally, according to provisional data, there were 616 overdose deaths in the first quarter of 2024, the lowest quarter on record since 2020.

This is a welcome stabilization after years of continual increase. Every life saved is a triumph worth acknowledging. This information also tells us that there is still a great deal of work ahead of us. While we are on pace with the rest of the country in decreases in deaths, we continue to lose a New Yorker to fatal overdose every four hours. Inequities in certain neighborhoods and populations remain stubbornly high, such as older Black men, and we are seeing increases in

overdose among Latino/a New Yorkers and women. The Health Department is committed to reducing these inequities and supporting healing in the communities most harmed by this crisis.

The Health Department also implements a significant array of programs to reduce substance use and its negative health consequences. This includes the delivery of substance use prevention and harm reduction services. We contract with 14 syringe service providers and 6 outreach and syringe litter teams. These are community-based organizations that provide access to sterile syringes, as well as collect and safely dispose of used syringes found in the communities they serve. They also provide a range of health services including naloxone distribution, overdose education, HIV and hepatitis C testing and counseling, drug treatment counseling, support groups and drop-in counseling, opioid addiction treatment with buprenorphine, and referrals to physical and mental health care, drug treatment. The Health Department also provides community naloxone and test strip distribution, drug checking initiatives, and education and training services across the city.

Given the scale of the crisis, we have implemented innovative solutions – such as Public Health Vending Machines, which are in 4 locations and provide 24/7 convenient and anonymous access to public health and wellness supplies; and the Relay program, a nonfatal overdose response initiative. Relay supports people who have experienced a nonfatal overdose by sending a peer Wellness Advocate to participating emergency departments to provide support, overdose risk reduction education, and Naloxone. This is all in addition to supporting Buprenorphine access, treatment and recovery, and peer workforce development programs.

As you can see, the Health Department provides critical insight and programming to the City's data-driven, evidence-based approach. The opioid settlement funds enable the City to enhance this work and better meet the demands of this crisis.

I want to turn now to Health Department programming supported by the opioid settlement funds. Beginning in Fiscal Year 2023, the Health Department utilized \$8.6 million in opioid settlement funding to expand wrap-around services and hours at existing syringe services programs to strengthen care connections and increase hours and support community naloxone distribution. As part of the City's phased release of opioid settlement funding, the Health Department's total allocation will scale up to \$23.7 million annually beginning in Fiscal Year 2026. This enables us to address gaps in the continuum of support and care and reduce overdose deaths.

Starting in Fiscal Year 2026, the Health Department will use \$4.1 million to expand wrap around services at all 14 Syringe Service Providers. One million will be used to expand the Relay program to two additional emergency departments, which will bring the total number to 17 emergency rooms city-wide. Three million will improve and expand substance use service provision on Staten Island through partnerships with 8 community-based organizations across prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services.

Additionally, four million will be allocated to expand Methadone and Buprenorphine treatment programs, and three million to expand recovery supports. The vast majority of funds will be directed to community-based organizations selected through a regulated procurement process. One of the RFPs for this new allocation was released today. The other procurement

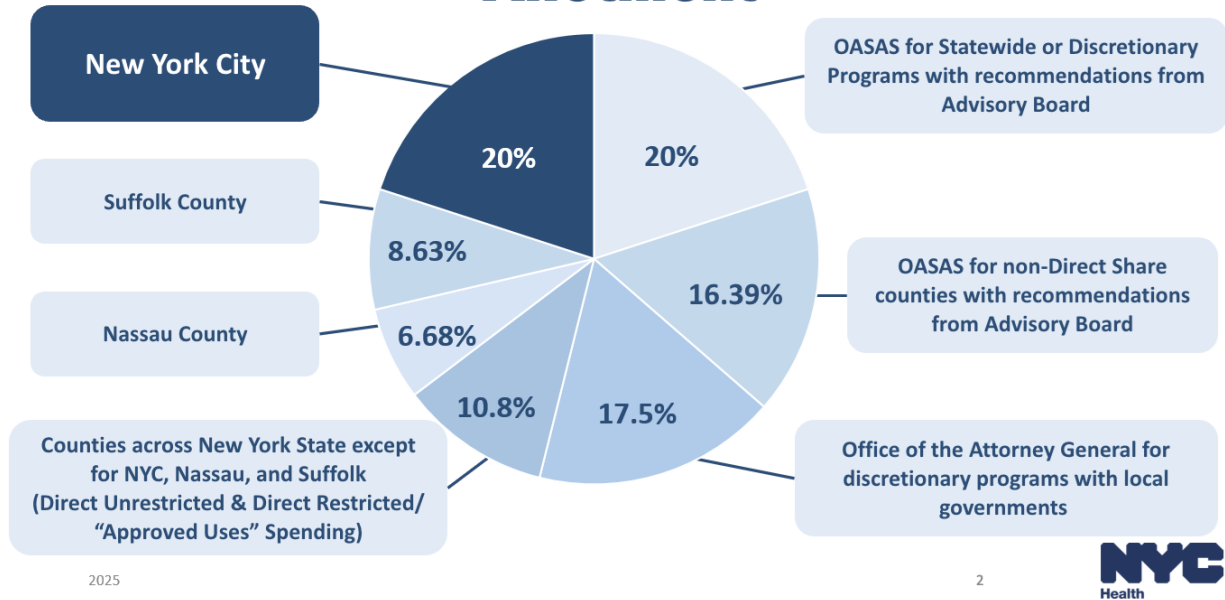
documents are being prepared and will be released shortly. The Health Department maintains its commitment to providing place-based initiatives in communities most deeply affected by the opioid crisis. Our programs and initiatives span the full continuum of care and support.

I am grateful to be doing this work alongside my City partners in order to prevent more avoidable death and improve the lives of New Yorkers. The Department is also deeply grateful to the Attorney General's Office and Governor Hochul for their work, alongside the City's, to hold bad actors accountable and secure these funds to invest back into the health of our communities. I have spent my career working directly in the field building and supporting programs that meet people in their moments of greatest crisis. These are our neighbors, our family, and even some of us in this room. Everyone deserves compassion and quality care in their darkest moments.

The Health Department appreciates the Council's continued partnership in promoting the health and wellbeing of all New Yorkers. I look forward to answering your questions. My colleague Dr. Dan Schatz will now give testimony on behalf of Health and Hospitals.

Appendix A

Opioid Settlement Sharing Agreement Allotment



Appendix B

