



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE**

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Written Testimony

of

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

before the

New York City Council

Committee on Women and Gender Equity

Committee on Hospitals

On

Oversight: Improving Maternal Health in New York City

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New York, NY

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) on our work to improve maternal health in NYC.

[HealthyNYC](#) is the City's vision for improving life expectancy and creating a healthier city for all. The Health Department is working with partners across the city to ensure New Yorkers can realize their full health potential, regardless of who they are, where they are from, and where they live. Supporting the health of women and people who give birth is a critical aspect of this work. Extreme racial disparities persist in maternal mortality. Black women and people who give birth are five times more likely than their white counterparts to die from pregnancy-associated causes. As part of HealthyNYC, we have set a goal to reduce maternal death rates among Black women and people who give birth by 10% by 2030.

Last month, the Health Department published an annual report on [Maternal Mortality in NYC](#), in collaboration with New York City's Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) that highlighted concerning and urgent findings.

The report showed that the number of pregnancy-associated deaths increased by 13.7 percent, from 58 deaths in 2021 to 66 deaths in 2022- the highest number of pregnancy-associated deaths since 2016. Black non-Hispanic women and people who gave birth accounted for 42.4 percent of pregnancy-associated deaths, despite representing only 17.5 percent of live births. The leading cause of pregnancy-associated deaths in 2022 was mental health conditions, followed by cardiovascular conditions. The report also includes recommendations for policy makers, hospital systems, and other stakeholders based on these findings.

The Health Department remains committed to reversing these sobering trends and eliminating these unjust racial disparities. We do so in part by providing a range of programs that support the health of families who are expecting or have young children. This includes the New Family Home Visits Initiative (NFHV), which provides citywide access to high-quality home visiting services for new families with a focus on maternal mental health, chronic disease, and early childhood development. NFHV prioritizes first-time families in Taskforce on Racial Equity and Inclusion (TRIE) neighborhoods, those who live in NYCHA in these neighborhoods, and those who are engaged with the Administration for Children's Services. We also support the Citywide Doula Initiative, which increases access to no-cost doula care to promote critical birth support at a sustainable wage for doulas.

Last month, we launched the City's first-ever pilot of the [Neighborhood Stress-Free Zone \(NSFZ\)](#) in Brownsville, Brooklyn. This initiative expands resources for maternal health education, social needs support, and connections to mental and behavioral health services. This is an important step forward as the Health Department advances its broader Maternal Home Collaborative, aimed at improving birth equity.

While we are proud of our work, there is so much more to be done. We look forward to continued partnership with the Council to improve maternal health and address associated racial disparities.