



**Testimony**

Of

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Commissioner of Health  
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**

before the

**New York City Council Committee on Health**

on

**The FY27 Preliminary Budget**

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City Hall  
New York City**

Good morning, Chair Schulman and members of the committee. I am Dr. Alister Martin, Commissioner of Health at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. I am joined today by our Chief Financial Officer, Aaron Anderson, and members of my senior leadership team. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on our Preliminary Budget as it relates to public health.

I am proud to represent the Mamdani administration, which puts forward a vision of a New York City we can all afford. That agenda is not secondary to public health—it is central to it. In our city, one in four New Yorkers are living in poverty. We know that has devastating impacts on health. On average, New Yorkers in the poorest parts of our city die nearly seven years earlier than those in our wealthiest neighborhoods. That’s seven fewer years to spend with those they love.

As we work to design a budget that supports a prosperous New York City, we do it with that in mind. We have our work cut out for us. The data makes it clear that the problems of health and wealth inequity are intimately related. The good news is that the solutions are too. Mayor Mamdani’s affordability agenda and our health agenda are aligned. We are focused on buying New Yorkers more time, more health, and more joy in the city we all call home.

At the New York City Health Department, that work is not new. For decades, we have been working at the hyper-local level to meet New Yorkers where they are. Every single day, we are making systemic changes by building individual connections. In order to change the material conditions of people’s lives at scale, we have to move one conversation at a time.

Many of our programs are built on that foundational understanding. For example, the City recently put \$20 million toward the Strong Foundations Initiative, which will grow perinatal and early childhood mental health services and expand the Nurse Family Partnership program. I have seen firsthand just how meaningful that program is.

My mom worked as an NFP nurse for nearly 15 years. I know the impact of that program not by the statistics that measure its success, but by the children’s books and toys that would pile up in the back of my mom’s gold Chevy and the stories she told me about mentoring new moms who were considering going back to school or changing careers like she did. A few weeks ago, I got to be a part of making that announcement about the expansion of services in New York City, with my mom in the front row.

Public health happens in a million small ways, and it is grounded in the relationships we build across our city. All of that work, taken together, contributed to New York City reaching its highest life expectancy in recorded history. That didn’t happen passively.

Our most recent data shows that in 2024, citywide life expectancy was 83.2 years. That’s higher than pre-pandemic numbers, and it’s a testament to a whole-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, years-long efforts on overdose prevention, and longstanding community work to move the needle on chronic disease.

The increase in lifespan did not happen by accident, and it represents a monumental success. That said, we are far from finished. There are still devastating inequities in life expectancy by race, by neighborhood, and by income. We are working to improve health outcomes for New Yorkers harmed by the consequences of historic disinvestment.

We know, too, that we have to interpret these numbers in context. Today's landscape is entirely different than it was in 2024. Our latest data show none of the impact of the federal administration's efforts to sow distrust, revoke life-saving benefits, and send health care costs soaring. Public health and public services are being dismantled.

Yet we are working hard to maintain our progress in the health and longevity of New Yorkers. We stand as a bulwark against misinformation spewing out of Washington, DC. We have done so since the inauguration of this administration, and we will continue to do so in the months and years ahead.

For decades, the New York City Health Department was closely tethered to national and international public health infrastructure. In the past year, the United States has adopted an increasingly isolationist approach to international work and a fractured public health strategy domestically. We are left to fill in the gaps as much as possible.

Earlier this year, the United States withdrew from the World Health Organization. In the wake of that decision, we became the first municipal health department to join the WHO Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network.

Following an unprecedented overhaul of the federally recommended childhood vaccination schedule, we continue to distribute more than 2.5 million doses of pediatric vaccines to health care providers across our city and to offer clear guidance where the federal government creates confusion. On Monday, a federal court temporarily blocked the CDC's attempt to change the longstanding childhood vaccination schedule. That is a public health win, but it also speaks to the gravity of the federal misinformation we are up against.

Without reliable leadership at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we are creating new avenues for collaboration and information. We continue to work with our regional partners as part of the recently formed Northeast Public Health Collaborative.

We are living in a time of heightened risk, and our team is working around the clock to protect the health of New Yorkers and everyone who travels through our city. That takes sustained investment from all levels of government and the private sector.

I will now turn to the funding that makes our operations possible.

The New York City Health Department has approximately 7,000 employees, all of whom serve more than 8.5 million New Yorkers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 2025 marked the third consecutive year in which hiring outpaced staff departures. We are successfully rebuilding our team to full capacity and recovering from staffing shortages caused by pandemic burnout.

We have an operating budget of 2 billion dollars for fiscal year 2027. About one billion of that funding is City Tax Levy; the remaining billion dollars are sourced from federal, state, and private funding.

At the city level, we're grateful to see a continued commitment to public health as we discuss the 2027 Preliminary Budget. In particular, we are encouraged to see resources dedicated to child care site inspections. Funding was also added for outreach and education for Early Intervention services at 2-K sites.

In response to the outbreak of *Legionella* in Harlem last summer, additional resources have been appropriated to support more cooling tower inspections, disease surveillance and testing, and community outreach and education. We appreciate the new funding to avert future Legionnaires' disease community clusters as much as possible.

Additionally, we are happy to provide funding for community-based organizations that serve LGBTQ New Yorkers, especially as federal attacks on queer communities continue.

And lastly, as a kid from Queens, I am particularly excited to see start-up funding for a Jamaica Neighborhood Health Action Center to invest in the health of this community. Our brick-and-mortar presence in priority neighborhoods is a critical part of our work, and I am encouraged by the resources to expand that model to Queens.

At the state level, the Governor's fiscal year 2027 Executive Budget for New York State provides crucial support for public health. I want to personally thank Governor Kathy Hochul and Commissioner James McDonald for restoring Article 6 matching funds of 36% to New York City. This reverses several years of cuts where New York City was the only jurisdiction in the state receiving a lower state reimbursement for core public health services, despite the fact that we are home to the most individuals with low incomes and the majority of Medicaid recipients in all of New York State. This year, New York State will finally restore parity between New York City and the rest of the state.

I am deeply grateful for the Governor's actions. I also want to thank Senator Rivera and Assemblymember Gonzalez-Rojas for championing this issue in Albany; we are pleased to see the Assembly and Senate include this in their budgets. Finally, thank you to Speaker Menin, Chair Schulman, and the entire Council for their continued advocacy.

The Health Department also supports Governor Hochul's proposed plan for universal child care, taxes on tobacco products, and a continued commitment to reproductive health care. Finally, I'll speak to the federal budget. About 20 percent of our budget is federally funded. That amounts to approximately 500 million dollars. The majority of that funding goes toward emergency preparedness and infectious disease control.

We expect the federal government to honor its commitment and maintain that funding. But if history is any indication, we cannot rely on federal resources.

Last spring, the Trump administration unlawfully rescinded \$11.4 billion in public health funding. Within that massive cut, approximately \$100 million was earmarked for critical disease control and outbreak prevention infrastructure right here at the New York City Health Department. Thankfully, our funding was retained due to a successful lawsuit led by New York State Attorney General Letitia James.

That said, we must brace for possible future cuts. We are enduring coordinated and large-scale attacks on public health, and we do not foresee them letting up soon. We have a dual responsibility to care for New Yorkers and to serve as a national leader and a universal trusted source in public health. We remain committed to do just that.

I am very grateful for support at the state and city levels as we continue to defend public health each day. I am confident that even amid all these challenges, a healthier, more affordable New York City is on the horizon. Thank you for your attention. I'm happy to take your questions.