

Office of the Mayor Health and Human Services

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity | December 2021



Photo credit: NYC Health + Hospitals

COVID Centers of Excellence

Agency: **NYC Health + Hospitals**

Context

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare and public health experts in New York City recognized that many survivors of COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus experienced new or ongoing physical and mood symptoms lasting weeks to months after acute infection. These symptoms became known as “long COVID,” or post-acute sequelae SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC), impacting as many as 57% of survivors (Taquet et al., 1), suggesting that tens of thousands of New York City residents are at risk for long COVID. Given the potential impact of long COVID on New Yorkers, the City immediately sought to address the health needs of COVID-19 survivors.

Response

In the midst of the first COVID-19 surge, City Hall and NYC Health + Hospitals recognized the unfolding public health burden long COVID posed for New Yorkers, especially among people of color, and moved decisively. New York City became the first municipality to specifically address long COVID through its public health care system. NYC Health + Hospitals, in partnership with NYC Department of Design and Construction and others, designed and built three new clinical sites dedicated to Covid care – COVID Centers of Excellence – in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn, in areas among the hardest hit by COVID-19. These clinical sites strategically included team-based specialty medical care (cardiology, pulmonology, radiology, and behavioral health) for some of the most common symptoms of long COVID – heart, lung, and mental health – as well as architectural features such as negative pressure exam rooms to minimize infection risk during the COVID-19 crisis and future pandemics. The NYC Health + Hospitals Centers serve a mix of all New Yorkers from well-insured to uninsured. Many patients get routed to the NYC Health + Hospitals NYC Care program, a health care access program that guarantees low-cost and no-cost services to New Yorkers who do not qualify for or cannot afford health insurance, as an added benefit.

Results

The first NYC Health + Hospitals COVID Center of Excellence opened on November 30, 2020 in the Bronx, followed by the second center on March 1, 2021 in Queens. As of October 11, 2021, nearly 14,000 appointments have been scheduled at these two sites since their openings. Additionally, over 21,000 telephone press offs (telephone referrals) have directed patients to the COVID Centers of Excellence. Two telephone hotlines, 844-NYC-4NYC and 212-COVID19, began phone tree options in Spring 2021 specifically for the Centers, and since then the volume of callers has continued to increase month-over-month.

Beneficiary Stories

Stories from NYC Health + Hospitals physicians at both open sites offer a window into the crucial care that the COVID Centers of Excellence provide patients with long COVID. At one site, a physician recalled a patient in their early twenties who had a mild case of acute COVID-19 but lingering breathing issues and anxiety about whether their long COVID symptoms would improve. Through regular visits and symptomatic treatment, the patient felt reassured, heard, and symptomatically improved.

A physician at another other site recounted a story of a family who received physical and mental health care after their spouse and parent died. The entire family suffered COVID-19, and the survivors were emotionally traumatized. One member had long COVID symptoms, including shortness of breath and chest pain. The NYC Health + Hospitals physician set up regular care appointments, addressed physical symptoms, and arranged for mental health care. The family expressed their gratitude for the high quality of the services and asked if they could bring in other family members. Patients report that they feel listened to at the Centers, whose clinicians are

trained in providing the highest degree of patient-centered care -- which is particularly important given how much uncertainty there is around long COVID.

Next Steps

The third and final NYC Health + Hospitals COVID Center of Excellence is scheduled to open in Brooklyn in January 2022. We continue to advertise these Centers on multiple media platforms to build awareness of the excellent care patients can expect to receive for long COVID as well as comprehensive primary care.

Relevant Publications

- List, Justin M, and Theodore G Long. "Community-Based Primary Care Management of 'Long COVID': A Center of Excellence Model at NYC Health+ Hospitals." *The American journal of medicine* vol. 134,10 (2021): 1232-1235. doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2021.05.029.
- Morgan, Jamie. "Centers open for COVID-19 patients." *Hfmmagazine.com*, Health Facilities Management Magazine, 31 May 2021, <https://www.hfmmagazine.com/articles/4188-centers-open-for-covid-19-patients>. Accessed 13 October 2021.
- Spectrum Noticias NY1 Queens. "Nueva clínica -'Centro de Excelencia'- en Jackson Heights para medicina familiar y recuperación de Covid." *Ny1noticias.com*, Spectrum Noticias NY1, 13 April 2021, <https://www.ny1noticias.com/nyc/noticias/noticias/2021/04/13/nueva-clinica---centro-de-excelencia---en-jackson-heights-para-medicina-familiar-y-recuperacion-de-covid>. Accessed 7 October 2021.
- Acevedo, Angélica. "Queens COVID-19 Center of Excellence to treat recovering patients opens in Jackson Heights." *Qns.com*, QNS, 25 February 2021, <https://qns.com/2021/02/queens-covid-19-center-of-excellence-opens-in-jackson-heights/>. Accessed 13 October 2021.
- Press Office. "Recovery for All of Us: De Blasio Administration Opens Gotham Health, Roosevelt COVID-19 Center of Excellence in Queens." *NYC Health + Hospitals*, 24 February 2021, <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/pressrelease/covid-center-of-excellence-opens-in-jackson-heights-queens/>. Accessed 13 October 2021. Press release.
- Madad, Syra, and Ted Long. "Help the COVID long-haulers: How the nation can learn from NYC." *Nydailynews.com*, NY Daily News, 18 December 2020, <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-help-the-covid-long-haulers-20201218-se4qpn4gdjif53cqvom5w3q3zq-story.html>. Accessed 7 October 2021.
- Michaels, Ian. "First of Three COVID Centers of Excellence Completed by DDC in Four Months, Now Open in the Bronx." *NYC Department of Design and Construction*, 7 December 2020,

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ddc/about/press-releases/2020/pr-120720-Bronx.page>.

Accessed 13 October 2021. Press release.

- City Hall Press Office. “Mayor De Blasio and Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity Announce New COVID-19 Centers of Excellence.” NYC Health + Hospitals, 05 June 2020, <https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/pressrelease/mayor-announces-three-new-covid-19-centers-of-excellence-gotham-health-sites/>. Accessed 12 October 2021. Press release.

References

- Taquet, Maxime et al. “Incidence, co-occurrence, and evolution of long-COVID features: A 6-month retrospective cohort study of 273,618 survivors of COVID-19.” PLoS medicine vol. 18,9 e1003773. 28 Sep. 2021, doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1003773.