



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**MAYOR DE BLASIO AND FIRST LADY MCCRAY LAUNCH NYC CRISIS
PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TASK FORCE**

Will develop comprehensive, citywide strategy to prevent mental health crises and improve the City's response to emotionally distressed New Yorkers

NEW YORK—Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray and City Council Members today launched the NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force, a 180 day effort to develop a comprehensive, citywide strategy to prevent mental health crises and improve the City's response to emotionally distressed New Yorkers. Comprised of experts from inside and outside the government as well as New Yorkers who have lived with mental illness, the Task Force will identify ways to increase early intervention and enhance coordination between the City's public health and safety agencies.

"As a City, we have completely overhauled how we address mental health to shatter stigma and increase access to care. Now, we must do the same for when a New Yorker is at risk of experiencing a mental health crisis," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "I've charged this Task Force with developing a comprehensive strategy to prevent these situations from escalating and enhance the City's crisis response system. These recommendations will keep our neighborhoods and our most vulnerable New Yorkers safe."

"It is our sacred responsibility to protect the lives of all New Yorkers. We must help those with severe mental illness get the treatment and support they need. We must also help their family members, friends and neighbors to support them. This new task force will propose fresh approaches the City can take to continue improving the response to people in mental health crises, and determine what additional work is needed to prevent these kind of crises from even happening," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**.

First Lady McCray will be the honorary co-chair. First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio will be the joint co-chairs. The work of the Task Force will be led by the New York City Police Department and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and coordinated by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. At the end of 180 days, the City will announce a citywide strategy to improve NYC's mental

health crisis system. Specifically, the Task Force will identify effective strategies to advance four goals:

1. **Prevent mental health crises before they happen:** NYPD responded to over 160,000 behavioral health-related 911 calls last year about mental health crises, many of which might have been prevented. The Task Force is charged with exploring, building and expanding strategies and supports to prevent crises, including community and family support, peer engagement and respite services.
2. **Enhance coordination between the City's safety and health systems:** In jurisdictions across the country, police are often the first to respond to people with behavioral health needs. The Task Force will develop multi-agency strategies which will allow better coordination between our health and public safety systems to better support these interactions.
3. **Enhance ongoing support to reduce mental health crises over the long-term:** The Task Force will be charged with creating long-term stabilizing services to prevent future crises, such as intensive engagement strategies, connection to ongoing support and treatment, enrollment in benefits, and help with housing and employment.
4. **Share data across systems to refine approach over time:** The Task Force will develop sustainable ways to share data and examine the effectiveness of these strategies.

The Task Force's advisory committee will be comprised of Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro, Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Travis Bassett, Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice Elizabeth Glazer, Executive Director of ThriveNYC Alexis Confer and NYC Health + Hospitals President Dr. Mitchell H. Katz. The Task Force's planning committee will be jointly led by DOHMH Executive Deputy Commissioner Gary Belkin and NYPD Deputy Commissioner Susan Herman. Ayesha Delany-Brumsey, Director of Behavioral Health Research and Programming at MOCJ, will coordinate the operations of the Task Force. The Task Force's working group will be comprised of a broad range of stakeholders including community leaders, health, mental health, and human service providers, payers, and advocates.

"This administration has already made unprecedented investments in mental health, but this newest task force will help elevate that work to the next level. I look forward to working with Deputy Mayor Palacio and the task force to help ensure that first responders can work safely and efficiently during a crisis, and that individuals struggling with mental illness receive the treatment they need," said **First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan**.

"Through the launch of the NYC Crisis and Prevention Task Force the City is taking another step towards connecting more people who are struggling with mental illness to care and away from the justice system," said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio**. "I'm pleased to co-lead this effort with First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and look forward to the great work ahead of us."

“It is as important as ever that we bring together professionals from all different fields related to behavioral health to come up with a new citywide strategy to prevent these crises before they happen,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards, chair of the Committee on Public Safety**. “We must also look at expanding our response teams when emergencies occur to prevent any loss of life in our communities. A mental illness shouldn’t be a death sentence, which is why it is imperative that we continue the conversation around better practices and keep pushing to find a smarter and safer approach. I’d like to thank Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray for their continued efforts to attack behavioral and mental illness head on.”

“The NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force will grant stakeholders the opportunity to cultivate holistic approaches to prevent behavioral health crises. As the Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, I am looking forward to the recommendations that will result from this task force and I thank Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, and the Health Department for investing resources into the creation of this body,” said **Council Member Diana Ayala**.

"I am glad this this long overdue task force is being convened, and that the administration recognizes the need for this issue to be a priority. The deaths of Dwayne Jeune, Saheed Vassell, and too many others have shown that there are fundamental flaws in the way our city handles EDP emergencies. I look forward to working with the task force to reform this system and implementing solutions which prevent the criminalization of mental illness while providing the support and resources needed to properly address behavioral health crises," said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams**.

This task force builds upon the City’s efforts to increase access to care and improve its crisis response system. The City invested \$130 million in 24 strategies to reduce the number of people with behavioral health conditions who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Since that investment, the number of people with identified mental health conditions housed at Rikers has been reduced by 11%. Since 2015, the NYPD and DOHMH have trained over 8,000 NYPD officers in Crisis Intervention Team training. This 4-day course enables officers to better recognize symptoms of mental illness and equips them with additional tools to respond appropriately.

The City also launched Co-Response Teams. Comprised of a mental health professional and two police officers, these teams have intervened with 2,457 individuals with mental health problems since its launch in March 2016. In the coming year, Co-Response will expand services and the Health Department will implement new Health Engagement and Assessment Teams (HEAT), health-only teams engaging and supporting people in the community with issues and needs that only require a health-only response.

First Lady Chirlane McCray launched Thrive NYC in November 2015 as an answer to the silent mental health crisis raging in New York City. With significant new resources and an evidence-based approach informed by New Yorkers themselves, ThriveNYC and its 54 initiatives set out to change the way the City approaches mental health and substance misuse. ThriveNYC’s initiatives now provide services and trainings in all five boroughs, and have further expanded into even more community spaces across the city, including schools, shelters and day care

centers. Cities across the country are now looking to ThriveNYC as a model. Through the Cities Thrive Coalition, over 200 cities from all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico have joined together to share best practices and advocate for a better funded and more integrated behavioral health system.

“Improving public safety and helping those suffering with mental health issues requires a holistic, multi-agency response. We can no longer tolerate a system that dispenses care and support through municipal siloes,” said **Police Commissioner James O’Neill**. “This task force will for the first time write a blueprint New York City needs to create a truly unified, proactive plan to provide help those in need and end the suffering of those grappling with mental health challenges.”

“As first responders to more than 1.4 million medical calls last year alone, FDNY members often respond to and treat patients who are coping with mental health issues,” said **Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro**. “Protecting all New Yorkers is the core mission of our Department and we look forward to working with the Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force to improve the care we provide our patients and the safety of our members.”

Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice said, “In jurisdictions across the country, law enforcement is often the default response to behavioral health crises. Police are tasked with recognizing complex mental health conditions and those with behavioral health needs often end up in custody. Under this administration, every possible effort is being made to recalibrate how we address behavioral health and remain attentive to the safety of every New Yorker. The City is doing this by making sure that we improve the connection between first responders and health workers to provide solutions that address the complex of issues presented. Doing this well will ensure that we increase safety while continuing to even further reduce the jail population.”

“The Health Department is an active leader in fostering safe and healthy communities,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Mary T. Bassett**. “We are committed to improving NYC’s crisis system and collaborating with our partners, city agencies, and communities to create a stronger safety net for New Yorkers experiencing a mental health crisis.”

“The Task Force process is important to bring together the many voices of those affected by a behavioral health crisis,” said **Mitchell Katz, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer of NYC Health + Hospitals**. “Given our public health system’s role as the city’s largest provider of behavioral health services, we look forward to bringing to the table our expertise and experience to maximize the success of this important initiative.”

“We must continually find new ways to support New Yorkers in need and improve access to social services for those who’ve fallen on hard times,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**. “This initiative will enable the City to more effectively understand the unique needs of individuals experiencing mental health challenges and enhance our efforts to help homeless New Yorkers get back on their feet and prevent homelessness before it begins.”

“I am looking forward working with my colleagues at the NYPD and Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice as we convene this effort,” said **Executive Deputy Health Commissioner Dr. Gary Belkin**. “We can build on and focus the significant investments already made in the last few years for getting people in crisis the right help, as well as identify needed new opportunities across the system to further improve.”

“NAMI NYC Metro is pleased to hear of Mayor de Blasio’s plans to launch the NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force, a necessary step to ensuring those living with a mental illness who are in crisis get the mental health response they need and deserve. This multidisciplinary Task Force, that welcomes the voices of people living with mental illness and their families, will be essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of those who need us most. NAMI NYC Metro looks forward to working with the Mayor’s office and the Task Force to begin to better address these challenging situations,” said **Matt Kudish, Executive Director at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of NYC**.

“The Mayor is to be commended for his commitment to expanding access to mental health services for New Yorkers and for recognizing the need to focus additional attention on the many complex issues related to police interactions with people in an emotional crisis. We believe a task force of this type is the best approach to create diversion and treatment strategies that are effective and sustainable,” said **Steve Coe, CEO of Community Access**.

“We must ensure that when a New Yorker is in a crisis situation that the emergency response is appropriate, humane and professional. The decision to rapidly convene the NYC Crisis Prevention and Response Task Force to prepare for these situations is the kind of leadership response expected from a city like New York that has invested millions ensuring that its citizens have access to on-going behavioral health prevention and treatment services,” said **Christy Parque, President & CEO of the Coalition for Behavioral Health**.

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