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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. So, the biggest vaccination effort in the history of New York City continues to move forward and we need everyone to be a part of it. This is how we bring New York City back. So, as of today, there have been 6,333,274 vaccinations. That's an amazing number and we want that number to just keep growing all the time. Today is the day to go out and get vaccinated if you have not already. Obviously, the City sites, now all walk-in sites. It's easy. If you prefer to make an appointment or you want to go to one of the other sites, nyc.gov/vaccinefinder to find sites all over the city or call 877-VAX-4NYC. So, it is literally the easiest it's ever been to get vaccinated. We need everyone to get in this so we can reach our goals and we can move this city forward. And you can see – we'll go over it indicators later on, they are getting better and better. It is because so many of you have gotten vaccinated. This is a matter of doing the right thing for yourself, your family, your city. If you haven't done it yet, it's time.

Now, we want to make it even easier. So, we are calling upon pharmacies and community health centers to start a walk-in approach as well. Every pharmacy out there, every community health center, I'm calling on you to immediately start having walk-in vaccinations. This is something that will help everyone to get vaccinated. We know a lot of this is about convenience. The simpler it becomes, the more New Yorkers will get vaccinated. So, let's do that right away. And to the doctors out there, you're our most trusted voices. We need you. We need you to urge patients to get the shot. We need you to reach out to your patients personally. If they have not yet been vaccinated, tell them why it's important, to answer their questions and concerns. That patient-doctor relationship makes all the difference and could be a key part, and will be, I'm certain, a key part of moving us forward. Here to tell you more about why this is a crucial piece of our strategy, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. When I think about what moves someone in all matters of health, there's no reference point in my life as profound as the conversation between clinicians and patients. In my experience, often it involves waiting through a fog of uncertainty with our patients, building a trust that grows gradually by being there with them for difficult and for happy moments. Sometimes this happens in unexpected ways. I think of two of my patients, a husband and a wife, whom I had been taking care of for years prior to COVID. The husband had multiple chronic illnesses, including emphysema and diabetes, and was in a vicious cycle of shortness of breath, leading to poor blood sugar control, leading to hospitalizations for both. Our primary care team saw him like clockwork every few weeks, focusing first on his breathing, which allowed him to get back to being more physically active, and to bring his diabetes and to better control. Showing

up at the bedside when he was hospitalized, our team finally getting to some relief of his symptoms and not least demonstrating reliability with his insurance paperwork, all helped me forge trust not just with him, but also with his wife. She was more skeptical of medical care but felt our concern for her husband. So, it felt like a major victory when she signed up for a checkup with me as well, and more so when we discovered some health issues that we could treat early.

That's steady building of trust, accompanying our patients through thick and thin, as with my patient and her husband – it's the very heart of patient care. And that's why today we are encouraging nurses, pharmacists, therapists, doulas, and doctors to reach out to their patients to encourage them to be vaccinated. Yesterday, I sent a personal letter to thousands of local providers, asking them to speak with their patients, their loved ones, and the community about the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines. No one is better positioned than they are to answer New Yorkers' questions with empathy followed by the facts. Their strong recommendation is the most critical factor when someone is on the fence about getting the vaccine. To reach those clinicians and healers, we will follow our letter with additional outreach, including webinars, advertising, and partnerships with professional associations.

So, to any provider who is watching this, we need you. You are a critical voice in our Vaccine for All campaign. Go to nyc.gov/vaccinetalks to learn more. And let's all keep these conversations flowing at the proverbial dinner table, in the pews, on your social feeds, and at your Zoom book club. You are an ambassador to your networks. You may be the most trusted messenger in your community. So, share your vaccination message and make it spread faster than the virus. It boils down to this, Mr. Mayor – share your story, save a life. Together, we can save lives and prevent further suffering. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you so much. And moving faster than the virus, that's exactly what our vaccination effort is doing. And you can see by the numbers. And, Dr. Chokshi, thank you for reminding everyone that they can be a part of this. And please, anyone, if you have questions about vaccination, you can talk to your doctor. You can talk to a clinician at the City of New York and get answers. But, most importantly, let's keep moving forward. Let's get vaccinated for the good of the city, for a healthy city.

Now, as we talk about health, it goes far beyond the coronavirus. When we talk about health, it goes far beyond just physical health. In fact, as Chirlane likes to say, there is no health without mental health. A city that is going to come back strong needs to address the mental health issues of our people. A recovery for all of us means making mental health services more available than they have ever been in the history of New York City. And that's what we're talking about all week, making more and more mental health support available for New Yorkers of all kinds. We are now moving forward, because what's happened is the reality of mental health is clear than ever, the coronavirus crisis has put a point on it, and people are talking about mental health in a whole new way. We need to meet the moment by putting more and more resources into reaching New Yorkers in need, of every kind of New Yorker, every kind of mental health need.

So, we're talking about this throughout the week. On Monday, when we announced the City budget, focused on the expansion of the crisis calls approach. This means health professionals – not uniformed officers, but health professionals – not police, but civilian, reaching out and

helping those in need. It means folks from Health + Hospitals, it means EMT and paramedics who do so much to protect people in so many ways, responding to 9-1-1 mental health emergencies, civilians reaching folks in need. This is an approach that we have begun to build out in part of the city, it's going to go citywide, and this is going to be crucial to reaching thousands – tens of thousands of people every year with a different and better approach to their mental health needs.

Yesterday, we talked about mental health in our schools. We talked about universal screenings. This is an amazing concept, never been attempted before in New York City or any other major city to the best of my knowledge – every single child offered a mental health screening so we can identify if they have needs and get to work on those needs right away. And the hiring of 500 new social workers, plus additional school psychologists to help make sure that children who need support we'll have it right there in their own school, mental health services available in every school in New York City – that's what we're doing now.

Now, today, we're going to talk about another crucial piece of the reality of our city, of people in need in our city, and it's folks with serious mental illness. Folks with serious mental illness need help and they need more intensive help. So, today, we're talking about a variety of approaches. First, 25 new mobile intensive treatment teams. Now, these teams provide services to folks who are most vulnerable and in greatest need – homeless folks, those with substance misuse issues. This is a model that has been worked on for years. It's proven to be successful. With these new 25 teams, we can reach hundreds more New Yorkers at any point, make sure that people get immediate and intensive help. Second, we're expanding capacity at spaces that are so important for folks who are dealing with ongoing serious mental illness. Folks dealing with that challenge need a place to go where they feel safe, where they feel supported, where they can work with others to address everything they face. One of the most positive approaches has been the clubhouses – and clubhouses are places where folks with serious mental illness can build connections with other people who are chase facing challenges, with the professionals who are there to help them, and they can have an ongoing presence and know there's always a place to turn. We're building out the clubhouses to serve 3,700 more folks with serious mental illness to get them the help they need in communities and to make sure people know there's a supportive place for them.

Now, crucially, this is about saying to anyone who's dealing with a profound challenge of serious mental illness – you're not alone. There's always a place for you. There's always a place you can turn for support. And people dealing with a challenge, any kind of challenge, need to know they're not alone, but, particularly, if it's a serious mental health challenge, we want to show you how this works, why these clubhouses have been an important part of helping people with serious mental illness. We have a video that I think will help you to see how important this approach is.

[...]

So, there is another piece of how we help people in need in a positive supportive way. Now, there's a third element we're talking about today and called Connect. Connect is a new effort that combines the best of places like clubhouses and other standalone facilities, brick and mortar

facilities, with the best of mobile approaches, like the mobile treatment teams. Connect will serve up to 850 people with serious mental illness. And it will help people stay connected even when they're not in a clinic or other facility. It will help people make sure they get the help they need, whether it's a substance misuse issue or other type of serious mental illness. Every one of these three approaches is about making access to mental health services much easier, more consistent, more available. We're talking about reaching thousands and thousands of people. And for those who deal with serious mental illness, which are obviously a small number within the larger community of New Yorkers who have mental health challenges – for folks with serious mental illness, these intensive approaches, these intense connections will make all the difference. People need to know help us there and this will be consistent help to address issues in a positive manner.

Now, I want you to hear from someone who really believes in this approach, who's particularly been a strong voice for ensuring that mental health services are provided more and more in communities of color that have historically been deprived of mental health services. And someone who's particularly been a proponent of the mobile treatment teams and their ability to reach people at any point anywhere. She is the Chair of the City Council Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction. I want to introduce Council Member Farah Louis.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Council Member. And you really have been such a strong advocate for getting mental health services to people who need them, where they need them. And what we've put in here in the City budget to expand community mental health services, particularly for communities of color reflects a lot of your leadership and advocacy. So, thank you very, very much for all you're doing. Thank you.

All right. Now, I'm going to talk about something very different, but, you know, every day I talk about recovery for all of us. And a recovery for all of us, it means so many things. It obviously means getting everyone vaccinated. It means addressing physical health and mental health. It means bringing back schools. It means bringing back jobs. Everything about a recovery for all of us is about really reckoning with what we learned painfully from COVID about disparity and changing our city in the future, not repeating the status quo of the past. Well, the people will have an opportunity to decide where we're going from this point on. The people of New York City in just under two months are going to decide the direction of this city. But as we've talked about before, it's a different kind of election than we've experienced, because so much of it has been overshadowed by the COVID crisis. Folks are just now beginning to focus on such a momentous decision, the mayor's race, of course, but also all the other City offices and Council. But here's the particular reality, that this is a brand-new voting system with ranked-choice voting. And that means for so many New Yorkers, there'll be voting in a way they never have before, and that's particularly crucial that we address the issue of educating people, helping them get ready to vote in this new way, because it's momentous, it will have a big impact. But we're doing an election – we're having an election against the backdrop of a moment where people are actually paying less attention than normal, because we're in the middle, still, of a global pandemic.

We need to overcome that challenge. We need to help New Yorkers get used to ranked-choice voting. We need to do something to break through that will really be felt by every-day New Yorkers, so they get used to the new approach to voting and they are fully enfranchised. Anyone who doesn't understand the approach or hasn't been educated in it, anyone who doesn't rank multiple choices, literally their vote could be wasted and that would be a horrible, horrible thing for this city. We need lots of people voting, everyone voting and their vote to be fully counted.

So, today, we announce a massive outreach effort – \$15 million outreach campaign to educate New Yorkers about ranked-choice voting, to make it something that people get used to, hear about everywhere they turn. You're going to see a very robust TV advertising campaign, radio, print ads, heavy focus on ethnic and community media as well. It will be done in multiple languages. We want to educate all New Yorkers. And an intensive effort with community groups as well to reach people down to the grassroots, plus a lot of direct outreach to New Yorkers – text and any other approach that will reach every-day New Yorkers constantly with updates, with ways they can get educated. The only way we're going to get people ready for this election is with a full court press. And leading the effort is someone who has done great work over the last few years, working to create more and more democracy in New York City. You know, as we saw a national backdrop where democracy was threatened, democracy was undermined – here in New York City, we've been working to expand democracy constantly, make it easier for people to run for office, easier for them to get public financing, easier for people to participate, especially if they happen to speak another language. All along, someone who has done great work on this effort is Laura Wood, who's been doing so much in our DemocracyNYC effort. We're now formally announcing her as our Chief Democracy Officer for New York City. And Laura has done amazing work to expand the democratic rights of New Yorkers for decades. And she's worked all over the country as well. The last two years, she's been a great innovative force with DemocracyNYC and she will lead the way this new election as Chief Democracy Officer and with this really intensive outreach effort and advertising effort to educate all New Yorkers. Here to tell you about it, our Chief Democracy Officer Laura Wood.

Chief Democracy Officer Laura Wood, DemocracyNYC: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. I am truly honored and privileged to serve in this role and I'm so lucky to have such a dream team to work with. Voting is in my DNA and in New York City is also in my DNA, it's my hometown. I still remember as a child going with my parents to the polls as they voted in every election big or small. Now, I won't lie, part of what I remember is probably that they took us to Wendy's for dinner afterwards, but more than anything what I remember is seeing how much voting mattered to my parents, to know that they had a say in the future of our city, our state and our country. And that's inspired me throughout my entire career, through my work on campaigns, doing voter protection in Florida and Pennsylvania, and here at City Hall. I've seen firsthand how the work we do protecting and encouraging people to vote can have ripple effects for decades to come.

What I want New Yorkers to know is, this ranked-choice voting is about you. It's about your voice and knowing that your voice matters. Knowing your right to vote is something sacred in New York City. There are those who are afraid of the growing diversity of voters, especially people of color and young people, and are doing all they can to silence their voices. Here in New York City, that's the opposite of what we're doing. We celebrate our diversity and we want every

voice to be heard. Ranked-choice voting allows voters to pick up to five candidates running for mayor and the other local offices in your order of preference. Even if your favorite candidate doesn't win, your second choice might win. So, your vote still matters. And this campaign that we're launching will help every New Yorker know that. Thanks to this funding, we can help drive awareness of ranked-choice voting all over our city, partner with grassroots organizations, government partners, and others who know how to reach communities with low turnout and help New Yorkers make a plan to get to the polls.

Over the course of the next several weeks, an interagency partnership spearheaded by DemocracyNYC, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Civic Engagement Commission, and the Public Engagement Unit, in close coordination with NYC Votes and other partners, will roll out a citywide media and outreach campaign to reach all New Yorkers who are eligible to vote in the upcoming June primary with an emphasis on language access. This will include TV and radio, print and digital media, with resources translated into as many as 18 languages to help us reach all New York voters. We will also be doing direct outreach through partnerships with community groups, faith-based organizations, minority- and women-owned businesses, and other stakeholders. And we'll directly engage youth through an exciting partnership with CUNY and DYCD to conduct additional voter outreach, education, and volunteer recruitment.

This is a crucial primary election. We are still in a pandemic and we are fighting every day for our recovery and to make this a more fair and equitable city. How you vote and whether you vote will have a big impact on you and your family for years to come. So, please spread the word about ranked-choice voting, the upcoming elections, and make your own plan to vote. In New York City, no vote will be silenced. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Laura. And congratulations on this role and thank you for your leadership. And look, we've got a lot to do. Two months is a long time, luckily, to get the word out, but we're going to do an intensive effort every single day to make sure New Yorkers know how to approach this right now. This stems – this new approach, this massive outreach approach really stems from the efforts of a member of the City Council who saw this challenge and wanted to make sure we really did the outreach needed to educate people. And she is the sponsor of Local Law 21, of this year, 2021 – it's a law requiring this voter education effort so we can really help New Yorkers to understand ranked-choice voting so it becomes something they're very comfortable with. And this effort is going to achieve that goal over these next two months. I want to thank her for her leadership and her vision, and I'm glad that her vision is coming to life today. It's my pleasure to introduce Council Member Alike Amprey-Samuel.

[...]

Mayor: Council Member, as always, you have provided a passionate and vibrant presentation. And I know you cared deeply about this, and that passion is what we're going to need all these next two months to really educate people. It's the right time, because, thankfully, we are starting to come out of COVID. People are starting to pay more attention. We've got to reach every single New Yorker and help them understand. Because of your leadership, we're going to be able to do that. So, thank you very, very much.

Okay. Let's now do what we do every day, go over our indicators. And, as I previewed, good news again today, real progress. Why? Because people are getting vaccinated. Dave, why?

Commissioner Chokshi: People are getting vaccinated.

Mayor: People are getting vaccinated. Dave agrees with me. Okay. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 148 patients. Confirmed positivity, 40.82 percent. So, again, well below the threshold. Now, here's another one – very positive and interesting – hospitalization rate is down today to 2.14 per 100,000. We want to get it below two. Look at that nice, steady downward line – really, really positive, really hopeful. Indicator number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 1,471 cases. Again, straight downward, let's keep going. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 3.39 percent. I want that line to keep racing downward and it can be done. We've proven it can be done by this extraordinary number of vaccinations so far, let's finish the mission and you can help today by going out and getting vaccinated yourself. Okay, a few works in Spanish, and I'm going to go back now to the efforts to help people with mental health challenges, reach all New Yorkers who need mental health support.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we will turn to our colleagues in the media, and please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Chief Democracy Officer Laura Wood, by ThriveNYC Director Susan Herman, by Dr. Katz, by acting Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Myla Harrison, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to David Rodriguez from Telemundo.

Question: Hello. Hi. Good morning, Mayor. Good morning to everyone.

Mayor: How are you doing David?

Question: I'm doing great. Happy Wednesday. Hope everyone goes well. Today I have a question for you because I want to have more information about what happened yesterday. I know yesterday in the morning we talked about the new guidelines from CDC, but now that we have the official announcement, I want to see, Mayor, at this time, we see your recommendation, New York City will adopt immediately, these new guidelines?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll start. And I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi. David, look, the guidelines make sense. And we certainly respect the extraordinary work of the CDC. What I'd say is we have to look at the guidelines carefully. They say, if someone's fully vaccinated, they can approach some things differently outdoors. But there's still caution if people are in crowded spaces and, obviously, if someone is not fully vaccinated, I think they'd need to continue to take careful precautions. I think it still comes back to the central point we've talked about for a while. We have to keep our

guard up. We have to keep vigilant. We have to keep practicing smart approaches because we want to end this crisis once and for all. And we can certainly do that within this guidance. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And I agree with you the starting point is we should recognize that these are guidelines that are really for people who are fully vaccinated. Remember that means 14 days after receiving your last dose of the vaccination. But what they highlight is that once someone is fully vaccinated, there are very tangible benefits because of the safety that vaccination confers particularly when someone is outdoors. As with any federal guidelines, we have to apply them to our local situation. And one of the things that we spoke about yesterday is that in New York City it is more common to encounter a lot of people, even in an outdoor space. So, even for fully vaccinated people, although we agree with the idea that you are at much lower risk when you're outdoors, when you are in a place that is crowded, when there are more people, when there's less ability to distance it remains reasonable and rational to keep your mask on in that situation. But the bottom line is fully vaccinated people, we're finding out more and more about the safety that, that confers, and this is yet another incentive for people to go and get vaccinated.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, David.

Question: [Inaudible] is about several days ago, the City of New York announced a partnership with the City of San Juan, Puerto Rico. After that announcement, I interviewed the Mayor of San Juan, Miguel Romero, and he told me that he wants officers from New York to be sent to San Juan during the winter to collaborate in security efforts. Will that be a reality? What did you agree to as part of that partnership with the mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico?

Mayor: Well, we talked about three major areas, David. And I want to thank Mayor Romero because he is immediately trying to address really tough issues in partnership and we've had – so one of the areas we talked about, we've had a very strong partnership with the City of San Juan in terms of emergency management. And we had a discussion about how to deepen that partnership. Obviously, Puerto Rico has been through so much – Hurricane Maria, the earthquakes, so many challenges even before COVID. So, we want to help San Juan to have the strongest possible emergency management approach. Our teams are talking now and adding additional elements to the work we'll do together. Second in terms of public safety, we agreed that we would work out an approach to have the NYPD help to train and support the public safety efforts of San Juan. We're working on the details of how that will work, the different elements of it. But we absolutely want to help the people of San Juan to be safe in every way. And the NYPD certainly has great experience and strategies to offer. We're going to determine how best to work together. And then third, we talked about something very positive and exciting coming up, the 500th anniversary of the founding of San Juan in September. And that, that is an opportunity to remind New Yorkers and people all over the country that the opportunity will begin again to go to Puerto Rico and support Puerto Rico and visit Puerto Rico, which is an amazing and enchanting place. So, we're talking about how to amplify that moment positively to help Puerto Rico's recovery. So, really good meeting, and I'm looking forward to working closely with Mayor Romero.

Moderator: Next is Sydney from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. The first question I wanted to ask is related to the ranked-choice voting funding. Given the election is less than two months away. Why didn't the administration allocate this money sooner since this is the first year of ranked-choice voting. And I know that Officer Laura Wood has been with the Democracy Office for a while, but just seeing she was just now appointed the Chief Democracy Officer after the position was left empty for over a year. Why now – why just now make that appointment since we're just less than two months before this very critical election?

Mayor: Sydney, obviously the answer is because there's been such pressing challenges we've been dealing with and the focus has been overwhelmingly on addressing the coronavirus and the crisis and bringing the city back. But I am absolutely convinced the timing works because what I'm seeing all over the city is people have not been paying attention to this election yet, but this is the organic time where they will pay attention. And in fact, concentrating such a massive outreach effort in this space of time is the thing that will get people's attention. We're going to spend the money when it actually will be felt. And as you said, Laura has been building up this work all along. So, we've formalized her role and she certainly deserves it. We put big resources behind it for such a concentrated period of time, and I believe this is the approach that's going to get through to people and be effective. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Okay, thank you, Mr. Mayor. And the other question is with your announcements on deepening mental health resources for New Yorkers I know with the Connect approach, a part of it is dealing with substance misuse. And I wanted to ask you about safe injection sites. I know you had previously supported them and there's a State level requirement to get those approved and opened, but I'm wondering is that an approach you still support and is there a way to do it without the State approval or have you talked to the State, just considering that type of resource could be a useful aspect of this – of the resources you announced today?

Mayor: It's a great question, Sydney. I really do appreciate it. This is a topic that needs to come back into the public discussion. I want to, first of all, say, Sydney, we did an extraordinary amount of research on this approach all over the world and in terms of where it's been used in the United States. Unquestionably, this is the right approach. It comes with challenges, real challenges. There are – it has to be instituted very smartly. There are legal issues to be approached properly. There are public safety issues that have to be addressed properly, but it's absolutely the right way to go because it saves lives. We're dealing with, all over the country, an opioid crisis. This is how you save lives. Now, Sydney, you referred to the term, the safe injection sites. We really believed in this administration, it was important to talk about this a little differently. So, you're using the term that a lot of people do use. We said, we believe in overdose prevention centers because really that's what is achieved. It stops people from dying. Unfortunately, folks who are addicted will too often be using drugs, but with this approach, their lives are saved, and they get an opportunity to be connected to substance misuse services, mental health services. There's an opportunity to turn around their lives because they are engaging with health care professionals, mental health professionals. So, I believe in overdose prevention centers. To your question about the State, we have never gotten an answer from the State of New York. We'll check the exact date, Sydney. Our team will get it to you today. I believe it's been

almost two years or even more since we asked the State of New York to formally support the City's willingness to move forward. We laid out detailed locations with the support of local Council members. But the State of New York has never responded to this day. I think there should be real pressure put on the State of New York to support overdose prevention centers right now, and equally will be appealing to the federal government as well now that we have a new administration to recognize the importance of this approach and support it so we can save lives.

Moderator: The next is James Ford from PIX11.

Question: Good morning. Thanks for taking my call.

Mayor: How are you doing today, James?

Question: No, I appreciate the question, Mr. Mayor. I'm doing great. It's a beautiful day. How are you doing, sir?

Mayor: It's going to be almost 80 degrees, James. Get ready. We're all going to sweat today.

Question: I'm actually looking forward to that. Believe it or not. Well, here's my question. What message do you have for both drug store chains and independent pharmacies regarding walk-in vaccinations, and what message do you have for people in the communities that they serve on this topic?

Mayor: Yeah, it's time for walk-ins everywhere. James, it worked. We saw it was working around the country. We tried it here at a number of our City sites and we wanted to see if there would be, you know, big lines or there'd be challenges logistically. We found it was fine. We found it was easy. So, we're doing walk-in sites everywhere. I want pharmacies to be walk-in, I want every place possible that can handle it to do walk-in appointments. It's so much easier. James, I had the amazing experience at the Museum of Natural History on the Upper West Side. And people are so happy to be there and they love the convenience of just being able to walk in. I want to remind all New Yorkers, if you love that place, go over there, walk in, get a vaccination – an extraordinary, exciting place. So, this is the way forward and it can be done. And Dave, why don't you specifically speak about doctors and the way they can facilitate folks coming in and getting vaccinated through them?

Commissioner Chokshi: Absolutely, sir. First, I'll just echo what you said. The time is now. We have to make vaccination as easy as a walk in the park. And that's what we've done at dozens of City sites. For people who are looking to understand where you can walk in at City sites, go to nyc.gov/vcc, and you'll find that list of sites, but we have to broaden that approach particularly to the large retail pharmacies, CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid, Costco. You know, they also have to move in this direction with respect to walk-ins. And with respect to your question, sir, about doctor's offices, I know that many community health centers are working to make a walk-in option available to them. And equally importantly is ensuring that they have the chance to set their patients up with vaccination either onsite or easily to make an appointment at one of the City sites. So, as part of our push to engage clinicians, including doctors, our hotline 877-VAX-

4NYC now includes an option when you just press two, you'll get to an operator specifically for a doctor or another clinician, and they'll be able to help you make an appointment for your patient swiftly and easily.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, James.

Question: And we clearly see numbers generally coming down regarding COVID and coronavirus, but what concerns do you have if any, that as these numbers continue to decline that people won't get vaccinated and won't take any variety of precautions that still are important.

Mayor: Well, really important question, James. I'll tell you I'm hopeful because just the sheer numbers continue to support the goals we've set. I mean, 6.3 million plus vaccinations. We see, you know, continued every day, you know, big numbers coming in. The new sites are helping, the walk-in approach is helping, making it more convenient. I think what Dr. Chokshi said is really what we've come to realize. We may have, all of us, mistaken hesitancy for lack of convenience. There is definitely hesitancy too. There's definitely some people just don't want to get the shot right now or maybe ever, but I think as we've made it more and more convenient, sort of incentivized folks more, we're seeing lots of folks coming forward. So, I'm really hopeful about that. I think people do understand that there's a direct connection between beating COVID and getting vaccinated. So, the numbers are proving the point. You know, I think folks have gotten used to wearing the masks and understand that it's a precaution that protects you. And I think a lot of people are going to stick with that for a while until we really turn the corner. So, in the scheme of things, I feel very good about how New Yorkers are going to respond to all of this.

Moderator: The next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Hey, how are you doing?

Question: Good and happy summer day in New York, right?

Mayor: Exactly. We'll take it.

Question: Yeah. I'd like to follow up with you about this New York Times report about your push to have the City approval for every new hotel. What is so unique about hotels that you believe it's appropriate to require City approval? I'm asking particularly because the Times reported that the Hotel Trades Council spent \$440,000 on your presidential campaign.

Mayor: Well, if you look at the history, Reuvain, this goes back to the Bloomberg years, the notion of special hotel permits as a way to address the particular community concerns that come with a hotel. And especially because a lot of hotel development in the city was happening in residential areas, in manufacturing areas, in places that weren't typical hotel zones. I think this is just a smart approach. It maximizes community input and makes sure that the fit will work. Again, we've got a hotel industry right now with a massive amount of rooms going wanting. I

think it'll take a long time for those rooms to be filled, but it will happen again. But as new hotels are developed, I believe that the community input makes sense. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: [Inaudible] that significantly affects the community. I can think of the marijuana shops that'll be coming, massage parlor, lots of places like that affect the community. Again, why should New Yorkers believe that hotels are so unique that they should require approval, and this is not just something where the City's just giving a particular union what it wants?

Mayor: Because if you look over the years at community concerns about different development, different facilities, hotels have always been one of the things that really concern people, because it brings a lot more activity and, you know, most hotels we're talking about, a lot of activity of one kind, some hotels it means a different kind, but either way you slice it, there's been real community concern about the impact, the traffic, parking, whatever it may be. This is not the only area where we have to take special care. I am really concerned as the new laws have been passed legalizing marijuana, which I fully support, but we do need smart efforts at deciding where facilities will be in communities. And this is something we've urged the State to include in the regulations for all localities, that localities have a substantial decision-making power in how these facilities get cited. So, no, it's not just one thing or another. I think being sensitive to community concerns makes sense in a lot of cases.

Moderator: The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning. How are you?

Mayor: Good. But you sound a little low there. Let's see if we can get your volume up.

Question: Okay. Oh, can you hear me? Okay.

Mayor: You're skipping a little bit, but come on, Andrew. Let's get it together here, man. Let's try again. Andrew? Yeah. We're not moving the right direction here. Andrew, can you hear us?

Question: [Inaudible] back to me? I hear you. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Okay. There you go.

Question: Hello? Can you hear me? Okay. Mayor, I'm wondering if you were aware of an allegation that's been made against Scott Stringer. There's a woman who used to be an intern for him who has come forward with allegations of sexual harassment. I'm wondering if you've been

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Mayor: I've just — yeah. Andrew, look, I've just heard about this. Obviously, it's something that needs to be taken seriously. My understanding is that she is going to detail her experiences later today and we need to hear what she has to say obviously. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: On another topic — on the topic of vaccines and trying to reach your five million New Yorkers vaccinated by June 1st goal. You had been saying for a long time that the issue was

supply, supply, supply. But now you have the supply, and we can still hear some concerns on your part, that the goal is not certain. And I'm wondering whether the demand dropped faster than you anticipated? Or what it might be that that has led to such a slowing at this point?

Mayor: Andrew, I want to clarify for you and all your colleagues. June, not June 1st. I said the goal was to get it done in June, which means to me by the end of June. And let me give you the update right now. We've got towards that five million goal, almost half the folks we need to get to 50 percent are fully vaccinated, 2.3 million. But we have almost 70 percent who have received at least one dose. And that's real important because as Dr Chokshi reported yesterday, New Yorkers overwhelmingly are following through on the second dose. So, it's still April, almost 70 percent have gotten one dose. That means the vast majority of them will follow through. And we see continued new folks coming in the door all the time, especially as we're making vaccination more convenient. So, I still feel good. It will obviously, you know, depend on several factors. We want to get that Johnson & Johnson supply back. We don't have a lot of new supply coming of that yet. That speeds things up a lot when you have Johnson & Johnson. But we're still working on that goal. And I think it's a reachable goal.

Moderator: The next is Yoav from The City.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask you about the decision to expand the mental health response, the 9-1-1 response to announce the expansion before the pilot's even started. You know, this – the process that got us here was very legacy, very deliberative. Some advocates said that it was going too slow. And I'm reminded of another pilot when the City was piloting the 14th street busway there was really great initial success and advocates were calling for that to be expanded to other parts of the city. And on that pilot a few weeks in, you said, we owe it to the whole city and to the community to really give this a thorough test. And you also said, we're not going to make a huge policy decision based on just a few weeks of experience. Fast forward to this pilot, now you're saying we don't even need to start the pilot. We know it's going to work and we're expanding it citywide. And obviously this pilot deals with a far more complex issue than the 14th street busway did. So, why are you kind of fast forwarding through this pilot right now?

Mayor: Yeah, I don't find that analogy to work at all respectfully, Yoav. I think they're very, very different and this is really apples and oranges. The idea of highly trained civilians addressing a mental health need is a really straightforward idea. Getting the specifics worked out that has taken some time. Yes, but the underlying idea is extremely clear with, to my point of view, tremendous positives. And what we've said is we're going to expand it citywide in the course of the next fiscal year. Which starts in July, goes all the way to June of 2022. So, there's time to keep adding it piece by piece to reach citywide. I want to thank Susan Herman, the Director of Thrive, who's done just immensely positive, detailed work, working with all the stakeholders, to get us to this point where we really are convinced we have a great model. And as we talked about it, it's a model that is needed to reach people in a way that really fits everything we understand now about the best ways to deal with a mental health crisis. So, I feel confident this is the right way forward. Go ahead, Yoav.

Question: Okay. on another issue in the budget – that the home visits for new parents, a program that you revived after it was cut before it started actually. But I wanted to ask initially that program was slated to begin only in Brooklyn and then expand to the other boroughs. Now it seems you're starting in, it says something about taskforce neighborhoods. If you could just explain what those are and where? And also at NYCHA, so where is it starting and why did you shift from that former proposal to begin just in Brooklyn?

Mayor: Yeah, it's such a good idea, first of all. And there's, I think great examples around the world of similar approaches that really help new families, helping them to understand how to address and support positive pregnancies, mental health, physical health. And, you know, the early time as a parent, which for all of us who've been through it is a mystifying time and a lot of folks really need help. And a lot of folks are going through it alone and particularly need a support system. The difference is since the coronavirus crisis, we really reassessed some of the disparity issues that the city faces. And we developed a focus on the 33 neighborhoods that bore the brunt of the COVID crisis. And looked at communities of color that have not historically gotten the support and resources they deserved. So, it made sense to start in those communities where the greatest need is, and obviously in public housing. And then build out the concept more and more citywide. But I think it's something that's really going to help families. We aim it to be a universal approach for families everywhere in this city. And I think for a lot of families, it's going to be a big difference maker.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Abu from Bangla Patrika.

Question: Hello, Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Abu. How've you been?

Question: Oh, thank you so much, Mayor. What I would like to know – in September as you mentioned yesterday about the mental health and school being open, how you evaluate all the students, whether they need mental health help or not?

Mayor: Abu, I'll give you the simplest way of thinking about it. And we'll talk more about the details as we move towards September. But the notion is that trained professionals can have a very simple questionnaire to go through with a child to ask them how they're feeling, to ask them, you know, if they have anything that's bothering them. Obviously to hear if they went through a COVID experience that has a big impact on them. For some families, they lost a loved one, they lost a grandparent or an aunt and uncle. Some children even lost a parent or a sibling, to ask them, you know, for example, what it has meant for them? Some families had to move. Some people lost a job. Just to bring out what they're feeling and to assess what kind of follow-up is needed. You know, I think we're going to find a lot of cases that kids are feeling that they're okay. And there's nothing that they say that raises a particular concern. In other cases, they may say something that indicates it's important to have some follow-up and some discussion with the family and if necessary, bring in a mental health professional to follow up as well. But this is exactly the kind of way we determine if there's a mental health challenge that needs to be addressed. And one of the things that's been a core concept in Thrive is that reaching people early is the best way to address a mental health challenge. And the ideal time is if it's manifesting

as a child, to reach that child while they're still young and get them help all along the way during their school years. Because now we're going to mental health support in every school. So, I think it's a straightforward approach. It's going to do a lot of good for our kids. Go ahead, Abu.

Question: Thanks. You know, it's been a long time, almost a year. There's a lot of [inaudible] money to pay the rent and then the landlords they're also – they need to pay their mortgage. Is City thinking anything about the, to help either the tenants or the, you know, the owners?

Mayor: Abu, the approach we've taken is to bring back New York City, to create a larger recovery. That's the best thing for everyone. As we talked about Monday, we believe we'll be able to restore 400,000 jobs this year. That's the number one way to help people, to help tenants to have their income back, obviously the folks who own the buildings as well. But the good news is the federal government really put substantial resources into helping people individually, with a variety of stimulus, you know, direct support for individuals and families. State Legislature did an amazing job with direct relief for renters. So, those approaches are going to have a big impact. And then as we've always done in our administration, if someone is threatened with eviction wrongly, they can turn to the City, they can call 3-1-1 and get free legal assistance. And we can help stop illegal evictions. So, that's always going to be available to all New Yorkers.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Juliet. How are you doing today?

Question: Good. I'm okay. Well, actually I wanted to ask you about vaccines, but I have to tell you, there is a City-site in Times Square, that's opened just last week and it's actually the first City-site in the Midtown area. So, that's great. But in true Time Square fashion, there was somebody outside, I don't know if she was a nurse or a physician's assistant wearing, you know, the white medical coat, you know, actually hawking the vaccine. It was really something. She was saying, come on in, you know, come on in and get it. And it was great. She was really asking anybody on the street to come and get the vaccine.

Mayor: I love that.

Question: So, I thought you should know that.

Mayor: We need to do more of that. We've got to find her and thank her, but I think that's going to be a new job title for the City government, vaccine hawker. Okay. That's a new title.

Question: So, in that vein though, there's still hesitancy. In fact, you know, I'm hearing about nursing homes and assisted living facilities where a lot of people are still not getting the vaccine. So, is there any way to incentivize people to get it? I don't know what that means, you know, time off or money? Or I know you're telling people to do walk-ins and get them closer to a vaccine locations. But what else do you think you can do to get people to get the vaccine?

Mayor: I'll offer my view. And then I want to give Dr. Varma and Dr. Katz an opportunity to get into today's presentation with their views. Juliet, I think it's a couple of different things. I think convenience, I think up until now, because of the scarcity of supply, because we were trying to reach as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, you know, everything was through centers, appointments, and all. Making it convenient, I think this will be the number one difference maker. Because I certainly have come across many, many people who had no objection to getting the vaccine. They just didn't get around to it. Or they thought it was a hassle. It's real interesting, when I was at the Museum of Natural History on Friday, I went up and down the rows of people who had gotten the shot and asked them what motivated them all? Everyone was like, you know, this sounded cool. You know, or this sounded easy. And I think we want to first and foremost, make it easy to walk-in, City centers, pharmacies, you know, all of these places that people turn to in their neighborhood ideally. The second I would say is, I agree with you that there's incentives that can make sense. And we're certainly looking at it. A small, but a great example is the Museum of Natural History saying everyone who comes here to get vaccinated gets four free admissions. So, you can go there and then you can bring your whole family to the museum. That kind of thing we want to do more and more of. Obviously, I participated in a very exciting incentive system with Krispy Kreme donuts. That's all it took for me to want to be vaccinated. So, I think those things, you're right, those things matter. And we want to start creating more and more of them. Dr. Varma, then Dr. Katz, anything you want to add?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: I would just build on what you've said, Mr. Mayor. Which is that the single most important thing right now is to make it just incredibly convenient for people to get vaccinated. You know, there are quite a number of people who would be willing to get vaccinated but they're not going to go out of the way to just get out. And that's what we see. And we know this was a lot of vaccine programs, flu vaccine is really probably the classic example. You need to have it widely available at your pharmacies at your doctor's office, anywhere you might be going for another reason and incidentally have that as an option. The second is those places have to be able to provide information and to actively encourage it. We know that a lot of people, not only do they want the convenience, but they do have some questions. And they would like to hear an answer from somebody that they trust. Somebody that is either personal to them or in their neighborhoods where they have some established relationship and bond. And so, we need people to be at those places who can also answer those questions. I also just want to signal a little bit of what you got at, which is the question about health care facilities. We have seen now through reports from CDC about outbreaks that have occurred in places like nursing homes. Where some staff have chosen to go un-vaccinated and there is going to be a time in the future where a vaccination or proof of immunity and or proof of infection has to be established as well. We're not at that point yet because we do want to make sure this is convenient. We want to make sure people have the information. But we do need to understand that in certain settings, it's going to be important for people to be vaccinated, not just for their own health, but for the health of the people that they're paid to protect.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Katz, you want to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: I would just add sir, that health care workers are a very special group. I mean, I think everyone has to understand what they went

through over the last year. The level of trauma that people experienced, how in order to go to work in a pre-vaccination world, you had to overcome your tremendous fear of COVID. Many people, not health care workers, they were able to stay home or protect themselves until they got vaccinated. Health care workers, not true. They had to go not only to work, but often into the rooms of people with COVID and that creates a particular dynamic where a certain number of people may feel they are immune, they are protected. They engaged in certain homeopathic or religious rituals and that protected them through this horrible year. We're doing a lot of work talking to people. I don't want to say educating because they know the issues. It's more of an emotional issue than it's a knowledge basis. But we have done in the past sort of fun sweepstakes around getting the flu vaccine. And I think now that there is sufficient supply for everyone, we're going to move to some of those other ways. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Doctor. Okay, Juliet, go ahead.

Question: Yeah. So, my second question is about the clubhouses that you're discussing in your mental health program. Are these – would these be residential facilities or would they just go in, people would go in for services? And where would you locate these facilities?

Mayor: I'll start and then I'll turn to Susan Herman and Myla Harrison to add anything that they would like to add. The idea here is to reach a lot of communities that haven't had enough mental health support. Because one of the things that is so striking about mental health Juliet, is even more than health care across the board, when it comes to mental health, it has been rationed according to income in the city and in this country, historically. So, folks who have a lot of resources, you know, the famous stereotype of parts of Manhattan, where there's psychiatrists all over the place. You know, for many, many communities in this city, there are very few mental health services historically available. We got to change that. So, one of the focuses here is to make sure the clubhouses are in some of the communities hardest hit by COVID and really offer this opportunity to folks who haven't had as much in the way of mental health services before. With that in terms of your specific questions about how they work, Susan, you want to jump in?

Director Susan Herman, Mayor's Office of ThriveNYC: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The clubhouses are not residential facilities. They're places that don't particularly rely on a medical model. They rely on a community building model. They are places where people can go and they are run by their members. They already exist. They provide meaningful work opportunities for people. It's a place where you feel that you belong and that people are encouraging you. And therefore, you are more likely to stay connected to care because you're supporting each other and encouraging each other, unemployment efforts and housing efforts, school, all of it. But these already exist. This investment will enable the clubhouses that already exist to do more recruitment and help bring people from neighborhoods around the city, to these clubhouses. And we do hope in the future that there'll be creating more clubhouses as well.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Susan. And Dr. Myla Harrison, you want to add anything?

Acting Deputy Commissioner Myla Harrison, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: I think Susan Herman really said it all. The only thing I would add is that these are programs that are based in science, have been around for some time. And really do help individuals with

recovery and establish a sense of self-esteem and group affiliation and a reintegration in a meaningful role in the community. And clubhouses have a significant contribution to the recovery of people with mental illness in New York City.

Mayor: Thank you so much Dr. Harrison. And you know what, couldn't have used a better word from my point of view, as we conclude today, recovery. So, recovery for all of us, guess what? It means a recovery for all of us. And it means addressing everyone's needs, including the challenges that have been created by the trauma of the COVID crisis. Whether it's the clubhouses or the mobile teams, so many of these different approaches that make such a difference. We're going to reach people. And this is the New York City way – compassionate, caring, going to where people are, speaking to them in their own language, reaching people in their own neighborhood. This'll make a huge difference. This is how we create a recovery for all of us. Thank you, everybody.

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