



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** November 28, 2018  
**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY ANNOUNCE PLAN TO FIGHT OPIOID  
EPIDEMIC IN SOUTH BRONX**

*Bronx Action Plan reinforces commitment to connect New Yorkers who struggle with  
substance misuse to treatment, care, community support*

**NEW YORK**—Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray today announced the Bronx Action Plan to tackle the opioid epidemic in the South Bronx, an area disproportionately affected by fatal drug overdoses. While overdose deaths citywide began to flatten in 2017 – a mark of the city’s successful prevention and treatment programs – overdose deaths rates in the Bronx increased nine percent from 2016 to 2017, compared to two percent across the City. This plan will dedicate \$8 million solely for programs in the borough to increase health staff who assist first responders, a \$1 million in ad campaigns warning about the dangers of fentanyl, more life-saving naloxone kits, and funding for Bronx-based support groups who connect people to treatment.

“We’re starting to see progress in our fight against the opioid crisis, but we won’t stop until every New Yorker is free from this addiction,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “We’re increasing resources in the Bronx to make sure one of the hardest-hit boroughs has the resources it needs to turn the tide on this devastating epidemic.”

“Today New York City takes new actions to double down on the opioid epidemic in the Bronx,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**, who leads the City’s mental health and substance misuse efforts. “With this effort, we will work with trusted community partners to embed services into the fabric of the hardest-hit communities of the Bronx, so there is no wrong door and people can find help wherever they are. And they will have support through every step of the recovery process to treat the **WHOLE** person, not just their addiction.”

The City has taken aggressive steps to reduce drug overdose deaths citywide and connect people to care and treatment since launching HealingNYC in 2017. Recent data from the Health Department show the increase in overdose fatalities began to slow down in 2017, compared to the previous year. In particular, overdose deaths have begun to decrease in Staten Island and Manhattan, as well as among White New Yorkers. However, the Bronx continued experiencing

increases in overdose deaths, and the South Bronx in particular has rates of overdose death more than double the citywide average.

In an effort to ensure no borough is left behind, the de Blasio Administration is bringing attention to neighborhoods in the Bronx. The borough surpassed Staten Island in 2017 as the borough with the highest rate of overdose deaths last year, according to Health Department data. Using a data-driven approach, the City is maximizing its resources to focus on identifying, engaging, and connecting people who use drugs to care. The City's total investment will be \$8 million through [HealingNYC](#) and [ThriveNYC](#), which will now be directed specifically to the Bronx.

“The Bronx needs more support to reduce drug overdoses and the City is ready to provide that support,” said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio**. “HealingNYC has allowed us to analyze mortality data much faster and know where drug overdoses are occurring much sooner — that information is guiding our strategies. We are doubling down our commitment to Bronx, creating innovative ways to connect people who use drugs to addiction treatment and partnering with communities to develop more support groups for people at risk.”

“Overdose is preventable, and opioid addiction is treatable,” said **Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot**. “Health Department staffs are in the Bronx every day to share life-saving information about harm reduction and naloxone and to connect people to services. We are also proud to support the essential Bronx community organizations that do this work, such as primary care practices and emergency departments, substance use disorder treatment programs, syringe service programs and other opioid overdose prevention programs. Together, we will help more people have the tools and information to reduce their risk of overdose and improve their health.”

### **Details of the plan:**

#### **1. Increase Innovative Programs to Directly Connect People Who Use Drugs to Care and Services**

- **Health Engagement and Assessment Teams (HEAT):** The City is launching two HEAT teams in the Bronx to support first responders in substance use related calls. HEAT teams work in pairs (one social worker, one peer advocate) to help first responders engage and connect with people who have substance use disorders. The teams will target neighborhoods where overdoses are highest and will offer a “health only” response options for agencies. Teams will operate from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week.
- **Innovative Programs to Connect People at Risk to Treatment:** The City will expand three proven programs to connect people who use drugs and are at risk of overdose with treatment:
  - **Expansion of CATCH team to H+H/Lincoln:** NYC Health + Hospital/Lincoln launched CATCH (Consult for Addiction Treatment and Care in Hospitals) in September to connect patients admitted with substance use disorder to medications for addiction treatment and other substance use outpatient care.

- **Expansion of Relay to BronxCare:** Relay dispatches peer Wellness Advocates to people who go to emergency departments after a nonfatal overdose. The advocates provide education on overdose risk reduction education, and help connect patients to care. Relay will expand to BronxCare (Bronx Lebanon) by early January, placing the program in the emergency department of the largest voluntary hospital in the Bronx. Relay currently operates 24/7 at six hospitals across NYC, including two hospitals in the Bronx (Montefiore Medical Center and Saint Barnabas Medical Center).
- **Expansion of Buprenorphine Nurse Care Managers:** This plan will allow Buprenorphine Nurse Care managers to be added at two additional Bronx clinics, bringing the total number of clinics with nurse care managers to eight locations in the Bronx. The Family Health Center and Williamsbridge Family Practice Center will integrate buprenorphine treatment for opioid addiction, increasing access to buprenorphine treatment for people receiving primary health care services.
- **More naloxone kits:** The City aims to double capacity to reverse overdoses by distributing 15,000 naloxone kits to Bronx Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs by the end of 2018. This would put about 8,000 more naloxone kits in the Bronx community this year, compared to 2017. The Health Department will recruit more Bronx organizations to distribute naloxone and provide overdose response trainings to educate community members on how to respond to an opioid overdose.
- **Launch Rapid Assessments and Response (RAR) Teams:** Overdose death rates in Hunts Point, Mott Haven and Highbridge-Morrisania are double the citywide rate. To target overdose prevention and education resources, RAR teams are surveying these neighborhoods, speaking with community members and people who use drugs, and providing educational materials and naloxone. They are present in locations frequented by individuals who use drugs and do not access services, such as barbershops, bodegas, and houses of worship.

## 2. **Expanding Community Partnerships and Support Groups to Increase “Points of Connection” with People Who Use Drugs**

- The Health Department will partner with “Radical Health,” a Latina-run, South Bronx-based organization that takes a grassroots, community-organizing approach to improving health in communities of color. Radical Health will organize 16 community sessions in Mott Haven to strategize with community members around solutions to serving populations that are difficult to reach. Critically, these sessions will include people who are interested in addressing opioids in their community, including friends and families of people who use drugs and who are directly affected by the crisis.
- The City will also launch a community engagement plan to marshal stakeholders in the Bronx to address the crisis and connect community members to resources.
  - The City is supporting the newly launched **Faith in Harm Reduction initiative**, which will partner with about 25 Bronx faith leaders to

distribute naloxone, address stigma around drug use and promote harm reduction services.

- Latinx Thrive, part of ThriveNYC’s effort to reach Latinos, will host 15 Thrive Talks (roundtables) with local leaders and NYCHA resident leaders starting next month.
- Thrive will also host events focused for this community. On Nov. 29, the Thrive will host a Day of Action with a focus on the Bronx Opioid crisis. In January, Thrive will host a Bronx Opioid Awareness Day of Action.

### **3. Increasing Awareness about the Dangers of Fentanyl and the Availability of Medications to Treat Addiction**

- The Health Department will launch a public awareness campaign to educate New Yorkers about the critical dangers of fentanyl and its presence in cocaine, crack cocaine, and heroin. The Department will place advertisements at Bronx bus shelters, subway stations, billboards, bodegas, barbershops, and laundromats, among other venues. The Health Department will also relaunch its “[Living Proof](#)” public awareness campaign about methadone and buprenorphine treatment featuring Bronx residents of color.

### **4. Expanding Ongoing Syringe and Needle Clean Up**

- In last six months, the City’s Parks Department has collected about 70,000 syringes from parks in the Bronx, but more help is needed. Through this plan, Parks will expand its program to reduce syringe waste by dedicating six new City Parks workers to routinely canvass and clean high-volume litter areas in South Bronx parks. The Department of Sanitation will address issues in surrounding areas outside parks. New Yorkers looking to report conditions can call 311 for assistance.
- In addition, the Health Department will invest in three South Bronx Syringe Service Programs to expand efforts to engage in harm reduction in parks and areas of public drug use.

“We want to be sure New Yorkers are aware of life-saving resources like free Naloxone kits and trainings, NYC Well, and Mental Health First Aid,” said **ThriveNYC Executive Director Alexis Confer**. “Our ThriveNYC outreach team will continue its work in all five boroughs to accomplish this goal.”

**Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark** said, “The Bronx has been underserved for many years in terms of prevention efforts and treatment options for those addicted to opioids. I welcome these new programs and resources from the Mayor’s office that will help us fight this scourge that has damaged the Bronx since the 1970s. My office is on the frontlines of providing treatment instead of jail time for long-term substance abusers. The Bronx Action plan will compliment our efforts in this struggle to save lives and communities.”

“The Bronx Action Plan comprehensively addresses the South Bronx’s opioid epidemic. Access to life-changing medications such as buprenorphine will be expanded, drug users will be connected to essential services, and syringe waste will be reduced,” said **Council Member**

**Diana Ayala.** “As the Chair of Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, I would like to thank Mayor de Blasio, First Lady McCray, Deputy Mayor Palacio, and Commissioner Barbot for working collectively to create a holistic and responsible plan. The Bronx cannot afford to lose any more lives to overdose and I am hopeful this strategy will improve our borough's circumstances.”

“For decades, the South Bronx community I represent has been battling issues surrounding rampant opioid use, especially in The Hub corridor in my district. Over the past few months, we’ve made great strides, from the Bronx Opioid Collective Impact Project I launched with Acacia Network and the Third Avenue BID to the \$500,000 I fought for in the City Council, allocated to St. Mary’s Harm Reduction and Acacia to combat the opioid crisis here in the South Bronx,” said **Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr.** “We need a multi-pronged approach to address this issue that includes an education component, preventative measures and life-saving services, which is why I commend the Mayor and First Lady for launching the Bronx Action Plan today. Lives are at stake. Today is a step in the right direction towards fighting the opioid crisis in the South Bronx.”

"I cannot thank the Mayor and First Lady enough for stepping in to combat what has truly become an epidemic - and a deadly one - in the South Bronx, which a large part of my Senate District encompasses. We ALL need to work together - private and public agencies and the community to help solve this problem and help those ensnared in its grip. Call on me for anything you need to help,” said **Senator Luis Sepulveda.**

“The Bronx Action Plan represents our City's commitment to address the serious opioid crisis that has devastated so many families in our borough for decades,” said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera.** “This comprehensive, community-focused plan will provide Bronx residents increased access to opioid services and resources to treat this harmful addiction and prevent overdose deaths.”

**State Senator Jose Serrano:** "The opioid epidemic has devastated communities across the country, and the Bronx has been disproportionately impacted by this public health crisis. Addressing this issue will require a comprehensive response by local leaders, healthcare professionals and educators. By emphasizing prevention, treatment, and recovery, HealingNYC has been effective at removing the stigma, and connecting at-risk New Yorkers and their families with the support they need to lead fulfilling, healthy lives. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray for expanding the program and for their commitment to the health and safety of the people of the Bronx."

“Community based organizations are on the front line against the opioid epidemic,” said **Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, Chair of the Health Committee.** “The Bronx Action Plan will connect patients and service providers across areas – health care, substance use, and social services – in order to ensure holistic, coordinated care.”

“I am thankful for this strong effort to help combat the opioid crisis. This issue has deeply affected our community and our city. As elected officials we must come together and continue tackling this crisis together. The comprehensive nature of this announcement shows that we

cannot approach this in only one way but that we must pool together all the resources available for it to be effective. I am grateful to the de Blasio administration for bringing forth this aggressive plan and I look forward to assisting in any way I can,” said **Assemblywoman Carmen E. Arroyo**.

“The opioid epidemic has reached a tipping point in the Bronx,” said **Assembly Member Nathalia Fernandez**. “Overdose levels in the Bronx are higher than any borough in NYC. It’s important that Mayor de Blasio’s Bronx Action Plan be successful so that we can keep our residents safe, rehabilitate opioid abusers, and remove unwanted syringes from the streets.”

### **About HealingNYC:**

Since the launch of [HealingNYC](#) in March 2017, the Health Department has:

- Distributed over 152,000 naloxone kits to opioid overdose prevention programs citywide.
- Launched Relay, a new peer-based program, in six hospital emergency departments for people who experience an overdose.
- Trained more than [1,000 clinicians](#) to prescribe buprenorphine.
- Conducted 1:1 education with more than 1,000 clinicians about judicious opioid prescribing and more than [1,100 pharmacists](#) about naloxone distribution.
- Raised public awareness about overdose prevention and effective addiction treatment through three citywide media campaigns — “[Overdose is Preventable](#),” “[I Saved a Life](#),” and “[Living Proof](#)” — as well as a pilot public awareness campaign in [Lower East Side bars](#) to alert New Yorkers to the presence of fentanyl in the cocaine supply.
- Launched a free mobile app, “[Stop OD NYC](#),” to teach New Yorkers how to recognize and reverse an overdose with naloxone. The app also links individuals to nearby community-based programs and pharmacies where naloxone is available without a prescription.

### **About ThriveNYC:**

In November 2015, the City launched ThriveNYC, a program with dozens of initiatives aimed at changing the conversation and stigma surrounding mental illness and providing greater access to mental health care. In addition, anyone can take a free Mental Health First Aid course to learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health challenges, including depression.

New Yorkers seeking mental health help, or who want to learn more about treatment options, can contact NYC Well by calling 1-888-NYC-WELL, texting “WELL” to 65173 or going to [nyc.gov/nycwell](http://nyc.gov/nycwell). Free, confidential support is available at any hour of the day in over 200 languages.

If you witness an overdose, **call 911** immediately.

###