



THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 7, 2022

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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ADAMS DELIVERS REMARKS, ANNOUNCES NYC
HEALTH + HOSPITALS EXPANSION OF ACCESS TO LIFESTYLE MEDICINE
SERVICES CITY-WIDE**

Mayor Eric Adams: Really, really, really excited to be here today, particularly with my colleagues in government. Councilwoman Lynn Schulman, a good friend, longtime friend, nurse, and I think one of your daughter's actually a doctor – you know, I noticed they were in that profession – yes. Mercedes Narcisse, my Deputy Mayor Anne Williams-Ison, also Councilwoman Rita Joseph, an educator. You know, just the Council is led by people who have been in the field and understand it. My good friend Dr. Mitchell Katz, and the Chief Operating Officer here at the hospital, Sheldon McLeod, and Dr. Vasan who's taken over the taking over the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, just an all-star team coming together to make this happen. And just two people I want to thank, in particular, one, Dr. McMacken, who had the vision, and one person who's not up here that we just all owe her just a debt of gratitude, Rachel Atcheson, you know, a real star in the city.

[Applause]

And, you know, this is a dream come true for her when she first in 2018 brought this conversation of the possibilities of putting in place a lifestyle medicine clinic in H + H people,

people said it was impossible. And there was just so much pushback during the previous administration, there was just, you know, people just didn't get it, and people were afraid. And when we were talking about lifestyle medicine, they just thought it was not possible. But with the dynamic duo of Dr. McMacken and Rachel, we opened our first clinic – when Dr. Katz, who was just open and he just got it. We were just in the right place at the right time and it landed us where we are now. And so I'm really excited about this announcement today.

And I just want to before we even get into the announcement today, we want to, like just really give our hats off to our team in the COVID fight. As I was coming up and speaking with Sheldon, he was sharing with me, you know the challenges we were having here but the hospital held on and hospital moved in right direction. Sheldon really kudos to you for, you know, just keeping the doors open during COVID, and the staff together, and making sure we were able to move forward. But today, the average positivity rate over the last seven-days across New York City is 4.52 percent, a huge win for the city, and another huge win, the daily positivity rate in schools is now less than one percent. Over and over again, we were very clear, we kept saying the safest place for our children is in a school building, and, you know, we went through a period when people were unclear on what we were doing. And I told my team every morning ignore the noise in government – government is filled with a lot of noise - if you know you're doing the right things, and you're clear on your message, you need to stay committed to it. Parents woke up with clarity. I said my schools are going to be open, we're going to make sure they're safe, and parents did not wake up every morning figuring out what they were going to do with their children. We were committed and the numbers prove we were right that our children are in a safe place. Now when they returned from the break we were at 16 percent, and now we're at less than one percent, and that's a real congratulation to the parents and the people of this city and this amazing health care institution and the coordination that we put in place to make sure this happen. And so we want to continue to tell New Yorkers get vaccinated, get boosted, that is why we won – 75 percent of all New Yorkers are fully vaccinated, an amazing feat. 85 percent of New Yorkers have at least one vaccine dosage, but we want to encourage and continue to do so, that is the difference maker here in the city. And so if New Yorkers all participate, we can get our city up and operating, and we're proud to do that.

And so just focusing on where we are today and what we're doing and what we have in front of us, it's about a healthy lifestyle, and we made a promise that during my campaign trail that we're going to start rolling out all of the promises that I put in the universe when I ran, you're going to see them actualize. Promise made, promise kept. We stated we were going to expand on our lifestyle medicine clinic and we're going to do that. We are fulfilling that promise, and today we are announcing the expansion of the Health + Lifestyle Medicine Services to all five boroughs across the city, one of them here in Kings County. This is the most comprehensive expansion of lifestyle medicine in the nation, in the nation. New York is going to change the conversation about using food, not to feed health care crisis, but to stop the crisis, and in some cases, like my case, to reverse some of the chronic diseases that historically we said was not possible. And I think that it was clearly mentioned earlier by the Chief Operating Officer, he stated, we are

happy to welcome this to learn. Too many people are not willing to learn and evolve on what's the possibilities that are associated with living a healthier lifestyle. So, these new sites will help patients who are living with chronic diseases, living with chronic diseases, and we need to be clear on something, a chronic disease does not only impact the individual who has the chronic disease, it impacts the entire family and everyone in this room knows someone who's going through a chronic disease if they are not going through the chronic disease themselves. That is what we must understand, a chronic disease hijacks your life, and it hijacks the life of your entire family, and that is why this is a significant moment on what we are doing. These – this clinic was first was based in Bellevue Hospital with Dr. McMacken and now we're going to expand it throughout our entire health care system, a program that Rachel helped me champion when I was Brooklyn Borough President, and her whole family may be looking down just saying yay, Rachel.

[Applause]

So these, these six public health care sites will provide full support for families and those who are going through the chronic diseases. And what type of diseases are we're talking about? We're talking about heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, pre-diabetes, and all the other health concerns that's associated with obesity. We have a health care crisis that's not sustainable, and to be bold enough as a city and a hospital system to say we are going to do something differently, is really commendable, and I just thank the entire team. This expansion is about helping patients make healthier lifestyle changes, including plant based diet, physical activity, improved sleeping habits, and stress reduction, all the things that we must incorporate into our lives so that we can deal with the stress of being in a stressful environment. And the sites will provide support for people to stay on course, because it's very difficult to stay on course, when you leave your home and all you see around your NYCHA facility is fast food, junk food. All you see in your schools is fast food, junk food. All you see in all the places we feed people is fast food, junk food. Now we're saying we're going to give people choices so they can make smart lifestyle choices. And this sites will be providing expert expertise and professionals in the area to help people move in the right direction. It will give people the opportunity to come up with a real team to focus on how to live a healthier lifestyle. Nothing was more frightening to me in my professional and personal life than waking up without my sight in my left eye, and to be able to reverse that, and go into all the doctors that's telling my nerve damage, my vision loss was something I had to live with the rest of my life and take five medications, plus insulin, and other medications for all the chronic diseases I was facing, not realizing that it was not my DNA, it was my dinner. If I was willing to change my dinner, I was willing to change my destiny, and we're going to put the naysayers to the side and tell them not only we want to help your families, but maybe we will help you also as you deal with some of the chronic diseases that you're facing.

And so we got it right, we're going to do it right, and New Yorkers will have trained lifestyle medicine professionals right here in the city to support them. Just ask my mom before the end of her life was able to reverse her diabetes by going to plant based eating as well. We're going to help the families, the moms, the dads, the children, we're going to expand this healthy lifestyle throughout our entire city. It's our goal to implement this in every part of our government. When you look at this city, one million New Yorkers are dealing with diabetes. More than half of the adults are overweight, 34 percent are suffering from obesity – 22 percent. Heart disease is our number one killer, number one killer, and we could do something about it, and I know we could do something about it. And most importantly, we're here at Kings County because this issue impacts Black and Brown New Yorkers the most, disproportionately, and it's time for us to stop feeding it.

And so before I call the next speakers, I just want to respond to one incident that's just seem to be running around. You know, my son said the other day, he said, dad, it's just amazing how the media it's just love following you no matter. Does Eric eat fish? Does he eat hamburger? Does he do this? Does he do that? Does he do this? You know, I mean, it's just – listen, here's my message. The more plant based meals you have, the healthier you are going to be. New Yorkers don't beat yourself up. No one is perfect in this city, and if you look at a person who states, I'm the Mayor of the City of New York and I'm perfectly imperfect. So, if I can be the mayor, then you can be the teacher, the engineering, anything you want. Ignore the noise. Don't worry about what's on Mayor Adams' plate. Put these items on your plate because I'm living a healthier lifestyle and I'm encouraging New Yorkers to have as many plant based meals as possible, because the science is clear. The more you eat plants, the more you eat fruits, the more you have a healthy lifestyle away from over processed food, the healthier you are going to be. I know how I feel every day, and I want you to feel the same way every day. And so those who have questions are what I am eating, I'm over 18 and I know how to take care of myself, and if you haven't noticed, look at the pictures of yesteryears, and then look at the pictures now.

[Laughter]

I wear my suit so much better than I did eight years ago, and if you like it or not, you have to say yes you do.

[Applause]

So I want to now turn it over - you know you made me lose my place.

[Laughter]

You know, I'm going to turn it back over to you, CEO Sheldon, thank you so much for allowing us to come here. We are really excited about the future.

[...]

President and CEO Mitch Katz, Health + Hospitals: Thank you so much. Hey everyone as a primary care doctor working in the Lower East Side, I know how important it is to adopt a plan forward diet and to take the other health improvements of exercise and stress reduction, sleeping well. My patients suffer from diabetes, hypertension, and obesity and often don't know that there's a way they can treat it without medications. And that turns out to be a message that a lot of people resonate with. They-we have an American culture where people think illness, doctor, pill. And that isn't always the best way. And people are fascinated, and it is, as you've heard about education.

I learned, I take care of many monolingual Spanish speaking patients and I speak Spanish, but I learned culturally there is no translation for brown rice in Spanish, it just doesn't exist. There's no you can't translate it. You can say arroz integral, you can say arroz cafe, no one has any idea what you're talking about. They just look at you, like you suddenly forgot how to speak Spanish. So concepts have to be translated, right? They have to be made culturally appropriate. But that can be done. Our Mayor is a great example. I mean, he was talking about his diet. I like better that his press secretary recently tweeted that he can't believe that for the first time his principal has told him to take six deep breaths and go meditate. So, this is a man who really lives this mission who helps everyone else to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

So, in closing, I just want to thank you know, the amazing people at Kings County, my CEO Sheldon, my CNL Opal and the amazing people at Kings County who save lives every day, but especially during these four cycles of COVID. Thank you.

[Applause]

[...]

Incoming Commissioner Ashwin Vasan, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: So, we're at a unique moment in the health of our city. Facing an ongoing, but slowly and cautiously improving outlook for the pandemic. COVID-19 is underscored, we must take a holistic approach to supporting the health of our communities. We're confronted with the underlying and structural health inequities our city has faced for so long, and that have been exacerbated by this health emergency we've lived in for the last two years. As the Mayor said, heart disease remains the leading killer of New Yorkers. Diabetes is not far behind it. Obesity, especially childhood obesity continues to rise. These are the burden of these epidemics. These chronic disease epidemics have been borne disproportionately by communities of color, communities just like this one that Kings County has served so well for so long. The same communities that were most impacted by COVID 19. As my public health colleagues have said, repeatedly, the pandemic is a portal, a window into underlying and intergenerational failures to serve all people equally, and a legacy of decades of systemic racism and neglect of certain communities, mostly black and brown.

We must choose to walk through this portal and to use it as a call to action to address these underlying health inequities our city has faced for too long. These disparities in access to care, to healthy foods, healthy nutritious plant forward foods, to green space for exercise, in education and in supports are not just core investments in prevention and public health, but they're very personal to me, my mother, an immigrant from Chennai, India has had type two diabetes for over 40 years. Because of our relative privilege and access to care and support, she's controlled it well through lifestyle and nutrition and with a minimal reliance on medications. But my family in India are not so lucky. I have loved ones who have lost their vision, who have had kidney failure, have developed heart failure and other complications due to untreated or under treated diabetes and other chronic illnesses. It's not lost on me the differences in their environments that resources and supports compared to my mother's . And as the Mayor said, the impacts of chronic illness are felt- ripple throughout families and communities, and even across continents, in this case, with each person impaired, and each life lost to preventable and treatable, chronic illnesses.

So, in order to begin to move the needle on cardiometabolic diseases and to save lives in the process, we're going to need every tool in the toolkit from upstream policies to help make healthy food and lifestyle choices like exercise, the easy and affordable choice to regulation that works to limit the impact of calorie dense nutrition poor to food to programs and incentives to end food deserts. The Health Department has been a leader in this work for decades. And we need continued and revitalized efforts in this space. But we also need fundamental changes

downstream in access to and quality of care, and innovations that provide holistic supports attached to basic primary care. That's why it's so critical that we invest in and expand this program, like this Health + Hospitals lifestyle medicine services. Increased access to dietitians, health coaches and physicians will help support New Yorkers around how to reach their long-term health goals and give them the tools to actually do it. We know that one diet or one exercise plan will not fit everyone. That's why these individualized services are so key and changes to health and lifestyle cannot be sustained on sheer willpower alone. It requires information, planning, and social support. Taking into account socioeconomic and cultural circumstances and other factors will help build sustainable success, which is why it's so important. So, so important and exciting that we've made a commitment to expanding the services through our flagship public hospital system so that New Yorkers who need it the most coming from the communities impacted the most, they can benefit from tailored supports, and services that for too long, have been only accessible to people with greater economic needs. As we continue to fight COVID-19, it's important to uplift these services that can address long standing health inequities.

So, I applaud Mr. Mayor, Dr. Katz, Dr. Long, Dr. McMacken in the entire Health + Hospitals team, especially the frontline health workers here and all over the city who do this work day to day and who have faced so much hardship over the past two years for their leadership and commitment to this effort. The Health Department certainly stands with your effort and to improve the health of our city and to ensure access to innovative and lifesaving care for all New Yorkers. Thanks a lot.

[Applause]

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