



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

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CITY LAUNCHES NEW MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT PILOT 'CONNECT'

New model of mental health treatment, developed by the Health Department in collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health, will focus on holistic care of New Yorkers struggling with mental health, including for people experiencing serious mental illness

May 23, 2022 – Today, the Health Department and the Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health announced the launch of an innovative model of mental health treatment, called Continuous Engagement between Community and Clinic Treatment, or CONNECT. This new model looks to bridge gaps in the mental health care system, move beyond the traditional clinic role, center collaboration with communities, and be responsive to the root causes of mental health challenges.

“New Yorkers struggling with their mental health deserve compassion and support — which is exactly what CONNECT provides,” said **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**. “The city is constantly innovating to provide the best possible care for New Yorkers who need it the most and CONNECT will center communities in care and bridge gaps, making sure that more New Yorkers will get the help that they need and don't fall between the cracks of the system.”

“Mental health is deeply intertwined with social need like housing instability, and food and income insecurity — which demands a whole-person approach to support people experiencing mental illness. In addition to access to high-quality, culturally competent community mental health care and support, we must address the social and economic drivers that worsen mental health. CONNECT lowers barrier to care, meets people where they are, and supports their social and behavioral health needs in lock-step by connecting people to care and supports that reflect them as a person, not just a patient,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasani**. “The Health Department is committed to compassionate and dignified care and support for people experiencing mental illness, and to promoting health equity through everything we do to improve mental health and wellbeing.”

“It can be difficult for someone to address their mental health needs if they are worrying about how they will eat that day, or where they will sleep that night,” said **Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner of Mental Hygiene Dr. Michael McRae**. “CONNECT aims to be responsive to individual and community-level needs, beyond what we may traditionally think of as mental health care.”

“As we move towards recovery, bringing mental healthcare to every New Yorker has never been more urgent,” said **Tina Chiu and Jason Hansman, Co-Acting Directors of the Mayor’s Office of Community Mental Health**. “Individuals experience mental health challenges wherever they are including non-clinical settings. The CONNECT model will allow people who struggle with serious mental illness to receive treatment and support in the communities they know and trust. Building on other innovative programs such as Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams, CONNECT will also bridge an important gap in care by offering a step-down from mobile and intensive treatment services to community-centered services.”

Nine clinic sites in high-need areas throughout The Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn have been identified for this pilot and are currently accepting referrals. Once at full scale, CONNECT will serve up to 900 new clients, and will broaden the spectrum of services for everyone who receives mental health services at the clinics.

CONNECT works to directly address health inequities within communities, responding to social factors that can negatively impact mental health, such as involvement with the justice system or housing insecurity. For example, based on community needs, some clinics may have a legal clinic available a couple of times a week, while others might establish connections with existing community-based services such as legal advocacy, housing assistance, employment service providers or food pantries.

Unique to this model, each clinic will have a full-time community liaison on that staff that will establish an ongoing relationship between the clinic and its community and identify behavioral health priorities and solutions. Examples of these solutions can include providing walk-in services throughout the day, facilitating referrals and access for justice-involved people, and immediate admission to the clinic for people stepping down from more intensive treatment services.

CONNECT clinics will provide virtual services as well as on-site and off-site services. Based on community feedback and assessment of needs, CONNECT programs may also offer individual and group interventions at non-traditional settings, such as soup kitchens.

Peers will participate in the program providing engagement and navigation through health, mental health, and social services for people, on and off site. Providing this level of support helps aid and promote continuity of services, preventing people from falling through the cracks while referred between systems.

“Henry Street Settlement, a long-time mental health care provider on the Lower East Side, is seeing firsthand the mental health crisis on the Lower East Side and throughout the city,” said **David Garza, President and CEO of Henry Street Settlement**. “The psychological toll of the pandemic on mental health—from isolation and grief to job loss to disruptions in care—has been dramatic for many, but particularly for lower-income New Yorkers who lack access to services and for those with serious mental illness, legal involvement and needing crisis services. The promise of CONNECT to meet people where they are—on the street, in their homes, in our

offices or elsewhere—and connect them to a wide range of supports gives us tremendous opportunities to reach Lower East Side residents who are in great need of mental health care. We’re pleased to be one of New York City’s CONNECT providers.”

“We are thrilled to be part of this groundbreaking initiative which will help us deliver much-needed care to the communities we serve. Healthcare is a human right, and that includes comprehensive, culturally-competent mental health care.” said **Elika Nerette, Director of Community-Based Behavioral Health Services, Housing Works.**

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