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## **NYC SETS GOAL TO SCREEN, TREAT ALL PREGNANT WOMEN AND NEW MOTHERS FOR MATERNAL DEPRESSION**

*NYC Health + Hospitals, Maimonides, Greater New York Hospital Association to lead effort*

**NEW YORK** – Today First Lady Chirlane McCray and Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery announced that New York City is setting a goal to screen and treat all pregnant women and new mothers for maternal depression. As the first step toward this goal, NYC Health + Hospitals, formerly HHC, and Maimonides Medical Center – who together perform approximately one-quarter of all deliveries in New York City – have committed to achieve universal screening and connection to treatment for maternal depression within two years.

The Greater New York Hospital Association will at the same time develop and launch a learning network of hospitals across the city that will also take on this goal. Both the American Medical Association and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that clinicians screen for maternal depression.

“I want to tell new and soon-to-be new mothers here in New York City: If you need help, you are not alone. Help is available, and we will make sure you get it,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “Screening and treatment for maternal depression should be a part of routine care. Today, we’re taking an important step toward making that a reality in New York City.”

“Maternal depression is common and treatable. Right now, too many pregnant women and new mothers don’t get the attention they should, and they are afraid to seek help because they worry about being judged,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. “It’s time to have a more open conversation about maternal depression. By giving new moms the type of care and support they need, we help them – and whole families – be healthier and happier.”

“We’re excited to announce one of the key initiatives of the coming mental health roadmap today,” said **Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery**. “Addressing maternal depression is one of the most important things we can do for New York City families. Too many mothers fail to seek treatment for fear of being labeled a ‘bad mother,’ because they don’t recognize the signs or because they just won’t take the time to take care of themselves. By connecting mothers to the support they need, we not only help mothers but we promote the development of healthy children. Nothing could be more important.”

“Maternal and postpartum depression often go undiagnosed, but to treat a patient holistically you must be attentive to mental health as well as physical health,” said **NYC Health + Hospitals President Dr. Ram Raju**. “We perform many well visits for babies, but how many for the mother? At NYC Health + Hospitals our practice has long been to screen for depression before and after birth since depression can affect not just the mother but also how parents care for their children. It’s wonderful that First Lady Chirlane McCray can help the

public health system partner with private health systems and the Greater New York Hospital Association to make this practice universal in New York City.”

“We know that postpartum depression is one of the most common complications associated with the postpartum period, and its effects on a woman and her family can be painful. That’s why it’s essential that all women be screened for signs and symptoms of depression,” said **Mark S. DeFrancesco, MD, MBA, President of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**. “We may not be able to prevent postpartum depression, but programs that support universal screening will help us better diagnose and treat women who need help.”

“Maternal depression is a secret epidemic that impacts mothers and their babies across all economic, social, racial, ethnic and cultural boundaries,” said **Elie Ward, MSW, Director of Policy and Advocacy for New York State Academy of Pediatrics**. “It is a public health epidemic impacting the health and wellbeing of thousands of mothers and babies across the city. Today’s announcement is an important step to move New York City toward universal screening and access to treatment which will lead to healthier moms and healthier babies. The NYSAAP strongly supports the First Lady and her partners in this first step toward universal maternal depression screening and treatment for all New York City families.”

“New York City’s entire hospital community recognizes the importance of maternal depression screening, strongly supports the goals of this important initiative, and will do its part to ensure its success,” said **Greater New York Hospital Association President Kenneth E. Raske**. “I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray’s vision and leadership in championing this issue.”

“More than 10,000 women in New York will suffer postpartum depression and its devastating consequences next year. We owe it to them, their children and our communities to provide the kind of care that can guarantee their families a healthy start; the kind of care we’d want for our own moms. That care starts with screening and identification and it’s a great way to ThriveNYC,” said **Pam Brier, President and Chief Executive Officer of Maimonides Medical Center**.

Depression during and in the months following pregnancy is common. At least one in ten women suffers from it – at least 10,000 women a year in New York City. Maternal depression can negatively affect both infant health and the mother’s lifelong mental health.

Maternal depression is treatable, and it can also potentially be prevented with simple supports and counseling for more at-risk pregnant women. One estimate found that these methods, if widely applied in NYC, could prevent nearly 3,000 women a year from suffering from postpartum depression. Screening and providing early treatment to every pregnant woman will improve the lives of families across the city.

As of October, New York State Medicaid will reimburse physicians for screening pregnant women for maternal depression.

"Feeling tired and even overwhelmed is not unusual for a new parent. Many of us have been there," said **Dr. Mary T. Bassett, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**. "But when new mothers experience more severe symptoms, such as depression or anxiety, as many do, they often don't know where to turn. The announcement today is about our commitment as a health community to do better in identifying and supporting new parents who need help."

“This commitment would provide vitally important postpartum depression screenings and connections to treatment for pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers,” said **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**. “All new mothers should receive these screenings as part of their routine medical care, and this new initiative would help us achieve that goal.”

"For too long the topic of depression and mental health has not been adequately addressed in our society, especially when connected to new mothers. I am encouraged to see the First Lady continuing her leadership by taking a public stance alongside Chair Ramanathan Raju to offer support to all mothers during the first days and months of their new child's life. With this commitment, more women will be able to feel the support and safety they deserve as they take on their new and continuing role of motherhood," stated **Public Advocate Letitia James**.

"Many new mothers have struggled in silence with maternal depression, which can put them and their newborns at risk. Fortunately, help is available; screening and treatment are simple solutions that put new families on the early road to good mental health. As part of my Family Friendly Brooklyn initiative, I have partnered with the Seleni Institute to conduct maternal depression screening trainings and referral workshops in our borough. Today, I am pleased to see these efforts expand with the commitment to universal screening and treatment at NYC Health + Hospitals and Maimonides Medical Center within the next two years. I applaud the City for leading on this partnership, and I urge the State to do its part by fully funding the maternal depression screening bill signed into law last year, funding that will save money long-term while helping thousands more women facing this common condition," said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams**.

"Many new moms and families are not aware of the symptoms of maternal depression. Too often women who are struggling with maternal depression go undiagnosed and untreated, suffering needlessly. I have long advocated at the state level for greater resources to identify and treat maternal depression, and I'm very pleased to see New York City taking proactive steps to screen all pregnant women. Thank you to Mayor Bill de Blasio, First Lady Chirlane McCray, NYC Health + Hospitals, and Maimonides Medical Center for making this commitment. Diagnosis and rapid referral to treatment can radically and inexpensively improve outcomes for mothers, babies and their families," said **State Senator Liz Krueger**.

"Maternal depression is a critical public health issue that affects the long-term health and welfare of mother and child alike. But too often women fail to recognize that they have a treatable condition, lack access to care, or are too overcome with feelings of guilt and embarrassment to seek help. This new initiative by First Lady McCray, however, is the first step toward overcoming these barriers and utilizing New York City's health infrastructure to provide pregnant women and new moms the support and counseling they need. I want to thank First Lady McCray for her tireless advocacy on issues of mental health and express my deep gratitude to NYC Health + Hospitals, Maimonides, and the Greater New York Hospital Association for their help in confronting this often overlooked condition," said **State Senator Brad Hoylman**.

"Our health care system hasn't done a good job treating expectant and postpartum women with maternal depression, although the problem is widespread and early diagnosis and treatment has an 80-90% success rate. By launching this initiative for universal maternal depression screening and referrals, Mayor de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray are ensuring that New York City will be successful in treating maternal depression," said **Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, Chair of the Assembly Health Committee**. "This will save lives and improve life for mothers and babies."

"Over the past few months, the realities of postpartum depression have tragically affected my community," said **Assembly Member Victor M. Pichardo**. "Mothers need to know that maternal and postpartum depression is a common issue, and they do not, and should not, have to struggle through it alone. Now more than ever, I am looking forward to working with the First Lady, the Mayor, and my colleagues on the state and local level to proactively address this issue and give mothers the support they need and deserve."

"Maternal depression – and the impact it has on young mothers and their infants – is a little understood public health issue that affects at least one-in-ten mothers," said **Assembly Member Latoya Joyner**. "I commend First Lady Chirlane McCray and her new initiative, as it is an important step in bringing this public health concern out of the shadows. In addition, I look forward to working closely with my state legislative colleagues

as I seek timely passage of my legislation that will provide unprecedented funding for a statewide awareness campaign on maternal and postpartum depression."

"Maternal depression is common and treatable, which should make this type of screening routine. I applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for taking the first step toward making this a reality for soon-to-be mothers in New York City. In taking action we are ensuring that both mother and baby are healthy before and after pregnancy," said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health**.

"Maternal depression is commonly experienced, seldom discussed, and can have a devastating impact on families. No one should feel ashamed of asking for help and the initiative announced today will reduce the stigma attached to maternal depression and improve our abilities to keep New Yorkers healthy at all stages of life. I thank First Lady Chirlane McCray for spearheading conversations on this important issue and am thankful to all of the partner hospitals whose work will improve the lives of mothers and children across the City of New York," said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**.

"Screening and treating maternal depression is an essential part of women's health care, but often there is stigma attached to it. Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) applauds New York City for taking such an important step in the health and well-being of pregnant women and new mothers in NYC," said **Joan Malin, President and CEO of PPNYC**. "Like sexual and reproductive health care and prenatal care, we must work together to ensure women have access to the mental health care they need when they need it."

"This initiative is a tremendous step forward for our city's mothers and families," said **Nitzia Logothetis, Founder and Executive Chairwoman of the Seleni Institute**. "We are so grateful for today's announcement, as we know that when women are supported, they are able to best care for themselves, their children, and their families."

"Providing postpartum depression screening and referral is an evidence-based practice that will undoubtedly improve the quality of life for New York City's mothers, children and families. With an early intervention, we can not only help mothers in the immediate aftermath of childbirth but potentially avert more serious behavioral health problems in the long-term. The Coalition strongly endorses the Mayor's proposal to expand this service throughout NYC Health + Hospitals and the private hospitals that are participating in the program," said **Phillip A. Saperia, Chief Executive Officer of The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.**

"The initiative announced today is critical at two important levels: it makes our health system better by integrating mental health into routine care for new moms, and it contributes to the stability and wellbeing of families. When a parent is suffering from depression, the impact is felt by the whole family, including the children," said **Dr. George L. Askew, Deputy Commissioner for Family and Child Health at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene**.

"This bold, timely initiative from First Lady Chirlane McCray is welcomed by OHEL as a means to further strengthen women, families and all communities. While maternal depression is treatable, for too long it has been stigmatized, severely impacting the well-being of mothers, their children and other family members. That the majority of women suffering from postpartum and related mental health illnesses can be effectively managed makes Ms. McCray's statement all the more powerful. Healthier mothers raising healthier children will make for healthier communities. OHEL looks forward to expanding its existing collaboration with Maimonides Medical Center on this initiative," said **David Mandel, Chief Executive of OHEL Children's Home and Family Services**.

Signs and symptoms of maternal depression can range from mild to severe. Symptoms may include feeling sad, hopeless or overwhelmed; crying a lot; having no energy or motivation; having trouble focusing, remembering or making decisions; sleeping too little or too much; having thoughts about hurting yourself, that something

terrible might happen to the baby or that you might hurt the baby, and more. New York City offers a number of supports for pregnant women and new mothers experiencing depression. For more information, click [here](#).

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