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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Well, I got to tell you, I'm really seeing amazing things happening all over this city. Last night, I had a wonderful experience. For the first time in 13 months, one of our most cherished cultural institutions, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, BAM – BAM had its first live performance in 13 months at the skating rink in Prospect Park. It was just beautiful, an amazing performance, a performance by a troop from Montreal. The group is called Le Patin Libre. It's an amazing use of skating as a form of dance, as a form of expression. And the energy and the excitement of everyone who was there, seeing our cultural life come back, seeing, on a beautiful spring evening, a live performance again, and it was done beautifully. Everything was safe and carefully handled by BAM and everyone at Prospect Park. I thank them, I thank them for that. But look, everyone, this is how we come back. This is what a recovery for all of us means, to have our cultural life back, to have the things that we feel, and we care about that mean so much to us. And I want to thank the performers. I want to thank everyone at BAM, because this is so important to the recovery of this city. So, a really magical performance. Anyone who's able, I urge you to go. It's something very, very special.

And today we're going to be able to share, thankfully, a lot of good news. This morning's briefing is filled with some really good updates. And first and foremost, our continued progress on vaccination. So, as you know, last week, over a half-a-million vaccinations in New York City last Friday, over a hundred thousand in one day, supply, finally starting to come in. So, the numbers are really moving now. So, since the very beginning, there've been 4,673,627 vaccinations in New York City, more vaccinations than there are people in the state of Louisiana altogether. So, I love seeing this progress. We're well on our way to the goal, five million fully vaccinated Adults in New York City by June. And we're going to keep doing more and more to reach every New Yorker, to address disparity, to give people trust in the system, and that really, to me, is about grassroots sites. These pop-up sites have been incredibly helpful. So, we're announcing a group of additional pop-up sites all over the city. And these are sites that community members know, that they believe in, they feel a connection to, and it's having a huge impact – sites in public housing, at community centers, at senior centers, sites in houses of worship, sites in community organizations that are known and trusted. It's making a huge difference. So, this is the shape of things to come, as we're finally getting the supply we need, more and more of these grassroots sites, reaching deeper and deeper into communities, and the numbers are just going to keep going up and up and up.

Now, definitely more good news from the State Legislature. And I want to just thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and the State Senate, Speaker Carl Heastie and the State Assembly. They have done remarkable work with the State budget. This is the best State budget we've ever seen for New York City and for the whole State of New York. It's absolutely the best ever. And I got to tell you, the Legislature provided tremendous leadership and what they did

was they created a budget that puts working people first. They created a budget that actually was based on what the legislators were hearing from the grassroots and what people needed. It was dramatic, the difference that we have seen because of the leadership of the Legislature. So, what have we gotten? For the first time in years and years and years, justice for our public school kids, for our public school parents. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity case from almost two decades ago, ignored by numerous governors, finally, we see the fairness in funding for New York City public schools being locked into this budget. And our kids are going to benefit over the next years in a way that they've deserved for a long, long time, but it couldn't be more timely because we have to bring our schools back next year, after everything we've been through with COVID. We have to have an extraordinary year academically. We have to do extraordinary work to help kids with their emotional challenges, and we're going to need a lot of resources to do it. This State budget helps us make that happen.

Tremendous progress on a number of fronts – expanding access to childcare, addressing the real needs of renters who have been through so much in this crisis, helping small businesses, helping them get back on their feet and survive COVID, extraordinary efforts all around, major recognition of people who need the help, including those fellow New Yorkers who are undocumented. The State Legislature did something extraordinary here. And the people in New York City are going to benefit not just this year, but for years to come because of the actions in this budget. So, this is really something to celebrate. And unquestionably, when I talk about a recovery for all of us, this is one of the ways it's going to happen because we got a stimulus from Washington. Thanks to President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer we got a stimulus that actually was what we needed to recover. Now, our State Legislature comes forward with an amazing package of support for New York City. This has given us what we need for a recovery for all of us.

Okay, now let's talk about all of us, because this is important, and this is a tough topic but one where we're going to do more and more to address the needs of a lot of New Yorkers who are still suffering from COVID. And when we say all of us, it means not forgetting that even though a number of people had COVID and the disease in the first instance passed, a lot of New Yorkers are still feeling the effects of COVID months and months later. And we've got to help them. We've got to make sure that folks who are still experiencing negative symptoms, having really tough aftereffects of COVID, that we're there for them. And just like everything else with COVID, we see tremendous disparities, that folks who are feeling these aftereffects are particularly feeling in communities that have been suffering the most – in the immigrant communities, in communities of color and lower income communities. The places where COVID hit hardest, people are feeling these effects the longest. We've got to keep working to help everyone who needs ongoing help.

And that's why we created our COVID Centers of Excellence. These are centers focused on holistic care for folks who are going to need it for months and even years ahead. There's two open already, Tremont in the Bronx, Roosevelt in Queens, the Bushwick site in Brooklyn coming in July, specifically focused on the hardest hit communities. And we want to provide help to all New Yorkers who are experiencing this need. So, today we're announcing something very important, an Aftercare program for folks who are still suffering. Our extraordinary Test and Trace Corps has really done miraculous work reaching all over the city, helping people, stopping the spread of disease, but also helping people with all of their needs, physical and mental health care needs, food, all sorts of support. And so, Test and Trace is exactly the right

place to turn for the ongoing care that's going to be needed for New Yorkers who are still suffering. I want you to hear about this initiative. It's so important. And our central message today is, we're going to be there with our fellow New Yorkers for as long as it takes. And leading this effort – and she's done a fantastic job leading the Take Care initiative at Test and Trace, which has helped so many people to safely separate, so many families to be safe, so many people to feel loved and supported even as they're going through COVID – my pleasure introduced Dr. Amanda Johnson.

Director Amanda Johnson, Take Care New York: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. And good morning, New Yorkers. Today, it's with great pride that I tell you about a new resource being offered by the New York City's Test and Trace Corps Take Care program to help those who are now living with the effects of long COVID. As you may have heard, long COVID is a collection of symptoms that develops either during or following a period of confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 and can continue for weeks and even months afterward. It's estimated that at least ten percent of individuals who have been infected with COVID-19 will go on to develop long COVID. I may have mentioned this before, but even before there was the COVID-19 pandemic, I've been a primary care doctor working at a community health center based in Harlem. April of 2021 looks very different than April of 2020 did. But not a week goes by that my patients are not touched and affected by the long-lasting impacts of COVID-19.

I have individuals who are months out from their acute infection of COVID-19 and are still stricken with shortness of breath, chest discomfort, with lightheadedness, with cough, anxiety, depression, confusion that they didn't have before their infection. Things that were taken for granted before they became infected with COVID-19 like showering, getting up to go to the bathroom, dressing, preparing meals, leave them exhausted. Many work in jobs that require quite a bit of physical labor, as can be expected, and they worry about what it would be like to go back to work while they're still feeling so ill. And at the same time, they are incredibly scared of what will happen to them if they don't go back to work. For that reason, we are bringing you the Aftercare program as part of Test and Trace because I know that my patients don't represent a unique experience, and this is happening in thousands of households across New York.

So, Aftercare connects Test and Trace clients who have ongoing health and social needs to a full range of resources and referrals related to long COVID. This program starts today. We're going to be reaching out to a group of former Test and Trace COVID-19 cases who indicated that they were still experiencing symptoms toward the end of their isolation period. And through text messaging, we're going to be connecting them to a wide range of resources to support them in their experience with long COVID. These resources fall into four primary categories, physical health, mental health, financial supports, and community supports. Examples include referrals and connections to our COVID-19 Centers of Excellence, as well as other post-COVID clinics across New York City, diagnostic testing, primary care referrals, virtual support group, support for accessing paid sick leave, as well as educational resources related to pacing and energy conservation so that people are able to get through their day to day.

We know that long COVID can look different for each individual. And for that reason, people will be able to choose the resources that are most relevant to them through the Aftercare program. We came up with our initial set of resources to offer based on our conversations with advocates in the field of long COVID, many of whom are patients themselves, as well as other local stakeholders in this area. But we recognize that this is an active and emerging area of

ongoing research. As we learn more about long COVID, what it entails, what to expect, how people are affected and what the best treatments are, we're continuing to enhance and personalize the range of resources that we're able to offer individuals who are living with long COVID. Aftercare and its resources are just one more step in our move toward a fair recovery for all New Yorkers so that we can deliver support to the communities that have been most affected by COVID-19. Thank you very much for your time, and I'm going to pass it back to you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Dr. Johnson. And look, everyone, this is such an important initiative. I thank Dr. Johnson and everyone at Test and Trace for this really important work. Look, we got to be there for people and we're still learning a lot about COVID. But the important thing is to recognize, a lot of New Yorkers are still suffering. We can help them. We will help them regardless of ability to pay, regardless of documentation status. Very important to say that this is – look, Test and Trace as part of Health + Hospitals and this has been absolutely the credo of Health + Hospitals all along, here to help New Yorkers no matter what. So, we're going to be there for folks as we move forward. And look, the good news, of course, is we continue to beat the variants, beat COVID with mass amounts of vaccination, we continue to take real steps towards our recovery. But as we do that, as we focus on a recovery for all of us, we've got to remember who is still suffering from COVID and stay by them no matter what it takes and that's what we're going to do.

Okay. Now, I said there was some things today to highlight and obviously very good news in the State budget, very good news on the continued vaccination levels going up and up and up. Very good news seeing our cultural institutions come back, our live performances come back, a lot of good news. Before I go to the indicators for today, I've got some more good news because even though it's still spring, summer is just around the corner. You can start to feel it. And so, I'm very, very pleased to announce that this summer, all eight New York City public beaches will be open and will be open on time on Memorial Day weekend, starting Saturday, May 29th. And 48 outdoor public pools will be open after the last day of school, that next day or a few days later, Saturday the 26th of June. Saturday, the 26th of June, 48 public pools will be open, outdoor pools. I'll note that five of our outdoor pools are undergoing major rehab so they will not be open, but the other 48 will be on time. We're going back to the schedule that we had for years and years. And that is a very good sign. Look, last year, we had to delay the openings with public beaches, we had to limit the number of outdoor public pools. This year we get to do what is great for the families of this city, the kids of the city, have them all open. It's outdoors. It's exactly where we want people to be. It's a great way for the families of New York City to spend their summer.

Now we're going to do it the right way, which means yes, there will be health and safety measures in place. There will be smart restrictions. There'll be rules. Whenever possible, outside the water, of course, we want people to keep their masks on, etcetera, but it's going to be a wonderful summer in New York City. Lots of outdoor activities, outdoor pools, beaches, cultural events. This summer New York City is going to come alive. This is going to be crucial to a recovery for all of us, and we're going to have a safe summer and we're going to have a fun summer, and this is your reminder that you can do both at the same time. So, we're going to use my whole wingspan here – this means summer's coming, public beaches, public pools, but we're going to do it the safe way. A little bit of social distancing, never hurt anyone. So, good news ahead.

Now let's talk about the indicators for today. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report, 238 patients confirmed positivity level 58.61 percent. Hospitalization rate, well we don't have this number today because we normally get it from the state dashboard and it has not been updated because of some technical issues. So, we'll have that for you tomorrow. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report, 2,991 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.52 percent.

Going to say a few words in Spanish, and I'm going to go back to a topic that everyone cares about, the fact that the beaches and pools will be opening on time.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, all we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Dr. Amanda Johnson, Commissioner Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver and Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz. With that, we'll go to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, all. How are you today?

Mayor: It's a good morning, Juliet. I'm doing great. How about you?

Question: Yes, I'm fine. Thank you. So, I wanted to ask you about this tourist who was shot yesterday. The Police Commissioner expressed outrage about a five-year-old shot, innocent bystanders being shot. Yet, I don't hear you talking about this and why not, and why aren't you going to these neighborhoods to be supportive and to say this won't be tolerated?

Mayor: Juliet, it clearly won't be tolerated because for years now we have been changing the whole reality of how we address crime and violence. We had a horrible disruption last year with a perfect storm of COVID, but the NYPD is out there doing great work, more gun arrests than we've had in a quarter century. So, of course we condemn all violence, but the best way to address violence is by getting guns off the street, which The NYPD is doing, by working with communities more closely, and that's what our police reform is all about. Deepening the bond between NYPD and community, and I know that's going to have a huge impact. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay. You know, I understand that, but people are afraid and you're advocating recovery when this is scaring people. You could be walking down the street and minding your own business and get shot, and this is happening in neighborhoods that are actually hardest hit by crime and the pandemic. So, what are you doing about that?

Mayor: Juliet, again, I've talked to New Yorkers all over the city. They are focused on this city coming back. I do not believe New Yorkers live in fear. It's just not who we are. I believe there's some real issues we have to address. I believe we've seen a serious uptick in gun violence that has to be addressed. It's going to be addressed. It is being addressed by more gun arrests, by

deeper work with communities, more use of and more support for the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System. We've been talking about these investments and these changes for months now and we're doing it. So, I think people see these actions and they know that continue to help is coming. But New Yorkers don't live in fear. They keep moving forward. I really believe that. I've felt that my whole life here. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you doing?

Mayor: I'm doing okay, Katie. How are you?

Question: Well, you know, excited about the beaches opening up on time. My question for you is about actually after the summer, looking ahead. Can you guarantee that every New York City public school next year will be open for five days of in-person learning?

Mayor: Based on what we know now? Absolutely. I'm going to put a little bit of asterisk and I think we've all been humbled by COVID that there's things we don't know and things that change beyond anyone's expectation, but I feel very confident based on what we know now, Katie, we're going to have five million people, five million adults vaccinated by June, and then we're going to just keep going. I will not be surprised by September if that number is closer to six million. The measures we put in place in schools have absolutely worked. Everyone sees it. Parents want to come back. Yeah, we're going to be open five days a week for every kid who wants to be in school. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thanks, and I guess bringing it back to summer. I know last summer there were restrictions on the beach. Obviously, social distancing measures. I think a masks mandate. Will there be those rules again this summer, or will there be some sort of a change to the rules where people have to, you know, continue to wear masks on the beach or whatever they did last summer?

Mayor: Look, I think things are evolving Katie. Obviously, as more and more people get vaccinated, and I do think that's going to start to drive down the case count for sure. I won't be surprised if over the course of the summer there's ways of doing things differently and you know, giving people a little more freedom, but look, the rules in place – last I've heard certainly the rules in place that the State set for last summer continue. I think that's smart for now. But we still have a ways to go until beaches and pools open and we're going to constantly watch the data and the science, and if things continue to improve, you know, hopefully we can relax some of those rules further.

Moderator: Next is Andrew from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and all on the call. You described the State Budget as the best one you've ever seen. You've praised the Senate Leader, you've praised the Assembly Leader, you did not praise the third entity involved in the negotiations, the Governor. Would you acknowledge, or do you believe that his weakened political position actually helped with the negotiations? And in that regard, it might've served a lot of folks benefit that he did not heed the calls to resign.

Mayor: Well, that's interesting theory, Andrew, I would say it just as simply, the legislature led the budget process. Carl Heastie and Andrea Stewart-Cousins led this process and it's no surprise as a result we got the best budget we've ever seen. I think very highly of both of them. I think they've provided extraordinary leadership. I think they listen to the people. They listen to the grassroots and look, it's clearly a budget for working people, not a budget for elites, and for too many years, the elites dominated Albany. This is the difference when the legislature has the power to lead the process. So, that's what I saw here. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Topic of vaccines and walk-ins at the 25 sites where 75 plus can now walk-in, what is it that you and your health team are hearing from communities about why seniors have not responded in the numbers you had hoped for? Is it a lack of tech savvy? Is it vaccine hesitancy? What is it that has impelled you to move to this step where seniors can just walk in?

Mayor: I think you hit the nail on the head. Andrew, I think we definitely think some of it is hesitancy, some of it is not being as comfortable navigating the sign-up process. We want to make it as simple as possible and this seems to be working, and we've looked at some examples around the country where it's worked as well. So, this – I think this could be really, profoundly important. We'll do walk-up vaccinations for folks 75 years and older. As we do that more and more places, we'll get a good idea if it's working, and we'll keep expanding as it is. But even in places where we're using other approaches, we're reserving appointments for seniors, we're going door to door. We have folks canvassing door to door to seniors, particularly in public housing, signing them up directly for vaccination. I think you're going to see more and more progress with seniors, but this is an approach that makes sense. I certainly can relate and say, you know, if someone said to me, hey, you just have to walk up, that is simpler, and I think a lot of seniors will therefore like that option.

Moderator: Next to Sydney from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I want to ask about something you came out against in early December, you expressed your opposition to national grids, natural gas pipeline being built in North Brooklyn, and then earlier this year you had issued an executive order to say the city won't support fossil fuel infrastructure. I'm wondering if you could talk about what actions you plan to take to actually stop that expanded infrastructure and what can the city actually do to keep it from happening rather than just expressing support for some of the activist positions?

Mayor: Yeah, Sydney, first of all, think when the City of New York speaks it has a real impact. So, we think it's time to stop these investments in fossil fuels infrastructure when what we should be doing is just singularly focusing on renewable energy to stop climate change. And we said, and I put this in the State of the City, that we're going to pass the rules and laws necessary to stop all new fossil fuel connections in the city by 2030. But in terms of some of those bigger infrastructure projects like the pipeline, we're going to use every tool we can. We've got to figure out new ways of doing things because we got to find a way to stop these. A lot of the power resides in the State. But what I can tell you is any tool we have that we can use to stop them, we will because they are part of the past, and what we need to do is strand fossil fuels in the ground and just radically shift to renewable energy. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Oka, thank you. And turning back to summer – the summer news, which you seemed to officially start the countdown to summer this morning. I want to ask, I know the city had previously done, like set up pools and dumpster bins on Open Streets several years ago, and I'm wondering if the city would – plans to do that again, just with like Open Streets, being so much more expanded now with COVID, would you bring that type of program back this summer?

Mayor: I think that's a great thing for us to look at because we want to maximize outdoor summer options. So, look having the public pools back, the outdoor pools, is going to be so important. Having the beaches back, Open Streets, Open Restaurants, cultural events outdoors, you're going to have a lot going on, but it's a big city. So, if we can get the most out Open Streets we want to. So, we're certainly going to look at that option and see if that's something we can do as well. I want folks to really be able to enjoy the outdoors in New York City this summer.

Moderator: Next is Reuvain from Hamodia.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, I'd like to ask you about the tax hike on the wealthy in the budget. Do you have any fear that this will cause more wealthy people to leave than during the pandemic?

Mayor: I really do not, Reuvain. First of all, it bears remembering that just a few years ago wealthy people got one of the biggest tax cuts they had ever gotten from President Trump. This simply covers back some of that ground. The wealthy have not been paying their fair share in taxes for decades, then they got a massive tax cut from Trump. Now the State of New York is creating a little more fairness. So, I think wealthy people are going to be quite fine, obviously, I've said it, and it is a fact, that wealthy people have done very well during the pandemic while so many other people were suffering. Stock market's been booming. The question really is what determines behavior and I've seen lots of studies that say marginal changes in taxation do not affect the decision-making of the vast majority of wealthy people. They are going to stay in New York City because they want to be in New York City, because they liked the life that's available to them in New York City, because they can make a lot more money in New York City than a lot of other places because it's one of the global capitals of every industry. So, I really think that's what matters here and the money that will come from this new taxation is going to make New York City an even better place to live, because it's going to mean we're investing in the city, making it a place that works for everyone. I really think the legislature has done the right thing and I think the negative predictions will not come true. Go ahead, Reuvain.

Question: If taxes are raised in New York to – making it be the highest tax state for those earners and you don't think that they may choose to live or make their primary residency one of the other 49 states?

Mayor: Again, I've talked to a lot of people who've done very well, and I've asked them over years and years, why are they in New York City? First of all, because they have an unparalleled opportunity to make money here. People have been very honest with me about that, that they can achieve things in New York City they can't achieve any place else. Even in a world where there's more remote activity, there's still nothing like New York City. We have every major industry represented here. It's one of the global economic capitals. People can achieve things here they can't achieve any place else. That's not changing at all. In fact, I think we're going to come back even stronger after this crisis because some of our strengths are going to come to the fore. I think

we will become the public health capital of the world. I think you're going to see our life sciences industry take off because of the billions and billions of dollars of investment in life sciences looking for a new home. They're going to find that home here in New York City.

I think people choose to be here because of what's available here, that's not available other places, and I asked our Office of Management and Budget, over the last few years, look at millionaires who have left New York City and billionaires who have left New York City - look at the millionaires and billionaires who have moved into New York City, and they said to me well, those numbers kind of even out, but what's really interesting is the number of millionaires who are created in New York City – people who become millionaires in New York City, because there's so much opportunity here and that is going to flourish again, and that's going to be one of the reasons that people stay here and new people come here.

Moderator: Next is Amanda from Politico.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Amanda. How about you?

Question: I'm doing well. I'm enjoying the nice weather, thank you for asking. So, I wanted to loop back to some of the health care stuff that we talked about earlier with this Aftercare program, I'm trying to get a better understanding of kind of what's the cost-benefit for New Yorkers who are going to be enrolling in these programs and how Health + Hospitals might be able to leverage what they're learning through these programs to kind of help guide medical care moving forward. So, I was hoping your health officials could talk a little bit more about, you know, like are there trials going on with these people? Kind of like, how is this going to help move New York City Health + Hospitals in terms of better understanding COVID?

Mayor: And I'll start with Dr. Johnson in a moment, and then I'll turn to Dr. Katz, but I'd say you're raising a really good frame here because it's a combination of helping people, helping them deal with what they're experiencing and doing it holistically because as Dr. Johnson said, folks are experiencing a wide range of symptoms, but it's also learning in the process, what we can do. Dr. Katz spoke eloquently and I imagine he'll make this parallel of the difference between a year ago, what was happening in hospitals versus now the amount of learning that happened in the last year in terms of dealing with COVID patients when they first arrive. I think you're going to see a parallel experience with long COVID, that we're going to learn a lot more about how we can support people and address their problems. Let me turn to Dr. Johnson, then Dr. Katz.

Director Johnson: So, thank you so much for your question, Amanda. So, one thing that I do want to make clear is that the reason that the Aftercare program exists is that first and foremost, we want to serve the New Yorkers who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, and so being able to actually engage with them on what their experience has been with long COVID, what have been the symptoms, what has been the economic impact for them, what have been the family consequences for them? It's going to enhance our understanding of what these programs should look like and where the gaps are. Where do we need to advocate for additional resources that don't exist today, or for which people who have long COVID are ineligible. So, that is one really important part of the learning that's going to enhance our programming. You also bring up and

did not miss what I said about the ongoing research in the area of long COVID. So, the post-acute COVID syndrome is something that is only beginning to acquire a definition in some understanding of the medical community. But we're far from having a complete understanding of what this really means.

Through the aftercare program, people who want to participate in a virtual support group can have access to participate in both national state and local trials, if that is what they choose, but let's remember how people have been impacted by COVID-19 in our city and across the country. We don't want this to be coercive. We don't want people to feel that they must participate in any kind of research study in order to gain access to some of the resources that we're able to offer. So, while we will facilitate participation in research studies to the extent that people want to, it's not a requirement of participating in the program and we'll just learn by virtue of being able to actually work with these patients on a day to day, week to week, month to month basis. I will also offer Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi the opportunity to weigh in, but we're really excited about what this means in terms of being able to serve New Yorkers through our program, as well as contribute to the larger body of knowledge about long COVID.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Katz.

President Katz: I think Dr. Johnson has always just done a good job. We're very pleased with your support, Mr. Mayor, you know, we've been able to open up two Centers of Excellence at Roosevelt and Tremont sites, and soon to open the Bushwick site. These are areas of the city that have been particularly hard hit, where we were going to have now have the ability to really meet people where they are to figure out what are their symptoms. As Dr. Johnson was explaining, there's a very wide range of symptoms that people have from respiratory symptoms, which require excellent radiologic equipment and techniques that we have at the centers, to more mental health, stress issues that people are experiencing. So, we're going to be working with patients, figuring out where they are, what their symptoms are, and then treating those symptoms. While it may not be yet clear that there's a single pill to take a long COVID, it's very unlikely that that will be true. As physicians, we do know how to treat the symptoms that are disabling people, and that will be our focus. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Amanda.

Question: Thank you so much, and Dr. Johnson, thank you for clarifying the fact that it's not, you're a patient, you want that care, you don't have to be enrolled in trials. That was one of my questions, thank you.

I just had a quick follow-up for Dr. Katz. During your last public meeting, your CFO is talking about the cost of these programs. It seems pretty low in terms of, you know, what's needed for infrastructure and for staff to keep these programs up and running. Is there a certain timeline that you're looking at to keep Centers of Excellence up, considering there's very little that we know about how long patients who were experiencing long COVID symptoms will have it for? I just trying to get a sense of what you're looking at for the future.

President Katz: Sure, thank you. We'll keep the centers open as long as there are patients who need them, and then, I mean, even beyond that, if we're lucky enough to be able to completely, you know, move beyond people with long COVID symptoms, we'll want to focus on the things

that contributed to this COVID pandemic, which are uncontrolled hypertension, uncontrolled diabetes, helping people to be the right weight to get enough exercise so that they're not at greater risk. So, there there's a lot that we can do to make people healthier and to prevent future pandemics, and we'll use the centers for those things as well. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more first. We'll go to Marla from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Marla, how are you today?

Question: Good. How are you doing?

Mayor: Good, good.

Question: It's become a divisive issue in the U.S. and been talked about for the past few days. Some states are supporting vaccine passports, including New York. Now, I'm wondering if you would support a mandatory vaccine passport for tourists once they begin flowing in and maybe New Yorkers to even attend indoor sporting or entertainment events?

Mayor: You know, Marla, it, it is a divisive issue, and I think we should all sort of pause and take a breath on this look at why it's troubling to folks. Put aside the politicization of the issue for a moment. I think there is an understandable tension here between sort of the greater public good in terms of health and wellbeing, but also individual rights, and this is kind of a historic American challenge. I'm someone who believes that we need to be smart about not asking people to do something unless it's absolutely necessary. So, I generally don't think, you know, mandatory vaccination for example, is a good idea. I think voluntary is good, but with a very, very intensive public education effort and a lot of outreach and making it easy for people, making it free for people, those kinds of things. And I think the passport idea is a very good idea. People need to know their information will be secure. They need to know their privacy will not be invaded, and I think there are some situations that are more sensitive than others. For example, I believe folks who go on an airplane should have to provide evidence of vaccination or having a negative recent test. That to me would be a common-sense measure of you're putting a whole lot of people in a steel tube and sending them up in the air for hours on end. But I would say it's a different standard if you're talking about an outdoor event or something like that. So, I think this is something we can all work together to figure out a balance point on. There's a place for these passports, but there do need to be some checks and balances as well. Go ahead, Marla.

Question: And you spoke about the \$2 billion fund to assist undocumented immigrants and others who could not apply for a pandemic relief. Could you – do you know how many New Yorkers would benefit, how much they would get? Is this a one-time sort of check that we'll be going to them and when will they get this relief?

Mayor: I don't have all those details and my team will follow up and we'll obviously get information from the legislature. What I'd say is how many people benefit? Well, first of all, we know there's about a half-a-million undocumented New Yorkers here in this city, who are part of

our communities, who are part of the life of the city, who contribute a lot to the city, who are part of our economy - a half a million people, I would say a huge number of people and they have not gotten the same help that other folks got during this crisis. My understanding is it is limited term. It is, you know, another part of thinking in terms of stimulus and relief. But I think it's going to really help families get back on their feet and help us with our recovery. That's why I commend the legislature for doing it. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hey, good morning everybody.

Mayor: Good morning, Nolan. How are you doing?

Question: I'm alright, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Alright.

Question: I would circle back to the question that Juliet led off with. You promised you would ride the subway to restore confidence and to people that it's safe to be there, both in terms of the vaccine and in terms of concerns about crime and violence on the subway. You've yet to make those subway rides. Why?

Mayor: Well, I have been out on the subway for sure, and some of your colleagues were with me Nolan, but I'm going to be doing it in a more systematic manner. There's obviously been a lot going on lately we've been dealing with, but I will simply ask the team to set a date and announce it so you guys will know is happening and you're welcome to come along.

Question: I appreciate the invitation in advance, and to sort of the second piece of the point, there have been a lot of concerns about whether or not there has been sufficient follow through for people who live in New York City or in the shelter system and suffering from mental illness. How much of a drop-off has there been in the number of people who are receiving care from the city for mental illness since the move from shelters to hotels?

Mayor: You know, Nolan, I'll get folks to get you more detailed information, but we've obviously been supporting people wherever they are. I think the difference is the shelter system is built with supports in place, and it's what we want to get back to. It's the whole idea of our turning the tide plan from years ago is to get out of scattered site apartments, get out of hotels altogether. We're going to be returning to that, and we're going to have updates on that soon about how we'll do that. We always provide mental health support in all the different efforts that we do on behalf of homeless folks. But I just believe that the shelters are where we can do it best, and so that's why we look forward to getting people back to the settings where we can give them the most care.

Everyone look, as we conclude today, here's the good news, and then what is all of us –the responsibility for all of us to follow through. The good news is New York City is coming back. The good news is there's extraordinary things happening all over the city. The good news is the things we love about this place, the life, the energy, the arts, the culture, the food, all of the amazing events – you're going to be seeing more and more of that. This is going to be a great

summer in New York City. Beaches open, outdoor pools open – a lot to enjoy this year, but what do we have to do? We have to keep it safe. We have to do all the right things to make sure we have the summer we want to have. That means getting out there, getting vaccinated. It means wearing the mask. It's such an important thing to do. The doctors keep telling us these masks have been miracle workers. Let's keep using them, keep observing the social distancing. We are winning the battle against COVID, but it's still another battle we got to finish. So, let's do the right thing now so, we can have the summer we all deserve, and New Yorkers, you have been amazing. You have been heroic every time we say we need help you answer the call. One last push, and then we can have a summer that we really can enjoy together. Thank you, everyone.

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