

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** January 19, 2023, 10:30 AM  
**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS CALLS IN LIVE TO WNYC'S "THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW"**

**Brian Lehrer:** Brian Lehrer on WNYC, and Mayor Eric Adams is back with us now. Today, we'll talk primarily about the mayor's announcement that four city-run sexual health clinics in New York City will begin offering, for free, the so-called abortion pill, which you take for what doctors call a medication abortion, as opposed to a surgical one. That's actually the majority of abortions in the U.S. at this point.

And that's a healthcare equity, as well as abortion rights issue. And the mayor refers to it as part of what he calls a New York City women's health agenda, that he says will include other health equity issues, including, according to the press release they put out on this, to fight the nine times higher maternal mortality rate for Black women than white women in the city, plus needs for menopause-friendly workplaces, more pelvic floor physical therapy access, and more.

I understand the abortion pills were to become available already yesterday, at the first location to offer them. We'll get specific about where that is, and touch on a few other things too with the mayor. Mr. Mayor, always great to have you. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Adams:** Thank you. It feels like it has been a long time, so it's good to speak with you.

**Lehrer:** Why this announcement and why now?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, it came from a series of conversations over the years, actually. I started this pursuit back when I was the borough president in Brooklyn. We did a lot of work around doulas, work around dealing with maternal morbidity. And I realized that once I become the mayor, I'm able to take the work we did in Brooklyn and make it citywide.

It was just really conversations with my sisters, my mother. Watching the women who were in my life, in one way or another, and just how unfair we have been towards women and their healthcare needs. And we want to take a real bold approach. Not only the abortion pill, but just really to redefine women, and their bodies, and the taboos that we've attached to them. And I

think that has prevented really some of the adequate healthcare. And this is how many women have shared with me.

**Lehrer:** I see they were scheduled to begin offering the pills yesterday, at the first of the four clinics that will have them. The Morrisania Sexual Health Clinic in the Bronx, Fulton Avenue, near 169th Street. Do you know if they got the program going?

**Mayor Adams:** Of my knowledge, it should be up and running. I was in D.C. yesterday. It was not on my briefing this morning, but of my knowledge, we should be up and running. I'm sure there were no hiccups in getting it done.

**Lehrer:** How will it work? Just walk in? Do you need a doctor's prescription, or an insurance card or anything?

**Mayor Adams:** The Department of Health commissioner, Dr. Vasan, they're going to list on the website all of the frequently asked questions, so people can know exactly how it's done. But it's going to be treated the same way we're using our 11 Health + Hospitals that's already in place. And traditionally it does not deal with no prescription. This is free for people, so they can get the necessary care if they're looking to terminate their pregnancy.

**Lehrer:** The New York Post, being The New York Post, headlined their story on the abortion pills this way, "Adams Inks Deal to Offer Abortion Pills at New York City Clinics Sparking Tourism Fears." And then it says, "Making the Big Apple the national tourist destination to snuff out pregnancies." Nevermind that, in my opinion at least, it's offensive to refer to women in one of the most difficult moments of their lives as tourists. But will this be available to non-New Yorkers, no questions asked?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, it is. We've made it clear, after the horrendous Supreme Court decision, that this is going to be a city where women are going to have the right to choose and make these difficult medical decisions. And if someone comes from outside the city, they will be entitled to this same procedure. Yes, it is.

And it's not tourism. And I concur with you, I think that it is unfair when a woman makes a difficult choice like this, they should not have to be restricted because the state doesn't respect their right to choose what happens to their body.

**Lehrer:** So is that part of your goal, in fact, to help contribute to abortion access after the Supreme Court overturned Roe versus Wade, leading to it being severely limited in other states?

**Mayor Adams:** A primary goal is to ensure women in this state have whatever is available for them for their healthcare needs. But at the same time, we wanted to send a message to the women of this country, because our relationship with women in this country is not limited to the geographical boundaries of New York State. I have aunts, and aunties, and nieces that are all over this country, and I wanted to make sure that we send a message that no matter who you are,

that you have a right to be in control of your body, and New York State is going to be a leading voice on that.

**Lehrer:** Listeners, who has a question on women's health equity for the mayor? I'll also be asking briefly about housing, and about the asylum seekers, but this is mostly about the undercovered topic of women's health. 212-433-WNYC, 212-433-9692, or tweet @BrianLehrer.

I see from our newsrooms reporting that three of the eight sexual health clinics the city had before the pandemic are still shut down due to staffing shortages, according to the Health Department. They were first repurposed for Covid use, according to the Health Department, and now closed, if I'm understanding this correctly, three of the eight. So if you're pledging to make women's health a cornerstone of your agenda, do you need to get those back up and running and have that workforce fully staffed soon?

**Mayor Adams:** That is our goal, but let's be clear, we still have our 11 Health + Hospital locations that are up and operational. And as we continue to recruit and staff up, we do want to get those three back up and operating. And Dr. Vasana has done an amazing job, he and his team — and Dr. Katz over at H+H — during these extremely challenging times when you're dealing with the staff shortages that the entire country is experiencing.

**Lehrer:** Can people also get free abortion pills at the city's public hospitals, which you just mentioned?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, they can.

**Lehrer:** So is one kind of facility more appropriate than the other, depending on the patient?

**Mayor Adams:** What I think many people don't realize is that there is a level of intimidation people feel sometimes when they go into a large hospital facility, that's different from a local clinic in your community. And that's what we want to always take into account, some of the challenges that people have that we may not even think about. You and I may walk into a hospital building and not be intimidated at all, but there are large groups who feel extremely intimidated by walking into large buildings, large structures, governmental locations, and we want to be culturally sensitive. And we also believe that local healthcare clinics can provide a real bridge to those who are seeking some form of healthcare needs.

**Lehrer:** Sarah in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the mayor. Hi, Sarah.

**Sarah:** Hi. My name's Sarah, and I'm part of NYC for Abortion Rights, a grassroots collective fighting for reproductive access in New York. I'd like to hear what Mayor Adams thinks about the anti-abortion harassment that happens every single day at abortion clinics across the city. Every week, a large group, sponsored by the Archdiocese of New York and Cardinal Dolan, called Witness for Life, harasses and intimidates patients. The NYPD keeps issuing them a permit to harass patients, even though multiple members of this group have been arrested and charged for clinic invasions, and have federal cases against them outside of New York City.

Given that Mayor Adams claims he cares so much about abortion access, what does he have to say about this? Wouldn't these people start harassing the four new sexual health clinics?

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor?

**Mayor Adams:** Sure, thanks for your question. We know that the city is a city of free speech, even when we disagree with the speech. No one is able to violate or harm anyone as they participate in some form of protest. We've done an amazing job to ensure that no one is harmed at these locations, we're going to continue to do so. But this is a city that we all know, just as I marched with those to fight on the right of women having the right to choose, there are those who are going to march against that.

That is the complexity of living in a city like New York in a country like America. Our goal is to make sure no one is harmed, no one is treated in an unfair way and we are going to continue to do so. We're not going to always agree with those who are marching in protest, but we are going to do it in a law abiding way and that is what the New York City Police Department has been doing.

**Lehrer:** The caller used the word harassment. Where's the line as you define it, as the NYPD defines it between exercising your right to free speech in a protest and harassing people who are trying to go in for medical care?

**Mayor Adams:** Right. There are clear guidelines based on the criminal procedure law and the penal law on when someone crosses the line and they go from the right to protest to harassing. And the Police Department has kept people at a safe distance away to allow individuals to walk in and out of a clinic to make sure they get their medical needs. And once they cross that line to go from their right to protest to harassing someone, the Police Department takes the appropriate action. That is what we must always do.

You know as well as I do that, we have people who protest. They will sometimes yell, they will scream, they will use, sometimes, language that is just really inappropriate. But that's the city and country we live in. Sometimes we like what the protestors are saying, sometimes we dislike what the protestors are saying, but that's the country we live in.

**Lehrer:** Margaret in the East Village, you're on WNYC with the mayor. Hi Margaret.

**Margaret:** Hi. I cannot tell you how happy I am to hear you say the words pelvic floor physical therapy. No one ever talks about this and it's so, so important. I myself have had several experiences with getting pelvic floor physical therapy, first in Massachusetts when I was in college and then here in New York City last year. My experience was, and this is truly wild, that there was only one pelvic floor physical therapy practice in New York City that even took insurance. They didn't take my insurance, it took me several months and probably at least 12 hours on the phone with my insurance company to get this covered. It was truly a wild experience and for some context for people who don't know what pelvic floor physical therapy is, I would love to share a little bit. Sometimes women experience issues with their pelvic floor, which is a muscular area inside their bodies.

They can have this issue after childbirth, they can have this before childbirth. It can mean that they have trouble with incontinence. It can also mean that they're unable to experience sexual intercourse or even use tampons because their bodies are so tight, related to trauma or like I said, even childbirth. So it's a serious issue for women, it's extremely painful and it's super, super expensive to treat. Even with insurance, I spent thousands of dollars probably on this. I'm curious to know about your... And it's so disruptive to your life, you have issues with incontinence like I said, or intercourse.

Some people can't even conceive naturally. So anyways, it's super important for women, no one ever talks about it. And I'm curious what these centers look like, how many of them there will be, and moreover, what is the payment like? How are you charging patients for this service that you're going to be providing, because it's really expensive? And where are you getting the people who do it? Because there are very, very few physical therapists who specialize, actually, in pelvic floor therapy.

**Lehrer:** Margaret, thank you very much. And I'll just say for the context of people who just joined that in the intro, I mentioned that in the press release on women's health from the mayor's office, it mentioned that one in three women might need pelvic floor physical therapy in their lifetimes after pregnancy or for other reasons, and that you're planning to expand that out, Mr. Mayor. What more can you say?

**Mayor Adams:** I don't know if you picked up the energy in her voice. This is what this movement is all about. For so long, women of this city and country, if not of the globe, have been living this silent suffering and no one wanted to step up and really acknowledge it. And I hope our announcement is now forcing this conversation in the forefront and the summit that we're going to hold in March with leaders all over the globe to come in and really start zeroing in on this issue.

The summit is going to assist us in answering many of these questions, but the commission of Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, these medical topics are so far over my head, I cannot even begin to give good medical answers to them. That is why the experts are going to be part of identifying, with locations, how we're going to do these treatments, how we're going to incorporate it in our current system. That is the role of Dr. Vasan and our entire Department of Health and Mental Hygiene team.

**Lehrer:** Margaret, stay tuned, it sounds like. Who else is coming to this Women's Health Summit in March, if you know yet?

**Mayor Adams:** We are partnering with a host of medical professionals, but what is really pleasing to me is that this city has a substantial and probably the largest number of women-help startups in New York City. We have become almost a place where startups want to be because of the excitement and the openness of engaging in these conversations, so we're partnering with a number of women's startup companies.

We're going to have medical professionals. We want to include some of our medical schools, because many of our medical schools are not given the proper training on these very important women's health issues. And we just want to really change this conversation and be very forthright and thoughtful as we move in this new direction. It's going to be open to a large number of participants and we're really excited about the number of people who have reached out to us and they want to participate in this.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, a couple of other things briefly while you're here, we've got about five minutes left. You've been lobbying Governor Hochul and President Biden, I see, to do more to ease the financial burden on the city of resettling so many asylum seeking migrants. So quickly, you say it could cost the city as much as \$2 billion this year, how responsive have the mayor or governor been?

**Mayor Adams:** It's more than the financial support, but it's the right support. This has always been a safe haven and a welcoming place, this city. This is a city of immigrants and as we put an individual on a pathway to citizenship or a pathway to live in this city and country, we must do it in a responsible way. The financial burden, we have not received any assistance at all. We were identified to get \$2 million from F.E.M.A.

Thanks to Senator Schumer and Congressman Jeffries, there is a substantial over \$800 million that was placed in a bill that was passed, but we don't know what will go to New York and we need to really coordinate this issue. I cannot say this enough. What I saw down in El Paso shows that there's a lack of proper coordination and one person should be responsible for coordinating and doing a real decompression strategy all over this country to deal with this issue to give people the right to be treated in a dignified way. That is not what is happening right now.

**Lehrer:** I read a quote of you in the Post asking the governor to resettle some of the asylum seekers in upstate locations that are losing population. That could be a win-win, theoretically. Did you ask the governor that directly and has she been responsive?

**Mayor Adams:** Yes. And I cannot thank Governor Hochul enough. She understands the seriousness of this moment. And you are right. There are locations throughout the state that are dealing with population issues, and are dealing with employment issues. We believe that there is a win-win. We know that those who are immigrants in this city, they provide a real boost to our economy. During Covid, believe it or not, many of the businesses that remained open were immigrant businesses. And we know there's a perfect combination of inviting those who want to be a part of the New York atmosphere. But it has to be done right and it's not been done right. And we had several conversations with the governor's office and came up with some real solutions, but we also need the national government to do their part. This is a national problem and a national government must respond.

**Lehrer:** It seems like many Republicans just want Biden, President Biden to close the border more to asylum seekers because the country can't resettle so many. Is your position, yes, the country can resettle this many and we will be economically stronger for it in the long run as a nation and as the city of New York. But it should be a federal responsibility.

**Mayor Adams:** Yes, without a doubt, we will be stronger as a nation and as a city if we coordinate in an effective way with our NGOs, with our government, with our cities. We will coordinate properly to ensure that those who are coming here are able to assimilate into our society. And that is not what we are doing now. History has shown that when you allow that diversity, it only improves upon our city and our country. And that is not what we are doing now. And it's really alarming to me that number one, we have not passed real comprehensive immigration reform, but with this new Congress, it does not look like we are going to get anywhere near that. And so we can't use that as an excuse for not coordinating a real approach to ensuring that people who come here across our borders are able to assimilate in our society in a very thoughtful way. Right now, that's not being done.

**Lehrer:** Last question. Does this also relate to your hopes for housing policy from Albany in their new budget negotiations, including hopefully much more supportive housing for people who need supportive services? Housing is arguably, I don't have to tell you topic number one for the city and affects everything else: crime, mental health, the next generation of creators and wealth generators believing they can afford to come here. So my question is, what are you looking for from Albany on housing in the new budget negotiations?

**Mayor Adams:** Well, first of all, you saw during the governor's State of the State, she talked about an aggressive housing agenda of looking to do 800,000 units. We also believe that this is a moonshot moment where we want to do 500,000 new units of housing, but it starts on several levels. We have to build, we have to look at some version of a 421-a program. We have to look at some of the rules that are put in place around zoning and restrictions. And we can't think of an antiquated method because building has changed the population and the needs have changed a lot.

We want to rethink how we're using some of the 10 million square feet of office space and see how we convert that into housing. We want to make it easier to do hotel conversion. And so we have a real list of items that we need from Albany to look at how do we build more. The way we deal with a housing crisis is to build more and that means a low income, which is in demand, but we also need middle income as well. Because my teacher and my accountant that are married, they too are struggling. So the goal is to build more and we must get the bureaucracy out of the way that's preventing us from doing so.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, I know it's a 24/7 job. It's always great of you to come on. Thank you very much.

**Mayor Adams:** Thank you very much and look forward to speaking with you in the future.

###