



Testimony on the Health and Medicaid Budget for State Fiscal Year 2025-26

Public Health Solutions appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on the New York State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025-26 Executive Budget. Public Health Solutions (PHS) is the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City (NYC). For more than 60 years, we have improved health outcomes and helped communities thrive by providing services directly to vulnerable low-income families, supporting community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships, and bridging the gap between healthcare and community services. We are a leader in addressing crucial public health issues, including food insecurity and nutrition, health insurance access, maternal and child health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS prevention. Health disparities among New Yorkers are large, persistent and increasing. Public Health Solutions exists to change that trajectory and support underserved New Yorkers and their families in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential.

Maternal and Child Health

Nurse Family Partnership and other Home Visiting Programs:

PHS' Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), located in Queens and Staten Island, is a nationally recognized, evidence-based nurse home-visiting program for high-risk, low-income first-time mothers, infants, and families. NFP nurses provide home visiting support from pregnancy until the child turns two years old, helping mothers engage in preventive health practices, promote positive parent-child attachment and child development, and improve women's economic self-sufficiency. PHS' NFP serves more than 300 families per year. PHS is also a provider of Healthy Families under funding from OCFS in Queens and Brooklyn neighborhoods.

NFP is funded in part through a \$3 million annual base appropriation from the Department of Health. This appropriation has been level funded for several years, while programs and staffing costs continue to rise, particularly in NYC.

In addition, we are grateful that the Legislature traditionally adds funding for NFP, and providers have come to rely on this add-on. However, that funding has varied in recent

years, making it difficult to effectively plan for continued service delivery. We encourage the Senate and Assembly to support the Executive budget appropriation and provide additional funding for the NFP.

Recommendations:

- Support \$3 million Executive Budget Appropriation for NFP and provide an additional \$1 million legislative add-on;
- Support Executive Budget proposal to allocate \$1.8 million in level funding for Home Visiting Program (which supports the Healthy Families NY program)

Perinatal Infant Community Health Collaborative (PICHC):

PHS' Perinatal Infant Community Health Collaborative (PICHC), known as Queens Global Families, works to improve health outcomes for vulnerable women and their families before, during and after pregnancy. Community Health Workers (CHWs) provide individual and group health education in a 'stress-free zone' approach, case management, risk screening, and home-visiting, and they connect families to clinical and community-based services. PICHC also coordinates a network of local health, social service, and community providers that increases access, reduces gaps in services, and addresses community challenges, which affect the health and well-being of families. PHS' PICHC serves more than 250 families throughout the borough of Queens each year and co-facilitates the Queens Birth Justice Hub.

In 2022-2023, recognizing the need to shore up the safety net workforce, New York State reinstated the human services cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and implemented the Healthcare Worker Bonus Program (HWB). However, these initiatives left behind most of the community-based public health workforce employed by CBOs, including PICHC Community Health Workers, because they did not meet the eligibility requirements for either program. This oversight left out the trusted frontline workforce best equipped at providing critical health education and reaching, engaging and supporting the most marginalized communities in accessing healthcare, social services, and benefits.

Recommendations:

- Support \$1.8 million level funding Executive Budget Appropriation for the PICHC;
- Support Executive Budget proposal for new \$320,000 initiative to reduce infant mortality;
- Restore the COLA for all nonprofit human service contracts – including all State Department of Health (DOH) contracts – as proposed in legislation (A.4037) introduced Assemblyman Hevesi;
- Support an annual human services COLA of 7.8% for DOH programs for Fiscal Year 2025-2026.

Maternal Mortality:

New York State continues to face a high rate of maternal deaths. This is especially true for Black, African American mothers. Black, non-Hispanic women are five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. In NYC, the disparities are even more profound: Black women are six times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related complication than White women. The top causes of maternal death in NYC are mental health (inclusive of suicide and substance abuse), hemorrhage, cardiovascular conditions, and embolism. Risk factors are obesity, economic and cultural barriers, and institutional racism and implicit bias in healthcare centers. CHWs such as those funded under PICHHC, and home visiting programs are critical in preventing pregnancy-related death and educating consumers about their rights.

Recommendations:

- Support \$4 million in level funding Executive Budget Appropriation for Maternal Mortality; and
- Support the Executive Budget proposal for a new \$320,000 initiative to reduce infant mortality.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity affects approximately one million children in New York State alone. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides a Federal grant from the USDA to New York State for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps, helps eligible community members to purchase the food they need from most grocery stores and other approved food outlets.

Extensive research has found WIC and SNAP to be a cost-effective investment that improves the nutrition and health of low-income families. Women who participate in WIC give birth to healthier babies, children participating in WIC have lower risk of obesity, and children whose mothers participated in WIC while pregnant show improved mental development. SNAP reduces poverty by 14-16% and is considered one of the nation's most effective anti-poverty programs for low-income families with children. Together, these services help lift families out of poverty, improve birth outcomes, and benefit childhood health and academic performance.

WIC:

PHS is the largest WIC provider in the State, now serving nearly 40,000 individuals at nine Neighborhood WIC sites in high-need areas of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. PHS also serves as the main manager of WIC vendors, ensuring more than 1,700 food stores that accept WIC checks offer and keep adequate stock of WIC-approved food package items. Our caseload has increased dramatically for over two years, as WIC is a high-impact program available to newly arrived migrant families. However, despite growth in caseload throughout the City, and the complexity of serving a large cohort of people in temporary shelters, WIC funding has not increased, and no coordination mechanisms were created. The Governor recognized the need to support WIC in her State of the State address and we strongly hope this will materialize through additional funding to local WIC agencies.

In 2022-2023, recognizing the need to shore up the safety net workforce, New York State reinstated the human services cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and implemented the Healthcare Worker Bonus Program (HWB). However, these initiatives left behind most of the public health workforce employed by CBOs, including the WIC program, because they did not meet the eligibility requirements for either program. This oversight left out the trusted frontline workforce best equipped at reaching, engaging and supporting the most marginalized communities in accessing healthcare, social services, and benefits.

Recommendations:

- Support the Executive Budget Appropriation of \$26.2 million in State support for the WIC program; and recommend that the additional \$9.5 million to support new enrollees should be dedicated to local agencies, like PHS, who are serving participants above their funded caseload and have seen substantial increases in the past couple of years.
- Add additional funding to support coordination and enrollment of migrants in WIC;
- Restore the COLA for all nonprofit human service contracts – including all State Department of Health (DOH) contracts – as proposed in legislation (A.4037) introduced Assemblyman Hevesi; and
- Support an annual human services COLA of 7.8% for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

SNAP:

PHS assists clients to enroll in SNAP at nearly 20 locations in all five boroughs as well as over the phone city-wide. PHS benefits counselors help clients fill out SNAP application forms and submit them to the New York City Human Resources Administration. They also

assist with the necessary documents, provide follow-up, complete re-certifications, mediation, and provide referrals to other programs and social services.

Recommendations:

- Support the Executive Budget Appropriations of \$36.9 million in State support and \$500 million in federal funding for SNAP;
- Support an annual human services COLA of 7.8% for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Tobacco Control

PHS operates the NYC Smoke-Free program, which works to protect the health of New Yorkers through tobacco control policy, advocacy, and education. The program supports evidence-based, policy-driven, and cost-effective approaches that decrease youth tobacco use, motivate adult smokers to quit, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. We partner with community members, legislators, and health advocates to support local efforts to end the devastating tobacco epidemic throughout NYC, where close to one million residents smoke. Annual funding for the grant covering New York City held by PHS, was reduced by \$500,000 annually in the new contract starting May 1, 2025. This strongly impacts our ability to serve the entire community.

Recommendations:

- Support the Executive Budget proposal and increase funding for tobacco-related programs. It provides a total of \$2.1 million for tobacco enforcement and education, and \$33.1 million for the tobacco use prevention and control program, but does not include funding added by the Legislature in Fiscal Year 2023-24;
- Restore funding for the New York City grant held by PHS;
- Add \$7.5 million in additional funding for tobacco control to restore it to Fiscal Year 2023-24's \$40.6 million in total funding.

Health Insurance

For over 20 years, our health insurance enrollment programs - funded by the New York State Department of Health - have been helping New Yorkers to overcome these barriers by providing step-by-step assistance to clients applying for health coverage. Our Navigator program assists individuals and families to apply through the NY State of Health Marketplace, while our Facilitated Enrollment for the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (FE-ABD) program assists individuals aged 65 years or older, and those living with blindness and disabilities to submit applications to the Human Resources Administration. Together, our programs help an estimated 20,000 individuals to apply for free or low-cost health insurance coverage annually and have contributed to a significant decline in the uninsured rate in New York. Our team has been playing a significant role in supporting the State's goal of

recertifying millions of New Yorkers for Medicaid coverage through the unwinding of the continuous coverage requirement.

PHS' enrollers speak the language of the community they serve and are trained to provide unbiased in-person and telephonic assistance, walking clients through the entire process, including helping them to understand health coverage options and find the right plan, gathering documents and required information, following-up on application outcomes, and helping them renew their coverage annually. We serve all 5 NYC boroughs, Long Island (Navigator program only), and Westchester and Rockland County (FE-ABD program only).

In 2022-2023, recognizing the need to shore up the safety net workforce, New York State reinstated the human services cost of living adjustments (COLAs) and implemented the Healthcare Worker Bonus Program (HWB). However, these initiatives left behind most of the public health workforce employed by CBOs, including our Navigator program, because they did not meet the eligibility requirements for either program. This oversight left out the trusted frontline workforce best equipped at reaching, engaging and supporting the most marginalized communities in accessing healthcare, social services, and benefits.

Recommendations:

- Restore the COLA for all nonprofit human service contracts – including all State Department of Health (DOH) contracts – as proposed in legislation (A.4037) introduced Assemblyman Hevesi; and
- Support an annual human services COLA of 7.8% for Fiscal Year 2025-2026

1115 Medicaid Waiver

On January 9, 2024, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) approved New York's \$7.5B Medicaid 1115 Waiver Amendment through a demonstration period that is set to expire March 21, 2027. With this amendment, New York builds on investments, accomplishments and lessons learned from past healthcare delivery system reform efforts to scale system transformation, improve population health, deepen integration across the delivery system and advance health-related social need services. Approximately \$3.6 billion of this funding focuses on addressing social drivers of health, including creating Social Care Networks (SCNs) across the state. These networks connect Medicaid members with essential community resources to address health-related social needs like food security, transportation, and housing stability, all known to improve health outcomes and reduce costs over time. WholeYouNYC-SCN is the largest SCN established under the NY-HER Initiative, managed by PHS. Serving 2.6 million Medicaid members in Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, WholeYouNYC-SCN screens Medicaid members for health-related social needs and connects them to community resources and Medicaid-funded services.

Recommendation:

- Support the SCN network by helping to expand SCN reach and raise awareness among Medicaid members about the available resources.
- Collaborate with all New York State regional SCN lead entities to enhance the visibility and impact of these vital community resources.