

**Oversight Hearing: The Current State of Access to Hospitals and Healthcare
Committees on Health, Hospitals, and Land Use
9/19/2022**

Good morning Chairpersons Schulman, Narcisse, Salamanca, and members of the Committees on Health, Hospitals and Land use. I am Dr. Andrew Wallach, the Ambulatory Care Chief Medical Officer at New York City Health and Hospitals (Health + Hospitals) and a practicing primary care physician at Health + Hospitals / Bellevue. I am joined today by my colleagues, Dr. David Silvestri, Assistant Vice President of Emergency Management and a practicing emergency medicine physician at Health + Hospitals / Lincoln, and Mr. Manny Saez, Senior Assistant Vice President of Facilities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the work Health + Hospitals does to promote access to healthcare for all New Yorkers and to ensure its preparedness for emergencies. While Health + Hospitals is only one component of a much larger health care delivery system in our City, we are proud of what we do.

Health + Hospitals is the largest municipal health care system in the United States. Our mission is to deliver high-quality health services with compassion, dignity, and respect for all, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. We provide essential inpatient, outpatient, and home-based services to more than one million New Yorkers every year in more than 70 locations across NYC's five boroughs. More than 60 percent of our patients identify as either Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, or Asian American/Pacific Islander. More than 70 percent of our patients are insured by Medicaid or have no insurance, including nearly 400,000 uninsured New Yorkers who would otherwise not have access to care.

Healthcare Access

Health + Hospitals offers high quality and affordable healthcare services at our eleven acute care sites, five post-acute care (skilled nursing) facilities, and through our Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), known as Gotham Health. Gotham Health has over 50 Community Health Centers throughout all five boroughs, allowing us to address the primary care needs of families and individuals in their own neighborhoods.

At both our hospital-based primary care practices and Gotham Health centers, we provide:

- Routine check-ups, preventive health screenings and immunizations for children and adults
- Chronic disease management, including for asthma, heart care and diabetes
- Adolescent health services
- Behavioral health services
- Diagnostic imaging services
- Women's health and maternity care services
- Well baby care and pediatric services
- Senior care and geriatric specialties
- Help with implementing lifestyle changes and other wellness goals

Health + Hospitals offers free language services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year in over 200 languages and dialects. We translate key patient documents, such as consent forms and patient education materials, into the top languages spoken by limited English proficient (LEP) New Yorkers, who represent an estimated 30% of our patients.

In addition to our extensive physical footprint across New York City, I am also incredibly proud of our new telehealth and mobile services, which expand access to care and allow Health + Hospitals patients to receive their care where and how they need it.

For telehealth, we have several options, such as telephone appointments, video visits, and an online patient portal for patients to connect with our health care providers without coming into the doctor's office or hospital, all accessible via our MyChart system. For non-emergency urgent care services, we offer Virtual ExpressCare. Virtual ExpressCare was launched in 2020 to ensure convenient one-click access for patients seeking urgent care services to the most appropriate level of care where they were safest during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic – at home. Virtual ExpressCare is available 24/7 and allows patients to receive virtual care from a Health + Hospitals provider for common physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health issues. We provide this service in over 200 languages, including American Sign Language, with in-screen interpretation services.

Virtual ExpressCare has become a nationally recognized leader for its COVID-19 treatment model that helps patients access treatment via telehealth and offering home delivery for antivirals and same- or next-day monoclonal appointments. Additionally, this summer we received funding to launch and integrate a new tele-behavioral health service into Virtual ExpressCare, and to create a tailored version of the new tele-behavioral healthcare service for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.

We are also bringing care directly to New Yorkers. For New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, the Street Health Outreach and Wellness (SHOW) mobile units engage individuals where they are and provide vital health care and social services. The SHOW units have provided COVID-19 testing and vaccines, behavioral health care, and a host of other harm reduction and social services to well over 100,000 New Yorkers. In addition, our mobile Test to Treat program offers COVID-19 testing and Paxlovid distribution to thousands of New Yorkers via 30 mobile vans. To ensure deployments are reaching New Yorkers most in need, 75% of mobile Test to Treat locations have been established in neighborhoods the City's Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity (TRIE) determined were hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emergency Planning

Hospitals play an essential role in planning for and responding to the needs of New Yorkers during any citywide emergency. Health + Hospitals has a history of preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a myriad of emergency events, including pandemics. While Health + Hospitals has been activated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to concurrently respond to multiple other emergencies including coastal storms, winter storms, mass transit shut down, extreme heat, and most recently MPV. Health + Hospitals has maintained and even expanded operations throughout each emergency event and provided continuity of care to our patients and communities we serve.

Health + Hospitals uses an Incident Command System (ICS) to manage all disasters, emergencies and other incidents. The ICS is a national best practice for coordinating emergency response and allows for communication, coordination, and collaboration with other agencies. A Central Office Incident Management Team (IMT), embedded within the System's ICS, is responsible for coordinating emergency response across the health system. Once Health + Hospitals activates the ICS, internal and external notifications are made while information is gathered for situational awareness. Staff are assigned to their incident command roles, briefings are held providing the latest intelligence, and an incident action plan is developed for the first

operational period. This process repeats for each operational period throughout the activation. Similarly, for preparation and planning of an emergency, Health + Hospitals also utilizes the ICS. Trainings and exercises take place regularly where each facility tests components of the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) to ensure operations and communication chains run smoothly.

In addition to its robust procedures to address an emergency as it unfolds, Health + Hospitals takes great efforts to ensure its preparedness well before disaster strikes. To ensure the safety of its patients and staff, Health + Hospitals has extensive plans in place in the event of weather, public health, or other catastrophic emergencies. Our emergency operations and response plans are developed to address “All Hazards,” with specific Incident Response Annexes and Guides for high probability and high impact events which include coastal storms, extreme temperatures, and winter and summer weather events. Each of our sites is required to conduct training and exercises to test and evaluate their plans. Planned exercises and actual response activations are reviewed to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Importantly, we do not work alone. Health + Hospitals works closely with the Mayor’s Office and NYC Emergency Management (NYCEM) in all phases of emergency management including planning, mitigation, response, recovery, and training and exercises. Each year, Health + Hospitals participates in exercises with other agencies and led by NYCEM. While the intent of these exercises is to test plans and identify gaps, real-life activations also serve this purpose and allow for real time identification of gaps and resolution of issues. In addition, Health + Hospitals partners with other hospital systems in NYC through the Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA) to prepare for emergency events.

We are always striving to better serve our patients and make our system even stronger and better prepared for the next emergency.

Infrastructure

Health + Hospitals is committed to enhancing the resiliency of its facilities in order to mitigate future disasters, plan for future emergencies, and shore up our aging infrastructure. We’re learning and building resiliency from COVID-19; shoring up facilities, increasing patient capacity, safeguarding long-term COVID-19 services, and supporting our staff. We have also learned and rebuilt after major hurricanes; sites that incurred flood damage after Hurricane Sandy made major improvement measures including moving critical infrastructure to higher floors, flood protection for our facilities, flood resistant infrastructure, investing in generators, electrical panels, HVAC systems, and other capital projects. In May, Health + Hospitals and the NYC Economic Development Corporation broke ground on a new flood protection system at NYC Health and Hospitals/Metropolitan in East Harlem. In October, Health + Hospitals will open the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Hospital at NYC Health and Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health campus, which will feature a new concrete flood wall and flood resilient infrastructure for power, heating, cooling, and water systems.

Over the next ten years, Health + Hospitals has significant infrastructure needs including IT, equipment, and capital improvements. This includes work specific to the COVID-19 response, green energy upgrades across the system, and work to improve the patient experience such as individual patient rooms, improved behavioral health settings, and renovated operating rooms and emergency departments. Infrastructure improvements are especially important to Health + Hospitals as a safety net provider: Our infrastructure is 17 years old on average, compared to an average of 9 years for other NYC hospitals. We have made significant investments to modernize

our facilities, and we are grateful to the Council, the Mayor, our Borough Presidents, and our Federal delegation for their crucial funding support. Hospital and health care infrastructure should be considered equally critical as roads and bridges, and we continue to engage on this topic at the city, state, and federal levels.

Closing

It is the mission of Health + Hospitals to deliver high quality health services with compassion, dignity, and respect to all, without exception. Every day, we work towards that mission and strive to continuously improve our services, and stay ready for the next challenge. Thank you to the committees for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support of Health + Hospitals. I look forward to our continued partnership and I am happy to answer any questions.