



**New York City Council Hearing**

**Access to Reproductive Health Care for New Yorkers with  
Disabilities**

**Committee on Hospitals**

**Committee on Disabilities**

**Committee on Health**

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Good afternoon Chairwomen Narcisse, Hanif, and Schulman and members of the Committees on Hospitals, Disabilities, and Health. I am Dr. Wendy Wilcox, Chief Women's Health Officer of NYC Health + Hospitals, and Chief of OB/GYN at NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull. In addition to these roles, I have been with the System for over 15 years, working at acute-care centers which include Jacobi, North Central Bronx, and Kings County in a clinical role. I am also joined by NYC Health + Hospitals Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer Dr. Ivelesse Mendez-Justiniano. At NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H, the System), our commitment is to excellence in health care. Built on a foundation of social and racial equity, H+H is led by standards known as ICARE, which stands for Integrity, Compassion, Accountability, Respect and Excellence. With this ethos as a guidepost, clinical and non-clinical staff strive to ensure that all New Yorkers who walk through our System's doors are treated with dignity throughout their care experience. No exceptions.

Historically, people with disabilities have faced elevated stigma and bias across health care systems, including sexual and reproductive health. H+H is a leader in providing culturally responsive health care services and continuously strives to remove barriers for special populations experiencing a disproportionate burden of illness. This commitment also extends to sexual and reproductive health conditions that have consistently faced delays in diagnosis and treatment, such as endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain.

H+H offers multitudes of diagnostic tools, medical therapies, and surgical procedures as well as treatment plans to address all patients' health care concerns. Patients who seek sexual and reproductive health care are met with a robust team of clinical staff including specialized physicians, surgeons, nurses, mental health providers, and social workers to meet patients where they are at in their sexual and reproductive health care journey. H+H's Women's Health clinical programs designed to prioritize listening, validate patient experience, and provide equitable, comprehensive, multidisciplinary care that is coordinated across the care continuum.

H+H has a comprehensive Obstetrics and Gynecology program that provides evidence based, compassionate care to help patients achieve their sexual and reproductive health goals. The System accomplishes this in part through an expansive network of physicians that includes subspecialty trained providers in sexual and reproductive health. Whether a patient with complex medical conditions is seeking counseling on contraceptive options, prenatal care, adoption, or abortion care, H+H staff provides care consistent with New York City's Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Bill of Rights as well as New York State's Hospital Patient Bill of Rights. In addition to providing these clinical services, H+H maintains a Reproductive Health Working Group comprised of Family Planning Directors at each acute care facility and Gotham sites. This working group focuses on troubleshooting everyday clinical issues to develop systemwide standards and guidance, allowing for challenges noted at one facility to be brought to the group to proactively address them across the system.

In its ongoing efforts to find innovative ways to reduce barriers to care, H+H became the first public health system in the nation to launch telehealth abortion care through Virtual ExpressCare in October 2023. The Virtual ExpressCare Abortion Access (vEC AA) program provides patients the opportunity to access reproductive health care where and when it best meets their needs, and receive a medication abortion kit at their New York City address within a few days, if clinically appropriate. The service is available seven days a week between 9am and 9pm and can be accessed online or by calling. Since the program's launch, H+H has had over 7,500 encounters and prescribed over 2,300 people in NYC a medication abortion packet mailed to their home. vEC AA expands access to care without compromising the patient experience, offering the same compassionate, judgment-free care as in-person visits, and supporting all patients in reaching their health care goals.

Treating patients with disabilities goes beyond the clinical services provided by H+H staff. In addition to the programs described, H+H prioritizes accessibility across its facilities and services to ensure individuals of all abilities can access care.

Across the System, facilities are ADA compliant and equipped with height-adjustable examination tables to make transfers easier for patients with mobility limitations. Facilities are also designed with accessibility in mind, including door frames and hallways that have been constructed to accommodate individuals who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices. To strengthen staff capacity to serve patients with disabilities, H+H has partnered with the Helen Keller National Center and Lighthouse Guild to conduct blind and low-vision simulation training to help staff better support patients navigating facilities.

To further support all patients seeking reproductive health care, H+H's Reproductive Health Navigators assist patients who may need extra support accessing services, including transportation, escorts after anesthesia, and other forms of care coordination.

The System also ensures that patients can access information and resources in their preferred format and language through the Accessible Format Directory. Through this directory, staff across H+H can provide patients consent forms in large print, braille, and audio files in English and the top five languages at the respective facility.

NYC Health + Hospitals remains committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers with disabilities seeking sexual and reproductive health care feel seen, heard, and respected during their visit to our System. Through ongoing innovation and a commitment to culturally competent care, we will continue to provide health care services that uphold the dignity and unique needs of every patient.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on this critical topic. I am happy to answer any questions.