



CHCANYS

Community Health Care Association of New York State

**Community Health Care Association of New York State Written Testimony
NYC Committees on Health and Hospitals:
NYC's Plan for COVID-19 Testing and Contact Tracing
May 15, 2020**

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) thanks the NYC Council for their attention to critical issues surrounding the response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. On behalf of the more than 1.4 million patients that our members serve at 486 sites throughout New York City, we submit this written testimony to the joint Committees on Health and Hospitals.

New York City is undertaking an ambitious effort to conduct widespread coordinated COVID-19 testing and contact tracing response. To be successful, the City can leverage the capabilities and existing community trust maintained by the long-standing network of community health centers (CHCs), also known as federally qualified health centers (FQHCs).

Located in low-income, ethnically diverse communities, CHCs have a documented history of providing high quality and effective primary care to anyone who requires services, regardless of insurance status, immigration status, or ability to pay. In NYC, 16% of CHC patients are uninsured, 62% are enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP, 76% identify as black or Hispanic, or Latinx, and 35% are best served in a language other than English. Each CHC Board of Directors is comprised of a majority of CHC consumers, making CHCs well equipped to identify and prioritize the unique needs of the communities they serve. Early data shows that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts low-income communities, communities of color, and people with comorbidities; these are the very communities CHCs have served since the 1960s. For these reasons, CHCs are the ideal partner to collaborate with the City in its effort to test and treat people in the communities most adversely impacted by COVID-19.

CHCs are well versed in mobile care, street medicine, and team-based care, all of which could be leveraged for wide scale testing and tracing. Also, CHCs employ promotoras and community health workers who are from the community and uniquely understand the concerns and needs of their patients. These individuals would be ideal candidates to partner with contact tracers if properly trained and supported by City infrastructure. CHCs' history of being embedded in their communities undoubtedly make them a key resource in the provision of COVID-19 testing, tracing, and treatment in underserved communities.

CHCs are ready and eager to engage in COVID-19 testing. However, current NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) guidance directs outpatient clinics (like CHCs) not to conduct COVID-19 tests with the explicit goal of conserving personal protective equipment (PPE).¹ Assuming this guidance is clarified to acknowledge that PPE is available and that testing may be conducted in outpatient settings, there are many ways that CHCs could partner with other entities and become integrated in the efforts to test and trace for COVID-19. For example:

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/han/advisory/2020/covid-19-03202020.pdf>



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Testing

- Conducting COVID-19 testing at CHC sites or at the site of a partner organization
- Communicating positive COVID-19 results to patients' primary care physicians

Supporting Contact Tracers

- Initiating contact investigation by educating patients regarding the contact tracing process at the time of test specimen collection
- Interviewing patient and/or family members, if patient is unable to be interviewed, to collect history of patient's activities throughout the potential incubation period and create the framework for identifying all potentially exposed individuals, including where contact tracing should focus
- Providing follow up testing and care to individuals identified as potential contacts by contact tracing
- Informing individuals of recommendations or requirements regarding testing, quarantine, and monitoring
- In the absence of a designated primary care provider, helping individuals who have tested positive or been identified by contact tracers as potential positives to establish a medical home
- Communicating with City government throughout the process to ensure accurate and timely data is available for public health decision making

Undoubtedly, a coordinated effort requires coordinated investment. Clear guidance and protocols must be available to all partners engaged in contact tracing and testing. The City also must ensure that providers participating in testing and tracing are adequately trained, equipped, and funded. The City should make funds available to cover technology needs, reimburse for staff time, and ensure adequate sourcing and distribution of PPE.

Without a coordinated response that leverages the resources of all health care and social services partners, including CHCs, New Yorkers in underserved communities will continue to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19. CHCANYS remains available to prevent these communities from suffering further.