

Office of the Mayor Health and Human Services

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity | December 2021



Photo credit: Michael Appleton/Mayoral Photography Office

NYC Care

Agency: **NYC Health + Hospitals**

Context

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers lacked health insurance in 2019 – some of whom were eligible for insurance but not enrolled, in many cases because they could not afford to do so, and some of whom were not eligible for insurance at all - because of their immigration status. Lack of access to affordable health care leads many New Yorkers, especially low-income New Yorkers of color and immigrant New Yorkers, to have shorter lives and poorer health, and this disparity is likely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In NYC, there is a 35-year difference in life expectancy between the healthiest and sickest census tracts.¹ Recognizing that New York City cannot thrive if all New Yorkers are not thriving, the City declared healthcare a human right and announced the creation of NYC Care to establish universal health care access in New York City.

¹ <https://nyshealthfoundation.org/resource/life-expectancy-by-census-tract-in-new-york-state/#introduction-key-findings>

Response

NYC Care is a healthcare access program designed to provide affordable healthcare to New Yorkers ineligible for health insurance or for whom health insurance is unaffordable based on federal guidelines. The program was launched in stages starting in August 2019 and has been citywide since fall 2020. NYC Care members receive a membership card that includes an assigned primary care provider and information about the low cost of care, 24-hour customer service, pharmacy benefits, and access to affordable, high-quality primary and specialty care at any NYC Health + Hospitals facility. Benefits include preventative services like mammograms, vaccination, and colon cancer screenings.

Results

There are currently close to 100,000 active members enrolled in NYC Care. NYC Care is not an insurance program, but it is a way for New Yorkers in need to obtain access to free health care. NYC Care members on average have higher rates of chronic conditions than the general population, but the majority of them are controlling these conditions and improving their health outcomes. Members have had over 500,000 primary and specialty care appointments and close to one-third of these appointments were televisits, illustrating the ability of NYC Health + Hospitals to pivot rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue to serve our patients. Over two-thirds of NYC Care members live below the poverty line, which is evidence that the program is reaching its target communities. Further, over half of members are accessing primary care at NYC Health + Hospitals for the first time, demonstrating the program's success in inviting New Yorkers to receive comprehensive and affordable ambulatory services and avoiding the emergency department when it isn't necessary.

Beneficiary Stories

Maura's father died of cancer, so when she started to have recurring chest pain she was worried. However, as an undocumented immigrant from Ecuador she had no access to health insurance and had trouble finding affordable mammograms. Through a community-based organization (CBO) partner of NYC Care, New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), she found out about affordable health care provided through NYC Care. She is now up to date on her recommended cancer screenings and her mind is at ease.

After becoming an NYC Care member in November 2019, Miguel was able to get primary and specialty care without fear of the cost or of difficulties due to his immigration status. As a kidney transplant recipient in his home country, ongoing access to care and maintenance medications are critical for him. Prior to enrolling in NYC Care, he received his medications from his home country through the mail. Miguel contracted COVID-19 in April 2020, and due to his positive earlier experience with the healthcare system and with NYC Care, he felt confident enough to go to the hospital for treatment. He spent 21 days intubated and recovered to tell his story.

Next Steps

NYC Care will continue to enroll new members reached through advertising, community outreach, and partnerships with other institutions serving low-income New Yorkers. In October 2021, NYC Care awarded 22 CBOs across the 5 boroughs City grants to perform NYC Care education and facilitate enrollment. Previous NYC Care grantees were also awarded additional funding to continue COVID-19 vaccine outreach. Continued partnership with CBOs allows NYC Care to remain culturally responsive and identify new areas of improvement.

Additional Metrics

When metrics were released on NYC Care in February 2021, the City reported that it was meeting its goal of providing quality health care to low-income New Yorkers. It reported that 66 percent of members were under 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and over 94 percent were under 200 percent of the FPL.

It also reported that over 50 percent of NYC Care enrollees were receiving primary care at H + H for the first time.

More metrics are available here:

<https://www.nyccare.nyc/nyc-care-reaches-milestone-of-50000-enrolled-members/>

Relevant Publications

NYC Care promotional videos, press releases, and media stories are available here:

<https://www.nyccare.nyc/media/>