



TESTIMONY

Presented by

**Dr. Lisa Scott-McKenzie
Commissioner**

on

Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget

before the

New York City Council

Committee on Aging & Committee on Finance

on

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Good morning, Chair Zhuang, Chair Lee, and members of the Committees on Aging and Finance, I am Dr. Lisa Scott-McKenzie, Commissioner of the New York City Department for the Aging (NYC Aging). I am joined this morning by Jose Mercado, our Chief Financial Officer. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss NYC Aging's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY 27).

Over the past three months, I have become acclimated to this role as Commissioner for NYC Aging. Every day I see the incredible work that staff at this agency and throughout our network of community-based non-profit providers complete as they deliver vital services to nearly two million New Yorkers over the age of 60. Today, we are discussing the Administration's Executive Budget during May, which as you may know, is *Older Americans Month*. This month is a national time to acknowledge and promote the contributions of older adults in our society and throughout the many communities represented in New York City. It is also an opportunity for us to affirm our commitment, as the largest Area Agency on Aging (AAA) in the United States, to providing aging services and making New York City a truly age-inclusive community. This year's theme for *Older Americans Month* is "Champion Your Health," and I am so excited to be part of NYC Aging's commitment to older adults and their health, well-being, and dignity as we meet the growing needs of New York City's quickly approaching 2 million residents over the age of 60. Through my previous work at the New York City Health & Hospitals (H+H) system, I became keenly aware of the many ways an older adult's health needs are affected by outside forces, whether that is based in food insecurity, escalating housing costs, or persistent inequality in our communities.

To support this important work, our FY 27 Executive Budget projects \$577.1 million in funding, of which \$472.2 million is in City funds, with funding for a headcount of 343 staff. This includes allocations to core programs you are all familiar with including \$263.6 million to support Older Adult Centers (OACs), \$81.1 million for home delivered meals (HDM), and \$57.6 million for case management (CMA). The work done by OACs, HDM programs, and our CMA providers combat poverty and financial insecurity while also connecting older adults to in-home services which address their needs when struggling with activities of daily living. There are also allocations of \$47.2 million to support home care for homebound older adults who are not Medicaid-eligible, and \$16.8 million for NORC programs. Finally, \$15.4 million for caregiver services supporting the 1.3 million caregivers and their care receivers in the City, and \$7.3 million for transportation services allowing older adults to be connected to community centers, houses of worship, shopping, and medical appointments.

As this Administration has made clear, there are key challenges in the City financially, and NYC Aging is always prepared to prioritize the needs of older adults and our core aging services while limiting the impacts of these challenges. Nonetheless, we are still keenly aware of these challenges which have been exacerbated by changes to the federal landscape, and the need for continued and increased investment from the State to support the growing number of older adults throughout New York. We also continue to advocate that our State and Federal partners share the financial responsibility of serving older New Yorkers living in the City.

Since our Preliminary Budget in March, we have achieved some notable milestones and had recent successes that we'd like to share with you today:

- Beginning in my second week at NYC Aging, I began visiting OACs as part of an engagement tour with the goal of visiting every OAC and NORC within the NYC Aging network. In some cases, you have all joined me for these engagement tours. These are not just meet-and-greets or photo ops, these are meant to be hands-on reviews of center status and function so we can better understand from the providers and center directors what their real needs are in running these facilities and what NYC Aging can do to improve services. I have observed staff serving meals, teaching continuing education courses, dance classes, music, intergenerational programming, and exercise classes at over 25 centers to date.

- In early March, we hosted the Second Annual Talent Connect Hiring Hall with Brooklyn Borough President, Antonio Reynoso at the Brooklyn Public Library. This hiring hall connected 800 older adult job-seekers with employers, workforce training partners, and community partners in our continued effort to ensure that we promote a viable workforce after 60. We know that more older adults are working after 60 and more older adults have the experience and talent to contribute to the workforce for longer. Events like this one are how we turn that commitment into action — connecting real people with real opportunity, in real time. We are so proud of the great impact this event had on older New Yorkers.
- Also in March, we hosted the Second Annual Plant-Forward Cook-Off where chefs from our exceptional network of providers competed against one another for the best plant-forward meal served at OACs throughout New York City. This year’s top winner, Korean Community Services Corona OAC, made an incredible *Vegetable Bibimbap* which really stole the show. The second and third place finalists were the Council of People’s Organization Halal OAC with a *Chickpea Curry Medley*, and the Bronxworks Morris OAC with a *Dominican Vegan Sancocho*. This was an impressive way to show that meat isn’t always the key to a tasty dish, and a little competition is a good thing.
- Finally, as I mentioned in the Preliminary Budget Hearing on March 12th, we were so excited to launch the citywide campaign to reach New York City’s family caregivers. Across New York City, many residents provide daily care for a parent, spouse, grandchild, family member, chosen family, friend, or neighbor. Yet many individuals who provide this care do not identify themselves as a caregiver and, as a result, do not realize they qualify for services designed to support them. This multimedia campaign titled “You Care for Them, We Care for You,” is aimed at raising awareness with the nearly 1.3 million formal and informal caregivers in the City.

We are thrilled about these recent successes and some key programs supported in this Executive Budget which shape our core services and improve the lives of older adults in New York City.

Congregate and Home Delivered Meals Programming

We know that a common denominator of challenges faced by many older adults today is food insecurity and the needs for increased nutrition resources among vulnerable populations. As I’ve said in the past, access to food and meals provision at NYC Aging are part of those “meat and potatoes” issues—excuse the pun—which are fundamental to supporting the lives of older adults. Two of NYC Aging’s core services are OACs and the HDM program which are intrinsically connected to providing meals and nutrition assistance to older adults. These are essential services for healthy living and preventing the social isolation that affects older adults at a very basic level. We continue to hit milestones in meal delivery, with a current record of more than 10 million meals served to older New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. This includes 6.1 million meals served at the 300-plus OACs in the network and 4.2 million meals delivered by our HDM providers. We are pleased to share that we are on track to match that number again in the new fiscal year.

Additionally, NYC Aging is continually evaluating our efforts and exploring areas for improvement. While workforce programs continue to be a way for older adults to avoid long-term poverty, meals programs are a life-line to older adults struggling with financial and food insecurity. This includes enhancing meal options for recipients, embracing the diversity of our city by increasing the availability of culturally aligned meals, and promoting uniformly high-quality and nutritious meals. These have been key improvements to service and our providers that we have met through partnership between this Administration and Council leadership.

Homecare & Caregiver Services

We are so excited about our current caregiver campaign because as we have said in the past, the number of older adults in New York City will continue to grow and it is imperative that we grow the community support systems which allow older New Yorkers to age in place. We do this through Homecare and Caregiver services which greatly serve those who are homebound or in need of additional supports. Homecare services are provided through Medicaid reimbursement and for those who do not qualify for Medicaid programs, through the Expanded In-Home Services for Elderly Persons (EISEP) program where case management hours are reimbursed to providers. Without this, EISEP clients are at a disadvantage when Medicaid Homecare workers are incentivized to take on those clients because the pay is higher. There is no distinction between EISEP and Medicaid Homecare workers, they are primarily women of color, and this exacerbates inequity because of the salary. Currently, the Homecare program at NYC Aging is projected to be funded at \$47.2 million for FY 27.

Many older adults are caretakers or caregivers who also have full time jobs. The caregiver program offers options for respite care through home care or participation in social adult day care. We know that the cost of maintaining an older adult in institutionalized care is far higher when compared to the cost of community care options such as supporting caregivers. In FY 27, funding for the caregiver program is \$15.4 million. Caregiver supports positively impact the health and well-being of older adults while aligning with the cultural background of the individual. This is why Community Care is so incredibly important to the future of older New Yorkers.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities

As New York City's population ages rapidly, ensuring older adults can age in place is paramount. Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) are a vital piece of the community-care puzzle. Through contracted providers, NYC Aging currently funds 36 NORCs across the city, delivering essential social services directly to where older adults live. NORC programs are uniquely positioned within people's homes and communities, offering services distinct from traditional Older Adult Centers. Currently, the NORC program is funded at \$16.8 million in New York City. Because they are embedded in the community, NORC staff provide vital healthcare management to address long term housing issues. These are key interventions that prevent older adults from being forced into institutional care. Maintaining and expanding NORC funding is essential to our shared goal of making New York a truly age-friendly city, and we welcome your continued advocacy and investment in these critical community anchors.

Conclusion

I continue to be proud of the great work that NYC Aging and our providers accomplish with our resources. This past year has shown where NYC Aging is prepared to prioritize vital programs that truly meet the needs of older New Yorkers and continue to advocate for innovations in aging services which look to the future. Even in the face of challenges, we continue to be good stewards of public dollars.

We are grateful to the Chairs and Committee members for your ongoing advocacy and continued partnership to support older New Yorkers. I also want to take an opportunity to invite you all to join us on May 27th for National Older Adult Health & Fitness Day in Foley Square. Once again, we will gather with more than 1,200 older New Yorkers to take part in instructor-led flexibility exercises, movement-based self-expression, dance at any age as a form of exercise, and laughter yoga designed to bring more oxygen to the brain, which all make us feel more energetic and healthy in our daily lives. We appreciate your dedication and advocacy to older adults and would love to see you there.

Thank you for your time today. Mr. Mercado and I are happy to answer your questions.