

## PRESS RELEASE

Media Contact: Bob Liff, George Arzt Communications, Inc.  
C: 917-287-7089; e-mail: [bob@gacnyc.com](mailto:bob@gacnyc.com)

Zoom link for Tues Dec. 22 Press Conference at  
at 11 am Below

### **WITH STUDIES SHOWING DIABETICS SUFFER FAR HIGHER COMPLICATIONS AND MORTALITY RATES FROM COVID, GOVERNMENTS SLASH SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS THAT COULD SAVE COUNTLESS LIVES AND BILLIONS OF DOLLARS**

#### ***DIABETES-LINKED CITY DEATHS ROSE 356 PERCENT EARLY IN PANDEMIC – STUDIES SHOW COVID DEATH RATES SKYROCKET WITH POOR GLUCOSE CONTROL FOR DIABETICS Health Groups Call for Immediate State and City Action***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DECEMBER 22, 2020**

As the COVID pandemic continues to rage through New York and the nation, a great deal of attention has justifiably been paid to the high correlation between those who contract the disease, and the severity and death rates, and socioeconomic factors including race, poverty, neighborhood and the likelihood those individuals are essential workers who continue to be exposed.

But those vulnerable populations also suffer disproportionately from Type 2 diabetes, and studies of COVID patients now clearly show diabetics suffer from more severe symptoms and far higher mortality rates specifically as their blood sugar levels increase. Policy makers know that, but fail to act on the knowledge that minimal investments in helping people drive down blood glucose levels has a direct benefit to their health in a short period of time. city and state health agencies, along with Medicaid, continue to leave people with diabetes vulnerable to more episodes of avoidable mass mortality in a COVID “second wave.”

A report released today by the Bronx-based Health People/Community Preventive Health Institute shows that minimal investments in encouraging vulnerable residents to take common sense, cost-effective steps to lower their blood sugar levels can drive down the severity and mortality of COVID patients with Type 2 diabetes, while saving taxpayers billions of dollars in health care spending. Health People’s director was joined by other service providers, front line medical personnel, and diabetics who have lowered **their A1C (blood sugar) levels** to call upon governments to fund community-delivered self-care programs that reach the most vulnerable populations.

The report, **Ending the Diabetes/COVID Disaster**, showed:

- New York City saw a 356 percent increase in excess diabetic deaths in the pandemic’s first wave
- A study of 10,535 Type 2 diabetics with COVID showed death rates rising steadily as A1C levels rose above 7.6, doubling when the A1C reached 10
- Another study of 952 diabetics showed a 1.1 percent death rate for COVID-infected diabetics with good blood sugar control (an average of 7.3), but the rate topped 11 percent for those with poor control (averaging 8.1.) This study showed that none of the diabetics with well-controlled blood sugar required invasive ventilation, compared with 4.2 percent of those with poorly controlled blood sugar levels

- A New York early-pandemic study in April showed that 34 percent of 5,700 hospitalized COVID patients had diabetes, and a Reuters review of states in the South and Southwest showed that diabetics comprised almost 40 percent of early COVID deaths.

“It is shocking and counterproductive, both from a public health and a budgetary perspective, to condemn diabetics who contract COVID to far worse outcomes when cost-effective investments in proven programs to drive down their A1C levels exist,” said Chris Norwood, Health People’s founder and executive director. “Somehow, the little available state and federal money to bring effective self-care education to the largely Black and Hispanic communities most impacted by diabetes simply disappeared in April, just as the terrible toll of COVID on people with diabetes was becoming perfectly clear. And during this months-long die-off of people with diabetes, it has never been replaced.”

An estimated 34 million Americans are diabetic, including 2 million in New York State and 1 million in the city. These studies confirm what medical professionals on the front lines have known – early intervention to drive down A1C levels yields dramatic improvement in health outcomes. But major providers of health care for the poor, including Medicaid, will not pay to provide well-evaluated self-management education shown to help vulnerable residents decrease their A1C levels.

In fact, the state, facing a pandemic-fueled budgetary crisis, cut funding for programs that cost an average of \$900 per patient for effective self-care education. **Government insurance continues** to cover such dire medical interventions as diabetes-related dialysis – a \$35 billion business annually – which cost between \$50,000 and \$90,000 annually per patient.

**Multiple health leaders, including C. Virginia Fields, CEO of the Black Leadership Commission on Health and former Manhattan Borough President, Rev. John Williams, President of New Creation Community Health Empowerment and Anthony Feliciano, Executive Director of the Commission on the Public’s Health System, joined Health People at a December 22 press conference to call for immediate city and state action to bring life-saving self-care education to the communities hardest hit by COVID and diabetes.**

“The National Black Leadership Commission on Health, Inc. (Black Health) is extremely concerned. The failure of government to assure people with diabetes have real education to bring down their blood sugar is clearly increasing COVID deaths and complications. In addition to the failures over the years to confront the diabetes epidemic in ways we know work by refusing to support self-care education provided directly in the most vulnerable communities, the public health and medical establishments are denying Black and low-income people with diabetes an equal chance at life and health during COVID, said C. Virginia Fields, CEO.

“The systematic racism is shocking and The Commission on the Public’s Health System strongly joins in calls for New York State and New York City to start the public and patient education campaigns which can save people’s lives by being sure they know that every step to reduce their blood sugar will reduce their COVID risks,” said Anthony Feliciano, Executive Director of the Commission on the Public’s Health System. “This is not an either-or. This is about addressing equity and taking care of chronic illnesses now.

“All these health departments know perfectly well Community-delivered self-care education works and it’s what’s needed to reach the communities where diabetes---and now diabetes-related COVID deaths and complications---are rampant,” said Central Brooklyn pastor Rev. John Williams, President of New

Community Health Empowerment. “We cannot stand by while medical systems and public health establishments allow Black and Brown communities to unnecessarily suffer like this.”

“I’m completely taken aback that during a viral epidemic that has devastated patients with diabetes, I’m not able to provide the kind of education courses in self-care that so clearly benefit them and help them reduce blood sugar,” said Dr. Robert W. Morrow, Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Social Medicine in Bronx’ Albert Einstein College of Medicine. “It’s just outrageous that just when people with uncontrolled diabetes are dying at such high rates, neither the state, city or federal governments will help them get the clear education, at the community level that can protect them from the worst consequences of COVID.”

Health People/CPHI is among several community-based organizations working in poor communities to train local residents, including those in NYCHA housing, to lead six-week courses in nutrition and a healthy lifestyle that can drive down a diabetic’s A1C levels within weeks. Health People’s program reached around 500 diabetics a year, but state health authorities earlier this year, as the COVID pandemic took its hardest grip on these vulnerable neighborhoods, withdrew funding to maintain the programs right after federal funders ended allocations.

Beyond unnecessary deaths and suffering, the failure to take readily available steps to help people control their blood sugar contributes to the disaster of overwhelmed hospitals and ICUs that we see occurring once again

***--The Health People Report is available at [healthpeople.org](http://healthpeople.org).  
--interviews with study author, other providers, and Bronx residents who have benefited from the program are available.***

***ZOOM Press Conference Tuesday Dec. 22 at 11 am accessible through***

Topic: Health People - Press Release  
Start Time : Dec 22, 2020 10:27 AM

Meeting Recording:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/v1xti7OnlyYXdyW\\_L52ir5pksEuPFORRBtFtqgWqssuFk9CI2TtYQAotr eT7kken.H5RNANjjiDic2soaS](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/v1xti7OnlyYXdyW_L52ir5pksEuPFORRBtFtqgWqssuFk9CI2TtYQAotr eT7kken.H5RNANjjiDic2soaS)