



PRESS RELEASE

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NEW YORK STATE DOOMS DIABETES SUFFERERS TO AMPUTATIONS, DIALYSIS AND ALZHEIMERS BY CUTTING FUNDS FOR PROVEN PROGRAMS THAT HELP RESIDENTS LOWER BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

AS STATE VOWS TO CUT MEDICAID COSTS, WHY WON'T IT FUND THE DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM THAT OFFICIALS KNOW WOULD SAVE THOUSANDS OF LIVES AND BILLIONS OF TAX DOLLARS?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Expressing outrage over the state's plan to kill programs well-proven to slash diabetes and other chronic disease, activists, providers and patients rallied outside the state Health Department in lower Manhattan today, World Diabetes Day, to protest state negligence that will clearly impose even worse chronic disease on low-income communities already reeling from the aftermath of Covid-19.

New York's uncontrolled diabetes epidemic has brought it the nation's highest Medicaid costs. Epidemic high blood sugar levels are propelling devastating complications including the state's 100% increase in lower limb amputations in just ten years and the highest Alzheimer's rate of any major state in the nation---at a Medicaid cost to the state of over \$5 billion a year.

"New York has already amputated 50,000 legs, feet and toes in the past decade and its low-income communities are staggering under diabetes-induced dementia, with the Bronx having the highest Alzheimer's rate in the United States," said Chris Norwood, Executive Director of Health People in the Bronx. "Yet, it is fully proven that in-depth, community-delivered self-management education both significantly prevents diabetes itself and prevents complications by teaching people with diabetes to lower their blood sugar."

Norwood said the state is breaking its promise, including from Governor Hochul, to start addressing chronic diseases that so devastated Black and Brown communities during Covid-19.

"The state is also violating all norms of public health," she said. "As our public health officials know perfectly well, controlling diabetes can almost uniquely save billions of dollars while fostering vast health improvements."

When Health People brought the Diabetes Self-Management Program (DSMP) into homeless shelters, participants' emergency room visits plunged by 45% in six months, immediately saving \$1,000 to \$2,000 per diabetes case.

High blood sugar levels are the main contributors to the state's highest-in-the-nation costs for diabetes, heart disease and other chronic diseases, which disproportionately affect poor communities of color. But the state has cut funding for the estimated \$900 per patient cost for the Diabetes Self-Management Program (DSMP) while continuing to cover kidney disease and the skyrocketing number of lower-limb amputations that could be prevented by the DSMP.

And recent studies have definitively linked high blood sugar levels to the early onset of dementia and Alzheimer's. It is no accident that the Bronx has the highest levels of Alzheimer's of any county in the nation, while also suffering from runaway diabetes.

City health activists battling the diabetes epidemic joined in calls for the state to fund the DSMP.

C. Virginia Fields, the former Manhattan Borough President who now heads Black Health, called state plans to end funding for the technical assistance and training that allows community groups to provide the DSMP, is "extremely disturbing."

"African-Americans already have the highest rate of diabetes-related lower limb amputations and diabetes-induced dementia," Fields said. "How does the state justify worsening this situation? It is violating every acceptable norm of public health and its repeated vows to address health disparities."

Jairo Guzman, the Executive Director of the Mexican Coalition, echoed Fields' concerns.

"I cannot understand why New York State would want to destroy any programs like this but it is destroying the whole state support for community self-care education ---little as that is already," said Jairo Guzman, Executive Director of The Mexican Coalition. "We cannot watch anymore as Hispanic, Black, and low-income families are deeply harmed by diabetes when we know we can prevent that."

Minister John Williams, whose New Creation Community Health Empowerment has been administering the DSMP to residents of Central Brooklyn, warned city and state officials, by ending the funding, are dooming his clientele to preventable complications.

"These programs are showing great results with helping to reduce the devastating effects diabetes is inflicting upon our minority communities with high levels of lower limb amputations, Alzheimer's and kidney disease," Williams said. "It is therefore only necessary for us to protest, to raise awareness about how our City and State officials are seemingly conspiring with involved with 'Big Pharma and the Sick Care Industry' to maintain a sick society for the enrichment of the privileged few."

Dr. Bob Morrow, an Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Social Medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, said that the advent of peer education in helping people lower their blood sugar levels and reverse their diabetes was a "revelation" and now threatened by the funding cut-off.

"The results found for the National Diabetes Prevention Program and the National Diabetes Self-Management program by respected health care researchers around the country and abroad are startling in both prevention and self-management successes, unmatched by medications by far," Dr. Morrow said. "Let's support these programs rather than watching the devastation of diabetes, both to individuals and their families and communities. The state is wrong and irresponsible to kill this effective approach."

"There is no excuse," Dr. Morrow said."

---For more information, go to healthpeople.org.