



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON
BRONX HEALTH MATTERS
 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION NEWSLETTER

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**DEFEATING
 DIABETES**
 PREVENTING & REVERSING TYPE 2 DIABETES
 IN THE BRONX

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In her 2023 State of the Borough Address, Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson called attention to one of The Bronx’s greatest health crises: the type 2 diabetes epidemic.

The Bronx is the epicenter of this epidemic, with some of the highest rates of diabetes across our city. In Bronx neighborhoods such as Mott Haven, Hunts Point, Tremont, and

Morrisania, more than twenty percent of the population has been diagnosed with diabetes. And that number does not account for individuals who are unaware they are living with the condition.

According to a recent survey published by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), diabetes is the fourth leading cause of death in The

Bronx. Diabetes management is critical, however, one in every five Bronx residents living with diabetes has high blood sugar. Furthermore, over the past decade, diabetes related amputations have increased by 48%. With these devastating numbers, the Borough President has made diabetes prevention a priority among her health goals for The Bronx.

What is Type 2 Diabetes?

Diabetes is a chronic condition that has lifelong consequences when left undiagnosed or untreated. Diabetes primarily arises from the inability of the body to properly make or use insulin, which is a hormone that helps to regulate sugar levels in blood. Insulin picks up excess sugar in the blood and transports it to organs that utilize the sugar for energy.

In type 2 diabetes, the body is not able to produce enough insulin or does not use the insulin it produces as well as it should. The latter is known as insulin resistance. In either case, blood sugar levels are left uncontrolled, and this excess sugar can cause serious medical complications, such as kidney failure, blindness, nerve damage, and heart conditions.

Diabetes is a food-related disease. Research shows that food insecurity is higher among people with diabetes and that the limited availability of healthy food affects long-term diabetes management. Diabetes disproportionately affects people of color and low-income communities that lack access to quality healthcare. People afflicted with diabetes often have additional underlying health conditions such as hypertension, obesity, and heart disease. These chronic health conditions put our residents at high risk and significantly diminish their quality of life.

Caring for people with diabetes accounts for 1 of every 4 healthcare dollars, making diabetes the costliest chronic condition in the U.S.

The prevalence of diabetes is a significant challenge to population health, and the systemic cost of continuous care is astronomical. The total cost of diabetes in the United States was \$327 billion in 2017, including \$237 billion in direct medical costs and \$90 billion in reduced productivity. Lack of funding for preventative services is a missed opportunity to save lives and reduce the burden of care on the healthcare system.

In the United States today, more than one-third of adults have prediabetes, in which the blood sugar levels are elevated, but not high enough for a diabetes diagnosis. Prediabetes indicates a person's higher risk for Type 2 diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. However, 84% of people with prediabetes do not even know that they have it.

Type 2 diabetes is also pervasive among the city's youth. According to the DOHMH, 40% of New York City elementary school children are overweight, and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes has increased 33% in the past 15 years, "mirroring the increase in weight and obesity." Alarming, an increased number of children, seven to thirteen years of age attending public schools in The Bronx are not managing their diabetes well.

Reversing Diabetes with Lifestyle Changes

While there is no cure for diabetes, scientists and medical providers are finding increasing evidence that diabetes can be reversed through lifestyle changes such as healthy eating and exercise. Integrating these changes into daily life, however, is difficult for most people. A quarter of Bronxites experience food insecurity or an uncertain or limited availability of safe and nutritionally appropriate food; we have one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country.

Food insecurity is even higher among people with diabetes, and the limited availability of fresh groceries makes it far more challenging to manage diabetes. Many parts of The Bronx are "food deserts" where there are insufficient supermarkets and fresh produce stores to meet the needs of the community and a lack of affordable and nutritious foods. Fast food restaurants proliferate in their place, offering inexpensive but unhealthy options. Thus Bronx families often face dilemma in this decision.

Defeating Diabetes with Policies & Partnerships

With these numerous economic and social issues affecting Bronxites, more medical care is simply not the answer. In a recent article in The New York Times, journalist Roni Caryn Rabin wrote that diabetes researchers have concluded that, "There is no device, no drug powerful enough to counter the



A pound of fresh apples costs about \$1.62.

A large cup of soda or a large order of french fries costs \$1.00.

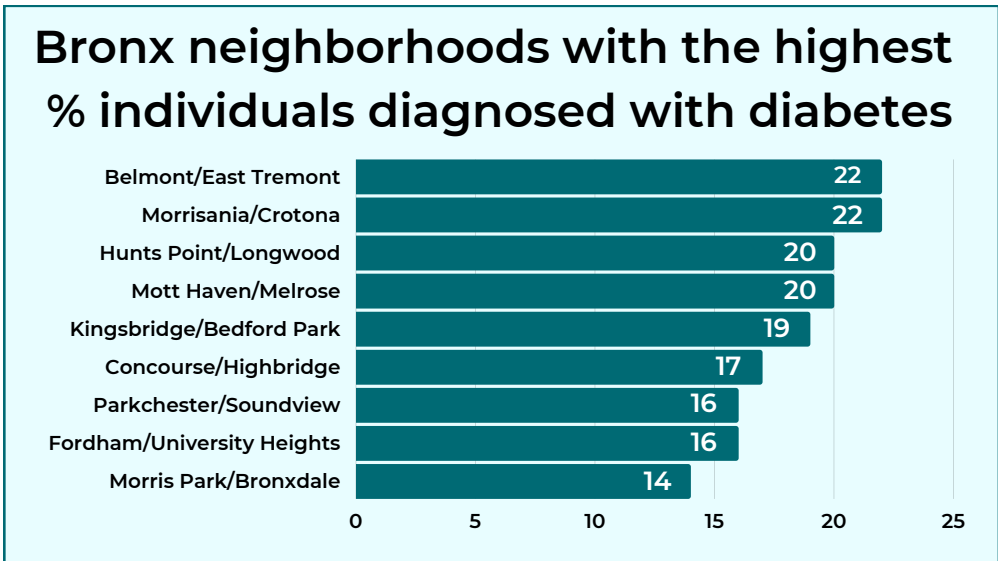
effects of poverty, pollution, stress, a broken food system, cities that are hard to navigate on foot and inequitable access to health care, particularly in minority communities.” Borough President Gibson has committed to spearheading policies, partnerships, and programs across healthcare, education, food access, and housing to make diabetes prevention and reversal a reality for all Bronxites.

Launching a Bronx Diabetes Task Force

The Office of the Bronx Borough President is building a coalition of stakeholders and experts to establish a boroughwide Diabetes Task Force to address the high rates of diabetes in The Bronx. Borough President Gibson is joined in this effort by many health advocacy leaders, including Chris Norwood, the Executive Director of Health People, and C. Virginia Fields, CEO of the National Black Leadership Commission on Health (Black Health). The Task Force will include hospitals, federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), food policy activists and activists, community-based and faith-based organizations, and health educators.

“Health is wealth and if we want to progress from being the poorest and sickest county in New York, we need to make sure our residents and families have access to fresh and unprocessed foods that also won’t break the bank.”

-Bronx Borough President Gibson



The Diabetes Task Force will be charged with creating a borough plan, securing funding for diabetes prevention programs at a community level and conducting targeted outreach for high priority neighborhoods and at-risk populations.

An initial effort under this plan was the Borough President testifying at a hearing of the New York City Council Committee on Health earlier this year, to support the creation of a citywide diabetes reduction plan to collectively address this public health crises and spotlight neighborhoods with high-risk populations. The Borough President testified in support of Intro 687 which would require chain restaurants to post labels when a food item has a high sugar content and Intro 675, which will require DOHMH to create a telemedicine accessibility plan.

Post-Pandemic Diabetes Surveillance and Funding

The most important priority when it comes to diabetes is screening and prevention. Until 2019, the Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings included a metric for surveillance of Diabetes in the Medicaid/Medicare population. This outcome data was missing from the 2021-2022 rankings, an

indicator of pandemic-related constraints. Many similar communities and environmental monitoring programs (including for asthma) were defunded, at least temporarily. However, even as the pandemic wanes, the funding projections for Fiscal Year 2023 by the DOHMH and the state Department of Health provide no funding for diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses associated with these preventable conditions.

Borough President Gibson has made it a high priority to restore city and state funding for peer support and education, which had been redirected towards the emergency management of COVID-19 response and the aftermath of the pandemic. This must be particularly directed towards educating youth on making lifelong healthy choices and seniors who are at elevated risk of illness and death.

Public health leaders must refocus efforts on the prevention and effective management of diabetes. The Office of the Bronx Borough President is actively exploring policy approaches to increase funding around diabetes surveillance, preventive services, and health literacy. Borough President Gibson is committed to making these policies inclusive of people’s lived



BP Gibson hosting a food distribution event in February 2022 (left) and in July 2022 (right).

experiences and exploring public and private partnerships to offer creative solutions to food accessibility. This includes roundtable discussions with Instacart, Hunts Point Market, Stop & Shop, Hunger Free America, R.A.I.N., and other stakeholders invested in food and wellness in The Bronx.

Increasing Access to Affordable Social Services

The Office of the Bronx Borough President is also working with hospital partners to connect them with the organizations that provide social and wraparound services that Bronxites with diabetes need to manage their chronic illness. Services provided by nutrition or culinary medicine programs as well as community-based experts create innovative, accessible, insurance-supported, and life-altering nutritional options for youth and adults. Creating pathways to these services through hospitals and clinics ensures that individuals with diabetes can easily access all

necessary resources to reverse their diabetes.

Community Outreach

Collaborating with our longstanding health partners in #NOT62, like the Bronx Health REACH, who work on “racial and ethnic approaches to community health,” along with Montefiore, Bronx Care, St Barnabas, New York City’s public Health + Hospitals (H+H) hospital system, and Lehman College’s Institute for Health Equity, we are using an evidence-based approach to understand the unmet needs of our residents.

The Office of the Bronx Borough President will conduct community outreach in conjunction with the Bronx Diabetes Task Force to increase diabetes screening and community awareness. Through robust social marketing and public health campaigns, the Office will work to instill values of inclusiveness and self-empowerment. Successful clinical programs rely on effective peer support networks and developing

trusted and knowledgeable peer educators as messengers, particularly in vulnerable communities.

Health People has been successful in implementing a National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP) that uses peer educators to coach people with prediabetes on lifestyle changes to prevent or delay the development of type 2 diabetes. BP office is collaborating with Health People to demonstrate the efficacy and results that people can expect from this peer support program, and we are actively recruiting participants to join us!

Recent City Initiatives

In addition to Borough President Gibson’s efforts, other Bronx and New York City initiatives have recently been introduced to address diabetes. New York City Mayor Eric Adams and H+H announced in February 2022 the expansion of lifestyle medicine services at six public health care sites, including Jacobi Medical Center, Lincoln Hospital, and Gotham Health

facilities. The expansion will provide patients living with chronic disease the tools to make healthy lifestyle changes, including providing access to plant-based diet resources, a full-time dietitian and health coach, and physician teams to monitor progress.

Eligibility criteria for participants include heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, prediabetes, and health concerns related to obesity. This is a most progressive and proactive public health initiative, and we are excited this campaign will be rolled out at three of our Bronx NYC H+H facilities!

“The expansion of the lifestyle medicine services program citywide, including in multiple Bronx hospitals, will be an important step towards providing our communities with the resources needed to use food as a tool towards leading an overall healthy life and avoiding chronic illness,” said Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson in response to the announcement of the expansion. I applaud Health + Hospitals, Dr. Katz, Dr. McMacken, and Mayor Eric Adams for their continuous commitment to holistic health and equity.”

In February 2022, New York City public schools began Plant Powered Fridays, a program to offer balanced vegan lunch menus every Friday. This initiative builds on the already successful Meatless Mondays program at all NYC public schools, which was introduced in 2019, and Meatless Fridays, which began in April 2021. Beverages are an exception to the program, with milk still being offered. Additionally, Wellness in the Schools (WITS) is transforming the school cafeteria menu, training school staff, and providing nutrition education to students across New York City. Chefs in the Schools is a Menu

Development and Chef Training program, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education’s Office of Food and Nutrition Services and the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy. The Chef Council has developed scratch-cooked, plant-based, and culturally relevant recipes that will be featured on the public school menu in Fall 2023.

The Office of The Bronx Borough President was thrilled to participate in a Chef Council Taste Testing where staff tasted and provided feedback on potential new menu items including Pineapple Fried Rice, Kachumber Salad and Jollof Cauliflower. Parents, staff and students had the opportunity to vote on the inclusion of these recipes on the new lunch menu for September 2023.

WITS has empowered children to have choice, to reflect the cultures of each community, and created an entirely new public dialogue around

public school lunch.

Beyond this, Montefiore-Albert Einstein College of Medicine was recently awarded a \$4.1 million grant by The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases to launch a six-year study on the metabolic, behavioral, and social factors causing type 2 diabetes in youth. The study will enroll 3,000 children from a variety of racial and ethnic populations at 15 clinical sites across the United States.

“It is important for us to create opportunities for all families, regardless of their zip code, to have access to fresh, healthy, high-quality nutritious food and live healthier lifestyles,” said Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson. We look forward to learning more about this study and how the findings may be used to improve health outcomes and end this epidemic in our borough.



Deputy BP Janet Peguero and staff visited Stephen Ritz and his students at The Bronx Green Machine in September, 2022 to celebrate their healthy eating and gardening curriculum.

BRONX TRAILBLAZERS IN HEALTHY EATING



Green Bronx Machine

Green Bronx Machine was created in collaboration between life-long educator Stephen Ritz and his students; what was once an alternative program for high school students has now evolved into a K-12+ model fully integrated into core curriculum. Green Bronx Machine aligns urban agriculture to key school performance indicators to grow healthy students and healthy schools. They are known all around the world for their project-based health, wellness, cooking, culinary, and gardening programs, and Tower Garden installations. These programs address not only food insecurity, but also workforce development and healthy living and learning for students and teachers all around the world.

Email info@greenbronxmachine.org to learn more!

Wellness in the Schools

Wellness in the Schools (WITS) is a non-profit organization that teaches kids healthy habits to learn and live better. WITS partners with school districts to provide nutrition and fitness education, healthy scratch-cooked meals, and active recess periods. Through the Cook for Kids program, trained culinary graduates work with schools to transform the cafeteria menu, train school staff, and provide nutrition education to students. The WITS Green for Kids program introduces students to gardening and environmental sustainability education. WITS has already partnered with 13 Bronx schools, offering its programs to thousands of Bronx students.

To bring WITS to your school for a program, workshop, or training, email abby@wellnessintheschools.org or call 212.724.2130.



Wellness in the Schools, Facebook



Hunger Free America, Facebook, Amsterdam News

Hunger Free NYC

The New York City affiliate of Hunger Free America, Hunger Free NYC helps low-income New Yorkers to access SNAP & WIC benefits and provides comprehensive information about where to get food help within their neighborhood. Additionally, Hunger Free America operates the National Hunger Hotline on behalf of the USDA to connect callers with emergency food providers in their community, government assistance programs, and various social services. The hotline can be reached at 1-866-3-HUNGRY (1-866-348-6479) or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (1-877-842-6273), for Spanish, from Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET. Hunger Free NYC also continues to conduct COVID-19 outreach and vaccine accessibility.

To receive more information on services, call the Hunger Hotline or contact the Hunger Free NYC office at info@hungerfreeamerica.org or (212) 825-0028.

Health People

A community health agency based in the South Bronx, Health People uses peer-to-peer education, instructive workshops, and referral relationships to ensure Bronxites receive comprehensive health and social services. Health People offers worksite wellness programs targeted at preventing and managing chronic illnesses including diabetes, asthma, and HIV/ AIDS. They are the first Bronx-based organization to be authorized by the CDC to provide the National Diabetes Prevention Program, an evidence-based six-session course for people with diabetes conducted by peer leaders. The program also includes peer-delivered foot care education designed to bring down the Bronx's extremely high diabetes-related foot amputation rate.

To receive more information about services, visit Health People at 552 Southern Blvd, Bronx, NY, 10455, email InHouse@HealthPeople.org, or call (718)-585-8585.



BP HEALTH EVENTS

WITH
LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

VISIT TO SCHOOL HYDROPONIC GARDEN

January 25 ~ P.S. 20



PHAROS ACADEMY'S SEX TRAFFICKING CONVERSATION WITH PASTOR POGUE

January 31 - 1001 Intervale Avenue



STI TESTING EXPANSION PRESS CONFERENCE

LED BY NYC COUNCILMEMBER
PIERINA SANCHEZ

February 7 - City Hall



PASSOVER FOOD DISTRIBUTION EVENT

March 15 - Riverdale YMCA



MENTHOL CIGARETTE BAN PRESS CONFERENCE

March 27 - Bronx Borough Hall



**HEALTHY FOOD FINANCING INITIATIVE
REAUTHORIZATION ACT ANNOUNCEMENT
LED BY SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND**

April 12 - Hunts Point Produce Market



QR Corner

Check out these local resources & services and interesting health articles!

The Bronx Health Link
Women & Infant Health Advocacy



BRONX DA'S 6TH ANNUAL CHILD SAFETY FAIR

April 15 - Baychester Community Center



Bronx Health REACH
Health and Social Needs Services

Montefiore Medical Center
Community Relations



2023 BRONX DENIM DAY MARCH
April 29 - Grand Concourse and Mount Eden Parkway



NYC Health+Hospitals
Personalized Chronic Disease Care - Lifestyle Medicine Program



For more news & updates, follow the Borough President's social media!



<https://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/>



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