

## **De Blasio offers increased aid to Health + Hospitals**

By Dan Goldberg

Mayor Bill de Blasio's proposed budget provides New York City Health + Hospitals with \$767 million in city funding, up roughly 11 percent from a year ago.

The increased commitment reflects the growing deficits facing the nation's largest public hospital system, which has a projected \$2 billion budget gap and revenue that continues to come in below projections.

The de Blasio administration must also find a new leader for the system. Ram Raju, the former president and CEO, resigned in November. He has been replaced on an interim basis by Stan Brezenoff.

## **De Blasio administration unconcerned over possible state Medicaid cut**

By Dan Goldberg

Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration isn't concerned with language in the state's proposed budget that could pull \$50 million in Medicaid money away from New York City.

In fact, de Blasio, during his own budget presentation on Tuesday afternoon, praised Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a frequent antagonist, for his support of the Medicaid program, and put Medicaid in the "good news category."

"There was a decision by the governor and his team to not include a Medicaid cut in his budget," de Blasio said. "That's been a good thing."

The mayor's praise comes despite language in Cuomo's proposed budget that would cut \$50 million in Medicaid funding from New York City unless the de Blasio administration comes up with a plan in the next five months to receive \$100 million more in federal Medicaid dollars for preschool and school supportive health services.

Dean Fuleihan, de Blasio's budget director, said he has had conversations with his counterparts in the state and does not believe the Cuomo administration's proposed cuts will come to fruition.

"I'm being told that is not the case," he said. "We've already been talking about how to increase our Medicaid reimbursements, but we will have conversations in the next couple days to make sure."

De Blasio's words of thanks represent a turnaround from the protracted Medicaid fight that occurred in 2016 when Cuomo suggested that the city once again contribute to the growth in Medicaid spending, a move that would have cost the city roughly \$656 million over two years.

That language didn't make it into the final budget, but Cuomo never stopped looking for savings for Medicaid, which is subject to a growth cap.

Cuomo has also made New York City a target for health care savings, proposing to cut \$11 million in grants to the city's health department.

### **Bassett's worries about Trump go beyond the Affordable Care Act**

By Dan Goldberg

Public health professionals are "bracing for an assault on the protections and safety nets" many of them have been advocating for their whole adult lives, New York City health commissioner Mary Bassett said Tuesday morning, as she listed all the ways in which the Trump administration can impact public health beyond the Affordable Care Act.

There is the Farm Bill, the Child Nutrition Act, the WIC program, the Hunger Free Kids Act.

"All of these are major concerns for us who want to ensure continued access ... to healthy food," Bassett said, speaking during a day-long event at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

Those are also programs run out of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, whose research arm was told to stop communicating with the public about taxpayer-funded work, according to BuzzFeed.

Bassett acknowledged the impact that repealing the Affordable Care Act would have, but as someone who has spent her tenure at the health department advocating for

race and racism to play a broader role in the public health discourse, she found plenty else to be concerned about.

Bassett mentioned a piece of legislation sponsored by Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican from Utah, and Rep. Paul Gosar, a Republican from Arizona, which has to do with denying federal funding to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The bill, Bassett pointed out, also prohibits federal funds from being used to build, maintain or provide access to a database of information on community racial disparities or disparities in access to affordable housing.

"That's one way that we can ensure we have alternate facts," Bassett said. "We simply don't look at the facts. ... There is no doubt that even generating the data that allow us to look at these inequities will come under threat."

The Mailman school canceled all its regular classes Tuesday and replaced them with dozens of mini-lectures that explored what the immediate future of public health policy might look like.

## **Lung Association calls for minimum age increase for tobacco products**

By Addy Baird

New York State failed to implement life-saving tobacco control policies in 2016, according to a new report released Wednesday by the American Lung Association.

Although smoking rates are at record lows for both youths and adults, the association's report faulted the state for not passing a statewide law during 2016 that would raise the age of sale for tobacco products to 21 years old.

The rates of high school students who smoke cigarettes fell 73 percent from 2000 to 2014, according to the state Department of Health, but, according to the Lung Association, hookah and e-cigarette use has increased, with more than one in four high school students (28.8 percent) using at least one tobacco product. Additionally, the Lung Association found that 95 percent of smokers tried tobacco before the age of 21.

"Increasing the minimum age of sale for tobacco products to 21 will significantly reduce youth tobacco use and save thousands of lives nationwide," Jeff Seyler, president and CEO of the American Lung Association of the Northeast, said in a release issued Wednesday.

Additionally, the report calls on New York State to restore statewide funding for tobacco prevention and cessation efforts.

The report does commend New York State for passing smoke-free air laws, and endorses proposals in Gov. Andrew Cuomo's executive budget that would treat e-cigarettes the same as other tobacco products, including restricting their use in places where smoking is prohibited, requiring retailers to register, and imposing a new tax on the products.

"New York State supports strong policies that reduce teen smoking rates and encourage a healthy lifestyle for all. Governor Cuomo's comprehensive anti-smoking and tobacco control initiative, The New York Tobacco Control Program, has resulted in record low rates for teen smoking since the program's implementation in 2000," a spokesperson for the state Department of Health said in an email. "The state appreciates the American Lung Association's support of the Governor's proposal to curtail the use of e-cigarettes by taxing and regulating them in the same manner as traditional cigarettes and including e-cigarettes in the state's comprehensive clean indoor air law."

Although the American Lung Association's report focuses on the state, New York City has also come under fire recently for not doing enough to curb tobacco use. While former mayor Michael Bloomberg championed anti-smoking laws, it has not been a priority for his successor, Mayor Bill de Blasio.

"Tobacco use is the leading cause of death and disease in our nation," Seyler said in a statement. "We know what works when it comes to preventing and reducing tobacco use, what we need is New York policymakers to implement the policies and programs called for in [the report] that would save lives and protect kids from a lifetime of addiction."

The full report is available here: <http://bit.ly/1PbxRzm>