



Dear Community Partners:

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented time. We are grateful for your partnership in our efforts to serve New Yorkers in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We at the Department of Social Services (DSS)/Human Resources Administration (HRA)/Department of Homeless Services (DHS) are committed to ensuring that clients receive continued support in these extraordinary times.

We are updating you in writing on the changes we have made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and we will continue to do so in the days to come as new developments unfold.

For clients in need of public benefits, we have implemented the following changes – and clients are being informed via ACCESS HRA, email, robocalls, text messages, flyers, and signage in our offices as well as social media:

- Starting last week, with State waivers that we requested, we have eliminated all requirements for HRA in-person appointments for clients, and we are preventing any adverse case actions for HRA clients who do not keep previously scheduled appointments. We are continuing to work with the State to obtain necessary federal waivers related to recertification periods.
- Since we anticipate that more New Yorkers will be applying for public benefits as a result of the economic dislocation from COVID-19, we asked the State for – and received – permission to accept Cash Assistance (CA) applications online, which began on Friday, March 20. The interview portion of the application process will be conducted by telephone.
- We have also asked the State for waivers relating to our services in the Medicaid, Home Care, Adult Protective Services, and Domestic Violence programs in order to conduct business in a way that minimizes face-to-face interactions.
- Today, the State has informed us that based on the federal legislation signed on Wednesday, March 19, 2020, no person who currently has Medicaid coverage will lose their coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Along with elected officials, service providers, and advocacy organizations, we successfully advocated for a moratorium on evictions as well as utility shut-offs – both of which will avoid unnecessary visits to an HRA Center to apply for these emergency benefits.
- All federal Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) requirements have been suspended.
- Home Bound clients and clients with disabilities are being informed that applications can be submitted through ACCESS HRA. For clients who cannot or do not want to use ACCESS HRA, Home Visits are available. Staff conducting these home visits will adhere to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s guidelines and protocols for such visits.
- Applications for emergency intervention services, including those for domestic violence survivors, can be done by telephone.
- Applications for burial services can be submitted by email, fax, and mail.
- Applications for benefits and services from the HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) can be obtained through ACCESS HRA.
- State fair hearings are being held by telephone and video without the need to appear in person.

For clients experiencing homelessness, we have implemented the following changes:

- With guidance from Health and Hospitals (H+H), we have provided a protocol for thousands of staff in DHS shelters and HRA shelters/congregate care settings and DHS outreach workers to help identify clients who are experiencing possible COVID-19 symptoms and connect them to a medical assessment and care.

- We created isolation capacity to provide shelter to clients who have COVID-19 symptoms or who test positive and do not need to be hospitalized. We have brought on additional shelter capacity to free up existing shelter space for isolation capacity.
- We are procuring additional drop-in center capacity.
- We have provided shelter providers with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) cleaning protocols and we are making sure that providers are equipped with the necessary cleaning supplies.
- We are promoting social distancing in congregate shelters by extending and staggering mealtimes.
- We have provided our street outreach teams with hand wipes (in the absence of hand-sanitizer supply) and socks to distribute to clients experiencing street homelessness.
- We have streamlined the shelter application process through the use of telephone interviews and conferences, submission of documents by email, and the use of Skype. We asked for a suspension of the Income Savings Plan (ISP) requirement and we have been authorized to grant good cause to participating clients.

As always, thank you for your continued partnership in serving New Yorkers in need, particularly now when our clients need us more than ever. For your use, here is a [link to the flyer](#) for clients regarding the public benefits changes that we described in this letter.

If you have any questions or concerns about any of these changes, please do not hesitate to reach out to Deputy Commissioner of Advocacy and Outreach, Marah Rhoades, rhoadesm@dss.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

Steven Banks

DSS Commissioner

Grace Bonilla

HRA Administrator

Joslyn Carter

DHS Administrator