



**Testimony of Educational Alliance
Before the New York City Council Committee on Aging
Oversight - Community Care Plan
Councilmember Crystal Hudson, Chair
Submitted September 23, 2024**

Thank you Chair Hudson and members of the Aging Committee for the opportunity to provide comments on the Community Care Plan.

My name is Rich Baum and I am the President and CEO of Educational Alliance. Educational Alliance is a settlement house with community centers located throughout the Lower East Side and East Village that offer individuals and families high-quality, multi-generational programs and services that enhance their well-being and socioeconomic opportunities. Educational Alliance is guided by the principle that each person is born with a divine spark of dignity and creativity; this belief is central to our older adult services, which encourage healthy living and social engagement through the arts, drama, fitness, cooking and much more.

Our older adult services are supported by contract with NYC Aging. Our current contracts help fund programs in two older adult centers, the Sirovich Center for Balanced Living and the Weinberg Center for Balanced Living as well as the Co-op Village Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC). This funding supports our Older Adults Services to provide approximately 4,000 seniors with daily meals, educational programming, fitness, recreation, and case assistance and referrals.

NYC Aging's Community Care Plan provided a common sense 5-year roadmap for long-term investments in services and programming for the City's growing older population. The specific goal of the plan is to help more people age in their homes and communities and avoid institutional care until medically necessary. The reasoning is solid: people prefer to age in their homes, and supporting their care at home is vastly less expensive and reduces hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and nursing home care.

The Community Care Plan called for new investments in older adult centers and NORCs, additional staffing and case management, and new investments in virtual programming. All of these are reasonable and necessary steps to create a more age-inclusive city.

Despite its value as a clear roadmap, the original vision of the Community Care Plan has not been fully realized – and in many ways, the opposite has happened. In each budget season since the plan was released, program providers like us have had to fight against proposed budget cuts that would have threatened our ability to provide quality programming each day for older adults. In the most recent budget cycle, the Adams Administration maintained an \$80

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million cut to NYC Aging for FY26. As Commissioner Cortéz-Vázquez has indicated, unless this cut is restored in the coming year, it will likely result in fewer Older Adult Centers across the City.

Such disinvestment is not only contrary to the Community Care Plan, but it would also be devastating for older adults now and in years to come. Community-based programming for older New Yorkers is critical. At Educational Alliance, our OACs and NORC work with the most vulnerable older populations in the City, including those living in poverty and with limited English proficiency. Over the last few years, we've seen demand for services and case management steadily increase. We have also seen an uptick in the number of individuals who are unhoused or are severely housing insecure and who participate in meals and activities. For these individuals especially, regular meals and case management support truly provide a lifeline.

At EA, we are dedicated to meeting our community members' needs, yet our NYC Aging contract does not fully cover the range of services required. To fill this gap, we supplement our NYC Aging contract through private philanthropic funds to hire additional case managers. Also, contracted rates through NYC Aging make it nearly impossible to hire bilingual staff, critical for providing services for our Chinese- and Spanish-speaking members

Our centers are meeting the needs of older New Yorkers each day. In a recent participant survey, we received value feedback from our members about their experiences. In the survey results, members consistently refer to the benefit of having opportunities to socialize and participate in activities to help them increase their mobility as well as social engagement. A member writes, ***"art classes allow me to be inspired and engaged. I love both in-person programs and zoom classes. The classes give me structure to my week. And without classes I would feel lost."*** Another member writes: ***"Having access to the activities available at the senior centers has helped me to stay healthy physically, mentally and emotionally. It has help me to stay fit and has positively added to my well-being. I can feel the difference of when I attend the activities and when I do not."***

Likewise, our NORC provides comprehensive wrap-around nursing support that enables residents to age in their homes for as long as possible, improving their quality of life while reducing financial strain on long-term care facilities. We know that more older adults would benefit from homecare or NORC services, yet city funds for these programs or funding to assist caregivers have not increased.

For example, our Co-Op Village NORC provides boots-on-the-ground services, including home visits and community nursing, and staff can reach older adults isolated from their community. In a recent client satisfaction survey, one NORC member shared that the Co-Op Village NORC Case Manager and Nurse ***"saved my life by reaching out to me when I was in a deep, dark,***

prolonged depression." This person has once again become an active member post-pandemic, reconnecting with friends and enjoying exercise and education workshops.

Lastly, we have a long list of spaces that require capital repairs and improvements, from smaller upgrades to lighting and sound systems, to larger renovations. These improvements are necessary to keep our facilities and equipment in good condition, to be used and enjoyed by older adults for years to come. Organizations cannot continue to provide services without resources needed to keep our buildings in good repair.

With acute needs across the system, instead of cuts to NYC Aging, the City must invest funds into the older adult network for both services and capital repairs and maintenance of centers.

Thank you to Councilmember Hudson for reviewing progress on the Community Care Plan and for listening to program providers. The work we do is vital to communities and without sustained investment, as promised in the Community Care Plan, services for older New Yorkers are in deep jeopardy.