

Speaker Adams Outlines \$8.7 Million Plan to Increase Funding for Senior Mental Health

City lawmakers are looking to invest millions of dollars to fund mental and physical health care programs, food security, and programs for young people, immigrants and people with disabilities, City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams said over the weekend in her first State of the City address.

These plans include \$8.7 million that would go to 108 senior centers throughout the city so mental health clinicians can work for double the hours, and more mental health practitioners could be hired.

This investment would underscore the critical need for mental health services among seniors during the pandemic, said Allison Nickerson, executive director of the nonprofit LiveOnNY.

Nickerson added that New York has “an amazing fabric of community” that the pandemic took away, and the city needs to ensure different communities have adequate care. LiveOnNY’s goal is to make sure the providers that would benefit from the council’s pledge offer programs that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Speaker Adams, who represents the 28th District in Queens, pledged an additional \$3 million toward mental health care in 33 communities that Covid has hit the hardest. Nickerson said providing adequate mental health services is the bare minimum.

“The needs of homebound people are very serious,” she said. “This is just a first step.”

Nickerson advocated for the city to invest more in front-line workers’ salaries, including mental health professionals, so the whole system is better funded and front-line staff will not age into poverty.

Michelle Jackson, executive director of Human Services Council, an advocacy group that supports a network of human services organizations, added that the pandemic had exacerbated city nonprofits’ struggle to attract and retain mental health care professionals. Most of these professionals need a high degree of education to work poverty-level jobs, she explained, which affects consumers’ quality and frequency of mental health care. Getting workers adequate wages is also crucial because these employees are often part of communities hit hard by Covid, Jackson said.

Speaker Adams also pledged \$250 million in capital funding, which would go toward the creation of five new Health+Hospital neighborhood health and ambulatory care centers in communities that lack access to health care facilities. The City Council proposed that these centers be built in Jamaica-St. Albans, Hunts Point-Soundview, Brownsville-East New York and Canarsie and on Staten Island.

LiveOnNY is a nonprofit that represents 120 organizations that help older New Yorkers connect with their communities through direct services and workforce development.