

# PLANNING FOR A JUST RECOVERY:

A Collective Crisis  
Response for an Equitable  
and Resilient NYCHA



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HESTER<sup>ST</sup>

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## Acknowledgements

The NYCHA COVID Collective Response Strategy is truly a collective effort in every way. No single person, entity, or organization is responsible for the process or this resulting report. First and foremost, the recommendations presented here center the voice, experience, and expertise of NYCHA residents during the pandemic's first wave. This was an overwhelming priority clearly articulated by the Working Group, which led to the creation of the Resident Focus Group.

As COVID-19 unleashed its fury on New York City, Working Group members and NYCHA residents were working under urgent and often dangerous conditions to bring relief to NYCHA communities. The commitment members of the Working Group and Resident Focus Group brought to the Collective Response process, even while working around the clock, was nothing short of astonishing. Representing 38 multi-sector organizations including city agencies, non-profit and community-based organizations, philanthropy and residents from 14 NYCHA developments across the city, both groups approached this work with openness and as an opportunity to advance collective action and to create change for the greater good. NYCHA residents were always prioritized over individual and organizational interests. A list of Working Group Members and Resident Focus Group members can be found in the Appendix of this document.

Gathering all the information to understand what is needed for a just and sustainable recovery response for NYCHA residents would not have been possible without the people and organizations that shared crucial data and research with the Working Group. We are thankful for our colleagues at NYCHA, DOHMH, MOCTO, CCI and MAP for their time and generosity.

In addition to participating in weekly meetings, the following Working Group members, and additional partners, contributed sections and helped edit the document: Sarah Batchu, Shanna Castillo, Jodi Callender, Torian Easterling, Debra-Ellen Glickstein, Elizabeth Hamby, Iskra Killgore, Javier Lopez, Andrea Mata, Rudy Murillo, Jose Ortiz, Jr., Herman Schaffer, Sideya Sherman, and Moriah Washington.

Many thanks to Deputy Mayor Vicki Been and NYCHA Chair Gregory Russ for your partnership and thoughtful comments. We are deeply grateful to the Ford Foundation, and Maria Torres-Springer and Jerry Maldonado particularly, for its support of the process that resulted in this Collective Response Strategy.

And finally, to the Working Group and the Resident Focus Group – thank you for your unwavering commitment to equity and to surfacing recommendations that center, value and honor NYCHA residents. Thank you for bringing your whole, authentic selves to every conversation and every page of this Collective Response. It is the dedication and commitment of individuals like you, working together as a collective, that will make a just and equitable recovery for NYCHA a reality.

Michael Steele, a member of the Resident Focus Group, sadly passed away in January 2021 before the release of this publication. We honor his memory through his contributions to this Collective Response Strategy; and hold up to the light his deep commitment to his community and Henry Street Settlement.

## Consensus Decision Making: Note about this Document

Given the diversity of stakeholders involved in developing this document, please note that not every Working Group and Resident participant agreed with ALL the final recommendations. However, all recommendations presented were generated by a consensus based methodology, and agreed to by a majority (by percentage) of Working Group members and/or prioritized by residents.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed its fury on New York City, NYCHA and its residents were already struggling with long-standing physical, economic and social challenges, resulting from systemic racism and decades of federal disinvestment. Introducing COVID-19 into the mix has exacted - and will continue to exact - a particularly harsh price on both the system and its residents. Already dealing with infrastructure and maintenance issues, NYCHA residents are now facing high rates of food insecurity, job loss and limited remote learning access.

The long-term health and well-being of over 365,000 New Yorkers and the city's political economy are at risk - and given the vulnerability of public housing and its residents, these are risks New York City cannot afford. This moment provides the city with an opportunity to deeply examine the present day impacts of historical inequities, reflect on lessons from this and recent crises and identify better responses for the future events. This Collective Response Strategy (Strategy) provides immediate and aspirational strategies that can support the ongoing emergency management, as well as serves as a foundation for long-term crisis planning and resilience. Additionally, the Strategy and the process used to develop it provides an opportunity to deepen collective, multi-sector advocacy for public housing resiliency.

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## GOALS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The following goals guided the process to create this Strategy:

- Leverage a range of sectors, perspectives and expertise
- Surface current challenges, innovations and opportunities to develop crisis and long-term responses
- Act as a "unified coalition" advocating for public housing
- Ensure that the Strategy is a living and guiding document

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Collective Response Strategy process and its recommendations were informed by the following Guiding Principles which were generated collectively by Working Group members:

- Integrate anti-racist values, approaches and strategies in all crisis-response and long-term resiliency efforts
- Prioritize NYCHA resident engagement, communication and self-determination
- Acknowledge that effective crisis response is built on mutual trust
- Encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and the removal of silos
- Integrate crisis response strategies with long-term resilience planning
- Celebrate and support NYCHA resident-led resilience strategies

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## THE PROCESS

This Collective Response Strategy is the result of a six month-long process that brought diverse stakeholders together around the themes of crisis response and resilience with a focus on NYCHA and its residents (see Appendix for a list of all 38 Working Group members).

From the outset, Working Group members expressed a deep desire to include and center resident experience to develop the Collective Response. The facilitation team adapted to this request and conducted a parallel Focus Group process with NYCHA residents in partnership with Working Group members representing nonprofits who actively work with NYCHA residents.

The Working Group and Resident Focus Groups built on identified challenges and lessons learned to craft a set of strategies as part of a crisis response framework. Each group was able to create their own recommendations on Health Equity, Economic Empowerment, and Community and Connectivity, as well as to provide feedback on each others' recommendations.

With the support of Red Hook Initiative, Henry Street Settlement, GOLES, and Center for Court Innovation, the facilitation team engaged 35 NYCHA residents from 14 developments across New York City. Most residents in this group had participated or been involved in rapid response efforts in their developments. The resident engagement process, while not extensive, allowed for new conversations to surface their priorities and recommendations for this document and the process.

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## THE FRAMEWORK

This Collective Response Strategy has been designed as a framework with tangible and actionable recommendations to serve as short-, medium-, and long-term resiliency strategies for public housing.

Recommendations are sub-divided into Cross-Cutting themes and three topic areas - Economic Empowerment, Health Equity, and Community and Connectivity. Each topic has overarching Objectives and specific Recommendations for implementation:



**Cross-Cutting** recommendations take an inter-sectional approach and call on city agencies and NYCHA to work with community organizations to prioritize resident-centered, anti-racist, collaborative, and long-lasting solutions.



**Economic Empowerment** recommendations aim to address both short and long-term economic vulnerabilities, ensure residents' immediate financial needs are addressed during a crisis, and connect NYCHA residents to increased economic opportunity.



**Health Equity** recommendations aim to increase the integration of public health and health care into other systems such as housing, education and food access to address the social determinants of health and as a means to strengthen the crisis response infrastructure for residents.



**Community and Connectivity** recommendations aim to invest in and support the ways in which NYCHA residents are connected to each other, their neighborhood and the city, whether through building strong locally led support networks or ensuring access to technology and broadband.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The end of 2020 provided an opportunity to reflect on the early months of the pandemic to ensure that the City is ready to tackle the next crisis head-on, whether it is the second wave of COVID we are experiencing now or a completely different crisis. While not every lesson identified below will apply to all crises, we hope they can offer insights and strategies that bolsters the resiliency of our city and public housing for future events.

- Need for stronger coordination and communication between city agencies
- Need for clear roles and responsibilities between CBOs and government to avoid gaps in service or duplication
- Need for regularly updated and accurate data about NYCHA residents to inform crisis response
- Building and supporting neighbor-to-neighbor response
- Leveraging and strengthening existing infrastructure and networks
- Need to advocate for timely and flexible funding
- Need for continued and inclusive resident communication and engagement during a crisis

## CALL TO ACTION + IMMEDIATE SIX RECOMMENDATIONS

This document is a call to action. It represents short and long-term recommendations for a more resilient NYCHA, but the recommendations must be activated. While the Working Group and parallel Resident Group's charge is complete with the release of the Collective Response Strategy, a process must be established for continued accountability and implementation of the remaining recommendations. In order to do this, a longer term Implementation and Civic Coalition will be established to carry on this work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPLEMENT IMMEDIATELY

The following recommendations can be implemented already or are already in process:

1. **Create crisis mode city contracting and procurement mechanisms** that enable the immediate disbursement of emergency funds needed to address a crisis, including to nonprofits, resident led networks, mutual-aid associations, and NYCHA Resident Associations in the aftermath and throughout an emergency through:
  - Simplified contracting and flexible or minimal deliverable and reporting requirements during crises
  - Creation of a pre-qualified list of nonprofits and resident-led networks in each borough (of diverse size, language reach and service population focus)
2. Currently, NYC Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are unable to be inclusive of all NYCHA developments. **Expand and fund the NYC Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and NYCEM** Community Engagement programming to ensure that all NYCHA developments are part of the existing CERT teams' activities and local Community Emergency Networks.
3. **Convene government agencies to debrief on COVID response**, as it relates specifically to NYCHA, to discuss challenges, wins and operational infrastructure required for future crises.
4. **Expand the training, recruitment and hiring of NYCHA residents** (and improve distribution and availability of information on training programs) to perform crisis related jobs in their own developments and at other NYCHA sites (e.g. sanitizing buildings, food and supplies distribution, and communication).
5. **Further identify and pre-qualify more NYCHA resident-owned businesses** for crisis response and other NYCHA related services and contracts.
6. **Expand and make long-term plans for the provision of mobile or pop-up public health services** on or near NYCHA developments during crisis events (e.g. testing, vaccinations, emergency treatment and mental health support).



# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT

Over the last 20 years, New York City has experienced three unique and all-encompassing crises - an act of terror, a severe climate event and the current novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. Each previous crisis has brought unique challenges and forced the city to respond in new and often innovative ways to meet the pressing needs of New Yorkers.

As COVID-19 began to spread across New York City in early 2020, it became clear that none of the crisis plans developed over the last 20 years could prepare us for the social, economic, and, least of all, health impacts of this fast-spreading disease. The pandemic has presented a crisis like no other in our lifetimes, impacting all geographies and populations. And while its impacts were, and continue to be, felt by the entire city, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the lives of our city's most vulnerable residents - low-income Black, and Latinx communities - many of whom call NYCHA home.

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed its fury on New York City, NYCHA and its residents were already struggling with long-standing physical, economic and social challenges, resulting from systemic racism and decades of federal disinvestment. Introducing COVID-19 into the mix has exacted - and will continue to exact - a particularly harsh price on both the system and its residents. Already struggling with infrastructure and

deferred maintenance issues, NYCHA and its residents are now grappling with the impact of the pandemic, high rates of food insecurity, job loss and a deep digital divide affecting remote learning.

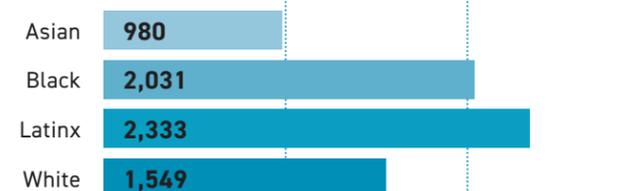
The long-term health and well-being of 365,000 New Yorkers and the city's largest affordable housing infrastructure are at risk. Given the vulnerability of public housing and its residents, these are risks New York City cannot afford. This moment provides us with an opportunity to deeply examine the present day impacts of historical inequities, reflect on what this and recent crises have taught us, identify how to handle future crises better, and proactively chart a course for recovery and long term resilience for a more just and equitable New York City.

We cannot wait for the next emergency to create a comprehensive crisis response and resilience strategy for public housing. This Collective Response Strategy provides immediate and aspirational strategies that can support the current crisis response, as well as serve as a foundation for long-term crisis planning and resilience. This process, and the recommendations it puts forth, reveals that it will take collective action, advocacy and resources from the public, private, nonprofit and philanthropic sector to achieve long-term success while at the same time holding NYCHA and City Hall accountable for making operational and systemic changes.

### COVID-19 CASES AND DEATHS IN NYC *per 100,000 people*

#### CASES

##### by Race and Ethnicity

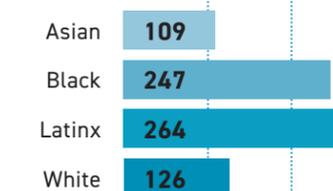


##### by Income Level

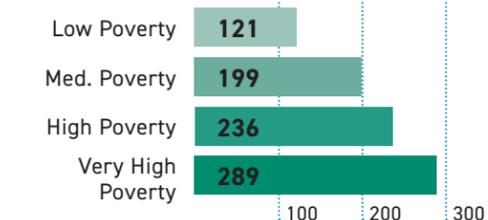


#### DEATHS

##### by Race and Ethnicity



##### by Income Level



Source: NYC DOHMH, November 18, 2020.

# GOALS AND OPPORTUNITY

The following goals guided the process to create this Response Strategy:

- 1. Leverage a range of sectors, perspectives and expertise**

The Collective Response Strategy was developed in deep consultation and collaboration with a Working Group consisting of city agencies, a wide range of community-based organizations, philanthropy, residents, representatives from NYCHA, and an independent Resident Focus Group of residents living in NYCHA developments across NYC.
- 2. Surface current challenges, innovations and opportunities to develop crisis and long-term responses**

Recognizing that Working Group and Resident Focus Group members have been closely involved with COVID-19 crisis response, the process sought to leverage their unique perspectives on both the challenges and opportunities in planning for crisis response, recovery and long-term resilience. This Strategy shines a light on the incredible resilience of NYCHA residents in the face of a crisis and identifies successful crisis response strategies that can be scaled up or replicated.
- 3. Act as a “unified coalition” advocating for public housing**

In addition to discussing crisis response, the Working Group process aimed to bring together a diverse body of residents, community-based organization, housing advocates and city agencies that can advocate for resources for NYCHA at the local, state and federal level. The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated long-standing inequities facing NYCHA residents and its housing stock. This collective advocacy is required to address deep seeded challenges. Conversations in both the Working Group and Resident Focus Group explored strategies and priorities for ongoing collective advocacy to shift the narrative of public housing, and influence policy and budget priorities at the local, state, and federal levels in favor of NYCHA and its residents.
- 4. Ensure that the Collective Response Strategy is a living and guiding document**

The involvement of city agencies, NYCHA, and City Hall in the Working Group ensures that decision makers and stakeholders are active contributors to shaping recommendations and exploring implementation strategies. Through collective advocacy and leveraging the Working Group members’ networks and spheres of influence, the Collective Response Strategy is intended to transcend any Mayoral administration. It is not a “white paper”, but an action plan with recommendations and action steps that serves as a policy priority agenda and collective advocacy road map for the short, medium and long-term.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Collective Response Strategy process and its recommendations were informed by the following Guiding Principles which were generated collectively by Working Group members:



**Integrate anti-racist values, approaches and strategies in all crisis-response and long-term resiliency efforts**

- Name systemic racism explicitly and understand it as a root cause of disinvestment in public housing and of health inequities and economic inequality for residents
- Address the underlying issue of systemic racism instead of solely focusing on its symptoms and effects



**Prioritize NYCHA resident engagement, communication and self-determination**

- Communicate with residents early and often
- Honor resident knowledge, lived experience and feedback for improving their communities
- Create opportunities for NYCHA resident decision-making and self-determination through deepened participatory budgeting and policy making processes and procedures



**Acknowledge that effective crisis response is built on mutual trust**

- Recognize that historic disinvestment, mismanagement, and lack of engagement and co-creation have eroded residents’ trust in NYCHA
- Investment in communication, co-creation, engagement and follow-through are key to maintaining and rebuilding trust between the Authority and NYCHA residents



**Encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and the removal of silos**

- Create opportunities to listen and learn from different NYCHA stakeholders: residents, resident associations, community-based organizations, city agencies and different departments within NYCHA
- Address issues through a comprehensive lens that allows different stakeholders to work together towards more holistic solutions



**Integrate crisis response strategies with long-term resiliency planning**

- Recognize that crises exacerbate underlying housing, income, health and other disparities experienced by NYCHA residents
- Learn from current and past crises to understand what has worked well and what can be improved in the future
- Create space for tackling both immediate recovery from COVID-19 and long-term adaptation towards an equitable and resilient NYCHA



**Celebrate and support NYCHA resident-led resiliency strategies**

- Acknowledge and learn from the successes of NYCHA resident-led strategies such as mutual aid networks, Resident Association and other volunteer crisis response efforts
- Amplify the innovations and resiliency of NYCHA residents in the face of immediate and chronic crises to change the narrative about NYCHA residents

# PROCESS

This Collective Response Strategy is the result of a 6 month-long process that brought diverse stakeholders together around the themes of crisis response and resilience. Rasmia Kirmani-Frye and Hester Street co-facilitated and managed the process with funding support from the Ford Foundation. The process began on July 2020 with the convening of a NYCHA Post-COVID Working Group - which consisted of representatives of 21 organizations and government agencies that work closely with NYCHA or its residents, NYCHA resident leaders and NYCHA staff (see Appendix for Working Group members). The Working Group had weekly virtual 2-hour sessions from July to September. Sessions consisted of discussions and working sessions to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on public housing residents, surface challenges and lessons learned from varied crisis response efforts organized by NYCHA, community-based organizations and resident groups and generate recommendations for improved crisis response and long-term resilience planning. Guest speakers from relevant agencies and organizations also presented at Working Group sessions to provide contextual information and data to inform the process.

From the outset, Working Group members expressed a deep desire to include and center resident experience to develop this Collective Response Strategy. The

facilitation team adapted to this request and conducted a parallel Focus Group process with NYCHA residents in partnership with Working Group members who actively work with NYCHA residents across the city.

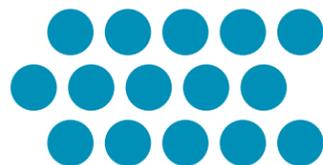
The Working Group and Resident Focus Group built on identified challenges and lessons learned to craft a set of strategies as part of a crisis response framework. Each group was able to create their own recommendations on Health Equity, Economic Empowerment and Community and Connectivity, as well as to provide feedback on each others' recommendations.

Both the Working Group and the Resident Focus Group reviewed and provided feedback on drafts of this document. A consensus based methodology was used to edit and refine recommendations with a special focus on centering resident needs and priorities. **Given the diversity of stakeholders involved in developing this document, it is important to point out that not every Working Group and Resident participant agreed with ALL the final recommendations. However, all recommendations included here were reviewed using a consensus based methodology, and agreed to by a majority (by percentage) of Working Group members and/or prioritized by the Resident Focus Group.**

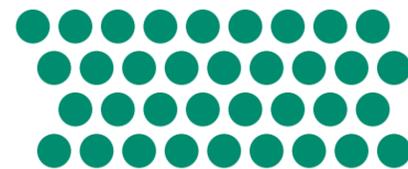
## WORKING GROUP & RESIDENT FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS INCLUDED:



**5** City Agencies

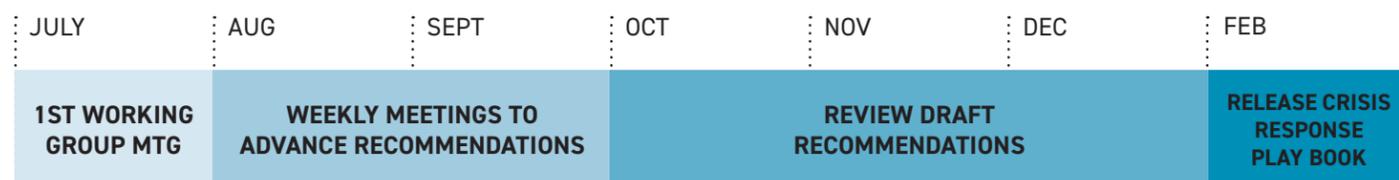


**15** Community Organizations



**35** NYCHA residents from **14** developments  
*[Identified by Working Group members whose organizations work in partnership with NYCHA residents and representing all five Boroughs.]*

## TIMELINE



# RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Early on in the process, the Working Group understood that no recommendation from this group should move forward without the voices, reflections, support or opposition of NYCHA tenants.

With the support of Red Hook Initiative, Henry Street Settlement, GOLES, and Center for Court Innovation, the facilitation team engaged a group of 35 NYCHA residents from 14 developments across New York City. Most residents who participated were active in rapid response efforts in their developments.

The Residents group met for four sessions hosted over Zoom between September and October of 2020. These meetings focused on confirming or clarifying the Working Group's understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on residents and helped surface particular pain points from the resident perspective during relief efforts. This engagement process created the space for prioritizing and generating recommendations for the Collective Response Strategy from the resident perspective.

In order to foster inclusive engagement, the facilitation team provided materials in advance and simultaneous translation to Spanish. Each resident also received a stipend in recognition of the time and effort they dedicated to participating in the sessions and reviewing drafts of the document.



Source: Henry Street Settlement

## TOP 3 RESIDENT CONCERNS:



# HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This Collective Crisis Response Strategy is a framework with tangible and actionable recommendations applicable to short-, medium-, and long-term resiliency strategies for public housing. The recommendations in this document are centered first and foremost on responding to the needs and priorities of NYCHA residents and are directed to NYCHA, City agencies, elected leaders, Community Based Organizations, and all other entities who can implement these recommendations into policy.

Recommendations are sub-divided into Cross-Cutting themes and three topic areas - Economic Empowerment, Health Equity, and Community and Connectivity. Each topic has overarching Objectives and specific Recommendations for implementation:



**CROSS-CUTTING** recommendations take an inter-sectional approach and call on city agencies and NYCHA to work with community organizations to prioritize resident-centered, anti-racist, collaborative, and long-lasting solutions. They also prioritize a comprehensive approach to both address the impacts of the current crisis and build infrastructure, processes and networks that prepare NYCHA residents for future crises.



**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT** recommendations aim to address both short and long-term economic vulnerabilities, ensure residents' immediate financial needs are addressed during a crisis, and connect NYCHA residents to increase economic opportunity. These recommendations also prioritize investment in the networks, mutual aid organizations and non-profits that residents have relied on during the pandemic for crisis response.



**COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIVITY** recommendations aim to invest and support in the ways in which NYCHA residents are connected to each other, their neighborhood and the city, whether through building strong locally led support networks or ensuring access to technology and broadband. These recommendations also prioritize building infrastructure and protocols to ensure residents are connected to each other and service providers to ensure rapid response.



**HEALTH EQUITY** recommendations aim to increase the integration of public health and health care into other systems such as housing, education and food access to address the social determinants of health and as a means to strengthen the crisis response infrastructure for residents. These recommendations also aim to ensure that public health and health care responses, research and data collection is done in coordination with NYCHA residents.

Below are 3 ways that this Collective Response Strategy can be used:

1. **A tool to understand the challenges, opportunities and lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis response**
  - *Responding to a Crisis* chapter
  - *Lessons Learned* chapter
2. **A tool to inform the implementation of crisis response policies for public housing**
  - *Lessons Learned* chapter
  - *Recommendations* chapter
3. **A tool for advocacy and coalition-building around crisis response and long-term resilience planning**
  - *Recommendations* chapter
  - *Call to Action* chapter

# RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

# INTRODUCTION

Crises are defining moments for society. The shock of disruption exacerbates the systemic challenges experienced by the most vulnerable even in non-crisis times. The current COVID-19 global pandemic is not an oil spill in a specific geography, or a storm that ravished through a coast—it is a long-winded, uncharted crisis that has brought with it new challenges, while uncovering many deep-rooted and systemic social inequities. The inequities vulnerable communities face during “non-crisis” times puts them miles behind the starting line during a crisis event. As a result, COVID-19 has exacerbated long standing health, economic, educational, and racial inequities in New York City.

Black American and Hispanic/Latinx New Yorkers have experienced the most severe impacts of COVID-19: higher rates of hospitalization and death.<sup>1</sup> Neighborhoods with higher percentages of frontline service workers (home health aides, nurses, food service workers, and many others) have the highest cases of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> NYCHA is home to many of these more vulnerable communities. Over 90 percent of NYCHA tenants are Black or Hispanic,<sup>3</sup> and public housing residents already have higher hospitalization rates for underlying health conditions that put them at an increased risk of COVID-19.<sup>4</sup> More than 88,000 NYCHA residents are part of NYC’s workforce, and of those, over 35% are front line healthcare and service workers.<sup>5</sup>

In considering and discussing the COVID-19 challenges faced by NYCHA residents, the Working Group asserted that:

- Structural racism is a root cause of inequitable health, socioeconomic, educational, and quality of life outcomes

## NEW YORKERS IN PUBLIC HOUSING

NYCHA is the **largest public housing authority** in North America and the **largest residential landlord** in the U.S.



Source: NYCHA

- Current federal, state, citywide and NYCHA crisis response practices and policies continue to operate within a racist structure.
- A crisis creates immediate challenges, but also deeply exacerbates chronic issues and challenges facing NYCHA and its residents.

Framed under these three collective assertions, the Working Group and Resident Focus Group participants identified the following challenges. These challenges were felt most deeply in the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Working Group and Resident Focus Group members also identified issues from previous crisis events such as Hurricane Sandy or the attacks of September 11, 2001.

- Unclear information sharing and unorganized communication protocols from all levels of government.
- Absence of rapid crisis response infrastructure (procedures, analysis of gaps and overlaps, expedited contracting, release of emergency funds, etc.) and live data on response efforts prevented a timely and coordinated response
- Exacerbation of NYCHA's building infrastructure and capacity issues caused by both long-standing and emergency funding gaps

It should be noted that while themes of the challenges had similarities across stakeholder groups, specific impacts and experiences were unique depending on one’s vantage point. As of the publishing of this document, the pandemic is an active crisis. It is acknowledged that some of the challenges have or are being addressed, while others continue to persist.

## COVID-19 VULNERABILITY



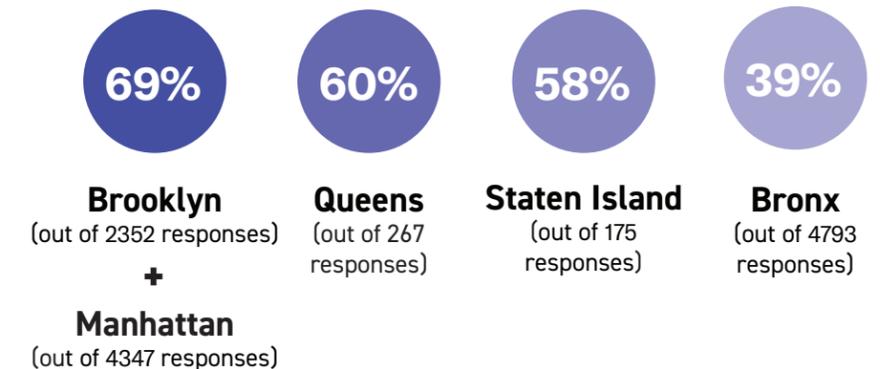
**90%** of NYCHA tenants are Black or Hispanic, two communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the virus



**40%** of all NYCHA households are headed by an adult older than 62 years old

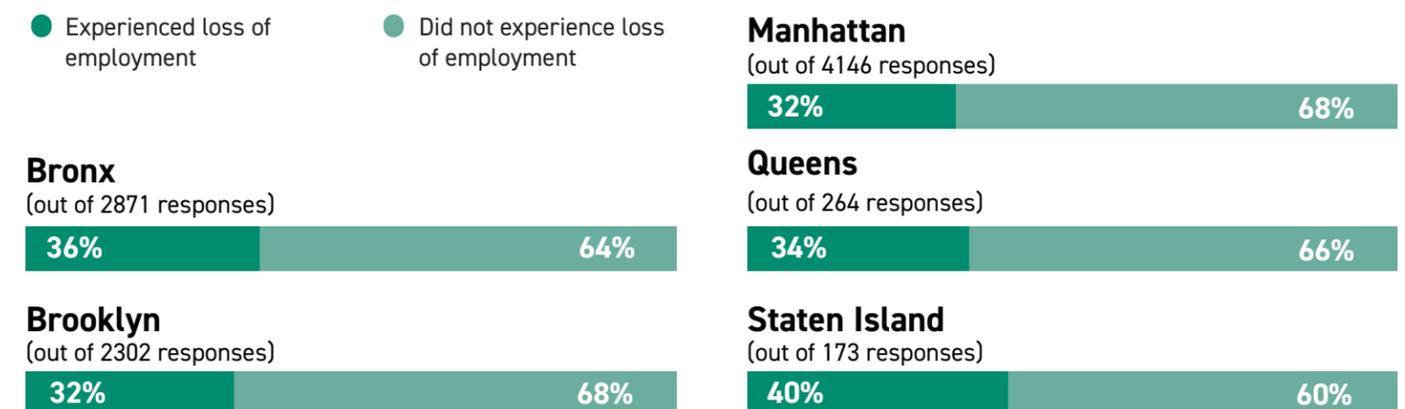
## UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS

COVID-19 has shown to have a more significant impact on people with underlying health conditions. **69%** of NYCHA residents surveyed by CCI in Brooklyn and Manhattan reported having pre-existing health conditions



## LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate in New York City reached **19.8%** in July 2020. In a survey conducted by Center for Court Innovation (CCI) in June 2020, at least **32%** of NYCHA residents surveyed experienced loss of employment.



Sources: NYC Furman Center, Center for Court Innovation (June 2020), NYC DOHMH, NYC Furman Center

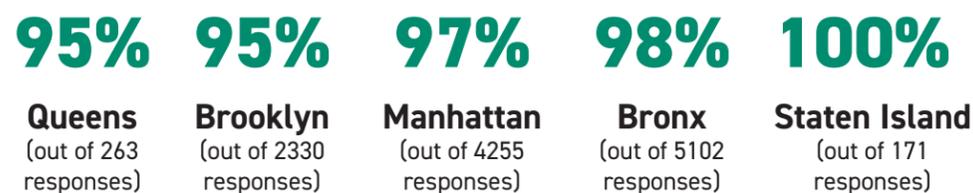
# Challenges Facing Residents

NYCHA residents bear the burden of decades of federal and state government disinvestment, compounded by years of institutional mismanagement from their landlord.<sup>6</sup> The city's agreement to collaborate with a federal monitor as appointed by the Southern District of New York, is the most recent example of efforts to address such historic mismanagement.<sup>7</sup> As stated earlier, NYCHA developments are also home to some of the pandemic's most vulnerable populations.

COVID-19 revealed what many public housing advocates already knew: vulnerable and aging populations who live in public housing are at greater risk of illness. Multiple news stories recounted the devastating experiences NYCHA residents faced during the onset and the height of the pandemic in the spring and summer of 2020.<sup>8</sup> Working Group members who work directly with NYCHA residents highlighted the challenging realities for many NYCHA residents. Local news outlets reported that NYCHA residents were confined to smaller spaces, often living in multi-generational homes with varying needs and levels of risk.<sup>9</sup> Other stories described NYCHA and Section 8 residents' frustration with lack of access to communal spaces, which were closed to reduce risk of exposure to the virus or challenges getting responses from property management. Finally, some residents reported that limited or no internet connectivity and language access barriers created additional challenges for rapid access to information about available support.

## FOOD SHORTAGE

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on food access for New Yorkers. Before the pandemic, nearly 1.2 million New Yorkers were already food insecure. By mid-April 2020, closures of food pantries and soup kitchens peaked at 39%. In a survey by the Center for Court Innovation (CCI), the majority of NYCHA residents they reached experienced food insecurity.



Sources: Center for Court Innovation (June 2020), NYC DOHMH, Food Bank for New York City

### Key challenges facing NYCHA residents, particularly in the first month of the crisis:

- Delays in communication in receiving timely health and safety information across all 302 NYCHA developments
- Lack of availability of PPE, building cleaning and cleaning supplies for adequate sanitizing.
- Many NYCHA Resident Associations and resident leaders took it upon themselves to distribute basic needs, PPE, and sanitize their building during the months before there was federal guidance for non-healthcare provider face coverings.<sup>10</sup>
- Exacerbation of pre-existing building conditions. Many NYCHA buildings and units are in dire need of repair. While NYCHA staff continued to repair critical life and safety repairs in buildings through the crisis, there were further delays or attention to much needed repairs for many households.

# Challenges Facing NYCHA<sup>11</sup>

Decades of federal disinvestment, deferred action on necessary repairs, and an aging housing stock has left the largest public housing authority with a crumbling infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> The complexity of NYCHA as a federally mandated, city, state and federally funded agency that exists within and outside of local government left NYCHA to shoulder some of the impacts of COVID-19 in a silo. While NYCHA leadership and staff began their response as soon as March 13th<sup>13</sup>, NYCHA was not spared of COVID-19's devastation. The agency lost tenants and employees to COVID-19 during the height of the pandemic.<sup>14</sup>

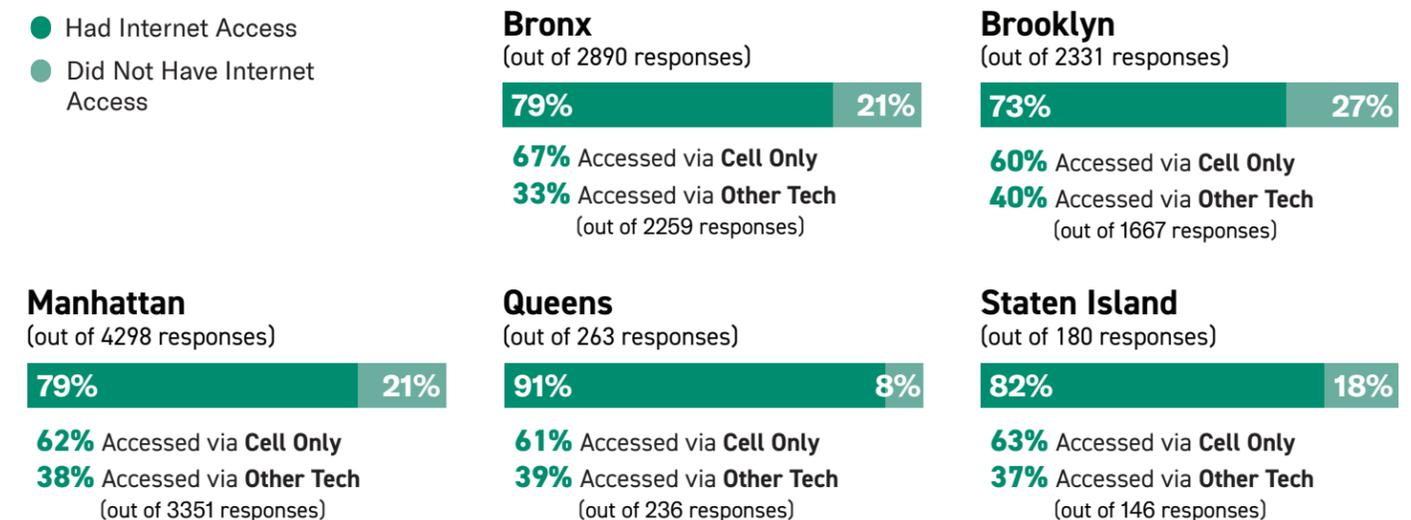
Additionally, job losses among NYCHA residents and rent reductions have impacted the agency's budget. In 2020, NYCHA was estimated to collect \$93 million dollars less in rent than in 2019, which represents a 6.4% decrease in the rent collection rate.<sup>15</sup>

### Key challenges facing NYCHA in the immediate month after the crisis began:

- From an external perspective, messaging and coordination between NYCHA and other agencies was unclear, making coordination of relief responses and distribution of basic needs and PPE for residents and community based organizations challenging
- Timely and uniform dissemination of health and safety communications to all developments was lagging.
- NYCHA staff and capacity were already burdened prior to the pandemic, and the additional needs of pandemic response further exacerbated the capacity, infrastructure maintenance and coordination challenges.

## INTERNET ACCESS

40% of New Yorkers do not have mobile and home broadband, and 18% of New York City households have neither a mobile or home subscription. During the height of COVID-19, most of the NYCHA residents surveyed by the CCI had access to internet and access internet through mobile devices only:

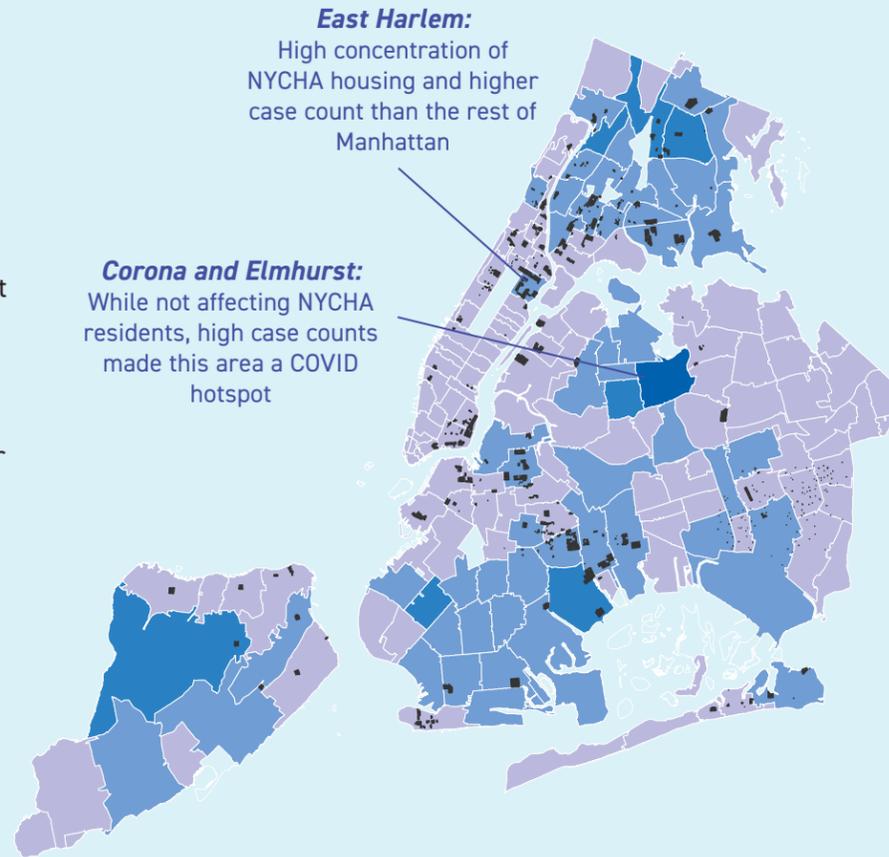


Source: Center for Court Innovation (June 2020), NYC Mayor's Office of Chief Technology Officer (August 2020)

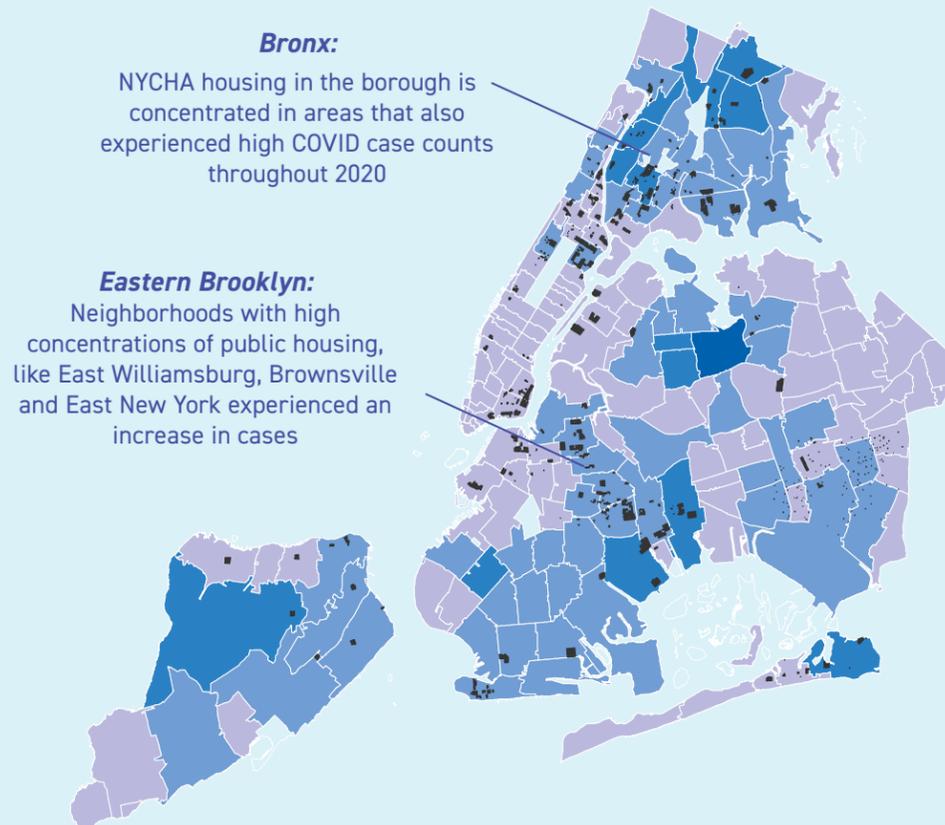
## COVID-19 IMPACT IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Apart from the underlying high-risk for COVID-19 presented by the demographics of NYCHA residents, another means to understand the impact on NYCHA is through a spatial analysis of the neighborhoods where NYCHA campuses are located. These maps show the city's COVID cases per zipcode overlaid with NYCHA developments over time. They demonstrate how community spread might have put NYCHA residents at an even higher increased risk.

May 2020



July 2020



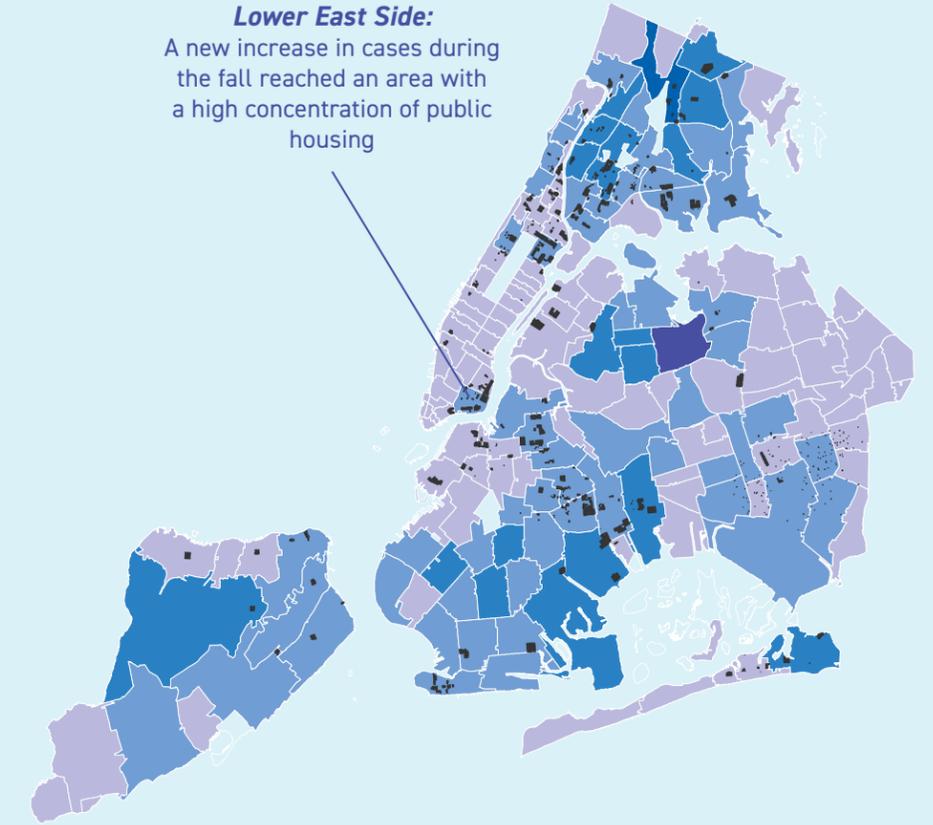
### LEGEND

- NYCHA Developments
- 0 - 1,250 cases
- 1,251 - 2,500 cases
- 2,501 - 3,750 cases
- 3,751 - 5,000 cases
- 5,001 - 6,250 cases

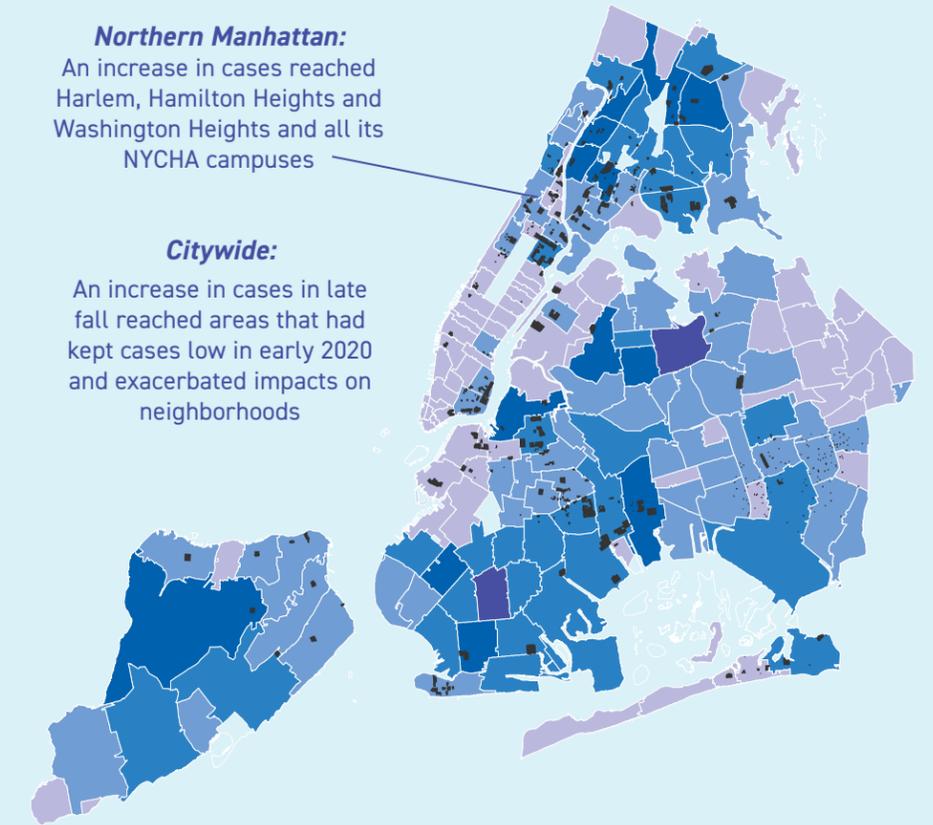
### LEGEND

- NYCHA Developments
- 0 - 1,250 cases
- 1,251 - 2,500 cases
- 2,501 - 3,750 cases
- 3,751 - 5,000 cases
- 5,001 - 6,250 cases

September 2020



December 2020



Source: DOHMH and NYCHA. Note: These maps reflect the availability of spatial data. DOHMH released case data by zipcodes starting in May 2020 once testing allowed for more accurate numbers.

# Challenges Facing City Government

New York City has survived many crises and has continuously reinvented itself. Withstanding the shocks of 9/11 and Superstorm Sandy lead to the creation of deep community support networks and improved government coordination. However, much like the rest of the country, New York City was not ready for COVID. The Governor did not close down all non-essential business statewide until March 22. Bureaucracy, various competing priorities, and leadership tensions resulted in inadequate multiagency coordination and hampered response efforts.<sup>16</sup> Since the crisis was the first of its kind in a generation, City leaders had to scramble to put in rapid response strategies to COVID-19 while public health officials were still assessing the most effective measures.



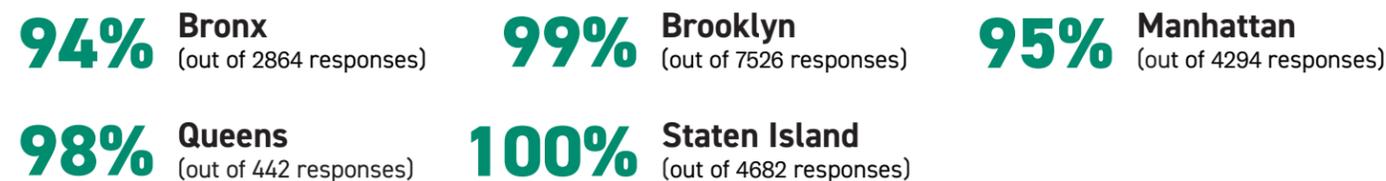
In August 2020, a Lower East Side resident takes a COVID-19 test at a pop-up site on Grand Street organized by CORE and and Henry Street Settlement. Source: Henry Street Settlement.

### Key challenges facing City Government in supporting NYCHA in the early months of the crisis:

- The Privacy Act of 1974<sup>17</sup> and the New York State Public Housing Law Section 159<sup>18</sup> which prohibits the disclosure of personal information, impeded the City government's efforts to share resident information among agencies coordinating supplies and wellness checks in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic.
- A lack of real-time information on citywide crisis-response efforts created challenges in understanding gaps and overlaps in crisis response between city and non-city agencies. Community-based organizations did not have conduits or means to access data on city agency response geographies or focus in the early months of the pandemic, resulting in service areas being duplicated or overlooked.

### LACK OF PPE

At least **94%** of NYCHA respondents across the city experienced a lack of both masks and gloves:



Source: Center for Court Innovation (June 2020)

# Challenges Facing Non-Profits

Nonprofit organizations are an integral part of the fabric of NYC. Since the early 2000s, many social services, on-site daycares, community center operations and senior center operations at NYCHA developments shifted from being run mostly by NYCHA to being operated by nonprofits contracted by DOE, DYCD and DFTA, as well as other organizations with long standing connections to public housing communities. During non-crisis times, nonprofits provide food access, health and social services, job training and placement, affordable housing and legal support, education and organizing networks, and much more. When the pandemic hit, many nonprofit organizations activated their employees and recruited volunteers to coordinate far-reaching mutual aid networks and relief funds that served as lifelines for many NYCHA residents.<sup>19</sup> Non-profits were critical to the COVID-19 response, but took hits to their budgets as government contracts, program timelines and funding streams were deeply impacted by the pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

**“My neighbors and I take turns to sweep and mop our hallways. we also spray and wipe down the doors with Lysol Wipes.”**

- NYCHA resident

**“I helped my neighbors and we looked out for each other. I cleaned my side of the hallway and volunteered with MAP to help with support for COVID assistance.”**

- NYCHA resident

### Key challenges facing nonprofit organizations working in NYCHA developments in the early months of the crisis:

- Non-profit organizations did not have access to regularly updated on-the-ground information on the specifics of city agencies' and elected officials' crisis response efforts, which impeded a coordinated crisis response strategy.<sup>21</sup> The lack of a coordinated crisis map, database or briefings on response efforts by federal, state or city agencies especially to non-profits managing relief efforts resulted in service areas being duplicated or overlooked.
- Disruptions and delays of anticipated funding as a result on service delays and the City's fiscal crisis impeded non-profit organizations ability to address exacerbation of economic, health, educational, housing quality, and other needs from residents.<sup>22</sup>
- Limited access to emergency funds to mobilize and fund urgent crisis response created multiple challenges for nonprofits. Where possible, nonprofits shifted gears and requested flexibility in funding agreements to focus budgets on relief responses.
- Multiple non-profits had to lay-off or furlough staff and grapple with dire financial outlooks, while simultaneously working over capacity with limited resources to address crisis needs.

# RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS: WHAT WORKED

Relief efforts provided fast-acting responses that saved many New Yorkers from exposure to COVID-19, as well as hunger, lack of schooling and social isolation. Across the city, mutual aid networks emerged overnight to coordinate the emergency relief, nonprofit partners already working with NYCHA residents shifted gears to directly respond to the needs of their constituents, city agencies mobilized to provide access to emergency food and technology access, and philanthropic partners provided emergency funds to neighborhood-based non-profit service providers. The following section provides a snapshot of some of the innovations, ingenuity and collaboration that multiple actors displayed, especially in the early months of the COVID crisis.

## »» PANDEMIC RESPONSE

### Resident Organizing

From neighbor-to-neighbor interactions to mutual aid support, NYCHA residents across the city banded together to support one another. NYCHA Resident Associations (RAs) were often the primary support networks for residents, working to create care packages, deliver food and organize resident-led door knocking, which allowed for quicker and targeted interventions where residents were in crisis.<sup>23</sup> At the Claremont Houses, active residents facilitated a large scale effort to feed neighbors, provide PPE, and share information about testing. NYCHA worked with the Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP) which represents RAs to activate a Volunteer Response Network and allow quick access to existing Tenant Participation Activities (TPA) funds— financial resources that NYCHA distributes to tenant organizations which typically support activities such as anti-violence programs, leadership training and ESL classes. The availability of these funds allowed tenant associations to quickly mobilize a respond to COVID-19. Residents also shared real time issues and challenges with NYCHA, which helped in the response. On the ground, NYCHA resident leaders have been coordinating directly with organizations providing testing services (including, but not limited to NYC Health + Hospitals) to increase testing at NYCHA developments.

Although NYCHA hired outside contractors to clean and sterilize developments to adhere to COVID-19 safety measures and conducted more than 4,000 site inspections to ensure quality<sup>24</sup>, residents shared a sentiment that not all spaces were cleaned equally. In several instances, residents - with support from CBOs - worked together to clean areas in their development beyond the scope of the sanitizing contractor.

## »» PANDEMIC RESPONSE

### Non-Profit Organizing

Community Based Organizations (CBOs), in many cases, acted as first responders and reliable sources for support and information for NYCHA residents. CBOs that have earned the trust of community members have a better sense of immediate needs and outreach techniques, enabling them to distribute resources quicker than city government in many instances. As resident needs and priorities shifted, CBOs pivoted from existing programs to those addressing the urgent demand for food, PPE, cash assistance and quick dissemination of information.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to personal protective equipment (PPE) was scarce, as was access to real-time information on testing and medical care. CBOs worked to deliver PPE to NYCHA residents and strategized on how to support on the ground medical response.

#### SPOTLIGHT

**Henry Street Settlement in Lower East Side implemented a fund to “disburse up to \$2,000 for workers who had lost their jobs due to COVID-19, including undocumented immigrants and others ineligible for government benefits”. The program also provided Lower East Side residents with funding to cover emergency expenses, such as child-care and medicine.<sup>25</sup>**

#### SPOTLIGHT

**Red Hook Initiative is currently working to connect sick community members to a volunteer telemedicine network. They are also using the Red Hook Hub to disseminate important community updates.<sup>26</sup>**



*Henry Street and Vision Urbana partnered to bring food to a growing population of those unable to leave home or who are newly unemployed. Source: Henry Street Settlement.*

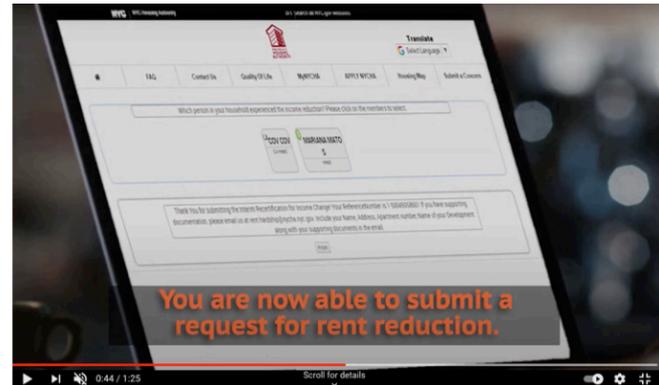
## ➤ PANDEMIC RESPONSE

# NYCHA

NYCHA was able to leverage existing resources and quickly develop new ones to meet City health and safety measures. When it became evident that cleaning and sanitizing was an important COVID-19 prevention measure, NYCHA employed hundreds of residents to perform additional sanitizing work. NYCHA hired 500 temporary workers for sanitizing high touch-point areas, and about half of these new workers are residents.<sup>27</sup>

NYCHA also organized various food access efforts, including the hiring of 30 trained staff to individually enroll residents in GetFoodNYC – NYC’s food benefits program. NYCHA also organized its own mass food distributions with Food Bank, City Harvest and other food donors, involving staff across different departments.<sup>28</sup>

NYCHA sought to prioritize timely and accurate communication with residents to equip them with the resources and information needed to protect themselves. The Community Engagement & Partnerships team made over 100,000 wellness check phone calls and reached almost 60,000 residents, many of them seniors and residents who are vulnerable to COVID-19’s impacts. NYCHA also used analog channels to share information (flyers, robocalls, mailed notices)



NYCHA created communication materials to help in applying for rent hardship. Source: NYCHA Youtube page.

and hosted several virtual town halls for tenant associations, sent out emails, and shared information on social media.

NYCHA also continues to maintain close contact with tenant organizations to keep them informed of about COVID-19 and important NYCHA and City resources. TA leaders receive weekly newsletters and routine phone calls. Thus far, NYCHA organized over 9,500 phone calls with tenant association leaders.<sup>29</sup>

### SPOTLIGHT

**Farragut Food Club NYCHA was able to utilize pre-existing infrastructure to support resident-led responses. The Food Club is a food delivery model - founded and operated by NYCHA residents - that was launched in 2018 to make it easier for Farragut Houses residents in the Vinegar Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn to buy bulk groceries online. The Food Club was especially effective when the ability to grocery shop in-person was severely impacted during the lockdown. Hundreds of residents joined the club to take advantage of waived membership and delivery fees. The Food Club structure enabled residents to shop online through Amazon and at the local supermarket Western Beef using credit, debit and their SNAP benefit cards through an Instacart partnership.**

## ➤ PANDEMIC RESPONSE

# City Government

In April, when New York City was experiencing highest cases and deaths, Mayor de Blasio presented a plan with the goal to improve the City’s response to COVID-19 with a specific focus on NYCHA residents. It amplified some of the work already done by non-profit organizations and residents themselves, including providing access to free testing on or near developments, food distribution services, wellness checks, and free tablets, internet access and training for seniors.<sup>30</sup>

The Mayor’s Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety (MAP)—an initiative led by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice in partnership with the Center for Court Innovation (CCI) to address neighborhood safety and crime reduction in 15 NYCHA developments, shifted their funding focus to provide rapid relief response to NYCHA residents. The MAP/CCI team quickly pivoted to leverage the program’s infrastructure to respond to COVID-19 related needs.

The designation of a Food Czar,<sup>31</sup> in March, helped to operationalize and oversee a structure for working New Yorkers to access the food they need. Food Czar Kathryn

Garcia quickly leveraged the resources of several City agencies to create multiple channels for food access. The inclusion of a NYCHA staff member in the Food Czar team supported the coordination and implementation of efforts like GetFoodNYC at NYCHA.

In May, DOHMH launched a publicly accessible web portal with frequently updated data about COVID-19 testing, cases and deaths desegregated by zip code, age, sex, race/ethnicity, poverty, and borough in order to support data-driven crisis response strategies. DOHMH also released a one-time snapshot of this data at the NYCHA development level, creating a foundation for future interagency data sharing. This data set also serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the distribution of illness and death across geography and population. More recently, DOHMH has been able to use this data to launch place-based initiatives in neighborhoods with high numbers of positive cases, as well as low rates of testing. Working closely with community-based partners and NYCHA resident leaders, DOHMH has been able to facilitate expanded community-driven testing and connections to wrap-around services.

### SPOTLIGHT

**CCI conducted a citywide needs assessment through a resident survey of more than 10,000 participant to identify resident needs by location in the 15 MAP developments. With this information, MAP Teams composed of NYCHA residents led an effort to get much needed resources, supplies and up-to-date information to each of the 15 developments. Residents heavily relied on MAP Teams for information and essentials, and for many residents, this was their only source for support.<sup>32</sup>**

## CONCLUSION

The multiple and varied response strategies that were activated in the pandemic have demonstrated the innovation and collaboration that is possible in every sector of NYC. In order to create a more coordinated crisis response, many of these strategies can and should be institutionalized, operationalized and replicated as part of the City and NYCHA’s crisis response and long-term resilience planning strategies.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## INTRODUCTION

A crisis provides an opportunity to reflect and put into place stronger measures to prepare for future crises. The end of 2020 provides an opportunity to reflect on the early months of the pandemic to ensure that the City is ready to tackle the next crisis head-on, not matter what it is from the second wave of COVID we are currently experiencing or another severe climate event. . Collectively, these lessons can help support both a just recovery and spur proactive planning for an equitable response to future crises. The recommendations in the next chapter were created in direct response to both the challenges and lessons learned.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### Need for stronger coordination and communication between city agencies

Although the City began planning for a COVID-19 response in early 2020, citywide emergency coordination and communication protocols were sometimes contradictory. In early March, Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio and top aides confidently stated that the outbreak would be contained at the same time that other countries and cities were demonstrating otherwise.<sup>33</sup> This can be attributed to an overconfidence in the city's preparedness, a need to ensure that information was accurate, coordinated and, where appropriate, approved by relevant state and federal levels first. These complexities of communicating during a crisis were also exacerbated by the divergent responses of the Federal government, the New York State government, and neighboring jurisdictions. Additionally, information and guidance on how to contain the crisis was still being developed by public health experts. It should be noted that while not without its challenges, the City's response to COVID-19 showed an improvement in its ability to coordinate amongst its own agencies compared to previous emergencies. The City should establish clear protocols that set into a motion a coordinated communication strategy between City and State officials at the very outset of a crisis.

### Need for clear roles and responsibilities between CBOs and government to avoid gaps in service or duplication

Although Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and residents were closest to the needs on the ground, they were often forced to operate with limited visibility into larger response efforts. CBOs, including those that already had working relationships with various levels of government, did not have access to real time information on the City's crisis response efforts that could inform their decision-making and prioritization of relief efforts. While a full picture of COVID-19's impact and the response from all levels of government might not have been available at the time, the lack of clarity on roles and responses often led to both duplication of efforts by community-based organizations and government, as well as gaps in service. CBOs and

residents struggled to define their role in the response and to prioritize where their limited resources should go. Clear roles and responsibilities for various city agencies and CBOs should be established prior to, and during a crisis in order to ensure a coordinated response. Additionally, a frequently updated dashboard or briefing, focused on informing CBOs of city agency and other crisis response efforts, would greatly improve citywide rapid response coordination.

### Need for regularly updated and accurate data about NYCHA residents

Regularly updated, accurate and transparent data from the City and the State has been fundamental in allowing city agencies, nonprofits and residents to decide what the best and safest course of action is during the pandemic. DOHMH's effort to frequently publish open data on COVID cases and impact to vulnerable communities has allowed a thorough analysis of how the pandemic has affected the most vulnerable New Yorkers. The most recent data on NYCHA at the development level were released by DOHMH in May 2020. This, coupled with a lack of data on the total number of public housing residents, is an ongoing challenge to understand and evaluate the true impacts of COVID-19, specifically on NYCHA residents. Up to date information on total number of public housing residents will require tackling the Privacy Act of 1974 mentioned in *Responding to a Crisis* chapter.

### Building and supporting neighbor-to-neighbor response

While those closest to the ground often felt disconnected from the citywide response, their greatest strength was the ability to meet the immediate needs of their neighbors at NYCHA. New Yorkers bravely stepped up to facilitate large scale efforts to feed their neighbors, provide PPE, and share information about testing. NYCHA resident leaders and community-based organizations were quick on their feet and leveraged existing resources and relationships that benefited from their long-term trust with NYCHA residents. Building and supporting neighbor to neighbor local infrastructure that can be deployed in time of crisis is key to mobilizing a rapid response to NYCHA residents. Further investments in resident-led networks will yield faster responses in times of emergency.

### Leveraging and strengthening existing infrastructure and networks

NYCHA utilized pre-existing partnership networks to support resident-led responses in a variety of ways. It activated multiple models of food distribution and wellness checks for vulnerable populations, which allowed them to provide constant updates, resources and crucial information. However, the lack of a consistent distribution and communication networks across all developments hampered NYCHA's ability to curate support and structure coordination in a crisis. Given the lack of affordable high-quality grocery stores in many NYCHA neighborhoods, the activation of food distribution networks such as the Farragut Food Club or Claremont Houses resident led response, could and should be scaled further to support residents in both crisis and non-crisis times.

### Need to advocate for timely and flexible funding

While Resident Associations and CBOs had unique insight into resident needs, they did not always have flexible funding to meet them and stay agile in a rapidly changing context. Existing contract goals, timelines and compliance requirements prevented some CBOs from using existing funding to cover crisis related needs. Some Resident Associations were, however, able to access and leverage existing Tenant Participation Activities (TPA) funds, which was key to support crisis response in their developments. Expanding the RAs that have access to TPA funds for crisis through trainings would increase access to resident-led crisis response networks. However, other public funds for emergency response are hard to repurpose since limitations on their use are prescribed by FEMA. Creating mechanisms that allow diverse public funds to be repurposed during an acute crisis will also improve CBOs abilities to respond.

### Need for continued and inclusive resident communication and engagement during a crisis

Limits on non-essential gatherings imposed by the State due to COVID-19 made many of NYCHA's normal strategies for resident communication, engagement and decision-making unavailable. Residents also experienced a greater difficulty connecting with their property managers during the pandemic, causing building maintenance issues to deteriorate further. While NYCHA continued to use analog and virtual engagement channels, many residents couldn't or did not participate due to the digital divide and lack of trust. Robust and inclusive engagement methods between NYCHA and its residents need to be expanded and fostered to build long-term trust for crisis and non-crisis situations.

**“Resident Associations were very effective in neighbor-to-neighbor response. They accessed funds to organize their own resident-led volunteer efforts and collaborated with NYCHA for food distribution events and other essentials. They shared regular updates on real time issues happening at developments, which helped in the response.”**

- Working Group Member

**“Communication is key during a crisis. Tenants won't accept informational robo calls because of how they are treated. NYCHA staff needs to have better relationship with tenants, so residents can better access and accept resources/information from them.”**

- NYCHA resident

**“Formal and informal resident leaders are great communicators. Engaging residents who are in the public health or healthcare community is an untapped resource. Intergenerational resident families can be really helpful with the emphasis on telemedicine and indoor and outdoor space can be repurposed for health screenings.”**

- Working Group Member

# RECOMMENDATIONS

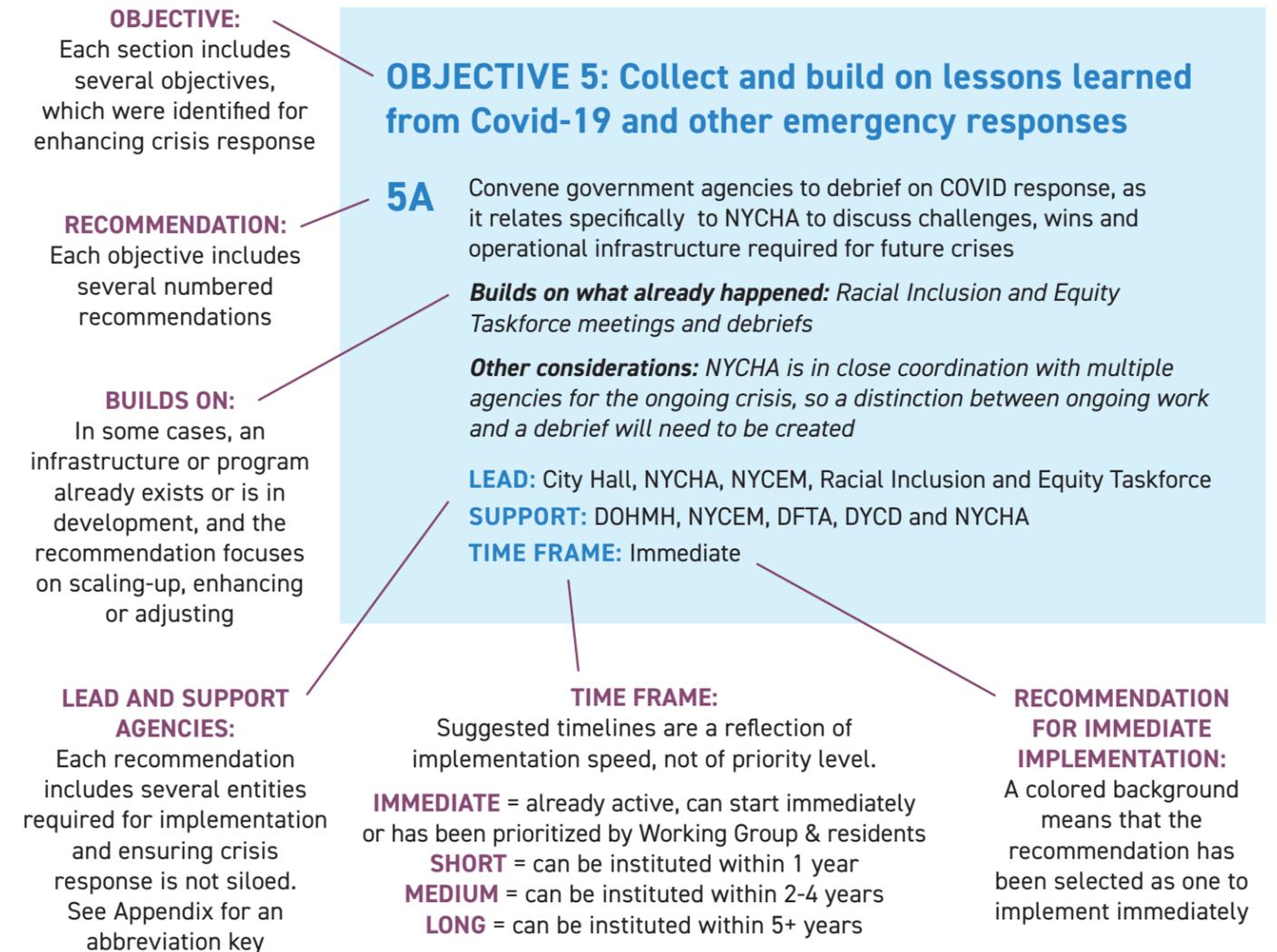
## GUIDE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The entire Working Group process supported the development of the following Objectives and Recommendations to improve and enhance crisis response and long-term resilience of NYCHA and NYCHA residents.

Objectives and Recommendations are organized in these sections:



Each section is organized in the following way:





## RECOMMENDATIONS

# CROSS-CUTTING

The cross-cutting recommendations identified in this chapter call on city agencies, NYCHA and community organizations to take a comprehensive and intersectional approach to address the impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis and build the infrastructure, processes and networks that prepare NYCHA and its residents for future emergencies. Planning for long-term resiliency is essential to address long standing and systemic barriers that prevent healthy living for all NYCHA residents. These recommendations focus on ways diverse stakeholders can collaborate to address systemic inequities experienced by NYCHA residents while centering anti-racist values, strategies and approaches. Prioritizing resident engagement, communication and self-determination to build trust between the community and NYCHA are at the center of these cross-cutting recommendations.

“How can we connect residents to resources, especially when ability to directly contact them is limited by health concerns, weather conditions, internet, and more? We wanted residents to sign up for food delivery but many don’t have access to internet or internet fluency.”

- Working Group Member

## OBJECTIVE 1: Establish coordinated citywide crisis communication protocols and rapid response mechanisms in NYCHA communities [Citywide]

**1A** Build on citywide COVID response infrastructure to establish clearer citywide and borough specific communication channels with clear roles for City Hall, city agencies, NYCHA and non-profit sector that can be deployed in any crisis scenario at NYCHA to ensure clear communication with residents in future crises

**Builds on what already exists:** NYCEM and NYCHA Emergency Management collaboration, Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COADs) across several New York City neighborhoods, New York City Advance Warning System

**LEAD:** City Hall, NYCEM

**SUPPORT:** City agencies, NYCHA, non-profit sector, residents, electeds

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**1B** Create crisis mode city contracting and procurement mechanisms that enable the immediate disbursement of emergency funds needed to address an emergency, including to nonprofits, resident led networks, mutual-aid associations, and NYCHA Resident Associations in the aftermath and throughout a crisis through:

- Simplified contracting and flexible or minimal deliverable and reporting requirements during crises
- Creation of a pre-qualified list of nonprofits and resident-led networks in each borough (of diverse size, language reach and service population focus)

**Builds on what already exists:** Flexible Philanthropic re-grants such as Robin Hood emergency grants

**LEAD:** City Hall, MOCS, Philanthropy

**SUPPORT:** HRA, Social Services

**TIME FRAME:** Immediate

**1C** Enact procurement and contracting structures within city agency contracts or funding streams that establish an approval process that enables nonprofits to pivot social service funding to on the ground support in NYCHA communities in the event of a crisis

**Builds on what already exists:** MAP funding pivoted to relief funding, TPA funds used for crisis

**LEAD:** City Hall, MOCS, Philanthropy

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, HRA, other Social Services Agencies

**TIME FRAME:** Medium



## OBJECTIVE 2: Invest in a crisis-related data gathering infrastructure for efficient and coordinated crisis response [Citywide]

- 2A** Create a centralized citywide system for sharing and synthesizing real-time data and information on crisis response services to CBOs, resident groups and mutual aid networks doing relief work to prevent gaps and overlaps in the cross-sectoral citywide and NYCHA response efforts

**Builds on what already exists:** DOHMH Incident Command Structure, CBOs that collect data (e.g.CCI)

**LEAD:** City Hall

**SUPPORT:** Mayor's Office of Information Privacy (MOIP), NYCEM, City Agencies, NYCHA, CTO, philanthropy, non-profit sector

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

- 2B** Strengthen existing data sharing agreements and create new ones between different levels of government by amending relevant laws/policies to access NYCHA resident addresses to increase efficiency and maximize crisis response while also vigorously protecting resident privacy

**Considerations:** Privacy Act of 1974 is hard to change. Resident Focus Groups expressed concern with data sharing, so residents should be consulted.

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** HUD, State government

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

## OBJECTIVE 3: Improve existing strategies and infrastructure to effectively communicate, support and engage with NYCHA residents in crisis situations

- 3A** Expand and fund the NYC Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and NYCEM Community Engagement programming to ensure that all NYCHA developments are part of the existing CERT teams' activities and local Community Emergency Networks by incorporating the following:

- Mobilize and train a larger pool of NYCHA residents, grassroots organizers and non-profit partners for general crisis response and readiness
- Implement a multi-pronged NYCHA communication campaign that can be applied to a variety of crisis scenarios (door-to-door, multi-lingual, accessible, digital and analog)
- Operationalize the existing infrastructure to reach vulnerable residents for wellness checks and immediate health needs
- Continue to expand existing partnerships with existing non-profits, on-site programs and other networks to provide emergency food, medicine, wellness checks and requisite supplies
- Partner with private pharmacies develop strategies to deliver prescriptions to public housing residents with low mobility especially in the event of a crisis

- Assess, along with Resident Associations, the most urgent and critical building conditions in conjunction with NYCHA building management
- Share information on emergency services and supplies being provided at each development to inform and coordinate with citywide crisis response
- Coordinate and organize annual crisis response drills and information sessions at each development and maintain semi-annual contact with all stakeholders involved to recruit, train and plan for a better response

**Builds on what already exists or is already in process:** New York City Emergency Management Department CERT Training Program, CERT Emergency Network RFPS, Taskforce for Racial Inclusion and Equity, Community Hubs, Red Hook Local Leaders Program, LES Ready, MAP Rapid Response teams

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** NYCEM, Non-Profit, Philanthropy, NYCHA TAs, Resident Associations

**TIME FRAME:** Medium (some aspects immediate)

- 3B** Prioritize and integrate ongoing input from Resident Associations and residents in all crisis response planning and decision-making processes from the conception of an idea to final implementation

**Builds on what already exists:** Resident Advisory Board (RAB), Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP), Heat/Elevator Action Plans

**Other considerations:** Desire to expand beyond existing Resident Association structures expressed by residents and NYCHA staff

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA TAs, Resident Associations

**TIME FRAME:** Short

## OBJECTIVE 4: Gather relevant data to inform both Crisis Response and Long-Term Resilience Planning on NYCHA developments

- 4A** Improve and centralize asset-based profiles of each NYCHA development that maintain individual resident privacy but can inform crisis and ongoing resilience planning by:
- Improving navigability and data interface of existing data portals
  - Increase awareness and usage of available data by NYCHA residents, nonprofits and other city agencies awareness through Resident Association, CERT Teams and other mechanisms
  - Overlaying demographic, economic, service, maintenance and civic information to inform crisis and on-going resilience planning
  - Building out information on non-profit organization and services available to residents in crisis and non-crisis situations
  - Including comprehensive health reports for each development focused on social determinants of health and root causes of health inequities for NYCHA residents; include data on resident health, budget allocations for resident health and impact of housing-based investments.

**Builds on what already exists:** NYCHA Community Engagement and Partnerships Map + MyNYCHA Developments Portal, DOHMH Community Health Profiles

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** DOHMH, DOITT

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**4B** Continue to activate unused NYCHA open spaces and community centers to allow for socially distant testing events, job fairs, food distribution and vaccination sites. Create a comprehensive strategy for NYCHA Campus capacity, feasibility and suitability for future crisis response efforts

**Builds on what already exists:** NYCHA campuses were and are currently being used for COVID-19 crisis response efforts such as food distribution and testing

**Considerations:** Balancing resident needs and privacy at the development level vs. citywide needs

**LEAD:** NYCEM, NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** DFTA, DYCD, Other agencies operating space in NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Short

## OBJECTIVE 5: Collect and build on lessons learned from Covid-19 and other emergency responses

**5A** Convene government agencies to debrief on COVID response, as it relates specifically to NYCHA to discuss challenges, wins and operational infrastructure required for future crises

**Builds on what already exists:** Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce meetings and debriefs

**Other considerations:** NYCHA is in close coordination with multiple agencies for the ongoing crisis, so a distinction between ongoing work and a debrief will need to be created

**LEAD:** City Hall, NYCHA, NYCEM, Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce

**SUPPORT:** DOHMH, NYCEM, DFTA, DYCD, NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Immediate

**5B** Create a living archive of conversations and stories of NYCHA residents' experiences during COVID-19, Hurricane Sandy, heat emergencies, and other crises. Use the wisdom, insight, and stories shared to facilitate reflection and forward planning.

**Builds on what already exists:** Story Corps archives

**LEAD:** Philanthropy

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, Local Voices Network (lvn.org), Residents, StoryCorps

**TIME FRAME:** Short



Source: GOLES



## RECOMMENDATIONS

# ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The Economic Empowerment recommendations are focused on the immediate and long-term impacts of a crisis on the financial health of NYCHA residents. Working Group Members and Residents Focus Group members alike stated the need to have structures in place that provide immediate relief to NYCHA residents during the crisis through rent relief and easier access to benefits and cash assistance. They also expressed that more resident led groups should be set up to serve as the conduit of appropriate relief efforts as they are both trusted and most knowledgeable about on the ground needs. Furthermore, while the crisis brings hardship, it also creates opportunities for NYCHA Residents and Resident Owned businesses to have prioritized access to crisis response contracts. A stable financial situation also helps mitigate the shock of a crisis. In order to set up NYCHA residents for long-term economic empowerment and resilience, recommendations that bolster both short and long-term income generation and wealth building strategies were also deemed to be of critical importance.

**“Workforce development should include permanent stable jobs. Most of what’s provided are skill building courses for temporary jobs.”**

**- Working Group Member**

## OBJECTIVE 6: Bolster systems to ensure residents’ immediate economic needs are addressed during a crisis

**6A** Expand partnerships with resident groups and non-profit organizations to deepen in person support and training to residents to access HRA and other benefit portals with a focus on residents with technology, accessibility or language needs

**Builds on what already exists:** HRA’s partner application and training process. Benefits screening at Jobs-Plus sites, MAP sites, NYCHA referral portal for SNAP benefits.

**LEAD:** HRA

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, Non-profit service providers, Philanthropy, CTO

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**6B** Improve access to and approval of rent relief measures for NYCHA residents who have lost income during a crisis by simplifying the digital interface, increasing multi-lingual communications beyond rent inserts and posters, improving training at the NYCHA Customer Contact Center to handle questions and enhanced Project Management training to handle questions from residents

**Builds on what already exists:** Recently enacted Rent Relief measures

**Considerations:** Paperwork and information required to recertify and get rent relief are still uneven. Many NYCHA residents are wary of the process because they fear there might be a penalty for applying and find the approval process complicated.

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** HRA

**TIME FRAME:** Short

## OBJECTIVE 7: Connect NYCHA residents to short and long-term crisis response jobs and contracting opportunities

**7A** Expand the training, recruitment and hiring of NYCHA residents (and improve distribution and availability of information on training programs) to perform crisis related jobs in their own developments and at other NYCHA sites (e.g. cleaning and sanitizing of buildings, food and supplies distribution, communication, and more)

**Builds on what already exists:** Section 3 priority categories and Section 3 reform. NYCHA hired 500 residents to perform additional cleaning tasks for COVID.

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** Resident Associations, City Hall, Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development

**TIME FRAME:** Immediate



**7B** Increase pathways to long-term resilience jobs (healthcare, building maintenance, logistics) for high need groups in need of employment (youth ages 16-18, seniors and those who have experienced job loss) and design workforce training strategies that prepare NYCHA residents to be mobilized during a crisis or in long-term crisis response

**Builds on what already exists:** *Construction Pathways, Americorps, Green City Force, Local Law 97 job opportunities, Parks Opportunity Program*

**LEAD:** NYCHA, Mayor's Office of Workforce Development

**SUPPORT:** Non-profit workforce organizations, Philanthropy

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**7C** Further identify and pre-qualify more NYCHA resident-owned businesses for crisis response and other NYCHA related services and contracts

**Builds on what already exists:** *NYCHA Business Pathways*

**LEAD:** SBS, Mayor's Office of MWBE

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Immediate

## OBJECTIVE 8: Bolster short and long-term income generation and wealth building strategies for NYCHA residents to lessen economic impact in crises

**8A** Create a learning community between NYCHA and its workforce/economic opportunity partners and financial institutions to:

- Identify trades and jobs with high growth potential in NYC + NYCHA's Jobs and Recovery Plan and provide paid job trainings, apprenticeships and other supports for NYCHA residents to access these jobs
- Improve referral networks, coordination, partnerships and share best practices
- Analyze and discuss what programs have the most impact, what needs improved and what should be scaled up

**Builds on what already exists:** *ResidentsCAN!, Jobs-Plus collaborative and KidsRISE*

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** SBS, NYCHA, Non-Profit Service Providers, Philanthropy, City Hall Mayor's Office of Workforce Development Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity

**TIME FRAME:** Short

**8B** Increase opportunities for NYCHA residents to become Community Health Workers by scaling up existing NYCHA pilot program and partnerships

**Builds on:** *NYCHA's current Community Health Worker pilot training with CUNY, Make the Road Community Health Worker Training (CHW) program*

**Considerations:** *Partnership with CUNY could provide credit bearing potential and career ladder growth in the healthcare sector.*

**LEAD:** Philanthropy

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, Mayor's Office of Workforce Development Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**8C** Expand resident economic democracy efforts by supporting and fostering existing and new individual and cooperative resident business concerns lead by NYCHA residents. Continue to scale up procurement opportunities provide by City contracts and NYCHA's Transformation Plan to growth and capitalization of these businesses

**Builds on what already exists:** *NYCHA's business pathways program, Farragut Food Club, NYCHA Business Pathways, Childcare Business Pathways, Construction business pathways*

**LEAD:** Philanthropy

**SUPPORT:** SBS + philanthropy + EDC, Non-profit providers, NYCHA, Workforce Training

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**8D** Seed universal college and career accounts for every child living in public housing communities so they have a financial resource for higher education starting in kindergarten, and amplify community support for economic success.

**Builds on what already exists:** *NYC Kids RISE Save for College Program*

**LEAD:** NYC Opportunity

**SUPPORT:** DOITT, DOE, NYCHA, DCWP, Philanthropy, NYC Kids RISE

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

## OBJECTIVE 9: Improve mechanisms for resident associations/mutual aid organizations to access, manage and control crisis response funds

**9A** Assist interested Resident Associations and resident groups in becoming incorporated with 501(c)3 status in order to increase access to crisis response and long-term recovery funds and provide ongoing legal and financial planning technical assistance

**Builds on what already exists:** *Some Resident Associations are already incorporated as 501(c)3*

**LEAD:** NYCHA; RAs and CCOP

**SUPPORT:** Private sector (pro bono attorneys); Nonprofit sector

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**9B** Create structures and mechanisms for non-incorporated 501(c)(3) groups and networks to receive crisis response funds from philanthropic sources

**LEAD:** Philanthropy

**TIME FRAME:** Short



## RECOMMENDATIONS

# COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIVITY

The Working Group and Resident Focus Group acknowledge that improved digital connectivity, social cohesion and continuous communication are key factors to both crisis response and long-term resilience. Currently, NYCHA residents do not have equitable access to the internet or devices. The pandemic demonstrated how critical the internet is in a crisis. NYCHA residents without internet or devices could not access benefit portals, learn remotely or access telemedicine. While much was done to provide devices and wifi to NYCHA residents, wide gaps still remain. 46% of New York City households living in poverty do not have broadband at home.<sup>34</sup> Deepening access to broadband for all NYCHA residents will support crisis response and long-term resilience, especially for seniors and youth. In addition to internet access, increased social cohesion, leadership and resident communications will support and strengthen resident networks and build trust. These networks are important for the overall wellbeing and resilience of NYCHA developments but become crucial and trusted conduits in times of crisis.

## OBJECTIVE 10: Ensure free to low cost access to broadband internet for all NYCHA residents, especially during crisis

**10A** Build and expand on City's Racial Inclusion & Equity Taskforce commitment to leverage existing and newly formed relationships with private and nonprofit internet providers to expand free or low cost broadband service at less than \$20/month to 17 NYCHA developments by the end of 2021, and eventually to all developments. Couple with measures to ensure that every NYCHA household has an ipad or laptop.

*Builds on what already exists:* Racial Inclusion & Equity Task Force with NYC Internet Master Plan

**LEAD:** MOCTO

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, City Hall, Private Sector

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**10B** Increase access to internet access, electronic devices and digital literacy support for NYCHA residents with language, visual, and other barriers with a priority given to school-age children and seniors living alone

*Builds on what already exists:* Devices given to Seniors by DFTA, tablets and devices given to students by DOE, OAT Training Queensbridge

**LEAD:** MOCTO

**SUPPORT:** DFTA, DOE, NYCHA, Private Sector

**TIME FRAME:** Short

**10C** Build wifi hotspots and charging stations in every development to provide residents with increased internet access and power

**LEAD:** MOCTO

**SUPPORT:** City Hall, Private Sector, NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Short

## OBJECTIVE 11: Invest in resident-led community cohesion and leadership building

**11A** Develop an online platform, inspired by the RedHook Hub, to connect needs and support from individuals, groups and organizations at the neighborhood level in crisis and non-crisis moments.

*Builds on what already exists:* RedHook Hub, Mutual Aid Organizations

**LEAD:** Philanthropy, Resident Associations

**SUPPORT:** Private Sector, Nonprofit sector, Universities

**TIME FRAME:** Short or medium



**11B** Improve quality of public spaces (computer labs, community centers, and others) and prioritize access to them during crisis moments so residents and neighbors can safely gather, access the internet and other resources

*Builds on what already exists: NYCHA Connected Communities Initiative*

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** DFTA, DYCD

**TIME FRAME:** Medium or Long

## OBJECTIVE 12: Build crisis response infrastructure and preparedness protocols throughout NYCHA developments

**12A** Ensure all residents have access to up-to-date information in crisis; partner with Resident Associations and non-profit organizations to provide information, training and support to residents in accessing digital portals

*Builds on what already exists: NYCHA's OpportunityConnect*

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** MOCTO, Philanthropy

**TIME FRAME:** Short

**12B** Launch a proactive campaign for NYCHA residents to update their contact information with NYCHA and key City human services agencies leveraging Resident Associations and Resident led mutual aid networks.

**LEAD:** HRA, Non-profit partners, NYCHA RAs

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Short





## RECOMMENDATIONS

# HEALTH EQUITY

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront the issue of health equity in all our communities. Health equity allows everyone to have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy and requires removing all the obstacles to health including poverty, discrimination, lack of access to good jobs, quality education and unsafe living environment. This Issue Area acknowledges that NYCHA residents face barriers to health equity and puts forth recommendations to increase the health infrastructure, especially in times of crisis. Additionally, NYCHA residents are often part of research studies or health related projects but do not have agency or voice in how these studies are designed or managed or how their data are shared. The recommendations therefore call for all research studies to be grounded in principles of equity - specifically through the meaningful inclusion of NYCHA residents in designing studies and the usage of their own health data.

**“As a person in a wheelchair, I felt terrorized when I was going through the grounds to get to some of the activities. If it snowed really badly, was raining, or dark, not only would I have problems but other kids and seniors who have canes and walkers that they use. What if there was a crisis where everybody had to get out? There’s too many of us to help.”**

- NYCHA Resident

Source: Hester Street

## OBJECTIVE 13: Strengthen public health and health care infrastructure for quicker crisis response

**13A** Expand and make long-term plans for provision of mobile or pop-up public health services on or near NYCHA developments during crisis events (testing, vaccinations, emergency treatment, mental health support, and more)

**Builds on what already exists:** Existing COVID response and Vaccine distribution plan

**Other considerations:** Skepticism of vaccine from communities of color

**LEAD:** DOHMH

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA, NYC H+H

**TIME FRAME:** Immediate

## OBJECTIVE 14: Increase integration of public health and health care into other systems such as housing, education and food access to reduce impact of crisis events

**14A** Proactively foster connections and collaborations between NYCHA Residents and primary care and telehealth services

**LEAD:** DOHMH

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Short

**14B** Pilot and refine an approach to having a one or more designated community health partner for every NYCHA development for both crisis needs and ongoing primary care

**Builds on what already exists:** Harlem Health Advocacy Partners model for Community Health Workers, Health Advocates and Community Health Organizers

**LEAD:** DOHMH

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**14C** Foster co-location of food and medical resources on NYCHA developments to promote access to preventative health measures

**Builds on what already exists:** NYC FRESH Program, Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force Initiatives to Expand Access to Food Programs

**LEAD:** NYCHA

**SUPPORT:** NYC Food Czar; Mayor's Office of Food Policy

**TIME FRAME:** Medium

**OBJECTIVE 15: Ensure that health responses, research and data collection is done in coordination with NYCHA residents**

**15A** Develop new tools and processes to ensure researchers interested in studying the health of NYCHA residents ground their work in solid principles of equity - including how health data of residents are shared

**LEAD:** DOHMH, Residents

**SUPPORT:** NYCHA

**TIME FRAME:** Short



# CALL TO ACTION

## ACTIVATING THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSE

This document is a call to action. It presents short, medium and long-term recommendations for a more resilient NYCHA, but the recommendations must be activated. Early in the Working Group process the topic of collective activism was raised. How can a diverse group of multi-sector actors leverage their networks and join forces with NYCHA residents to build civic will to both implement these recommendations and develop an agenda for ongoing collective activism? Approaching this document as a call to action declares urgency in the coordination required to implement its recommendations. It also develops a process of continuous accountability and sets the stage for ongoing collective activism and commitment to build the civic will required for sustainable systemic change that prioritizes and values public housing and public housing residents in a just crisis response and long-term resiliency strategy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPLEMENT IMMEDIATELY\*

1. **Create crisis mode city contracting and procurement mechanisms** that enable the immediate disbursement of emergency funds needed to address an emergency, including to nonprofits, resident led networks, mutual-aid associations, and NYCHA Resident Associations in the aftermath and throughout a crisis through:
  - Simplified contracting and flexible or minimal deliverable and reporting requirements during crises
  - Creation of a pre-qualified list of nonprofits and resident-led networks in each borough (of diverse size, language reach and service population focus)
2. Currently, NYC Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are unable to be inclusive of all NYCHA developments. **Expand and fund the NYC Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)** and NYCEM Community Engagement programming to ensure that all NYCHA developments are part of the existing CERT teams' activities and local Community Emergency Networks.
3. **Convene government agencies to debrief on COVID response**, as it relates specifically to NYCHA, to discuss challenges, wins and operational infrastructure required for future crises.
4. **Expand the training, recruitment and hiring of NYCHA residents** (and improve distribution and availability of information on training programs) to perform crisis related jobs in their own developments and at other NYCHA sites (e.g. sanitizing buildings, food and supplies distribution, communication).
5. **Further identify and pre-qualify more NYCHA resident-owned businesses** for crisis response and other NYCHA related services and contracts.
6. **Expand and make long-term plans for the provision of mobile or pop-up public health services** on or near NYCHA developments during crisis events (e.g. testing, vaccinations, emergency treatment and mental health support).

\*See Recommendations Chapter for further detail on the above recommendations

## Process of Continuous Implementation and Accountability

While the Working Group and parallel Resident Group's charge is complete with the release of this report, a process must be established for continued accountability and implementation of the remaining recommendations. In order to do this, a longer term Implementation and Civic Coalition will be established. Much like the Working Group, this Coalition will also need to represent multiple sectors, including residents. The group will be charged with meeting with the lead agencies (City Hall, NYCHA DOHMH, for example) and partners associated with each recommendation to ensure implementation, as well as developing a process of accountability to ensure recommendations are proceeding and that a system of measurements is in place to document progress. This group will issue updates and report on implementation to NYCHA residents, the Working Group and its network, NYCHA and any partnering organizations and agencies.

## Opportunities for Collective Activism

As Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) New York City residents continue to experience the grave social and economic impacts of COVID-19, the need to address underlying inequalities and inequities has never been more clear. The rapid spread of COVID-19 has increased BIPOC poverty rates while exacerbating racial injustice in areas including, but not limited to, broadband access, health, wellness, and education.

Before we look towards opportunities for change, we must reflect on the history of America's Public Housing Authorities (PHA). PHAs have played a significant role in providing Americans an affordable place to live, work and play for generations. There are 3000+ public housing authorities across the United States; the New York City Housing Authority is the largest. Primarily built between 1945 and 1965, NYCHA has 302 developments holding 169,820 apartments in 2,252 buildings with a population above 360,000.

After years of disinvestment and management struggles at the City, State and Federal level, NYCHA is facing significant capital needs that are estimated to exceed over \$30 billion.<sup>35</sup> Without an agreed upon plan to address this figure, NYCHA, City, State and Federal leaders, researchers and nonprofits continue to employ solutions that range from "public-private" partnerships to legislative proposals to third party monitoring to nonprofit programming. Any approach to developing solutions requires co-creation with residents from the outset, in order to overcome the trust deficit that exists between NYCHA residents and the larger ecosystem. This trust deficit will be repaired when resident driven solutions are valued, seen and heard.

Here is an example of what a co-creation, or co-governance, process that centers resident-self determination might include. This is taken from the report recently released by Community Change, *A New Deal for Housing Justice*:

"Co-governance moves beyond community engagement activities that have a binary definition of either "top-down" or "bottom-up". Instead, co-governance is informed by network theory and process-oriented approaches that center local actors as experts, innovators and problem-solvers. Co-governance moves away from the practice

**"Any approach to developing solutions requires co-creation with residents from the outset, in order to overcome the trust deficit that exists between NYCHA residents and the larger ecosystem."**

of centering government as the dominant voice in problem solving and expertise. In traditional "engagement" practices, residents, grassroots leaders and other local actors are engaged after a policy or solution has been created for feedback, but not at the beginning of the creation process. A co-governance process also puts forth the belief that local action moves in a more fluid and nimble way that "enables it to impact...and inform governmental priorities". Thus, the power dynamic of co-governance is distributive, not centralized. Co-governance initiatives may be community-led or can be facilitated by an external entity. This external entity sits in the network between government and the local entity to facilitate the process of co-creation and collaboration. Co-governance by definition centers social justice and inclusion as features of its model."<sup>36</sup>

NYCHA resident driven solutions and self-determination are not foreign concepts. These solutions and decisions happen on a daily basis and away from the public eye. As part of COVID-19 response work residents have organized their own mutual aid organizations, acted as their building and floor community health workers and pushed all levels of government and local nonprofits to do more. Powerful NYCHA leaders across the city are working to address the pandemic in real time, while also trying to influence long term public housing stability and systems change. This resident-led collective action is anchored by NYCHA residents' experience, power and commitment to problem solving.

In order to build trust, city agencies and other institutions need to join, and co-create with, NYCHA resident-led efforts to:

"[...] ensure that tenant involvement is properly integrated and resourced and values of the compact are embedded throughout the government. Tenant involvement should be part of mainstream housing services, not a bolt-on, and responding to tenants' views should show through all landlord activities as part of the government's culture and the way it delivers those services".<sup>37</sup>

A united and multi-sector effort will create mutual trust and confidence in the collective itself, and not one individual or one group, cultivating the conditions to take more ambitious action that ensures NYCHA resident health and wellness is prioritized, while building the architecture that aims to create a sustainable public housing community. During crises, when collective action is needed most, a multi-sector approach – grounded in trust - will be especially valuable and rewarding.

**"Co-governance by definition centers social justice and inclusion as features of its model."**

**- New Deal for Housing-Justice**

## Building Civic Will

It will require a range of stakeholders and constituencies to establish authenticity and build the civic will to make public housing a central part of agenda setting and accountability across administrations.

It is time for a city-wide independent multi-sector movement and network to create the civic will that will transform public housing in New York City. There is a broad coalition of support for "affordable housing", generally, but

**“A Civic Coalition presents a unique opportunity to design broad, transformational and systemic change for the public housing system.”**

public housing is so often segregated from the affordable housing narrative, just as it is segregated from financial opportunities. Much of this segregation is because there is a legacy of systemic discriminatory housing policies and white supremacy and incorrect assumptions made about who lives in public housing. A Civic Coalition will be a nonpartisan, multi-sector network of policymakers, non-profit and community-based organizations, advocates, and public housing residents charged with building a civic movement for the long-term sustainability of public housing in New York City. This coalition will work independently and transparently with New York City residents, State, City and Federal stakeholders, and national experts to address the deeply entrenched systemic challenges facing the public housing system and ensuring its sustainability.

The introduction of a Civic Coalition presents a unique opportunity to design broad, transformational and systemic change for the public housing system—changes that will save public housing in New York, impact public housing residents for generations, and ensure just and humane living conditions for public housing residents, who form the backbone of our city.

As an independent body, a Civic Coalition will be able to convene diverse stakeholders, develop a path towards long-term solutions that reach beyond political interests to address the root causes of the challenges facing public housing, and galvanize the public and political will to take concerted action.

Through its work together a Civic Coalition will deliver a set of actionable recommendations for fixing the public housing system. Its recommendations will incorporate fresh thinking, rigorous research, narrative change and new ideas; prioritize the most impactful short-term remedial solutions, and present feasible long-term solutions that address the root causes of the crisis. Public housing residents not only “inform” the recommendations and participate as members of the coalition, but co-create the path forward. This Collective Response Strategy is but one step towards this deep and long-lasting co-creation process.



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# APPENDIX

## WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Miguel Acevedo, Fulton Houses  
 Afua Atta-Mensah, Community Voices Heard  
 Vic Bach, Community Service Society  
 Sarah Batchu, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development  
 Courtney Bryan, Center for Court Innovation  
 Jodi Callender, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development  
 Shanna Castillo, NYCHA  
 Zaire Dinzey, Former NYCHA board  
 Shaun Donovan, Former HUD Secretary  
 Torian Easterling, DOHMH  
 Giancarlo Fernandez, CVH & Resident  
 Anne-Marie Flatley, NYCHA  
 Renita Francois, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice  
 David Garza, Henry Street Settlement  
 Debra-Ellen Glickstein, NYC Kids RISE  
 Elizabeth Hamby, DOHMH  
 Jenelle Hudson, NYCHA  
 Javier Lopez, Red Hook Initiative  
 Sham Manglik, Robin Hood  
 Andrea Mata, NYCHA  
 Erica Mateo, Center for Court Innovation  
 Jose Ortiz Jr., NYC Employment and Training Coalition  
 Damaris Reyes, GOLES  
 Anthony Richardson, NYC Housing Development Corporation  
 Sideya Sherman, NYCHA  
 Arvind Sohoni, NYCHA  
 Bishop Taylor, Urban Upbound  
 Eva Trimble, NYCHA  
 Valerie White, LISC  
 Barika Williams, ANHD

## RESIDENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mary Arroyo, Baruch Houses  
 Michele Beaulieu, Butler Houses  
 Betty Bernhart, Red Hook West  
 Danette Chavis, LaGuardia Houses  
 Felicia Cruickshank, LaGuardia Houses  
 Freddina Fulton, Lillian Wald Houses  
 Wendy Gonzalez, Castle Hill Houses  
 Gerena Lauren  
 Leticia Lucero, Stapleton Houses  
 Linda Maitte, Red Hook East  
 Tia Martinez, Stapleton Houses  
 Vanessa McKnight, Red Hook West  
 Catherine Melecio, Seward Park  
 Bernelle Mitchell, Red Hook East  
 Camille Napoleon, Baruch Houses  
 Juana Narvaez, Red Hook Houses  
 Teresa Pedroza, Jacob Riis Houses  
 Odalys Perez, Red Hook Houses  
 Joseph Puma, Campos Plaza II  
 Daqua Ritter, Brownsville Houses  
 Luis Antonio Rosa, Castle Hill Houses  
 Gladys Sanchez, Patterson Houses  
 Kiyana Slade, Red Hook Houses  
 Munir Smith, GOLES  
 Michael Steele, Rutgers Houses  
 Aixa Torres, Smith Houses  
 Tabitha Torres, Patterson Houses  
 Wanda Velez, Vladecks Houses  
 Aleudis Villa, Stapleton Houses  
 Frank Walker, Brownsville Houses  
 Phyllis Walker, Castle Hill Houses  
 Robin Wilder, Butler Houses  
 Tevina Willis, Red Hook West

## FACILITATION TEAM

Nisha Baliga  
 Daryle Ward-Cherry  
 Rasmia Kirmani-Frye  
 Anna Pelavin  
 Isella Ramirez  
 Jimena Veloz

## ABBREVIATION KEY

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous and People of Color
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCI	Center for Court Innovation
CCOP	Citywide Council of Presidents
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CHW	Community Health Worker
CTO	Chief Technology Officer
CUNY	City University of New York
DCWP	Department of Consumer and Worker Protection
DFTA	Department for the Aging
DOE	Department of Education
DOHMH	Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
DOITT	Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications
DYCD	Department of Youth and Community Development
HRA	Human Resources Administration / Department of Social Services
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
MAP	Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety
MOCS	Mayor's Office of Contract Services
MOCTO	Mayor's Office of Chief Technology Officer
MOIP	Mayor's Office of Information Privacy
MWBE	Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises
NYCEM	New York City Emergency Management
NYCHA	New York City Housing Authority
NYC H+H	New York City Health and Hospitals
PHA	Public Housing Authority
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SBS	Small Business Services
TA	Tenant Association
TPA	Tenant Participation Activity



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