



Testimony of the Alliance of NYS YMCAs
Presented to the Joint Budget Committee on Health
January 23, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Alliance of New York State YMCAs and the 36 YMCA Associations and 140 YMCA branches across the State that we represent.

The Y has a long history of deploying programs and services to meet the pressing needs of local communities. Today, Ys across New York State deliver a range of services, including: child care to families of all incomes, swimming safety instruction and youth sports opportunities, housing for low-income individuals, programs that promote social connectedness among seniors, and evidence-based health interventions. For this hearing, we will focus on the intersection between YMCAs and healthy living, broadly.

The Y builds strength on a local level by empowering people of all ages to reach their full potential with a collaborative community approach that combats social isolation and elevates well-being, disease prevention, and health maintenance. The YMCA is a leading force in facilitating transformation by advancing community health efforts, such as chronic disease prevention programming and swimming safety. The Y also plays an integral role in nurturing future generations of New Yorkers by promoting healthy development and supporting social, emotional, and physical health holistically.

In budget negotiations over the next few weeks, we ask for your consideration of the following recommendations and additions to the Executive's proposal:

Regarding the 1115 Medicaid waiver, the Y is uniquely positioned to reach those experiencing inequities and deepen social impact through purposeful engagement with the participants and stakeholders that are hardest to reach. The Alliance was energized by the approval of the Waiver by CMS which aims to reduce health disparities and improve health equity. As a convener in our communities, the Y looks forward to partnering with other community-based organizations in assisting with social care service navigation and the delivery of Health-Related Social Needs.

More than 40% of New York adults suffer from chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, accounting for 23% of all hospitalizations in NYS,

according to the Department of Health. YMCAs across the State implement evidence-based chronic disease prevention and health management programs, including: the Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring Program, EnhanceFitness for arthritis, LiveSTRONG at the Y, Healthy Weight and Your Child, and the National Diabetes Prevention Program, of which Ys are the largest in-person provider. **We appreciate the maintenance of funding for chronic disease programs (obesity, diabetes, and asthma) in the proposed budget, and emphasize the importance of disease prevention through investment in longevity and a continuum of health initiatives.**

The Alliance was excited to see the identification of swimming access and drowning prevention as a priority in the 2024-25 Executive Budget proposal, and fully supports the Governor's vision to expand pool access and drowning prevention programming to historically underserved and economically disadvantaged areas. **We emphasize the role YMCAs could play in ensuring robust realization of this vision, and respectfully urge Governor Hochul to expand the NY-SWIMS funding proposals to include community-based organizations (CBOS) in addition to municipalities and state parks.** While the proposed investment of \$150 million will indeed expand swimming access, earmarking the funds exclusively for municipalities misses the opportunity to include highly impactful partnerships with youth-serving nonprofit organizations such as the Y. CBOs ensure that every child in New York has year-round access to water safety programs; by expanding funding opportunities to CBOs, the Governor would ensure equity for all New York children.

Furthermore, YMCAs are experiencing pool challenges and lifeguard shortages like other facilities across the State. Recognized for over a century as "America's swim instructor," YMCAs across New York teach children of all ages and backgrounds that water should be fun, not feared. In 2023, YMCAs provided more than 150,000 youth swim lessons across New York. We urge consideration for the role YMCAs can play in community partnerships to support training and building the lifeguard workforce. The Governor's proposal may exacerbate challenges for our year-round providers of water safety programming without intentional investment and partnership.

As the largest provider of school age child care and afterschool programs in the State, YMCAs across New York offer Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) curriculum in their programs. Wellbeing is best measured holistically and is supported during foundational years of development. The YMCA offers health and fitness programs with other opportunities in early care and learning, youth sports, and day camps so everyone has the resources needed to lead active, vibrant lives at every age. In today's world, youth can be especially sensitive to vicarious and collective trauma during critical periods of development. The Governor's commitment to enhancing children's mental health programs via expansion of existing programs and development of school-based clinics is a crucial first step to supporting future generations. From cradle to career, YMCAs partner with more than

481 educational organizations across the State. **We see the opportunity to bolster the impact of school based mental health services by ensuring the echo of this support is integrated in YMCAs across the State.**

The Y is the leading nonprofit committed to strengthening community by connecting all people to their potential, purpose, and each other. Working locally, we focus on empowering young people, improving health and well-being, and inspiring action in and across communities.

For additional information, please contact Maggie Dickson, Director of Public Policy, Alliance of NYS YMCAs, mdickson@ymcanys.org.