

2024 State of Public Health

Good afternoon: Welcome to our 2024 State of Public Health Address, the first of four briefings making up the 2024 State of the County. Over the next several weeks I will also present the State of Public Safety, the State of the Economy, and the State of Infrastructure.

But today, we begin with Public Health. Amidst the backdrop of our beautiful Monroe Community Hospital.

It wasn't long ago that public health was front page news, everyday. The pandemic had devastating impacts on our hospital systems and skilled nursing facilities.

We talk about hospital systems and nursing facilities as systems, but, we are also talking about the people who provide us care and comfort. And we know that the pandemic had a tremendous impact on our health care workforce.

These are lifesaving careers, but they are demanding, and with a shortage of workers, the increased responsibility on those in health care was causing burnout and exacerbating the problem.

In late 2022, hospitals were in crisis – emergency rooms were operating at or above capacity, exacerbated by a shortage of Skilled Nursing beds. Residents who no longer required hospital level care had limited discharge options available.

With American Rescue Plan Act funding, we collaborated with the health care systems and nursing homes to launch the Transformational Community Care Coordination Program and the Complex Care Program known as TC3.

The program took a three-pronged approach.

TC3 provided block grant support for skilled nursing facilities to aid with the excessive costs of treating complex patients.

And we started a program for patients in need of transportation to nursing facilities and home settings, so they did not needlessly stay hospitalized while awaiting transportation.

Within 9 months, these efforts supported 12 skilled nursing facilities, placed 535 patients, and opened 169 new beds.

A partnership between Finger Lakes Performing Provider System known as FLPPS and MCC will support the successful recruitment and training of Certified Nursing Assistants, Home Health Aides, LPNs and RNs. The Long Term Care Workforce Program will train 232 individuals and the Nursing Pathways Initiative will train and certify up to 630 individuals by the end of 2026.

Two years ago, COMIDA's modernization effort supported the creation of a workforce development fund to invest in community driven workforce programs. Those programs include a partnership with MCC to support the mPower program, which upskills and re-skills health care workers.

In addition, COMIDA provides funding for a partnership with the City of Rochester and 1199 SEIU to train new health care workers, providing stipends and support to overcome obstacles and pass certification exams. To date, over 60 individuals have been trained or placed as Certified Nursing Assistants, Patient Care Techs, Phlebotomy Techs, and Pharmacy Techs.

And, COMIDA has also joined with RochesterWorks, to launch a recovery services grant program that offers training in health care related fields to people who have been impacted by substance use disorder.

MCH has launched an in-house Certified Nursing Assistant program. Last month, I had the privilege of attending the graduation of our second cohort. Our third cohort is already underway today, and we have three more classes scheduled for this year.

MCH's efforts will be expanded through a NYS Increasing Health Care Training Capacity grant. This \$878 thousand dollar grant will enhance our CNA training, and allow us to purchase additional manikins, and expand our training capacity.

Our public health agenda is built on technological advances that modernize our services and amplify our reach through the power of collaboration.

A perfect illustration of these efforts is happening right here at MCH. We recently launched an innovative training experience at the MCH Simulation Center. As we bring in new workers, they need to be trained, and our current workforce benefits from continuing education. The simulation center is preparing our health care team for both clinical and non-clinical scenarios.

Advanced and ongoing training from wound care and injections using our new state-of-the-art manikins to having difficult conversations with family is helping our team sharpen their skills and keep our residents well cared for.

What's more is that this training center is positioned to be a community resource, and MCH is already in talks with other agencies for shared use.

Mental Health App

Public Health is about more than physical well-being; it must include the holistic health of our community – that includes mental health, fighting addiction, and providing the supports people need to live full healthy lives.

A growing number of people know or love someone experiencing challenges with mental health, addiction, or other personal crises, and when these issues arise, there is no time to waste.

And it starts with this.

It is impossible to overstate how important cell phones have become. As the father of teenagers, no one knows better than I, just how ubiquitous these devices are.

Recognizing this, our Office of Mental Health developed and has launched an interactive cell phone app.

The Monroe County Office of Mental Health app - available on Apple and Android platforms - provides essential wellness information, crisis resources contacts, and connections to nearby support services at the tap of a button.

The new app brings a wide-array of services to one place:

- Direct access to emergency crisis services.
- Community programs for behavioral health, vocational support, respite, family support, self-help, and more

- Contacts and locations of Code Blue Shelters, warming centers and food pantries
- Residential and housing information
- Options for inpatient and outpatient treatment and
- Directions to Monroe County's 569 Naloxone boxes, identifying those closest to you and where to receive naloxone training.

Users have access to suicide prevention information, can create a safety plan and can call or text for help directly on the app.

Immediate access to crisis and wellness resources is a key recommendation of the RASE Commission, and this is an effective way to quickly and accurately provide vital information.

Download the app today. Scan the QR code. Go to the app store and search for Monroe County Office of Mental Health. I am telling you this app will save lives.

Supporting this effort with boots on the ground, is our Office of Mental Health and our Forensic Intervention Team, (FIT) who continue to offer 24/7 mental health crisis support. FIT operates in collaboration with 11 law enforcement agencies to assist individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis, allowing trained mental health experts to de-escalate crisis situations where law enforcement is involved.

Recently FIT was featured in a National Association of Counties study on Mental Health Crisis Care focusing on FIT and its partnerships with the City of Rochester and with our healthcare institutions.

And when it comes to innovation around Mental Health – our Veterans Service Agency is leading the way. After piloting a nature-based clinical therapy program for our veterans, we made the decision to bring these services in house. Working with a clinical psychologist we developed a brand new program, hired clinical staff, and this month launched the first municipally run clinical nature based therapy program in the country.

Roughly 25 percent of combat veterans will experience PTSD in their lifetimes. The symptoms associated with PTSD may impact their daily lives, they may feel constantly alert, uneasy in unfamiliar situations, and even everyday experiences like going to dinner with family can be difficult.

Backed by evidence, this program seeks to address these sobering statistics. In fact, we had an epidemiologist study the impact of our clinical nature-based program on our veterans, and the results showed a 70% reduction in acute PTSD symptoms by program's end.

All active duty service members and veterans in Monroe County are eligible to participate in this life-changing program.

This is only one facet of the remarkable work our VSA team performs everyday. With the passage of the PACT Act, more veterans are eligible for VA benefits, and our Monroe County VSA team is actively connecting them with the benefits they've earned. In 2023, Monroe County veterans received \$6.5M in retroactive payments, and \$23M in ongoing monthly payments, that's money going directly into our veterans' bank accounts.

Mental Health services are critical, especially when it comes to our young people. One of our American Rescue Plan success stories is a partnership among URMC Pediatrics, Rochester Regional Health, and RCSD to serve the behavioral and mental health needs of RCSD students.

Monroe County's initial investment of \$1M in ARPA funds was the catalyst to leverage \$5 million in funding from the Rochester City School District, Wegmans and ESL.

The coalition is establishing telehealth infrastructure for behavioral and mental health services in 9 schools. It will serve 1,100 students and double the number of RCSD school-based health centers. It will also provide school-based telehealth, mental health consultation, and capacity building. This project aims to create a culture of health in schools where behavior and mental health challenges are seen as critical parts of health and without stigma.

Opioid Announcements

Mental health concerns often co-occur with addiction, and the scourge of the fentanyl and opioid epidemic claim far too many lives in our community. It's why we created the 24-hour Improving Addiction Coordination Team, or IMPACT, and why we built a diagnostic Opioid Dashboard. This system reliably tracks overdoses and overdose fatalities, providing critical data we've lacked in the past. Having accurate data is fundamental, as we cannot solve what we cannot measure.

This is a heat map from our Opioid Dashboard showing locations of opioid overdoses across the county.

Using this data, we targeted and placed an unprecedented 569 naloxone boxes in the community, and that number is growing.

I can confidently say, no other county in New York State has made investments to ensure Naloxone is as widely available as Monroe County.

We distributed 20,446 Naloxone kits from these boxes since we installed our first Naloxone box in July 2022. We've installed boxes in locations all over the County, because we know an overdose can occur anywhere and at any time.

We created a network by working with government partners, businesses and community organizations who in an effort to **save lives** were willing to host a Naloxbox. One of those businesses is Smokin' Joe's Bar and Grill.

And just like Smokin' Joes, we've worked with Common Ground Health to partner with 20 barbershops and salons through the Get-It-Done Network, where owners of these establishments become Community Health Educators who connect their clients and neighborhoods to life saving Naloxone.

We also partner with the New York Recovery Alliance, who empowers people with lived experiences to distribute Naloxone to individuals in high risk settings and hot zone zip codes. This is a crisis that requires collaboration at all levels and I'm proud to have these community partners.

Last week I had the chance to meet some of those community partners and join the IMPACT team in their work. The day was a transformative experience, conducting street outreach on Lyell

Ave, checking and refilling Naloxone Boxes, and connecting with community partners at the Sisters of St. Joseph Northside ministry, ROCovery Fitness, and Diva Defined Salon and Boutique, part of the Get-It-Done network.

During my time with IMPACT, I was struck by the breadth and scope of this crisis, the tremendous number of community organizations that work together to fight the scourge of addiction, and most importantly the humanity behind the work that is being done.

Street outreach is critical, it connects with a hard to reach population, but outreach is limited to the individuals our IMPACT team directly engages.

We know the need for help is strong, the capacity to help is strong, but the connection between the two is not. We must amplify the message to a larger community-wide level.

Data has shown when IMPACT appears on media sources, TV or radio, there are significant increases in calls to our opioid hotline.

Therefore, we will launch a sustained public awareness campaign, slated to kick off later this year that will feature videos, TV, radio, digital ads, billboards, bus tails and social media on a variety of platforms.

While we often talk about opioids by the numbers, every number is a person - a mother, a father, a child, a friend, who people worry about and love. Addiction has become so stigmatized that you lose sight of the fact that these are all human beings in need of help. It's time we work to address that stigma.

To that end, the objective of our public awareness campaign will be to eradicate the stigma associated with addiction, and then connect those individuals and their support networks with services and supports to treat and manage their addiction.

People with lived experiences, who have faced addiction, are the messengers we need. They provide hope and can relate to the struggles of those actively facing substance use disorder. That's why we are proud to work with ROCovery Fitness and the House of Mercy to train and certify peer workers to help us fight addiction.

We have many incredible not-for-profit and community organizations working with us and I am proud to stand with them today and every day.

Housing

If there is a baseline for a healthy life, it is housing. Our housing strategy includes temporary shelters, support services, growing affordable rental units and encouraging new affordable housing construction.

With the end of pandemic-related rental assistance, our Department of Human Services saw a significant increase in the number of families in need of emergency housing.

Since 2021, we have seen a 223% increase in family placements.

Finding appropriate housing for these families has been a challenge, so this summer, in partnership with Volunteers of America we will open the Moving Forward Family Shelter. This will be the first County-owned emergency housing facility that will

provide wraparound services to stabilize families and connect them with permanent affordable housing options.

Just like here in Monroe County, there is a shortage of affordable housing across the country. The housing crisis is complex and will require an array of solutions. That means cooperation between state, local, and federal governments, and partnerships with the private sector.

To foster that cooperation, we recently partnered with New York State to host a roundtable discussion with housing stakeholders, elected officials, New York State agencies, landlords and developers to discuss the role they can play in creating more affordable housing in our region.

This was an unprecedented opportunity for these key stakeholders to learn more about the funding streams available, as they start to develop more affordable housing.

Earlier this spring, I announced a series of innovative tools to impact the housing crisis by making more units available, helping families and individuals connect with available units, and mediating challenges that often times occur between landlords and tenants that threaten housing stability.

My plan will launch a housing search navigator and after-care program that will help connect up to 720 low and moderate income clients with quality affordable housing.

The plan will include a landlord incentive program to make more rentals available with a potential to bring on as many as 1,500 additional units; and

The landlord/tenant mediation program will train and certify mediators who will work with up to 250 landlords and tenants seeking to resolve conflicts and keep people in housing.

We are working together to confront the housing crisis and ensure that families, veterans, those with disabilities, and older adults have access to safe and affordable housing.

Age Friendly

Public Health is about the health of the community, and removing barriers so people can live full and healthy lives. That means creating an intentional community where our residents, regardless of age, can thrive.

Monroe County is experiencing a historic demographic shift. Currently, county residents 60 years or older make up 25% of the population, and this number is projected to reach 215,000 by 2030.

As Irondequoit Town Supervisor, I championed the motto “A Town for a lifetime,” my goal as County Executive is to make Monroe County a county for a lifetime.

The county made its first commitment to becoming an age-friendly community back in 2012, and again in 2018, but progress was slow until my administration reignited these efforts.

As a member of the Monroe County Aging Alliance, a joint initiative of the Rochester Area Community Foundation and the United Way, we partnered in the publication of *Creating a Community for a Lifetime: An Action Plan for an Age-friendly/Livable Rochester and Monroe County*.

This is a groundbreaking effort – the number of organizations that have come together to make meaningful and impactful changes have had their work recognized. Last month AARP designated Monroe County as an age-friendly community.

With help from community partners, we opened the first new Senior Nutrition Program in more than a decade located in the City of Rochester.

We are offering computer proficiency programs at senior centers and doubling down on this effort through American Rescue Plan investment with Lifespan. This \$750,000 grant connects older adults with the resources they need to assist with telehealth, arrange pharmacy deliveries, and schedule health screens. On top of that, Lifespan is offering wraparound services that provide older adults the supports they need to maintain their independence.

One of the first things I did as County Executive was to connect our Office for the Aging with various departments, and I challenged them to start operating through an age-friendly lens. We are seeing these results.

Monroe Community Hospital received Age Friendly designations from the John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. MCH is also an Age-Friendly Employer, committing to developing an age-diverse workforce that values experienced workers.

The Department of Planning & Development with community partners created a County-wide Active Transportation Plan that incorporates age-friendly recommendations that address

increased challenges some older adults experience while getting around.

The Department of Transportation is implementing safe streets projects to make our community more pedestrian-friendly and has improved snow and ice removal efforts.

The Monroe County Parks Department is enhancing accessibility, with projects across our parks system including: a wheelchair-accessible beach mat at Ontario Beach Park, paved golf cart paths at all county golf courses, and new pickleball courts in Mendon Ponds and Black Creek Parks.

Age-friendly initiatives impact people of all ages, and make our community more accessible for everyone. Creating these intentional livable communities, along with the investments we are making in mental health, addiction services, housing, and services to support veterans, children, and older adults are the key components that make up Public Health.

We are advancing technologies, modernizing our services, and meeting people where they are, and we aren't doing this alone, our public health agenda is bolstered, supported, and amplified through the incredible work of our community partners.

Reflecting on the challenges we've faced and continue to face, from the devastating impacts of the pandemic to the ongoing opioid crisis, it's clear that our resilience and innovative approaches are paving the way for a brighter future.

We've made significant strides in addressing mental health, supporting our veterans, advancing workforce development and ensuring we become an age-friendly community.

However, our journey is far from over. The vision for a healthier Monroe County is rooted in continuous improvement.

We must keep pushing the boundaries of what is possible, keep leveraging technology, keep forging partnerships and keep meeting our residents where they are.

Each initiative, each partnership and each step forward brings us closer to a community where everyone thrives. Together, we are building a Monroe County that is more compassionate, more forward-thinking and more inclusive.

I'm proud to say when our collective efforts are taken together, we are making Monroe County a healthier place for all.