

**Testimony of Planned Parenthood of New York City
before
The New York State Assembly
Regarding Immigrant Access to Healthcare**

December 13, 2017

Hello, I am Larissa Vasquez, Associate Director, Adult and Professional Programs at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to submit testimony for the Assembly hearing on immigrant access to health care. Thank you to Assembly Member Richard Gottfried and the Assembly Committee on Health, the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force and the Assembly Task Force on New Americans for convening this important hearing and their dedication to supporting immigrant New Yorkers' access to health care.

For over 100 years, Planned Parenthood has been a leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in New York City, reaching over 85,000 New Yorkers annually through our clinical and education and outreach programs. At PPNYC, we recognize the importance of having trusted resources and providers with whom patients can identify; I oversee our Promotores de Salud program, which helps to bridge the gap between immigrant communities and the healthcare system in order to increase access to sexual and reproductive health services for Spanish-dominant Latinxs in New York City.

Despite the many gains of the Affordable Care Act and New York State's insurance programs, too many New Yorkers are left out of the healthcare system due to immigration or eligibility concerns. PPNYC's Promotores, or health outreach workers, regularly hear from community members about the ongoing health care challenges they face. Clients share that they often seek out medical care only when it is absolutely necessary, many times waiting years in between visits, and face provider discrimination and burdensome costs when they do seek care. Extending insurance coverage to all immigrant New Yorkers and providing language-inclusive and culturally responsive services would help improve linkages to needed care and lower costs.

Recently, our staff met a woman who had not visited a medical provider in over 10 years. She mentioned that she had not had many positive experiences with medical providers in the past and most of the time did not receive compassionate care. She was concerned about a lump she felt on her breast for several years, and made an appointment with our Promotores who provided health center assistance during the visit. Our provider was concerned and referred the woman to a partner site who provides mammograms at a low cost. The woman had Stage 2 breast cancer and was able to receive the appropriate care she needed immediately. A few months later she wrote to one of our Promotores letting her know how grateful she was for the care she received at Planned Parenthood of New York City. She also mentioned that she would share her medical history with her family in Mexico so that they could be screened for breast cancer.

We also hear from community members about the high healthcare costs they face and lack of information they receive because of their immigration status. This past summer, while conducting outreach in Queens, our Promotores met an undocumented and uninsured woman

who was paying \$300 for her NuvaRing and doctor visit each month, entirely out of pocket. PPNYC staff made an appointment for her at our Queens health center and provided assistance during the visit. The patient received health services, including her preferred birth control method, at no cost. After the visit, she became emotional and confided that she had no idea how to get information on where she could get affordable care. She often had to decide between paying her bills late and getting medical attention. The patient also mentioned that many of the women she works with are spending hundreds of dollars a month to take care of their sexual and reproductive health even though it is not affordable for them, and invited the promotores to meet with her coworkers. New York State needs to expand coverage options for all New Yorkers to be able to access affordable care, regardless of their immigration status, and should maintain eligibility protections for the thousands of DACA recipients currently enrolled in Medicaid.

PPNYC's Promotores de Salud program highlights the stronger investment needed in community-based care and outreach models, and safety-net providers who speak their patients' language. Our Promotores are certified Spanish language medical interpreters and have been working with PPNYC's street-based outreach and mobile HIV care program, Project Street Beat, to bring clinical health care services and interpretation to more immigrant New Yorkers. With Project Street Beat, we recently partnered with the Bronx Family Justice Center whose clients are monolingual Spanish-speaking survivors of intimate partner violence. This partnership has shown the critical importance of community providers in serving hard to reach communities and helping to inform New Yorkers of their healthcare options. Often times, individuals who have faced trauma or are concerned about their own or a family member's immigration status are less likely to seek out care if it is not in their own community, let alone in their own language. The Bronx Family Justice Center (BXFJC)'s Deputy Director, Jamal Alsarraj recently shared:

“The partnership with PPNYC has been transformative for the BXFJC, expanding the breadth of services available to survivors of IPV, many of whom have overlapping health and wellness concerns. Since almost half of our client population are Spanish-speakers, many exclusively, the Promotoras de Salud initiative is a much-needed bridge, spreading critical information preventively and connecting our clients to affordable and confidential, local healthcare, including interpretation on the Mobile Medical Unit... PPNYC staff engage IPV survivors, making them feel supported to discuss sensitive health issues and access care.”

As immigrant access to healthcare is increasingly threatened, and many New Yorkers face security concerns, it is critical that New York State both expand coverage and invest in language-accessible, community outreach programs, like the Promotores de Salud, that help to ease anxieties and reduce barriers immigrant communities face in obtaining health services.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today.