

**NYS Department of Health
Public Health and Health Planning Council
Deputy Commissioner Executive Report
May 7, 2026**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

Special Advisor to the Commission of Health (Substance Use Policy)

The New York State Department of Health in partnership with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene published a paper in the New England Journal of Medicine Evidence (NEJM Evidence) on the detection of the sedative medetomidine in New York’s illicit drug supply from 2024–2025. The substance has been associated with prolonged sedation and a complex withdrawal syndrome, and has been detected in overdose fatalities. Importantly, the paper traces the data on the emergence of medetomidine as well as the public health responses initiated to address this evolving challenge. The open access paper is available at the following link: <https://evidence.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/EVIDpha2600045>.

OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for Community Health

As of April 6th, 2026, the New York State Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, And Children completed food package updates to align with the 2024 United States Department of Agriculture Final Rule: Revisions in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Food Packages. The changes outlined in the rule are intended to provide Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children participants with a wider variety of food options; provide state agencies with the flexibility to accommodate participants' special dietary needs and personal and cultural food preferences; and address key nutritional needs. New York State Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, And Children evaluated factors such as program costs, participant feedback, and market availability of food items when choosing which to adopt. Key changes include:

- Less juice and the ability to swap juice for an additional \$3 to spend on fruits and vegetables.
- The ability for participants to choose extra beans or nut/seed butter instead of 1 dozen eggs.
- The addition of canned fish for children.
- New foods: quinoa, oats, whole wheat bagels and English muffins, plant-based milk and yogurt, cage free eggs, almond butter, sunflower seed butter, and fresh herbs.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Program is currently engaged in staff training, outreach, and communication to inform all stakeholders of these changes. Relatedly, with the release of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, you may be wondering how/if the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans will affect Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The New York State Special Supplemental

Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children food packages already prioritize nutrient-dense protein, encourage fruit and vegetable consumption, include healthy fats, emphasize fiber-rich whole grains, and limit highly processed foods, added sugars, and refined carbohydrates and supports healthy choices and families. At this time the United States Department of Agriculture has indicated that any future changes to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children food packages will follow the rule making process, which is scheduled to occur every 10 years.

*However, of note, we saw with the current year's appropriation, the United States Department of Agriculture changed the maximum quantities for milk. Changes made this way are temporary, and it's unclear whether changes to future budgets will impact food package options.

Center for Environmental Health

Children's Camp Safety Plan Additions

As announced in the Governor Hochul's State of the State address, Department of Health staff in the Bureau of Community Environmental Health and Food Protection are revising safety plan templates and developing guidance for summer camps to better prepare for potential weather-related emergencies, including intense storms, flash flooding, extreme heat and other climate-change related events. The Bureau is also completing assessment of public comment on proposed amendments to Subpart 7-2. We expect to publish the final regulation in the fall in order to avoid confusion for the 2026 camp season and ensure that camp operators and local health departments have sufficient time to implement changes for the 2027 season.

Division of Public Health Infrastructure

National Public Health Week – April 6-10, 2026, Ready. Set. Positive Impact

In alignment with this year's National Public Health Week theme, Ready. Set. Action., the Community Engagement and Outreach Unit, in collaboration with the Office of Public Health's Communications and Collaboration Strategic Priority Workgroups, led and supported a series of activities designed to strengthen visibility, engagement, and shared ownership of public health across the Office of Public Health.

A key component of this year's National Public Health Week activities was the continued rollout of the 'Public Health Impact Cards' initiative. This work helps make public health more visible, relatable, and actionable by translating programs and outcomes into clear, accessible messages that connect with everyday life. As part of this effort, thirteen (13) new programs and initiatives were highlighted through newly developed Public Health Impact Cards for outreach and promotion, and select impact statements were adapted into social media content to support broader visibility and alignment with State Health Department priorities

These activities demonstrated a more connected approach to communication and engagement, and one that not only highlights public health work, but helps staff and communities see its relevance, recognize its impact, and take part in advancing it.

Public Health Pipelines

The Academic Partnership Development team continues to advance a coordinated strategy to strengthen the public health workforce pipeline through expanded access to academic partnership resources and early professional talent development initiatives. These efforts are critical to increasing awareness of public health career pathways, expanding experiential learning opportunities, and strengthening alignment between academic preparation and workforce needs. The team is actively supporting student engagement through a statewide student webinar series designed to introduce students across New York to public health career pathways and opportunities within state and local health departments. The first session in this series, being held April 17th, 2026, from 12:00pm to 1:00pm, brings together subject matter experts across programs to highlight multidisciplinary entry points into public health careers and reinforce the Department's commitment to broadening and diversifying the workforce pipeline.

The Pathways to Public Health Internship Program has successfully launched its spring cohort, with 9 interns actively contributing to diverse project-based work across Department programs, while planning efforts are underway to expand and strengthen summer programming. Building on this momentum, a new initiative Coast 2 Coast Connections will launch in June. This multi-state collaboration brings together public health internship programs from six states (New York, Kentucky, Vermont, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Tennessee) to participate in a three-part virtual networking series. Through this initiative, student interns will share project work, highlight public health impact, and build professional networks that support long-term career development and cross-state collaboration. Together, these efforts reflect a strategic and scalable approach to workforce pipeline development, strengthening both immediate program capacity and the future of the public health workforce.

The New York State Public Health Corps Fellowship Program, including Fellows and programmatic staff, will end on July 31st, 2026. The New York State Department of Health has not secured funding to continue the Program beyond July 31st, 2026. The Department is very supportive of the New York State Public Health Corps Fellowship Program. Launched in 2021 as a Governor's initiative, the New York State Public Health Corps Fellowship Program has created a successful pathway for public health careers. Between two cohorts, the New York State Public Health Corps Fellowship Program has enhanced workforce capacity by mobilizing 834 fellows to support core public health functions in local health departments, New York State Department of Health offices, and community-based organizations across the state. For the Fellows who have completed their placements, 60% of Fellows across both iterations of the New York State Public Health Corps Fellowship Program (n=459) secured permanent positions in public health or healthcare.

WADSWORTH CENTER

Wadsworth Center Establishes Memoranda of Understanding to Advance Public Health Collaboration

The New York State Department of Health has approved the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding between the Wadsworth Center and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute on February 4th, 2026, and with the NYS Agriculture and Markets Laboratory on April 6. These agreements enable investigators across institutions to access scientific core facilities at internal user rates, removing a key financial barrier to collaboration. These Memoranda of Understandings are designed to maximize the utilization of high-cost, specialized

instrumentation that is often underused when limited to a single institution. By eliminating external user fees, the agreements provide a more efficient and cost-effective pathway for researchers to leverage existing infrastructure. Beyond improving access, these partnerships are expected to strengthen scientific collaboration, accelerate research productivity, and enhance coordination of future capital investments. Increased visibility into complementary institutional capabilities will allow for more strategic, data-driven decisions regarding shared technology acquisition and infrastructure development. Looking ahead, the Wadsworth Center will pursue similar agreements with additional research institutions across the Capital Region. This effort will further amplify the return on public investment in advanced scientific infrastructure while reinforcing a more integrated and collaborative regional research ecosystem.

Wadsworth Center Biodefense Laboratory Identifies Contamination Source in Multistate Infant Botulism Outbreak

Beginning in early November 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, initiated an investigation into a multistate outbreak of infant botulism associated with ByHeart Whole Nutrition powdered infant formula. Early epidemiologic evidence demonstrated a strong association between illness and consumption of the product, prompting a voluntary recall. By mid-November, laboratories across the country detected *Clostridium botulinum* Type A toxin-producing organisms in opened containers of formula consumed by affected infants. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration requested assistance from the Wadsworth Center to test unopened containers of powdered infant formula. Through extensive analysis, the Center's Biodefense Laboratory became the first to detect and isolate *C. botulinum* Type A from an unopened container – providing critical evidence linking contamination to the manufacturing process. The isolate was sequenced and genetically compared with clinical and environmental strains. In total, the investigation identified 51 suspected or confirmed cases of infant botulism across 19 states, with illness onset dates spanning December 2023 through December 2025. This investigation underscores the critical role of advanced public health laboratory capacity at the Wadsworth Center in identifying contamination sources, informing regulatory action, and protecting vulnerable populations. U.S. Food and Drug Administration Press

Release: www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/outbreak-investigation-infant-botulism-infant-formula-november-2025

OFFICE OF HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

Office of Primary Care and Health Systems Management

Improvements and Efficiencies in Funeral Directing Applications

The Bureau of Funeral Directing has developed a fully online process for accepting Funeral Director applications for certification. This new process will eliminate the need for mailing for 3600 applicants, improve data collection and cut in half the time needed to process these applications.

Providing New Opportunities to Advance Innovative Patient Care

The Division of State EMS has developed the first-ever regulations for Community Paramedicine. This innovative method of delivering care allows emergency medical service agencies to provide care in non-emergency situations that avoids hospitalization. This work is the culmination of a series of meetings with stakeholder experts in emergency medical services, nursing and community paramedicine.

Automating Additional Manual Data Collections

The Center for Healthcare Provider Services and Oversight has been advancing improvements to the Hospital Capacity Direct Access system. This system is currently used to automate capacity collection data and avoid manual data entry while providing a 24x7x365 view of hospital capacity. The latest improvements are additional collections of data regarding behavioral health capacity and patients with respiratory viruses. The Department will be finalizing automation of these collections over the coming months with the intention of eliminating the need for manual data entry through legacy data systems.

Rural Health Transformation Program

New York's application for the Rural Health Transformation Program was selected by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for a \$212 Million award in year one of the 5-year program. The Department is working to advance the four initiatives that make up New York's Rural Health Transformation Program. The initiatives include to:

- Establish coordinated rural health partnerships
- Strengthen rural communities with technology-enhanced primary care
- Build a sustainable rural health care workforce:
- Invest in technology innovation and cybersecurity enhancements:

The Department is continuing to meet with stakeholders and is developing an External Advisory Group. The Department previously hosted a webinar where we provided information to stakeholders. That webinar and the application project narrative is available on the Department's website.

Office of Aging and Long-Term Care

The Master Plan for Aging

The Final Report was published on June 30th of 2025. Since then, many programs and regulatory changes from that Report have already been initiated. Initiatives from the Master Plan that are already being implemented include the Direct Caregiver Flexibility Grant in the Department of Health, creation of a Center for Hospice and Palliative Care in the Department, funding to close the waitlists at Area Agencies for Aging, and a program created by the Office of Mental Health to provide better support for psychiatric care and mental health for the residents of nursing homes. Governor Hochul's State of the State and Executive Budget also included ideas from the Report, including expansion of rent assistance programs, support for naturally occurring retirement communities, and better ways for older adults to find out about benefits programs.

The Master Plan for Aging is now actively pivoting to operate as an ongoing platform for interagency coordination and development of policy affecting older adults and people with disabilities. On March 26, the first meeting of the Master Plan for Aging Steering Committee was held. The new Steering Committee will include representatives from eight agencies including the Department of Health, NYS Office for the Aging, Department of State, Office of Mental Health, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, Homes and Community Renewal, and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities.

The Steering Committee will monitor initiatives and policies across State government, to ensure that state efforts are efficient and effective. On an annual basis, the Steering Committee will be able to report on aging policy across State agencies, feedback from stakeholders about what is working, and insights on the needs of older adults across the state as those needs evolve over time.

Nursing Homes and Adult Care Facilities Education

Throughout the first quarter of calendar year 2026, the Center for Residential Surveillance teams visited seven (7) providers in a non-regulatory capacity. The goal of such meetings is to observe the facility's daily operations and interact with staff and residents, share best practices, and discuss innovations the facility may be considering and how those innovations can be realized, expanded and/or replicated.

Additionally, the Center for Residential Surveillance, in concert with the Department's Bureau of Water Supply Protection, provided two, 3-part foundational series on Legionella, one for nursing homes and one for adult care facilities.

The Center also hosted webinars on the Nutrition Critical Element Pathway and Social Work in Nursing Homes, both foundational in-services for nursing homes that outlined the minimum expectations for regulatory compliance in such settings.

In 2026, the Center is preparing in-services on Bed Rail Safety and Emergency Preparedness, as well as other targeted topics based on citation patterns. The Center maintains a robust course catalogue online at www.nylearnsph.com.

Improving Efficiency for Data Reporting

The Office of Aging and Long-Term Care's Data Center is in the process of converting legacy Health Electronic Response Data System surveys to the modern Survey Management and Response Tool platform. The transition to the survey Management and Response Tool is designed to reduce provider burden through streamlined navigation and enhanced survey controls that prevent data entry errors. The nursing home COVID19 Health Electronic Response Data System survey transition will be launched on May 5th, 2026, which will be the final provider type collected on a weekly cadence. With all other weekly cadence surveys now migrated to the survey Management and Response Tool platform, the Department observed an increase in the reporting rate and improved data quality from all long-term care provider types.

National Healthcare Decisions Day Activities

The Center for Hospice & Palliative Care engaged in several activities to publicize and celebrate National Healthcare Decisions Day on April 16th, 2026, as part of this year's Advance Care Planning strategy, including recording video footage with the components of Advance Care Planning and a patient story illustrating the importance of having Advance Care Planning conversations, social media posts, an editorial for *Empire Report*, and an educational video on Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment that was disseminated to all provider types and posted on both the Center's Web pages and on the Department of Health's YouTube channel.

OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Availability of Syphilis Treatment Update

The shortage of Bicillin L-A, the first-time recommended treatment for syphilis, continues to be limited or unavailable, meaning providers must continue to monitor inventory, and pivot to oral-based treatments for non-pregnant patients. The supply recovery date of Bicillin L-A continues to be pushed back; Pfizer recently updated their projected recovery date to the fourth quarter of 2027, representing at least 2.5 years of continued shortage. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has allowed for the temporary importation of Lentocilin, another Medicaid reimbursable option, demand quickly exceeded supply, and orders are no longer being filled.

The AIDS Institute in the New York State Department of Health continues to work directly with counties (via local health departments) across the state to identify acute treatment needs, especially for pregnant people. For additional questions please contact: stde@health.ny.gov.

Congenital Syphilis Elimination Partnership

Last month, the AIDS Institute in the New York State Department of Health hosted the Annual Congenital Syphilis Awareness event series. This two-day event hosted over 170 people and highlighted the work of six external community-based organizations implementing work towards eliminating congenital syphilis.

During the event, the AIDS Institute announced the launch of a partnership initiative to engage community collaborators in implementing recommendations outlined in the Congenital Syphilis Elimination Framework. Partners will engage with the AIDS Institute throughout the year with support and technical assistance as needed.

Annual New York State Hepatitis C Elimination Program Report Meeting

The Office of Hepatitis Health Care and Epidemiology in the AIDS Institute is pleased to announce registration has been open for the Annual New York State Hepatitis C Elimination Progress Report Meeting to be held virtually on May 6th, 2026.

The purpose of the annual New York State Hepatitis C Elimination Progress Report meeting is to share New York's progress toward reaching its elimination goals. The keynote speaker is Dr. Luis Gonzalez Corro, Assistant Professor of Infectious Disease, Department of Medicine, NYU Langone/Bellevue Hospital. Dr Gonzalez Corro will speak on the impact of social determinants of health on reaching hepatitis C elimination by 2030. New York State and New York City will also report on elimination metrics as well as programmatic, policy and other significant accomplishments.

The registration flyer is available on the New York State Department of Health's Hepatitis C webpage at www.health.ny.gov/hepatitisc

State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System Update

The State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System program is an enhanced public health surveillance reporting system, supported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that collects comprehensive information on fatal drug overdose cases to inform public health action. The final report for the January through December 2024 has been finalized and is going through the internal New York State Department of Health review and approval process. State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System program findings on the circumstances surrounding overdose deaths will be used to inform subsequent public health action.

Drug Overdose and Surveillance Epidemiology (DOSE) Unit Update

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the New York State Department of Health including members of the AIDS Institute's Office of Drug User Health's Drug Overdose and Surveillance Epidemiology unit, have published a paper in the April 2026 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine Evidence. The findings were derived from 21 drug-checking programs across New York State and summarize the downstream effects of medetomidine in the street drug supply. [Emergence of Medetomidine in New York's Illicit Drug Supply | NEJM Evidence](#)

This study provided critical and timely public health data that lead to real action steps: surveillance activities were strengthened, public health alerts were issued, and medetomidine test strips are being utilized.

Medetomidine, a new adulterant in the illicit opioid supply, is present in New York State's illicit drug supply. The New York State Department of Health Drug Checking Programs are continuing to monitor its prevalence. New York State Department of Health (and New York City Department of Hygiene and Mental Health) drug checking programs are uniquely positioned to allow for this type of public health surveillance which provides us with real-time information for decision making and protecting New Yorkers.

Health Literacy Certificate Pilot Program

The Health Literacy Committee is rolling out a Health Literacy Specialist Certificate program pilot developed externally by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement, the only certificate of its kind designed to build staff's health literacy knowledge. The New York State Department of Health is also the first state health department in the nation to launch a pilot of this kind. The pilot includes 17 cross-disciplinary staff from across the Department and consists of seven individual, stackable courses covering key areas of health literacy, delivered through an online platform. The program is designed for anyone who creates, delivers, or supports health information, including public health professionals, providers, patient educators, community health workers, care navigators, researchers, health communicators, and marketers.

New York State Department of Health’s Five-Year Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan

The Center for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within the Office of Health Equity and Human Rights is responsible for compiling information and developing the New York State Department of Health’s Five-Year Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan. New York State Executive Order 187, signed in 2018 and titled “Ensuring Diversity and Inclusion and Combating Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace,” mandates that all State agencies have a Five-Year Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan on file and submitted to the Department of Civil Service to provide a data-informed roadmap for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion across all agency functions.

The New York State Department of Health, as are other affected State entities subject to New York Executive Order 187, is in the process of developing the Five-Year Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. Please contact CDEI@health.ny.gov with questions.