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## **Testimony of the Alliance of NYS YMCAs**

Presented to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Committee on Health

February 10, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposals pertaining to Health funding in the FY26-27 Executive Budget proposal.

On behalf of the 35 YMCA Associations and 140 branches across the State, the Alliance of New York State YMCAs advocates on behalf of policies and initiatives that help youth develop into the healthy leaders of tomorrow, prevent and combat chronic disease, and foster holistic health supports in New York State communities.

The Y has a long history of meeting the pressing needs of local communities by delivering a range of programs and services, including: universal pre-kindergarten and early child care to families of all incomes, before/afterschool care and other out-of-school time offerings, swimming instruction, youth sports opportunities, housing for low-income individuals, programs that promote social connectedness among seniors, and evidence-based health interventions.

**Our testimony will focus on the integral role YMCAs play in supporting wellbeing across the lifespan through direct evidence based chronic disease prevention programming and broader, more holistic supports that reduce stress, promote connectedness, and strengthen New York State youth, families, and communities.**

### Holistic Supports

The Y strengthens communities by empowering people of all ages to achieve their full potential through a collaborative approach that combats social isolation and enhances overall well-being. The YMCA's holistic approach to health extends beyond disease prevention to include mental, emotional, and social wellness, ensuring that individuals and families have the support needed for **lifelong health**. This includes access to child care services (both early childhood and school-age), which serve as critical support structures for working families and contribute to the healthy development of children.



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In budget negotiations over the next few weeks, we ask for consideration of the following recommendations and additions to the Executive's proposal, for the role they will play in promoting **whole-family health**:

- Increase state funding for the child care workforce, alongside the Executive's proposed investments in the Pre-K system, Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and universal child care pilots - to ensure programs are adequately staffed and available.
- In alignment with the NYS Network for Youth Success's request, invest **\$180 million to strengthen the Learning and Enrichment After-School Program Supports (LEAPS) grant, to support eligible but unfunded LEAPs applicants (\$155M) and address gaps for middle and high school students (\$25M)**. With the consolidation of Advantage and Empire programs, afterschool programs across NYS have lost state-funded afterschool contracts, leading to lapses in services and uncertainty for programs and families. 17 YMCAs across the State participate in the Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), to provide healthy meals and snacks to eligible children. Investment in the State's afterschool infrastructure also ensures children have access to nutrition needed to grow and develop, opportunities for exercise and play, and social/emotional connectedness.
- Protect and strengthen SNAP, WIC, and other food security programs. Increase funding for emergency food programs and expand access to summer nutrition programs. The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York's network of SNAP navigators, will play a critical role in helping New Yorkers access and maintain SNAP benefits amid federal policy changes, but without additional state investment to backfill federal cuts, many communities will lose SNAP navigators when they are needed most. We urge the Legislature to fund NOEP at **\$8.5M to sustain access to SNAP navigators statewide**. We also ask the Legislature to provide **\$30M in supplemental WIC funding** to ensure local agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services and reach more of the approximately 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers. New York can also build on successful programs, including by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit, extending food benefits to families who are excluded from SNAP



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- solely due to immigration status, and expanding Nourish New York, HPNAP, and Double Up Food Bucks.

The Alliance is grateful for the Executive's focus on the role of the community in promoting health - mental, social, and physical - and is supportive of the Governor's 'Unplug and Play' initiative, including the additional proposed \$75M for another round of BRICKS infrastructure funding.

### Community Connectors

The Y is uniquely positioned to address health inequities and deepen social impact through purposeful engagement with the participants and stakeholders that are hardest to reach. The Alliance is pleased to assist YMCAs in connecting with Social Care Networks across the State under the 1115 Waiver, and to serve as one of the Community-Based Organizations to assist with service navigation and in the delivery of programs to address Health-Related Social Needs.

As trusted community organizations, YMCAs already serve as informal hubs for food access, housing supports, chronic disease prevention, youth development programming, and social connection - all of which influence health outcomes. Through the 1115 Waiver, the YMCA can formalize and scale this role, helping to reduce hospitalizations, improve care coordination, and improve health upstream. However, uncertainty around Medicaid and waiver-related funding threatens the stability of this work. Community based organizations like the YMCA rely on federal support and without predictable, sustained investment, are unable to continue supporting work that advances health equity, improves outcomes, and reduces long-term healthcare costs for New York.

### Chronic Disease Prevention

More than 40% of New York adults suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, which account 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 YMCA for cancer survivors, Healthy Weight and Your Child, and the National Diabetes Prevention Program, of which Ys are the largest in-person provider.



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Lowering obesity rates is especially critical. Obesity is a chronic disease that affects the livelihood of many New Yorkers, linked to 200 medical conditions (including many listed above) and largely preventable illnesses. New obesity treatments and medications have the potential to transform the way obesity is treated and potentially prevent other diseases. Coverage should also include YMCA memberships to help the approximately 4.7 million New York residents who live with obesity and ultimately could protect our state from incurring future medical costs treating other chronic health illnesses linked to obesity. The NY adult obesity rate is projected to increase to up to 43% by 2030. We must recognize that addressing obesity is a health equity priority.

**The Alliance urges the inclusion of comprehensive obesity treatment coverage to include YMCA memberships by NYS Medicaid.**

**We appreciate the maintenance of funding for chronic disease prevention programs (obesity, diabetes, and asthma) in the Executive Budget. However, we would like to emphasize the importance of disease prevention through sustained investment in a continuum of health initiatives that foster long-term well-being.**

Community organizations like the YMCA extend the reach of the healthcare system by delivering evidence-based programs in trusted, non-clinical settings where people naturally gather. The Alliance supports additional state investment in chronic disease prevention programs supported by the NYS Department of Health to continue this work.

#### The Role of Mental Health in Whole-Person Wellbeing

Disease is costly, with some estimates stating that three quarters of the State's healthcare spending goes toward treating disease. Health and well-being must be supported from the earliest stages of development, and the Y offers integrated health and fitness programs alongside child care, youth sports, and day camps, ensuring that individuals of all ages have the resources needed to lead active, vibrant lives. In today's world, youth face heightened exposure to vicarious and collective trauma during critical periods of development. We commend the Governor's commitment to supporting youth mental health.

As the largest provider of school-age child care in the State, YMCAs are uniquely positioned to lead meaningful change in addressing and supporting



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youth mental health. Last year, YMCAs began a pilot program designed to promote the development and implementation of youth mental health policies and practices within YMCA school-aged child care sites. The pilot includes increased resources for staff training, including Youth Mental Health First Aid – a training elevated in the Governor’s Executive Budget proposal – and enhanced Social Emotional Learning programs.

**With this robust work underway, and the deep connections YMCAs already have in communities across the State, we request the inclusion of \$5 million for the New York State YMCA Foundation in the state budget to support YMCAs across the State.**

### Conclusion

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 holistic health and well-being, and inspiring action across communities.

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