

# How to Move New York Forward

# What Frontline Nurses Need

# Before New York Reopens

Nurses have been on the frontlines in this crisis. We've seen firsthand just how deadly COVID-19 can be.

Despite our repeated warnings, public health officials and elected leaders were unprepared for this pandemic. **We can never let that happen again.**

Here are some of the things New York must do to move forward and reopen. Anything less means we're likely sacrificing thousands more New Yorkers to this deadly disease.

## Fortifying the Frontlines

New York's healthcare system was woefully unprepared for this crisis. Before we can move forward, our hospitals and nursing homes must be on stronger footing.

- **Science Sets the Standard:** We are only beginning to understand SARS-CoV-2, but we know that we cannot go back to the way our hospitals operated before. We must establish a new normal, and new set of COVID-19 standard precautions. Safety, not efficiency or expediency, must drive decision-making.
- **Enhanced PPE:** The continued risk of airborne transmission means every hospital in the state must adopt enhanced conventional capacity guidelines, build up stockpiles, and begin the migration to reusable equipment. Other essential workers must also be protected.
- **Universal Testing:** We need on-demand, rapid-result diagnostic testing for all frontline workers. Once accurate antibody tests are widely available, they may only be used for epidemiological purposes.
- **Time to Rest and Recover:** Healthcare workers with COVID-19 must be provided a two-week quarantine or isolation period, with access to the paid sick time benefits available to all New Yorkers, and more if required.
- **Ongoing Accommodations:** At-risk healthcare workers must receive the protections they need to safely provide patient care. Those with at-risk family members must have housing and other supports to protect their loved ones.
- **Transparency and the Right to Know:** Nurses and other healthcare workers have a right to know what risks they're facing when they report to work. Hospitals must be transparent with workers and the public.
- **Restoring Elective Procedures Responsibly:** Elective procedures must be phased in only as the COVID-19 census falls, and suspended automatically if it starts to rise. Patients must be tested 24 hours prior to admission and COVID-specific standard precautions must be instituted.
- **Safe Staffing Across the State:** Going forward, we need far more staff to protect our patients, and we need the same staffing standard in every hospital. No hospital can justify layoffs in the face of COVID-19.

- **Maintain Surge Capacity:** New York must maintain enough hospital beds and adequately trained staff for repeated outbreaks. This will require a moratorium on hospital closings and the reactivation of shuttered units.
- **Build Back Better:** The state must fund major improvements to hospital plant and equipment, including HVAC upgrades to improve ventilation, along with other engineering controls that are supposed to be our first line of defense against workplace hazards.
- **Coordinated Purchasing Pools:** The state must take a central role in coordinating purchase and distribution of PPE, to ensure supplies are delivered where they are most needed, not to the hospital with the most resources.

## Centering on Hardest Hit Communities

COVID-19 has laid bare the deep economic and racial disparities in our state's healthcare system. We cannot move New York forward without recognizing and beginning to rectify them. What we do in New York's historically underserved communities will be the yardstick by which we measure our progress.

- **Addressing Racial Disparities:** African Americans and Latinos are dying from COVID-19 at twice the rate of white New Yorkers. Reversing these longstanding inequities must be a central focus as we move forward, and state lawmakers must prioritize funding for significant new healthcare infrastructure in hardest hit communities.
- **Fixing Healthcare Funding:** We must restore the \$2.5 billion in Medicaid cuts to next year's state budget, and finally fix our Medicaid funding formulas to allocate resources based on need. Safety net hospitals have borne the brunt of the COVID crisis, and they should receive a disproportionate share of state Medicaid funding, as well as any one-time assistance.
- **Real Accountability for the Public's Health:** For too long hospital administrators and elected officials have sidestepped responsibility for addressing the urgent health needs in our communities. We cannot return to a healthcare system where your zip code determines your life expectancy.

## Safeguarding Every New Yorker

Our first priority must be the public's health, and New York can't move forward until we can protect every New Yorker.

- **Everyone In, Nobody Out:** With over a million New Yorkers out of work we need to make sure they can get the care they need during this pandemic. The state must pay for all COVID-related healthcare costs for unemployed, uninsured, underinsured, or undocumented New Yorkers.
- **Protecting Public Health with Testing and Tracing:** New York cannot reopen until we've got the tools we need to stop another outbreak. This requires widespread COVID testing, so we can identify and isolate infected residents. We also need thousands of contact tracers working for the state to uncover exposures and avoid runaway infection.
- **No State Budget Cuts to Vital Services:** New York must provide enhanced unemployment insurance, expanded healthcare coverage, even food and shelter for New Yorkers in need. The federal government must unlock whatever resources are needed, and the state must also raise the necessary revenue, starting with Wall Street, big corporations, and New York's billionaires and millionaires.

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