



FY26 Aging Preliminary Budget Hearing

Testimony to the New York City Council

**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Aging
Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair**

March 10, 2025

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Hello Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on Aging, my name is Penelope Hernandez. I am the Director of Wellness Together, a program serving home-bound older adults, at University Settlement. Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of older adult services and the urgent need to stop over \$100 million in budget cuts that would close centers and slash services and instead invest in aging services across the city.

Older adults need urgent investments in aging services – not cuts. I am here today to urge the City to:

- Add \$44m for the case management program to support with caseloads and staffing

AND

- Invest at least \$5m a year for a revolving capital repair program at NYC Aging.

Case Managers are critical in supporting older adults in accessing benefits, social services, and more. However, current caseloads have become unfeasible. Increased funding for case management services for older adults is essential to maintain quality care and meaningful client engagement.

We have seen firsthand at Wellness Together how, with each case manager handling 69 cases, the rising caseload has left staff overwhelmed and limited their ability to provide the personalized support clients need. Previously, with a lighter workload of 30 cases, we could

Commented [MHI]: Mentioning the WT model which ideally would go beyond simple, basic case management and provide holistic services for our clients.

-69 cases/case manager

-contrast between WT before the increased caseload and now.

-staff is overwhelmed with how much they have to do and cannot provide quality care at level we want to maintain

-bare minimum services endanger vibrant programming

-we cannot justify paying for phase 2 programming because CMs are not able to connect with clients on an intimate level.

-depersonalizing CM work with increased caseload and very long assessments, we dont have the chance to actually get to know our clients

-increased budget to fill empty positions with higher pay for staff and case managers in particular

-participant able to get connected to creative writing workshop and work on art because we were able to intervene and spend time with the client



offer deeper, more individualized care—connecting participants to transformative opportunities. Now, the focus has shifted to providing only basic services, threatening the vibrant, holistic programming that enhances clients' lives. When we are able to provide this to certain clients, we have witnessed the truly transformative impact it has on the older adults we serve. Every older adult deserves this level of comprehensive care.

The increased funding would also provide crucial support to retaining and attracting staff. Without additional resources to hire and retain staff through competitive salaries, we cannot sustain the level of care required, nor can we justify expanding our programming. Increased investment is necessary to help fill vacant positions, reduce caseloads, and ensure older adults receive the comprehensive, compassionate support they deserve. The City must invest \$44 million to expand the case management program to ensure older adults have the opportunity to thrive in New York City.

Additionally, our staff work out of a NYCHA building that we share with our Older Adult Center. At this very moment, the ceiling is leaking onto the desks of the OAC office; there is mold and water pooling in one of our back rooms. These poor conditions often take an extremely long time to be addressed by agencies or aren't addressed at all. It took NYCHA an entire year to repair the door to the staff bathroom. The City must invest at least \$5 million to create a recurring capital fund to make essential repairs and ensure aging program centers remain safe and accessible.

Conclusion

I urge the City Council to:

- Make the bold, long-overdue investments that would truly support older New Yorkers and
- Stop the over \$100 million in cuts that threaten to close centers and reduce vital services.

Thank you for your time. For any follow-up questions, I can be reached at phgonzalez@universitysettlement.org.