



PHS HEALTH BRIEFS

SOCIAL SERVICES ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY

NEW YORKERS EXPERIENCE FRUSTRATION ACCESSING SOCIAL SERVICES, BUT LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS OF COLOR ENCOUNTER MORE CHALLENGES THAN OTHERS

A new survey from Public Health Solutions uncovers stark differences in access to social services across racial groups, income levels, and locations, illustrating the need for a comprehensive network of services.

BACKGROUND

New Yorkers continue to have some of the worst health outcomes in the United States, despite the many systems in place to support good health. While many New Yorkers qualify for social services and other healthcare benefits, they are too often unaware of their eligibility or face barriers, such as language or technology limitations, when accessing services. This major disconnect between the available services and the people who need them has serious ramifications for health and wellbeing across the city.

To further its mission to combat health inequities in New York City, Public Health Solutions (PHS)

recently launched WholeYouNYC, a one-stop resource in partnership with hundreds of healthcare and social services that connects New Yorkers with assistance and direct access to the services they need.

The latest PHS Social Services Accessibility Survey shows that most New Yorkers experience some level of difficulty accessing social services regardless of their race, income, or location, yet these challenges are more severe for low-income New Yorkers of color. The survey takes an in-depth look at the obstacles New Yorkers face when accessing services, as well as how accessibility varies across demographics.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, the survey found that most respondents have experienced some degree of challenge applying for and accessing social services, despite the multitude of benefits available. Key findings from the survey include:

- **Nearly 75% of respondents encountered challenges applying for social services.**



- 97% of respondents believe that a one-stop shop to find and access social services would or might be helpful.

FINDINGS

Overall, New Yorkers often face an unclear and inefficient process when seeking out and applying for social services. These challenges worsen when we examine the experiences of New Yorkers of color and low-income New Yorkers.

More white respondents have received a recommendation for social services and experienced an easier process of applying and receiving them compared to Black and Hispanic respondents.

- Of the respondents who have received a recommendation for social services, more white respondents received one from a government agency (35%) compared to Black (19%) and Hispanic (18%) respondents.
- 19% of Black respondents and 25% of Hispanic respondents considered their experience accessing social services from applying to

receiving them “difficult,” compared to just 12% of white respondents.

Similarly, high-income respondents (those with an annual household income over \$100,000) reported an easier process in applying and accessing social services compared to low-income (household income under \$50,000) respondents.



59%

of low-income respondents applied for social service programs entirely on their own compared to only **25%** of high-income respondents.

- 22% of low-income respondents reported their experience of accessing social services as “difficult,” compared to 14% of high-income respondents.
- 60% of high-income white respondents said they have applied for a program and learned they are eligible for others, compared to 40% of low-income respondents of color.

Huge swaths of various boroughs and demographic groups are left out of the picture when it comes to recommending social services, despite the opportunities that recommendations provide.

- Nearly half (48%) of Brooklyn respondents and 39% of Queens respondents say they have never received a recommendation to use social services.

65% of white high-income respondents say they've received a recommendation to use social services, compared to 38% of low-income respondents of color.



- This is a critical gap because those recommendations can unlock even more support. Nearly half (47%) of all respondents applied for social services and learned they were eligible for more, and of those respondents, 83% applied for and received all or at least some of the newly recommended services.

CONCLUSION

Even in a city with robust social services offerings, the lack of support and clarity when applying and accessing these services prevents New Yorkers, and particularly low-income New Yorkers and people of color, from benefiting from every service for which they qualify. As a one-stop hub of services, WholeYouNYC aims to streamline the entire process from learning about services to receiving them, with the ultimate goal of creating a healthier, more equitable city.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

983 New York City adult residents from varying income levels across all five boroughs were surveyed in an online questionnaire. The survey was conducted December 1-29, 2022, in partnership with Kantar, the world's leading evidence-based insights and consulting company.

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ABOUT PHS

Health disparities among New Yorkers are large, persistent and increasing. Public Health Solutions (PHS) exists to change that trajectory, and support vulnerable New Yorkers in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential. We improve health outcomes and help communities thrive by providing services directly to vulnerable low-income families, and supporting 200 community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships. We focus on a wide range of public health issues including food and nutrition, health insurance, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS. Your support helps us to realize our vision for health equity in New York City. Visit healthsolutions.org to learn more.