



Department of Health

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Dear Colleagues:

It is no coincidence that November—a time in which most Americans share anticipatory delight in the Thanksgiving feast—is National Diabetes Month. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 9.4% of the U.S. population has diabetes, which doubles a person's lifetime healthcare bills and costs the country roughly \$245 billion annually. This is a widespread disease for which we have no cure, so prevention is critical.

This month, I want to discuss a Department initiative to prevent type 2 diabetes and help New Yorkers make lifestyle changes so that they can enjoy both holiday festivities and better health. I will also review important recommendations for thyroid cancer screening in New York State.

Diabetes Prevention Targeting Those Most at Risk. An estimated [1.6 million adult New Yorkers](#) have been diagnosed with diabetes, and another 1.2 million adults¹—or 30% of the State's adult Medicaid population—are estimated to have prediabetes. The prediabetes Medicaid population has been an important focus for the Department because the [CDC estimates](#) that without intervention, many of these individuals could develop type 2 diabetes within five years. In the United States, the average [annual cost](#) for adult Medicaid beneficiaries with diabetes is \$13,490, compared to \$5,133 for Medicaid beneficiaries without diabetes.

Created in 2010 to address the increasing challenges of prediabetes and type 2 diabetes across the United States, the **National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP)** establishes public-private partnerships to offer evidence-based, cost-effective interventions that help prevent type 2 diabetes. The National DPP embraces the [CDC-recognized lifestyle change program](#), a research-based program in which [participants](#) who lost 5% to 7% of their body weight and added 150 minutes of physical activity per week cut their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by up to 58% (and up to 71% for participants over 60 years of age).

The Department considers this evidence-based program of healthy eating and physical activity a wise and solid investment in the future health of New Yorkers. That is why we have made the National DPP a covered benefit for Medicaid members in New York State. Services for the NYS Medicaid National DPP must be recommended by a physician or other licensed practitioner of the healing arts within their scope of practice. There are currently [98 CDC-recognized National DPP providers](#) across the State.

This delivery model expands National DPP into the community to reach Medicaid members where they live, through community-based organizations (CBOs) such as the YMCA. Changes to the Social Services Law in New York allow a CBO to enroll into Medicaid (fee-for-service and Medicaid Managed Care) as a National DPP service provider and allow CBOs to bill Medicaid directly for National DPP services rendered to Medicaid members. Implementation of this benefit for fee-for-service and Medicaid Managed Care is planned for February 1, 2020.

The National DPP requires a year-long commitment to accommodate critical changes in daily habit, but its impact can be long-lasting. According to the CDC, [research has found](#) that even after 10 years, people who completed a diabetes prevention lifestyle change program were one-third less likely to develop type 2 diabetes, and those who did develop type 2 diabetes delayed the onset of the disease by about four years. In addition, [preliminary findings](#) of a CMS Health Care Innovation Award program with Y-USA for Medicare enrollees showed an estimated savings of \$2,650 for each enrollee in a DPP over a 15-month period when compared to similar beneficiaries who did not participate.

Thyroid Cancer Screening. Screening for many cancers such as breast, cervical, and colon cancers allows for early detection and the benefit of early treatment. For some cancers, however, screening in those who aren't symptomatic can do more harm than good. Thyroid cancer is one of these cases, as screening for it often reveals a diagnosis without clinical benefit. The Department [recently investigated](#) elevated incidence rates of cancer on Staten Island and attributed the higher rates to the overdiagnosis of thyroid cancer.

The Department supports the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force's [recommendation against screening](#) for thyroid cancer in asymptomatic adults because the harms of unnecessary treatment often outweigh the benefits. Each year, [approximately 50 men and 70 women die](#) from thyroid cancer in New York State, so we do need to be vigilant, especially for people with symptoms or with a higher risk due to such factors as a family history of medullary thyroid cancer. But for the general population, thyroid cancer treatment can have many adverse effects—the need for lifetime thyroid hormone replacement, possible surgical damage to the nerves that help with speaking and breathing, and possible exposure to radiation treatment.

Based on the results of the [Department's study](#), Governor Cuomo announced a new training and education forum for Staten Island medical professionals and healthcare providers on best practices for thyroid cancer screening. The Department is undertaking a larger awareness campaign to remind clinicians across the State to refrain from screening for thyroid cancer in asymptomatic adults.

The Department is partnering with Greater New York Hospital Association, the Staten Island PPS, the Medical Society of the State of New York, Staten Island University Hospital, and Richmond University Medical Center to determine best practices for cancer screening programs statewide. By raising awareness about the overuse of thyroid cancer screening, we can limit the harms associated with treatment.

As always, thank you for providing exceptional primary care to your fellow New Yorkers and for supporting the Department's recommendations for diabetes treatment and prevention and for cancer screening. Your commitment makes public health successful.

All best wishes for a joyful Thanksgiving holiday and safe travels wherever your celebrations take you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Howard".

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.

¹ Figure derived from data in August 2019 *NYS OHIP Medicaid Monthly Enrollment Report*.