



For immediate release

ROCKAWAYS STILL SUFERING, NEW REPORT SHOWS

Two years after Sandy, residents suffer rising stress, severe barriers to healthcare.

New York, NY (September 22, 2014) – Two years after Hurricane Sandy, healthcare issues in the Rockaways are worsening, said a new report issued by Doctors of the World USA today. The organization, part of the global non-profit Médecins du Monde network, founded a free healthcare clinic in the Rockaways one year ago to address the area’s severe healthcare needs.

“We already knew Rockaways residents had to overcome severe barriers to access healthcare – that’s a key reason why we established our free clinic,” said Noah Barth, Doctors of the World Program Manager. “But there’s an absence of hard data on this. We’ve tried to fill that gap, and the results have surprised us. We expected to find low-income communities with poor health outcomes and poor access to healthcare services, which we did; but we also found that the deficit in affordable services is impacting everyone, including people with insurance and those in higher income brackets.”

The report, titled “Assessment of Health Needs in The Rockaways Post-Hurricane Sandy”, shows 46% of respondents cited lack of facilities and limited services as the main barriers to healthcare access, in addition to long wait times, inconvenient hours of operation and expensive services. Researched jointly with Columbia University’s School of international and Public Affairs, the report is being released today at an event co-sponsored by State Assemblyman Philip Goldfeder.

One Rockaway resident told surveyors, “If you have something that can’t be treated at St. John’s [Hospital], they send you to Jamaica or Mercy Hospital, which are really far away.”

“I commend Doctors of the World USA for opening their free clinic and bringing to light the severe lack of affordable healthcare for our families in their new study,” said Assemblyman Goldfeder. “We must do everything we can to ensure that all of our communities are provided with the healthcare options they deserve and I look forward to working with my colleagues in Albany and Doctors of the World to accomplish that goal,”

Key Findings

Researched in partnership with Columbia University, the report supports anecdotal evidence that Rockaways health disparities, which predated Superstorm Sandy, were worsened by the storm. Self-reported incidence of “fair” or “poor” health is higher than New York City as a whole. 12% of survey respondents reported needing medical care at some point in the previous year and not receiving it.

“It is humbling to witness the relief that the Rockaways Free Clinic provides, but the needs remain immense. There is still a long way to go in addressing the healthcare issues in this community,” says Barth.

Despite mounting evidence of obstacles to care, a majority of respondents (87%) reported having health insurance. This suggests a phenomenon of “underinsurance” where the lower middle class is too wealthy to receive government support but not wealthy enough to consistently access needed healthcare services.

Meanwhile, uninsured and lower income communities of the Rockaways report alarming rates of chronic disease (e.g. diabetes in 32.3% of the lowest income bracket measured), as well as significant challenges in accessing care.

Doctors of the World

Doctors of the World USA is a US non profit that is part of the global Médecins du Monde network, which provides emergency and long-term medical care to vulnerable populations while fighting for equal access to healthcare worldwide. Founded in France in 1980, the network cares for the most vulnerable through 350 programs in 79 countries worldwide.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Doctors of the World USA supported the Rockaways community by assessing health needs of the affected and displaced residents and connecting them with volunteer doctors. In October 2013, the organization opened the Doctors of the World Rockaways Free Clinic, which provides free medical care to the uninsured and undocumented residents of the area.

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