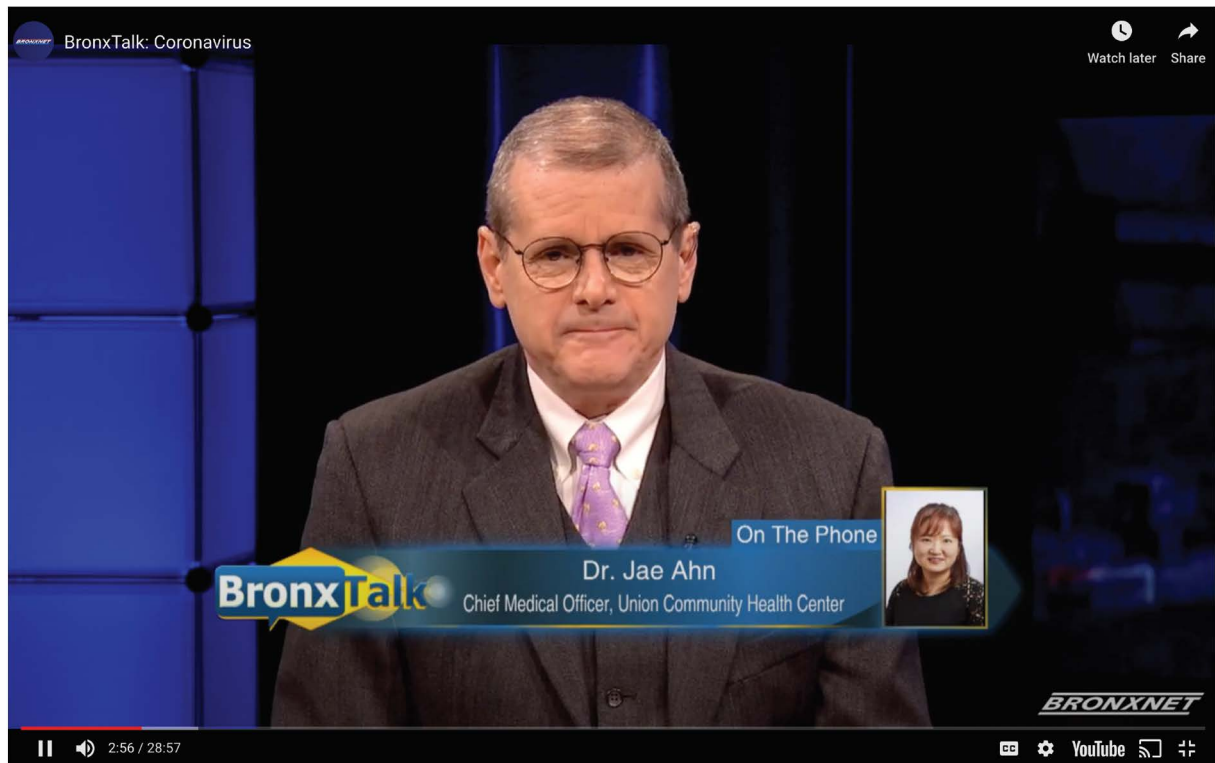


BRONXNET



BronxTalk: Coronavirus

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Falguni Sen, Professor at Fordham University and Head of the Global Healthcare Innovation Management Center (GHIM), as well as Dr. Jae Ahn, Chief Medical Officer at **Union Community Health Center** join Gary Axelbank for a discussion on Coronavirus, their takes on what to do if you have it and how to prevent it, as well as their takes on the future of the virus.

BRONXNET



Dr. Vanessa Salcedo | OPEN BxRx

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Dr. Vanessa Salcedo, M.D., Director of Wellness and Health Promotion at **Union Community Health Center**, joins Host Doctor Bob Lee for a discussion on the Bronx health statistic, the recent borough by borough COVID-19 breakdown, tips on protecting yourself, what you should do if you are feeling

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#abc7NY

May 10th, 2020

Generous donation of face masks, and meals for
Union Community Health Center's providers and patients,
by Assembly Member Michael Blake and 100 Black Men Of America, Inc.
Executive Director Mr. Courtney A. Bennett.



CORONAVIRUS

For Clinics, Pandemic Has Caused a Revenue Gap That Threatens Patient Services

BY LYDIA HU | NEW YORK CITY

PUBLISHED 10:30 AM ET MAY. 12, 2020

Alicia Gonzalez's health is fragile, putting her at higher risk of a severe illness should she become infected with the coronavirus. A housekeeper who lives in the Bronx, Gonzalez was diagnosed as pre-diabetic last year, and had a gastric bypass in March. "I was in the surgery on March 10, exactly when everything started," Gonzalez said.

Her medical lifeline is the **Union Community Health Center**, which provides an array of medical services, from primary and dental care to physical therapy, to 38,000 people a year across six sites in the Bronx and a 35-foot mobile unit.

But since the pandemic erupted, **Union Community** has been forced to end on-site visits for all but the most urgent medical needs and substitute what it can with telehealth services.

"My therapist call me, my psychiatrist call me, my primary care call me, and my other doctors call me, yeah everyone calls me, everything is fine. They worry about me," Gonzalez said.

"We are the working poor," said Dr. Vanessa Salcedo, Director of Wellness Health Promotion at **Union Community**. "As we know, we've been hearing a lot about essential workers throughout the pandemic, these are our patients."

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Bronx is the least healthy county in the state, in part because it has the fewest doctors per resident. That makes clinics like **Union Community** so essential.

"We have the highest rates of diabetes, of obesity, of hypertension, of chronic disease of all of New York state, so we know this is a medically vulnerable population," Salcedo said.

But in March, when **Union Community** was forced to cancel non-essential, on-site services, it went from helping 700 patients a day to fewer than 100.

"So when you think about the revenue impact of losing 80-plus percent of all your revenue, almost within a few days. Devastating," said Dr. Douglas York, CEO of **Union Community**.

Even with its expansion of telehealth since then, **Union Community** still only serves about half the number of patients each day than it did before the pandemic.

"Community Health Centers across New York State are really struggling financially at a time when they're needed most," said Community Health Care Association of New York State President and CEO Rose Dugan. There are more than 70 community health centers with more than 800 sites, according to the organization.

"Without patients coming in, they've quickly pivoted to providing care via telehealth and telephone, but that alone is not enough to pay the bills," Dugan said.

Congress has provided more than \$100 billion dollars to hospitals and clinics to compensate for lost revenue and higher costs but **Union Community** says the \$1.8 million it received is not nearly enough.

"Even with the pivot toward telephone or telemedicine visits, the shortfall is still tremendous," York said. "If we get into the position where this goes on for a long period of time and there isn't continued financial safety net provider funds, we have to start cutting services and when you start cutting services, all that does is start hurting patients," he explained.

That means **Union Community** could become one more victim of the pandemic, forced to cut services to an already underserved community, putting New Yorkers like Alicia Gonzalez at even greater risk.

"I don't want to think about that," Gonzalez said. "I don't know what I'm going to do without them."

SPECTRUM NOTICIAS NY1



Más gente con problemas de ansiedad, depresión y otros por emergencia del coronavirus

BY SPECTRUM NOTICIAS NY1 | MANHATTAN

PUBLISHED 6:08 PM ET MAY. 14, 2020

Según expertos médicos del **Centro de Salud Comunitario Union** en El Bronx, la pandemia del coronavirus podría estar sembrando una crisis de salud mental sin precedentes, sobre todo en los vecindarios hispanos y afroamericanos, donde la emergencia parece no dar tregua.

Muchos de los pacientes están sufriendo de ansiedad. Mucho miedo de que no saben lo que va a pasar mañana. No quieren salir de la casa. Dificultades durmiendo"

"Muchos de los pacientes están sufriendo de ansiedad. Mucho miedo de que no saben lo que va a pasar mañana. No quieren salir de la casa. Dificultades durmiendo", explicó Mildred Casiano, directora de Salud del Comportamiento.

Y es que la preocupación que sienten muchos neoyorquinos, ya sea porque han perdido un trabajo o temen perderlo, tengan dificultades para pagar las cuentas, o miedo por su salud y la de su familia, ha incrementado el número de pacientes con problemas de salud mental que hoy reciben terapia a través de videollamadas.

"En estos momentos es bien importante que todo el mundo vea un terapeuta porque todo el mundo está sufriendo por lo mismo y yo no soy diferente de ninguno de mis pacientes porque yo

también tengo las mismas preocupaciones y ansiedad pero es como uno maneja esto".

Y es que esta recomendación es vital en medio de esta emergencia, dicen expertos médicos, quienes advierten que detectar síntomas de problemas de salud mental podría ser especialmente desafiante en este momento debido a las órdenes de permanecer en casa y el distanciamiento social.

- [Video muestra a policías esposando a madre en el metro por disputa sobre tapabocas](#)

La situación lleva a irritabilidad en el 'mood'. Se vuelven irritables, pelean fácil. Se ha visto un incremento en el (consumo de) alcohol, de sustancias, y eso está incidiendo en la vida de las parejas"

"La situación lleva a irritabilidad en el 'mood'. Se vuelven irritables, pelean fácil. Se ha visto un incremento en el (consumo de) alcohol, de sustancias, y eso está incidiendo en la vida de las parejas", dijo el doctor Henry Rochel, psiquiatra.

Y mientras la situación vuelve paulatinamente a la normalidad, la gran recomendación es...

"No oigan noticias todos los días. Oigan por la mañana para estar informados pero no estar todo el tiempo girando la mente en torno a las noticias del COVID19", agregó el doctor Rochel.

Si necesitas ayuda para sobrellevar el estrés durante esta emergencia, puedes llamar a la línea especial de bienestar emocional de la ciudad al 1-888-692-9355.

Visite la página de NY1 Noticias con nuestra cobertura especial sobre el coronavirus:



The Bronx Was Facing A Public Health Crisis. Then The Pandemic Hit

BY YASMEEN KHAN, WNYC [/STAFF/YASMEEN-KHAN]

MAY 19, 2020 11:50 A.M. • 12 COMMENTS



→ UCHC health center in the Bronx receives a food donation.

Vilma Delgado lives in the Throgs Neck section of the Bronx, the borough with the highest infection and death rates (<https://gothamist.com/news/coronavirus-statistics-tracking-epidemic-new-york>) from COVID-19. Delgado, 62, knows two people who have died from the virus, so she no longer goes out just to stroll. Delgado was working to manage her anxiety well before the coronavirus outbreak, but her symptoms have worsened. Her mind races. She is fearful.

And being more confined to her apartment doesn't help.

"In the middle of the day when I'm by myself, it feels like a spinning wheel," Delgado said. "You know — like the world's spinning around and you're still in the middle?"

Delgado's two adult children, who live with her, still go out to work every day. Her daughter is a medical assistant; her son works in the facilities department at a college. They live across the street from a cemetery, which Delgado finds appealing because it's quiet. And she feels lucky to have a deck, giving her a small haven of outdoor space. She's learned to meditate.

"Inhale, exhale. Inhale, exhale. That's what I do all day," Delgado explained.

She gets counseling through Union [Community Health Center](https://www.uchcbronx.org/) (<https://www.uchcbronx.org/>) in the Bronx. It's a place that offers a range of services — primary care, urgent care, pediatrics

— and is now doing many of its appointments by phone, including therapy.

The Bronx was already at a steep disadvantage before the pandemic. It consistently ranks at the bottom (<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/new-york/2016/rankings/bronx/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>) of all New York counties for income and health outcomes. The virus is exacerbating feelings of uncertainty, and [Union Community Health](#) has seen an increase in patients seeking mental health services, said Mildred Casiano, director of behavioral health. She said therapists are speaking with 14 to 17 patients a day, on average.

"It's an indicator of the amount of patients that are experiencing anxiety and depression," Casiano said.

Many patients, like Delgado, had a diagnosis of anxiety or depression before the virus outbreak, but symptoms have intensified, said Casiano. Other patients are experiencing these symptoms for the first time.

Casiano said people speak of their loss of income, managing kids, or guilt over bringing the virus home to vulnerable family members. She said patients report an inability to sleep, constant crying, and grief.



"This is becoming a daily norm for us where we're just saturated with stories of deaths," Casiano said.

The staff at **Union Community Health Center** knew that the Bronx was going to be hard hit by the pandemic. The center serves a high-poverty population. It has 274 employees spread over six locations and a mobile unit, serving all of the Bronx, with approximately 40,000 patients on its roster. Many of them have chronic health issues, such as diabetes or asthma. Many are essential workers. And much of the center's role has been making sure these thousands of patients are weathering the public health crisis, whether they contract COVID or not.

"Because we had so many chronically ill patients, we did do a very organized, structured outreach to all 40,000 of our patients," said Douglas York, chief executive officer for the health center.

Those calls included informing patients on the latest about the virus and how to stay safe; that many health appointments were still being conducted over the phone, and some urgent ones in-person; that parents should still bring in their healthy children for immunizations. The health center has served as a filter for local hospitals, coaching patients on whether they should go to the emergency room.

In its outreach, providers also tried to glean the situation at home and how patients and their families were faring. They found that at least 50 percent of patients were experiencing food insecurity, York said.

"The worry about food and how are you going to eat — that's a huge burden for our patients," said Dr. Vanessa Salcedo, a pediatrician at Union who leads wellness initiatives in the community, and is managing the health center's COVID response.

The health center's always worked to connect people with social services; now that effort's in overdrive — whether it's helping patients find food pantries or get housing assistance. Staff are then following up to make sure people actually got what they needed. Salcedo gave the example of a call to a patient early in the crisis who had received a recent round of chemotherapy. The patient had a box of food delivered, but was unable to actually eat anything from it. So, Casiano, the behavioral health director, brought the patient food herself.

This kind of follow-up has required a new layer of coordination that the center has been doing out of necessity, said Salcedo, and because it was unclear who would fill that gap if the providers at Union did not.

"Our whole executive team is working, really, around the clock to develop these systems," Salcedo said.

The health center has received some federal funding to help with its COVID response, like outreach to patients or other clinical changes, such as getting telemedicine up and running (a project still in the works).

But these changes have been a massive administrative lift, and an emotional one. The center lost approximately 80 percent of its revenue overnight, York said, when it suspended traditional health appointments (<https://gothamist.com/news/health-centers-serving-low-income-communities-decimated-covid-19-say-cuomo-starving-them-vital-funding>), including dental services. It had to furlough some support staff. Providers are still dealing with a shortage of protective equipment, especially gowns and N95 masks. Some staff members have contracted COVID, including Salcedo. One staff member has died.

"We use each other as a support system," said Casiano.

The first five weeks of the crisis were especially challenging for Union's providers, she said, since staff were learning to manage a crisis while living it at the same time. Casiano now does wellness check-ins at staff meetings each Tuesday.

"We talk about what's going on with ourselves, our struggles, our own fears," she said. "We are experiencing everything that our patients are experiencing, because the fear is real and so is the uncertainty."

Salcedo added, "Our community is mourning from this epidemic, and we're still scared. We're scared of the risk resurgence. We're scared about when we start opening up — are we going to experience more deaths? We really need help."

Salcedo said she worries about the patients who are not getting care for chronic illnesses, or those who may be ignoring urgent needs unrelated to COVID. She worries that as parts of the state reopen, and as infection numbers improve citywide, the Bronx will be even further left behind.

"We know that this is still the beginning for us," Salcedo said.



University Neighborhood Housing Program

Bronx Reality before Covid is Manifesting Devastating and Deadly Consequences

June 2, 2020
by UNHP



from top left; Livery cabs line up at Kingsbridge Armory to receive food packages for delivery to the homebound, mask requirements on Kingsbridge Road, social distancing, and lines for the Kingsbridge Road Chase branch. May 13, 2020

Headlines about the impact of COVID-19 on the Bronx abound.

Arguably, the most striking title was from the Washington Post: “[The Bronx, long a symbol of American poverty, is now New York City’s Coronavirus Capital](#)”. The Bronx has the highest rate of positive COVID-19 cases among New York City’s boroughs. As of June 1st, there have been 11,765 hospitalizations, 3,568 confirmed COVID-19 deaths, and 912 probable COVID-19 deaths. To UNHP, a community-based organization with a [history in the Bronx](#) dating back to the 1970s, these are more than just statistics. The numbers reflect our friends, family, neighbors, coworkers and program users.

On April 13th, Dr. Vanessa Salcedo, Director of Wellness and Health Promotion at [Union Community Health Center](#) was interviewed on [BronxNet](#). She highlighted the underlying health conditions that place many Bronx residents at higher risk. The high number of COVID-19 cases in the Bronx “are not surprising [to me] as a health professional. [It is] devastating for me as a pediatrician, a community doctor, and health worker. [These are] not only numbers, these are people from our community, our patients and our families.”

Community-based health centers like [Union Community Health Center](#) and [Bronx Community Health Network](#) (BCHN) will help Bronx residents regardless of their documentation, insurance status or ability to pay. Both healthcare programs offer a sliding scale for families, but even a sliding scale may make poor people ration care. Community-based health centers often offer care beyond the medical.



University Neighborhood Housing Program

Luz Correa, Vice President for Government and Community Affairs at **Union Community Health Center (UCHC)** shared her concerns about medical predictions about the return of the virus in the fall and what lack of face to face access to patients could mean.

As the COVID-19 health crisis hit the Bronx - overwhelming hospitals with residents sick with the Coronavirus, we had to reinvent our model of care. UCUH turned to outreach by phone to our patients, providing information on how to remain safe, connect with their doctors, and manage chronic illnesses at home ... but lack of in-house technical infrastructure, as well as a lack of patient internet access, smartphones, and technical skills, prevent us from fully using a telehealth system effectively.

UNHP has also seen the breadth of the digital divide in the Bronx. Many of the individuals who engage with our programs do not have access to the internet or are not comfortable using technology. Like **Union Community Health**, when our face - to - face programs were suspended we had to primarily rely on phone calls to reach our community members. Last month, 50 of our program users became eligible for a grant program. However, the application process required internet access and a relatively high level of technological literacy. Working with people over the phone, it took us over two weeks to help individuals through the process. A few were unable to receive the funds due to a variety of technical issues, and suspension of face - to - face contact.

Moving Forward

UNHP has long fought for the Bronx neighborhoods we serve. Decent affordable housing for neighborhood residents, appropriate private investment, fair wages, and access to healthcare are necessary to support a vibrant community. Unsurprisingly, inequalities in healthcare, income, and housing were part of what made our community particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. The only way to truly help the community recover from the pandemic is to address the long-standing inequities that have been part of the Bronx's history.

Proudly Serving Bronx Communities Since 1988



NORWOOD NEWS

Tech Savvy Students Connect Elderly with Healthcare Services

🕒 August 12, 2020 (<https://www.norwoodnews.org/tech-savvy-students-connect-elderly-with-healthcare-services/>)

By **JASON GONZALEZ**

If the age of the coronavirus pandemic could be summed up in one sentence, it would read, “The world has changed – forever”. Who knew that face masks would become a part of regular attire, or that terms such as “sheltering in place”, “essential workers”, and “social distancing” would become part of our everyday vocabulary?

Indeed, the universe has transformed in ways human beings never thought possible. For almost six months now, large gatherings in the City have been cancelled, indoor dining is prohibited, and sporting events are being held in empty venues.

Of course, no other industry sector has been more impacted by the coronavirus than the health care sector. Here too, outside of the hospitals and nursing homes which became the epicenters of the pandemic, healthcare centers also had to learn how to adapt to the new normal. Patients were suddenly instructed to avail of Telehealth services, where possible, rather than visit their healthcare providers in person, all in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19.

This compulsory shift, in both mindset and procedure, has inadvertently spawned at least one innovative collaboration in healthcare provision, and is gathering momentum across the country. A promising partnership has developed between **Union Community Health Center (UCHC)**, based in the Bronx, and a federal student-led nonprofit called Telehealth Access for Seniors (TAFS), which launched in March 2020.



(l to r) Abe Baker-Butler, national recruitment coordinator and New York lead at Telehealth Access for Seniors, and Luz Correa, vice president of government and community affairs at **Union Community Health Center**
Photo by Serena Muniz

NORWOOD NEWS

As a concept, Telehealth is the provision of health-related services by electronic means using telecommunication technologies. It allows long-distance patient and clinician contact, care, advice, reminders, education, intervention, monitoring, and remote admissions. It is also the name of an app. TAFS, on the other hand, is a nonprofit comprising high school, college, graduate, and gap year student volunteers who collect various camera-enabled (smart) devices, and distribute them to the elderly and others so that they can access Telehealth services remotely and safely.

Aware of the direction in which the planet was moving as the pandemic unfolded, employees at UCHC, located at 260 East 188th Street in the West Bronx, were concerned about how the local elderly population would manage during the mandatory shelter-in-place period. Indeed, of the many groups impacted by the statewide stay-at-home order, senior citizens are probably the most affected. In an effort to meet social distancing requirements, they were encouraged by health professionals and by family members to stay at home due to being extra susceptible to the virus.

Luz Correa is vice president of government and community affairs at UCHC. “We were faced with this crisis, this very unexpected health care crisis,” she said. “I mean it was a crisis on all kinds of levels, because it was an economic crisis, it was a mental health crisis, and definitely a health care crisis.” Correa said the center had to basically reinvent itself overnight to adapt and find new ways to care for its patients. It went from seeing 750 patients a day pre-pandemic, to not seeing almost anyone once the shutdown went into effect.

“Our patient volume decreased 85 percent overnight,” Correa said, referring to outpatient visits. “You know, we were very much in agreement [with public health policy] and encouraged our patients to stay home. We made our best efforts to call in all of our staff. It was an all-hands-on-deck effort to get our staff to reach out to our patients by phone, and let them know that we were here, and that we were still open.”

In fact, UCHC was already in the process of implementing some new technological initiatives for their patients when the coronavirus hit New York. “We had to kind of hurry up and ramp up those efforts during the pandemic,” said Correa. This entailed setting their patients up with telephonic services, ramping up their telemedicine service, and creating a new virtual care environment, all while continuing to see some patients who still came into the center because they thought they were potentially COVID positive or were looking to get tested.

NORWOOD NEWS

Studies show that virtual connectivity between seniors and doctors has proven beneficial, especially for seniors suffering from chronic conditions that require continuous monitoring and care. The Telehealth app, streamed through an electronic device, includes both audio and visual connectivity, keeping senior patients engaged with their doctors, and offsetting the risk of COVID-19 infection following a physical doctor's visit.

With a second wave of COVID-19 expected in the fall, the telehealth system will be highly conducive to patients' needs, allowing them to receive their medication from online pharmacies. Their prescriptions will also be delivered to their doorstep. Additionally, through the telehealth app, patients will be able to plan real time consultations with their physicians, albeit virtually. Indeed, the partnership between UCHC and TAFS is expected to provide patients with even more options in the future.

Anyone interested in supporting the nonprofit can visit their website, telehealthforseniors.org. It includes a link to where people can donate devices, start a collection, or donate directly via their GoFundMe page.

For their part, the team at UCHC strongly encourages anyone with extra electronic devices lying around at home to stop by any of their facilities where people can also drop off old devices. Alternatively, for anyone interested in helping out patients financially, donations to assist with patients' healthcare costs can be made via UCHC's website, uchcbronx.org.

"We know that a lot of people need health care, and despite our best efforts, some might be going on without it," Correa said. "We're talking about chronically ill patients, those with diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma." She said a lot of parents weren't bringing their kids in to the center during the pandemic, so they were skipping their immunizations. Correa stressed that all members of all communities need the same access to health care services, when it's needed.

"The only barrier to it might be that you don't have a device, or you don't have connectivity," Correa said. "So, we're trying to break down those barriers with relationships, like the one that we've established with TeleHealth Access for Seniors. We will be looking to apply for as much funding, or look[ing] for as many partners that can help us break down these barriers."