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■ New Yorkers Strongly Back Expanding Involuntary Treatment to Help People Experiencing Severe Mental Illness

A new Tulchin Research poll conducted on behalf of the Association for a Better New York (ABNY) finds that voters in New York City strongly favor expanding the state’s eligibility standard for involuntary treatment and care to individuals who are unable to care for themselves and their basic needs. New Yorkers widely perceive that there have been more public safety incidents involving individuals with untreated severe mental illness in recent years, and most report personal experience being around people in public who appear to be unable to meet their basic needs. Providing involuntary treatment and care is widely regarded as a more compassionate alternative to leaving individuals with severe mental illness on the streets, and most believe that expanding eligibility for involuntary treatment will make their communities safer.

New Yorkers Say Public Safety Incidents Involving Individuals Experiencing Mental Illness are on the Rise

Our polling finds that more than 7 in 10 New York City voters (73%) say that the number of public safety incidents in New York involving individuals with untreated severe mental illness has increased in recent years, while 18% say the number has stayed the same, just 4% say it has decreased, and 4% say they don’t know. The vast majority of voters say they have personally encountered this issue in their daily lives, with 86% stating that they have “personally seen a person on the street or on public transit who appears to be struggling with mental illness and unable to care for themselves and meet their basic needs” and 64% reporting that they “have felt endangered while riding the subway or bus due to the actions of someone with severe mental illness.”

Near Unanimous Support for Expanding Eligibility for Involuntary Treatment

Despite widespread awareness of New York city’s challenges with untreated severe mental illness, few voters are familiar with the ongoing policy debate. Most voters (69%) report that they have not heard, read, or seen anything about proposals to change state law involving people with untreated severe mental illness, while 12% say they have heard “a lot,” 12% have heard “some,” and 2% have heard “only a little.”

We asked respondents about expanding the state’s eligibility standard for involuntary treatment and care to include individuals who are unable to care for themselves and meet their basic needs, and found that this idea attracts overwhelming, broad-based support and very limited opposition. Nearly 9 in 10 voters (88%) say they support expanding the eligibility standard – including 50% who say they *strongly* support this – while just 4% are opposed and 7% are undecided.

New Yorkers Overwhelmingly Back Expanding Eligibility for Involuntary Care

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose expanding the state eligibility standard for involuntary treatment and care to include individuals who are unable to care for themselves and meet their basic needs?

Total Support	88%
Total Oppose	4%
Don't Know	7%

Support for expanding the eligibility standard for involuntary treatment is both wide and deep, extending across all five boroughs of the city and across the political spectrum. Notably:

- The policy attracts strong support across the city, including 90% support in the Bronx, 85% in Brooklyn, 90% in Manhattan, 88% in Queens, and 95% in Staten Island.
- Support for expanding eligibility for involuntary treatment transcends party lines, with 90% of Democrats, 81% of Republicans, and 81% of independent voters in favor.
- The policy is supported by 87% of white voters, 89% of Black voters, 94% of Latino voters, and 83% of Asian voters.
- Support for extending the standard is comparable among both men (92% support) and women (86% support), as well as among voters aged 18-39 (90% support), voters aged 40-64 (86% support), and voters aged 65+ (90% support).

At a time of deep political divisions, it is rare to see a policy proposal garner such overwhelming support and unite such a broad coalition of voters.

Voters See Involuntary Care as Compassionate, Fostering Safer Communities

We asked voters about their attitudes toward different assertions made about involuntary treatment and care for individuals with severe mental illness and about expanding the eligibility standard. We found that voters widely see involuntary care as compassionate and necessary to help those who can't help themselves and believe that expanding the eligibility standard for involuntary care protects public safety.

More than 9 in 10 voters (91%) agree that "it is more compassionate to provide involuntary treatment and care for people with severe mental illness than it is to leave them on the streets," including a majority (53%) who *strongly* agree with that statement. Similarly, 91% agree that "people struggling with severe mental illness should not be denied life-saving psychiatric care because their illness prevents them from recognizing that they need help," including 59% who *strongly* agree.

Voters not only view involuntary treatment as a moral imperative but also recognize its benefit to the broader public interest. Nine in 10 voters (90%) agree with the statement that “expanding eligibility for involuntary treatment and care for people with severe mental illness will protect public safety and make our communities safer,” including 49% who *strongly* agree.

Voters Believe Involuntary Treatment is Compassionate, Protects Public Safety			
<i>Please indicate whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.</i>			
	Total Agree	Total Disagree	Agree - Disagree
<i>It is more compassionate to provide involuntary treatment and care for people with severe mental illness than it is to leave them on the streets</i>	91%	5%	+86
<i>People struggling with severe mental illness should not be denied life-saving psychiatric care because their illness prevents them from recognizing that they need help</i>	91%	6%	+85
<i>Expanding eligibility for involuntary treatment and care for people with severe mental illness will protect public safety and make our communities safer.</i>	90%	5%	+84

This polling data sends a clear message: New Yorkers overwhelmingly support expanding eligibility for involuntary treatment as a compassionate and necessary step toward addressing severe mental illness and strengthening public safety.

Survey Methodology: From February 4-10, 2025, Tulchin Research conducted a survey among 600 voters in New York City. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4 percentage points.