

# Royce Duplessis – New Orleans Mayoral Health Policy Questionnaire

## Healthcare Access & Insurance Coverage

**Q: About 1 in 3 New Orleans residents, including 59% of children in the city, are enrolled in Medicaid. Recent policy changes will make it more challenging for those residents to keep their Medicaid coverage. How would you leverage the City resources, programs, and partners to support residents maintaining coverage in Medicaid as the new requirements are implemented?**

As Mayor, I will work closely with the Louisiana Department of Health to ensure New Orleanians do not lose coverage due to red tape or bureaucratic barriers. I will partner with hospitals, clinics, and mental health providers to expand access to care, while advocating at the state and federal levels to protect Medicaid funding. We need to support programs and efforts that identify and enroll qualified residents into Medicaid and help those with coverage keep it.

**Q: Recent policy changes limit immigrant access to basic health care services. Do you commit to providing City funds to ensure noncitizen residents of our City can continue to access basic health care services?**

Yes. Access to healthcare should be a right, not a privilege.

We know that when people have reliable access to primary and specialty care, they stay healthier, more productive, and ultimately reduce the long-term financial and resource burdens on our healthcare system. That principle applies to all of our residents, regardless of citizenship status.

As the next mayor, I will inherit a massive budget deficit that will force tough choices and demand creative solutions. Even so, ensuring that our neighbors can see a doctor, manage chronic conditions, and access preventive care must remain a priority. I am committed to working with all stakeholders, including our City's strong network of Federally Qualified Health Centers and industry leaders, to make sure noncitizen residents are not left behind because of federal policy changes.

## Food Security & Nutrition

**Q: According to a recent report by the New Orleans Health Department, more than 1 in 6 residents of the city struggle with food insecurity, including more than 21,000 children in New Orleans. What strategies would you implement to address hunger and food insecurity among New Orleans residents, and particularly families with children?**

As Mayor, I will focus on three priorities.

First, I will expand access to fresh and affordable food. Too many neighborhoods, like the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East, lack grocery stores. I will build on mobile markets, farmers' markets, and SNAP incentive programs to bring fresh produce directly to families. I will also launch a Fresh Food Retailer Initiative that uses tools such as New Markets Tax Credits and Opportunity Zones to attract investment in underserved areas.

Second, I will support families and local food entrepreneurs. Small businesses and vendors are vital to our culture and economy, yet outdated rules hold them back. I will streamline permitting, reduce fees, and reform zoning to encourage neighborhood markets and urban farms.

Third, I will build a resilient food system that can withstand disasters. I will strengthen partnerships with Second Harvest, local grocers, and community groups to ensure food distribution during storms. I will also expand access to vacant land for urban farms and community gardens, giving residents long-term stability and resources to grow food locally.

**Q: New Orleans is well below the national average for the number of grocery stores per capita. Additionally, about 1 in 5 households are low income and lacking transportation. As Mayor, how would you support increasing the number of full service grocery outlets and ensure that all residents have access to fresh, healthy, affordable groceries regardless of their income or access to a personal vehicle?**

As Mayor, I will prioritize increasing the number of full-service grocery outlets while also improving access for families who currently face long, costly trips to shop.

As mentioned above, I will launch a Fresh Food Retailer Initiative to provide incentives and low-interest financing for grocers who locate in underserved areas, utilizing tools such as New Markets Tax Credits, Opportunity Zones, and partnerships with local banks and community development organizations. At the same time, I will expand proven solutions such as mobile markets, the Crescent City Farmers Market, and SNAP incentive programs that bring fresh produce directly into neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East.

To better serve families without cars, I will work with the RTA and rideshare companies to pilot affordable transit and on-demand options that connect residents to existing grocery outlets. Finally, I will support small food businesses and urban farms by reforming permitting and zoning rules, ensuring they can thrive and expand food choices in every community.

By combining investment in grocery infrastructure with creative transportation and local food solutions, we can build a healthier, more equitable food system for all New Orleanians.

## **Maternal & Infant Health**

**Q: Infants are the canary in the coal mine of population health, and in New Orleans Black infants are twice as likely to die in their first year of life than white infants. Maternal wellbeing PRIOR to pregnancy - as measured by poverty and unmanaged chronic conditions - are driving rates of death and illness in New Orleans' infants. How will your administration commit resources to building health and wealth so New Orleanians can thrive?**

As a legislator in Baton Rouge, I have made maternal and child health a priority because I know that when mothers are healthy and supported, children thrive. I supported legislation to expand access to prenatal and postpartum care, extend the Earned Income Tax Credit for working families, and prohibit insurance companies from denying displaced residents health coverage. These efforts were about giving families the stability and care they need before, during, and after pregnancy.

As Mayor, I will build on this record by investing in maternal and infant health through partnerships with hospitals, clinics, and community organizations. That includes expanding access to primary care and chronic disease management, protecting Medicaid coverage, and supporting local programs that provide doulas, home visits, and mental health support for mothers.

At the same time, I will address the economic drivers of poor maternal health outcomes. Too many women enter pregnancy facing low wages, housing insecurity, and limited access to healthy food. My administration will prioritize affordable housing, workforce training, and food security initiatives that allow families to build wealth and stability.

Reducing infant mortality requires both medical care and economic opportunity. My commitment is to build a healthier, more equitable New Orleans where every child has the chance to reach their first birthday and beyond.

**Q: In 2022, the City of New Orleans launched Family Connects New Orleans, which offers free postpartum nurse home visits to every resident who delivers a baby in a New Orleans hospital. Do you commit to continuing the funding for that program at current levels?**

Yes. As a father, I know how important and stressful those days are right after a child is born. If we want to set up mom, infants, and families for success, programs like this are smart investments.

## **Sexual & Reproductive Health**

**Q: Sexual health education, contraception, and reproductive health services are becoming more challenging to access in our polarized political climate. As Mayor, how**

**would you support expanded access evidence-based sexual education for New Orleans youth?**

As Mayor, I will support comprehensive, evidence-based sexual health education so young people in New Orleans have the knowledge and resources to stay healthy and safe. In Baton Rouge, I fought to expand healthcare access and protect families from losing coverage, and I will bring that same commitment to City Hall.

I will work with schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations to ensure students receive science-based education on contraception, disease prevention, and healthy relationships. I will also support our school-based health centers and Federally Qualified Health Centers, which play a vital role in providing confidential, affordable reproductive health services for youth.

In today's polarized political climate, local leadership matters. I will make sure our city's programs remain inclusive and equitable, and that our young people have the tools they need to make informed decisions, reduce unintended pregnancies, and build brighter futures.

**Q: How would you work to ensure that women in the City are able to access contraception that best suits their needs, regardless of their ability to pay?**

I fully support women's access to contraception that allows them to make decisions about their health and exercise their bodily autonomy. As Mayor, I will work to ensure cost is never a barrier. That means partnering with Federally Qualified Health Centers, school-based clinics, and local nonprofits to expand confidential, affordable access across the city.

## **Mental Health & Substance Abuse**

**Q: Ensure that residents experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis have access to timely, community-based responses instead of law-enforcement-only interventions?**

I will build a 24/7 citywide crisis response that sends trained clinicians, peer counselors, and EMTs as the first option, with police only when safety requires it. Our 911 and 311 systems will route calls to mobile crisis teams and guarantee same-day follow-up. I will expand co-responder units for situations that overlap with homelessness or domestic disputes, and create clear warm handoff protocols with hospitals, shelters, and schools so people are not left to navigate care alone. A public dashboard will track response times, diversions from ERs and jail, and outcomes after 7, 30, and 90 days. My goal is simple. When someone is in crisis, they get timely, community-based care that stabilizes them and supports long-term recovery.

**Q: Support partnerships with local providers to expand treatment (both residential and community-based), housing, and recovery supports for individuals and families affected by substance use?**

I will convene a permanent Public Health and Recovery Table that includes the Health Department, hospitals, community clinics, Medicaid plans, and recovery and harm reduction providers. Together, we will map capacity, close gaps, and braid funding so treatment is available when people ask for help. I will contract for more residential and community-based treatment slots with same-week intake, expand recovery housing and permanent supportive housing, and align rapid rehousing with treatment plans for families. I will streamline permits for providers, reduce red tape, and protect clinical decision-making from political interference. Every contract will include clear performance measures, from retention in care to housing stability, so we pay for what works and scale it.

**Q: Invest in prevention strategies that address the root causes of mental health and substance use challenges in New Orleans?**

Prevention starts with stability. I will link resilience and affordability by scaling fortified roofs and green infrastructure that lower insurance costs and flood risk. I will expand after-school programs, mentorship, and paid internships so young people have safe places to learn and earn. I will speed up rental aid, strengthen eviction diversion, cut fees that trap families in debt, and enforce wage protections. I will keep the Health Department led by professionals who follow evidence, and I will counter misinformation with transparent data and citywide campaigns. When families can afford housing, access care quickly, and trust public information, stress falls and health improves.

**Q: Invest in two-generation strategies that address the impacts of mental health and substance use for young people?**

I will bring counseling and peer navigation into schools and NORD sites and work to guarantee next-day youth appointments with family therapy when needed. I will fund parent coaching, home visiting, and childcare assistance that support treatment adherence and reduce household stress. Each family will have one coordinator who connects mental health care with tutoring, summer jobs, and recreation, so services feel coherent rather than a maze. I will track outcomes like school attendance, crisis calls, and reunification so we know which supports make the most significant difference.

## **Injury Prevention**

**Q: In July 2025, two bicyclists were killed in separate crashes on St. Claude Avenue within a span of two weeks and 27 people have died in fatal crashes in our city so far this year. What strategies would you use to reduce preventable crashes on city-owned roadways and state-owned roadways, such as St. Claude Ave?**

I will adopt a Vision Zero plan, with quarterly public reviews and immediate action on high-injury corridors. On St. Claude, we will deliver quick build safety now. Protected bike lanes, daylighted corners, leading pedestrian intervals, refuge islands, hardened centerlines, and raised crosswalks near schools and transit stops. We will coordinate with DOTD to lock in safety

standards on state-owned segments and with RTA to add bus priority where it reduces dangerous weaving.

## **Tobacco Prevention & Control**

**Q: Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease. Additionally, exposure to secondhand smoke causes many of the same smoking-related diseases as active smoking, including heart disease, stroke, and cancer. The science is clear: there is no safe level of exposure. In 2015, the City of New Orleans took action to reduce the toll of tobacco, by passing a comprehensive smoke-free ordinance to eliminate smoking in all workplaces, including bars and casinos. Are you committed to keeping comprehensive smoke-free air protections in place?**

Yes.

**Q: E-cigarettes are hooking a new generation on nicotine-fueled by kid-friendly flavors and massive doses of nicotine. Louisiana has the third highest youth e-cigarette use rate at 25.5%. As Mayor, what strategies would you implement to reduce youth tobacco use?**

Reducing tobacco use, especially among young people, will be a top priority for my Health Department. We cannot allow an entire generation to become hooked on nicotine through kid-friendly flavors and massive doses of nicotine. As mayor, I will work closely with healthcare advocates, schools, and community organizations to employ best practices in prevention and education. That means implementing evidence-based campaigns in schools and neighborhoods, strengthening enforcement against the sale of tobacco and vaping products to minors, and making sure resources are available for young people who want to quit. Our administration will treat youth tobacco prevention as a core public health and safety issue, and we will bring urgency, transparency, and accountability to reducing these rates year over year.

## **Vaccines & Infectious Disease**

**Q: Recent data from the CDC demonstrates a significant drop in the number of children entering kindergarten who are vaccinated and an increase in the number of vaccine preventable diseases. As Mayor, how will you address vaccine hesitancy to ensure our schools avoid outbreaks?**

Public health is about public safety, and it should not be political. Hospitality staff, transit drivers, healthcare workers, first responders, teachers, and all the other frontline workers who drive our economy do not have the luxury of working remotely or avoiding interaction with the public. It's disrespectful to them and dangerous to all of us when leaders downplay threats that can be prevented or managed.

We've been fortunate to have strong leadership in our Health Department. Dr. Jennifer Avegno has set the standard for evidence-based, compassionate public health in New Orleans, and I want to build on that foundation. Under my administration, the Health Department will continue to be led by individuals who prioritize science and facts over politics. We will not bend to misinformation or intimidation from Baton Rouge or Washington.