



Ashwin Vasana, right, said he had decided to resign to spend more time with his family. Credit... Dave Sanders for The New York Times

As Investigations Swirl, Another Adams Official Resigns



By **Jeffery C. Mays**

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/23/nvregion/vasan-health-commissioner-resigns.html>

Dr. Ashwin Vasana, who led New York City out of the pandemic as its health commissioner, is the third top official to quit in recent weeks.

The health commissioner chosen by Mayor Eric Adams to [lead New York City out of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) resigned on Monday, the third top administration official this month to leave, or announce plans to, amid [multiple federal investigations](#) of the mayor's inner circle.

The commissioner, Dr. Ashwin Vasani, a mental health expert, cited a desire to spend more time with his family in his decision to step down, which will take effect early next year.

"As anyone with a family — or a chosen family — knows, you are never alone in service," Dr. Vasani said in a statement. "My wife and three young children have served alongside me, bearing the brunt of my absence and shouldering so much. I'm grateful for their love and have chosen that now it is time to support them and their well-being."

A City Hall spokesman, William Fowler, said Dr. Vasani's departure was unrelated to the federal inquiries, and the commissioner affirmed that in a brief interview.

"I'm so far away from that world, and my focus has been on the health of the city," Dr. Vasani said of the investigations. "I don't think anyone wants to see that kind of environment around us, because we want our mayor and the administration to be successful, because we want the city to be successful."

Mr. Adams praised Dr. Vasani's tenure.

"His expertise as a mental health expert, coupled with his training as a public health professional, have proven indispensable to our city over the past two and a half years as we've handled rising Covid rates, mpox outbreaks and a mental health crisis both on our streets and in our schools," the mayor said in a statement.

The resignation reflects the mounting pressure facing Mr. Adams and his administration, and underscores concerns about the mayor's ability to [retain and attract top talent](#) and to stay focused on governing the largest city in the U.S. as at least four separate investigations of his campaign and closest advisers swirl around him.

Earlier this month, Edward A. Caban, who had his phone seized by federal agents, [resigned as police commissioner](#) at the request of City Hall. Lisa Zornberg, the mayor's chief counsel, [resigned abruptly days later](#), in part because she was unable to persuade Mr. Adams to fire Timothy Pearson, a senior mayoral adviser whose phones were also seized this month by federal authorities.

In an unrelated municipal scandal, Dr. Jay Varma, the former city health official who led New York's initial pandemic response, was fired from his job as executive vice president and chief medical officer at SIGA Technologies, a pharmaceutical company.

The dismissal, first reported by [The Daily News](#) and disclosed in [a regulatory filing](#), followed [a hidden-camera video recording that caught Dr. Varma boasting about participating in sex parties](#) during the height of the pandemic.

Dr. Vasan's resignation may not be the last for the Adams administration. Zach Iscol, the city's emergency management commissioner, acknowledged on Monday that he had considered leaving amid the federal investigations and had spoken to people about departing, but decided against it.

"I love New York," Mr. Iscol said. "I'll always do what I think is best for New Yorkers. This is a time where we really need leadership. Between hurricane season and the upcoming election and everything else we have going on in the city, I'm focused on doing my job."

Mr. Iscol denied a [published report](#) that he planned to leave this fall. A spokeswoman for Mr. Adams declined to comment on any conversations Mr. Iscol may have had with the mayor, and referred to Mr. Iscol's statement denying his departure.

Candidates who plan to challenge Mr. Adams in the Democratic primary next year said the chaos at City Hall was bad for New York.

"This pattern of turnover at the highest levels of city government is disconcerting and destabilizing," said Zellnor Myrie, a state senator from Brooklyn who is among those running against Mr. Adams.

Scott M. Stringer, a former comptroller who is also running for mayor, said the departures were "the beginning of a mass exodus at City Hall which will soon make it impossible to govern."

Mr. Adams "must fix the ship or it will sink," Mr. Stringer added.

Before becoming the health commissioner, Dr. Vasan was president of [Fountain House](#), a New York nonprofit focused on mental health, and a professor of public health at Columbia University.

He served as co-chairman of the health committee on the mayor's transition team. Mr. Adams often cited the work of Dr. Vasan and Fountain House as a model for how the city should deal with mental health issues.

Mr. Vasan said he planned to return to a full-time role at Columbia. Of his efforts as commissioner, he said he was most proud of the [HealthyNYC](#) initiative, which set goals for increasing life expectancy; his work on improving access to reproductive health; and his push to reduce medical debt for New Yorkers.

"Look at public health departments across this country and everyone will point to New York City and say they are on strong footing," he said.

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