

How are Chicago Hospitals Advancing Health Equity?

Addressing Root Causes of Health Disparities.



Bringing Healthcare to Neighborhoods

Community health workers (CHWs) are at the heart of hospital efforts to enhance health. One Chicago hospital has partnered with organizations in North and South Lawndale to build a strong, highly skilled network of CHWs. The One Lawndale Community Health Collective is laser focused on ensuring residents connect with CHWs and that CHWs have maximum impact on individual lives and the community. This hospital is also part of the Healthy Chicago Equity Zones project, which the Chicago Department of Public Health created in 2021 to close Chicago's racial life expectancy gap.

Taking a Holistic View of Health

Good health isn't just about what happens in a hospital. That's why one Chicago hospital employs about 70 community health workers who fan out into neighborhoods to address the social factors impacting health. These workers coordinate care for Chicagoans impacted by community and domestic violence, as well as chronic diseases like diabetes. That's not it, though. The hospital also partners with community organizations to help patients address the social determinants of health affecting their health—such as housing, food and transportation. This 360-degree view of what drives health outcomes is key to advancing health equity.



Addressing Social Determinants of Health

Every single inpatient and primary care clinic patient at a Chicago hospital is screened for social determinants of health (SDoH), such as food insecurity, literacy and violence. These factors have a big influence on health outcomes and health disparities. The hospital's SDoH screening tool was developed during the pandemic to help ensure access to care and community support services for high-risk patient populations. Over 35,000 patients have been connected to social workers and community health workers. What's more, by understanding patient needs, the hospital can direct community support and grants to targeted areas and services.



Taking on Food Insecurity

To address this social determinant of health, a Chicago hospital partners with a community organization on the Food Connections Program. Funding from the hospital's health system has translated into a 91% increase in food distribution—totaling nearly 960,000 pounds of food. The health system also tackles food insecurity by screening all adult inpatients for it. Those who are food-insecure meet with a social worker, who shares a list of resources such as local food pantries and meal programs, as well as how to apply for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Equalizing Access to Fresh Foods

When a Garfield Park supermarket closed in 2021, a Chicago hospital stepped in to fill the gap. The hospital isn't charging residents for groceries, though. Instead it's distributing food for free every week. There's a clear connection between fresh, whole foods and optimal health. Unequal access to affordable, nutritious food can negatively affect individual and community health. The hospital's Food is Medicine Veggie Rx Program has provided over 40,000 pounds of food across 40 community sites since 2022. By doing so, the hospital has positively impacted over 9,000 families and 36,000 individuals.

