

18 vulnerable neighborhoods. One powerful goal.



18 vulnerable Chicago neighborhoods. 10 leading health systems. One powerful goal. ***Strengthening neighborhood engagement to reduce violence and improve health***

More than three years ago, a meeting was held in a Chicago conference room that sparked a change in the framework and delivery of health care across the city.

The meeting was convened by U.S. Senator Dick Durbin and it brought together the CEOs of ten major hospitals serving Chicago. We agreed to work both together and within the vulnerable neighborhoods of Chicago to address the underlying drivers of violence and the reasons why communities of color live sicker and die younger. It became known as the Chicago Hospital Engagement, Action, and Leadership (HEAL) Initiative. Today we continue to work towards the shared commitments of increasing local hiring and procurement, expanding mental health and trauma-informed programming, conducting more research into gun violence, and much more.

As this work entered its second year, we smacked straight into the COVID-19 pandemic that put our hospitals and staff on the front lines, upended the financial stability of these systems, and wreaked havoc across our communities. This public health crisis magnified the racial health disparities we were already striving to address, with COVID-19 infecting communities of color with a disproportionate ferocity.

But because of the work our ten hospitals had already been doing under the Chicago HEAL Initiative, we were poised to address these disparities head on. The community-based work our hospitals have done to address violence—providing post-injury counseling for 4,524 patients last year and enlisting trusted messengers for street outreach programs—was the same community footprint needed to address COVID-19 disparities, whether through targeted testing, contact tracing, or vaccine confidence efforts. In essence, our hospitals had a jumpstart on the roadmap for addressing COVID-19 disparities.

The relationships, camaraderie, and collective vision touched off by this project created a ready-made forum to engage one another during the hectic and uncertain first wave in February, March, and April of 2020. This meant collaborating with our State and City public health and community partners, sharing equipment, working with our colleagues in community hospitals, and passing along best practices on how to defeat the virus.

One result of this collaboration was that, compared to the other major metropolitan areas across the country, Chicago holds the third-largest population in the country yet ranked seventh nationwide in its COVID-19 mortality rate—faring better than sister cities of similar sizes.

While too much suffering and loss has transpired over the past year, there's no question that the partnerships established and strengthened through the Chicago HEAL Initiative between hospitals, community partners, and State and Chicago public health officials helped provide a head start to Chicago's rapid response to COVID-19. We believe this collaboration helped to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and prevented what could have been an even worse outcome.

Hospital Engagement Action and Leadership

CHICAGO HEAL INITIATIVE

DICK DURBIN
U.S. SENATOR
ILLINOIS

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The Chicago HEAL hospitals are committed to improving the health and well-being of our City through investment in the social determinants of health. Whether it is providing pipeline programs for 1,688 students for careers in health care last year, spending \$131 million in procurement of hospital goods and services, or hiring 3,080 new employees from the surrounding communities, there is a demonstrable commitment by our hospitals to uplift our neighborhoods and support economic vitality, which has cascading health and societal benefits.

This week we released a [comprehensive report](https://tinyurl.com/8ayucajw) (<https://tinyurl.com/8ayucajw>) detailing the progress of our ten hospitals toward the original goals of the Chicago HEAL Initiative, as well as our commitment to serving our neighborhoods throughout the pandemic. We are proud of the impact that is documented in this report, and the stories of lives that have been touched by the work of our hospitals in meeting our commitments under this project.

Our work to tackle gun violence and racial and ethnic health disparities across Chicago has a long way to go. Too many Monday mornings start with the grim headlines of heart-wrenching fatalities, and too many Black and Brown families continue to face systemic inequalities. But the work of the Chicago HEAL Initiative stands as a bright spot amid this challenging time, and we believe serves as a launching point for future progress in addressing the root causes of health inequity and gun violence across this great city.

We greatly appreciate the leadership of U.S. Senator Dick Durbin on the Chicago HEAL Initiative and we look forward to continuing to collaborate to address gun violence and advance health equity.

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