

Chicago Hospitals Are Advancing Health Equity



Bringing Healthcare to Neighborhoods

Good health isn't just about what happens in a hospital. That's why community health workers (CHWs) are at the heart of many hospital's efforts to take a holistic view of health. Demonstrating this approach, one Chicago hospital has partnered with community-based organizations in North and South Lawndale to build a strong, highly skilled local network of CHWs to coordinate care. Additionally, as a lead of the Healthy Chicago Health Equity Zones initiative, the hospital ensures community members have the power and resources to identify local assets and develop solutions that meet their most pressing needs—with the overarching goal of closing Chicago's racial life expectancy gap.



Addressing Social Risk Factors

Social risk factors profoundly shape health outcomes, accounting for up to 80% of a person's overall health and well-being—far exceeding the impact of medical care alone. Chicago hospitals are leading the way by implementing comprehensive social determinants of health (SDOH) screening across care sites to identify challenges like transportation barriers, food insecurity, literacy gaps and exposure to violence. Through this systematic screening, healthcare providers can uncover root causes of poor health while connecting patients directly to vital community resources and support services, ultimately driving better health outcomes for vulnerable populations.



Taking on Food Insecurity

Chicago hospitals are taking a comprehensive approach to combat food insecurity among patients through innovative screening and intervention programs. During both routine visits and inpatient hospital stays, healthcare providers systematically screen patients for food insecurity and connect those with needs to immediate resources, like emergency food assistance, and help them enroll in ongoing SNAP benefits. As an example, one 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.



Equalizing Access to Fresh Foods

When a Garfield Park supermarket closed in 2021, a Chicago hospital stepped in to fill the gap and distribute free food weekly to residents in the neighborhood. Additionally, 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 served over 9,000 families and 36,000 individuals. This hospital program strives to erase the negative health effects resulting from unequal access to affordable, nutritious food and provide a long-term solution to food insecurity.