

## **Health & Medicine Policy Research Group**

### **2021 Policy and Governance Priorities**

Health & Medicine's policy priorities advance our core [values and mission](#) of health equity through research, education, advocacy, and collaborative action.

We support communities by seeking redress of root causes of health inequities, focusing on policy, governance, and practice changes at the structural level. Our work is grounded in the knowledge that structural racism, class injustice, and other forms of oppression are the fundamental causes of health inequities, which are the unjust, remediable differences in health status and outcomes across different populations and communities. Policies and systems that shape the distribution of money, power, and resources stratify access to the social determinants of health—the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. We use equity, human rights, and trauma-informed frameworks to advocate for progressive change. We seek to advance equity in areas such as housing, environmental and economic justice, and education which enhance wellbeing, and contribute to growing national movements for social justice and health equity.

Based in Chicago, we are an independent public health think tank committed to resisting and responding to reactionary and discriminatory local, regional, and statewide, and federal policies and actions that have vast negative impacts on communities throughout Illinois and the nation.

This year's policy agenda is informed by our history and current work, and importantly the experience of COVID-19 in Illinois.

#### **Economic Justice**

- Advocate for federal, state, and local budgets that prioritize and protect the foundational supports all people need to reach their potential, such as healthy food, a safe place to live, quality schools, accessible and affordable health and behavioral health services and financial stability.
- Support workforce equity across the economy and encourage healthcare, nonprofit, and public health sectors and organizations to leverage their large size to lead by example by: encouraging unionization; supporting worker protections, equitable and transparent pay and benefits; addressing trauma; preventing and mitigating burnout; and supporting equitable practices like paid internships.
- Support the growing movement to enact a Universal Basic Income.
- Advance efforts for paid family, parental leave, and universal pre-school and childcare as important steps toward economic justice and security for Illinois families.
- Promote the replacement of Illinois' flat income tax with a progressive tax that will lower rates for working and middle-class families and ensure sufficient revenue for the services and supports our state needs to thrive now and into the future.
- Protect and strengthen programs and policies like SNAP, TANF, Baby Bonds, and the earned income tax credit that help people stay out of poverty.

#### **Public Health & Healthcare**

- Advocate for a fully funded public health system, employing lessons from history and Covid-19.
- Champion efforts to ensure that all people—particularly undocumented and other marginalized populations—have access to safe, affirming, and welcoming healthcare and social services.
- Contribute to efforts to support universal health insurance coverage and a health system where healthcare is honored as a human right.
- Develop and advance a coordinated approach to publicly provided free and reduced-cost care to ensure all patients receive appropriate and timely care.
- Support healthcare providers and health institutions to adopt and advance trauma-informed policies and practices which enhance patient care and improve wellbeing.

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- Lead development of a statewide strategic action plan on aging to develop a vision of how our state can comprehensively support and address older adults' health and wellbeing.
- Advocate for decarceration while also advocating for improvements in healthcare in carceral settings.
- Track Medicaid reform efforts and implementation of the Omnibus bill and redetermination rules to ensure the state follows legislation aimed at addressing gaps in coverage.
- Advocate for a strong, fully-funded Cook County Health system, a critical arm of the health safety net.
- Initiate a process for constructive, proactive planning for health improvement, including the health safety net in Cook County, incorporating community voice and the strategic needs of the region.
- Promote policies that advance prescription drug affordability.
- Support reversal of the Free Care Rule in Illinois, allowing school districts to bill Medicaid for all services provided to Medicaid-enrolled students.
- Support the equitable distribution of vaccines for COVID-19 and advance an equity focus in other healthcare and public health responses to the pandemic.

### **Health Workforce**

- Champion policies and programs that help diversify the health workforce at all points along the career trajectory from pre-K through health professions training and education to develop our needed healthcare workforce and rebuild the public health infrastructure.
- Reduce barriers to employment, including stronger record expungement laws, fully-funded MAP grants, and transportation that links people to jobs.
- Advocate for the expansion of scholarship, loan repayment and forgiveness, and debt cancellation programs to increase accessibility and promote diversity in the health workforce.
- Ensure the frontline health workforce has access to a thrivable wage and the ability to progress along the health careers ladder.
- Support policies that preserve and protect worker safety and health.
- Promote policy and practice that supports interdisciplinary healthcare teams and health professionals' commitment to health equity.
- Support a robust and adequately funded long-term care workforce, including unpaid caregivers, to support our growing aging population and people with disabilities.
- Advance comprehensive review of existing policies and gaps to support community health workers in Illinois, including certification and reimbursement and career ladders for entry level healthcare workers
- Support policy that ensures healthcare and other essential workers have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and workplace safety.

### **Thriving & Equitable Communities**

- Support the acceleration of [defunding and abolition of the police](#), decarceration of jails and prisons, and elimination of gang databases and other police powers. Reimagine public safety and support shifting of public funds from the criminal-legal system to equitable investments into community health and wellbeing.
- Support the use of a "health equity in all policies" approach in the development and implementation of public policy and public health improvement plans.
- Promote and advance efforts to build a trauma-informed Chicago and Illinois (see our [trauma-informed policymaking tool](#)).
- Support implementation of Healthy Chicago 2025, and contribute to the public health sector adopting root cause analysis and both anti-racist and equity-oriented planning and policy.
- Advocate that health equity and public health are prioritized in the citywide *We Will Chicago* plan.
- Engage City leaders to commit to making Chicago a Livable City for seniors, disabled people, and thereby for all Chicagoans.
- Advance healthy, safe, affordable, equitable, and accessible housing policy, including proactive rental inspections, lifting the ban on rent control, and just-cause eviction policies.

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- Champion the health sector's role in advancing equitable, high-quality, trauma-informed, and fully-funded public education, including the expansion of STEAM programming.
- Support policies and narrative for harm reduction and public health approaches to preventing overdose from opioids and other drugs, including safe consumption sites and defelonization.
- Engage in efforts to ensure reproductive rights, safeguard maternal child health, and diversify birthing options in Illinois, including advocating for freestanding birth centers where there are acute shortages of birthing options.
- Advance the Chicago HEAL Initiative (Hospital Engagement, Action, and Leadership) to enhance hospitals' role in violence prevention through workforce development, creating economic opportunities in the neighborhoods these hospitals serve, and healing trauma.
- Promote equity, transparency, and democracy in redistricting and efforts to eliminate prison gerrymandering.