

HEALTH & MEDICINE

POLICY RESEARCH GROUP

Board of Directors

Founding Chairman

Quentin D. Young, MD

President

Steven K. Rothschild, MD*

Immediate Past President

Claudia Fegan, MD*†

Vice President

Suzanne Carlberg-Racich,
PhD, MSPH*

Treasurer

Lon Berkeley**†

Secretary

Jennifer McGowan-Tomke,
MPH*

Board of Directors

Karen Aguirre, MPH*

Misty Drake, MA

Joe Feinglass, PhD

Michael Gelder†

Robyn L. Golden, MA, LCSW

Amy C. Lulich, MHA

Rene David Luna, MA

Ray Mendez, MD, MA

Yadira Montoya, MSPH

Linda Rae Murray, MD, MPH

Olyvia Phillips, MPH, MBA

Elena Quintana, PhD

Rachel Reichlin, MPH, MSN,

CTN-B

Gayle Riedmann, CNM

Melissa Simon, MD, MPH

Kai Tao, ND, MPH, CNM

Mildred Williamson, PhD, MSW*

Tom Wilson*

Joseph Zaroni, PhD, MILR

Executive Director

Margie Schaps, MPH

*Executive Committee Member

†Past President

August 29, 2024

To:

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle

Cook County Board of Commissioners

Kanako Ishida Musselwhite, Budget Director

We urge you to increase funding for the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), which has long been underfunded and faces significant budget reductions as COVID-related grants expire. [America's public health system is underfunded nationwide](#), especially for CCDPH, causing it to be understaffed and under-resourced.

We respectfully request an *increase* in the Cook County Corporate Fund appropriation for CCDPH in the amount of \$23 million starting in FY2025—to a total of about \$46 million—with plans to increase this further in future budgets.

Suburban Cook County has staggering health inequities with a [15-year gap](#) in life expectancy comparing the highest to lowest ranked municipalities, with a range of 87.7 years in Kenilworth and 72.2 years in Dixmoor. Coupled with racial and class health inequities across virtually every disease, the reality of vast health inequities means both untold suffering and thousands of early deaths annually. This is unacceptable and requires a stronger response.

The problem of health inequities is not insurmountable, and indeed, health inequities can be reduced and eliminated. CCDPH is the lead agency in suburban Cook County for safeguarding public health and responding to health inequities.

When COVID-19 upended our lives, CCDPH did not have the necessary capacity to fully respond. Major federal funding eventually helped, but hiring, onboarding, and training new staff during an emergency response is difficult and takes time, and in many cases, CCDPH had to contract for services. Furthermore, COVID-19 remains a deadly threat, and it is neither the first nor the last pandemic or other public health emergency we will face.

To respond to such deadly emergencies, it is essential to the well-being of all Cook County residents that our health department have sufficient funding and staffing. In the long term, these investments will save lives, reduce suffering from sickness and injury, and support greater future thriving for all our residents. Notably, a similar request for an increased appropriation is being made of Mayor Johnson and the Chicago City Council regarding the Chicago Department of Public Health, which is likewise underfunded and understaffed.

Based on an earlier analysis that Health & Medicine Policy Research Group conducted on 2019 municipal budgets, CCDPH had the lowest overall total funding per capita in a sample of six local health departments. A significant cause of this is that CCDPH receives a small amount of local funding: \$5.21 per capita in 2019, a tragically low level of local investment in public health (2019 year was chosen to measure pre-pandemic funding). This analysis is available by request.

Still, the need for better public health services is real, and our elected officials must find or develop the revenue to fully fund CCDPH.

Additional local funding should also be designed to provide appropriate funding flexibility to CCDPH since the vast majority of its current budget is from categorical grants, which means such funds can't be flexibly used or redirected to meet emerging health needs of suburban Cook County residents.

Examples of some areas that need expansion are public health data infrastructure, harm reduction, vaccination services, policy, community health assessment and planning, community health workers, and strengthening the response to maternal and child health inequities. Critically, these are examples, not an exhaustive list. We encourage you to work with CCDPH leadership to determine the best uses of additional County Corporate Fund dollars for public health, again, while maintaining appropriate flexibility so that CCDPH can be nimble and responsive to the dynamic nature of public health threats.

What must come with increased funding for CCDPH is faster hiring. The current high vacancy rate and slow pace of hiring at CCDPH is mostly a political challenge due to bureaucratic hurdles—with solutions that require action, such as providing all the human resources support CCDPH needs and making jobs more competitive with other employers in the public health sector. The County must cut the red tape and get this fixed.

In summary, CCDPH has been underfunded and understaffed for decades. Suburban Cook County has vast health inequities that should prompt a much stronger public health response than we have seen thus far. Virtually all residents are harmed by the insufficient capacity at CCDPH, both when a new public health emergency occurs and because health inequities harm us all, albeit differently.

You have critical roles to fulfill as public health protectors. To strengthen Cook County's public health staffing and infrastructure, we again respectfully request that you, President Preckwinkle, and County Commissioners appropriate an additional \$23 million from the County Corporate Fund to CCDPH in FY2025, totaling \$46M in local funding. This investment will benefit all Cook County residents and support people's health and well-being.

Sincerely,

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Health & Medicine Policy Research Group | 10. Chicago Jobs Council |
| 2. AFGE Local 704 | 11. Chicago Survivors |
| 3. AIDS Foundation Chicago | 12. Chicago United for Equity |
| 4. Black Researchers Collective | 13. Chicago Volunteer Doulas |
| 5. Black Treatment Advocates Network | 14. Chicago Women Take Action |
| 6. Brighton Park Neighborhood Council | 15. Chicago Women's AIDS Project |
| 7. Chicago Center for Health and Environment | 16. Chicago Workers Collaborative |
| 8. Chicago Family Doulas, LLC | 17. Chicagoland Healthcare Workforce Collaborative |
| 9. Chicago Housing Justice Coalition | |

18. Children's Best Interest Project
19. Chinese American Service League
20. Collaborative for Community Wellness
21. Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County
22. Community Organizing and Family Issues
23. Complete Communications, Inc.
24. Cornerstone Community Outreach
25. Cook County College Teachers Union
26. Deborah's Place
27. Employment & Employer Services
28. Equity in Health Advisors Network
29. EverThrive Illinois
30. Every Block a Village Community Stakeholders
31. Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation
32. Health in the Arts Program, UIC School of Public Health
33. HRDI Human Resources Development Institute
34. Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
35. Illinois Disability Housing Justice
36. Illinois Psychiatric Society
37. Illinois Public Health Association
38. Illinois Public Health Institute
39. Increase The Peace Chicago
40. Institute of Medicine of Chicago
41. Israel's Gifts of Hope
42. Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
43. Kaizen Health
44. Kindu 4 Humanity
45. Lawrence Hall Youth Services
46. Legal Council for Health Justice
47. Mental Health America of Illinois
48. Metropolitan Asian Family Services
49. Metropolitan Tenants Organization
50. Midwest Asian Health Association
51. NAMI Chicago
52. NAMI Illinois
53. NAMI South Suburbs of Chicago
54. National Association of Social Workers - Illinois Chapter
55. Nehemiah Trinity Rising
56. Northside Action for Justice
57. Northwest Center
58. ONE Northside
59. Open Communities
60. Padres Angeles community organización LV
61. People's Response Network
62. Phalanx Family Services
63. PODER
64. POWER-PAC IL
65. scaleLIT
66. Shriver Center on Poverty Law
67. Sinai Urban Health Institute
68. Sokana Collective Birth Justice Doula Agency and Training Academy
69. Southside Together Organizing for Power
70. Southwest Organizing Project
71. Start Early
72. The HAP Foundation
73. The Resurrection Project
74. The Southwest Collective
75. Thresholds
76. Trilogy Inc
77. Universidad Popular
78. University of Chicago Department of Psychiatry
79. University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health
80. West Suburban Midwife Associates, Ltd

Contact:

Wesley Epplin, MPH, Policy Director
 Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
wepplin@hmprg.org 312-372-4292, x25

CC:

Dr. Lamar Hasbrouck, COO, Cook County Department of Public Health
 Cook County Health Board of Directors