

# HEALTH & MEDICINE

POLICY RESEARCH GROUP

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August 29, 2024

To:

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson

Chicago City Council Members

Deputy Mayor Jennifer Johnson

Annette Guzman, Budget Director

We urge you to increase funding for the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), which has long been underfunded and faces significant reductions as COVID-related grants expire. [America's public health system is underfunded nationwide](#), especially in Chicago, where our local health department is understaffed and under-resourced. CDPH receives only around 8% of its funding from Chicago's Corporate Fund—an insufficient amount, given the Department's broad responsibilities.

**We respectfully request an increase in the City of Chicago Corporate Fund appropriation for CDPH in the amount of \$25 million starting in FY2025—to a total of about \$101 million in local funding—with plans to increase this further in future budgets.**

Chicago has staggering health inequities, with an [11-year gap in life expectancy](#) between Black and white Chicagoans. Statistics such as this one are not just a singular number. 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. CDPH is the lead agency in Chicago for safeguarding public health and responding to health inequities.

Primarily due to underfunding, when COVID-19 upended our lives, CDPH 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, CDPH had to contract for services, which often is not ideal. 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 Chicagoans that our health department has 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 Chicagoans. Notably, a similar request for

an increased appropriation is being made of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and President Preckwinkle regarding the Cook County Department of Public Health, which is likewise underfunded and understaffed.

To understand just how much CDPH's capacity has been depleted, consider that in 2001, the Department had 1,861 budgeted positions; however, in 2019, it had only 588 budgeted positions, a 68 percent reduction—and fewer than 500 of these positions were filled. Based on national averages, CDPH should have at least 1100 funded positions. Now, CDPH is facing the reality that the COVID-19 relief dollars will expire in 2026. This will be an approximately 60% budget cut from CDPH's peak in 2022.

We recognize the significant budget challenges the City faces. Still, the need for better public health services is real, and our elected officials must find or develop the revenue to fully fund CDPH.

This additional local funding should also be designed to provide appropriate funding flexibility to CDPH since about 90% of the agency's current budget is from categorical grants; this means such funds can't be flexibly used or redirected to meet emerging health needs of Chicagoans.

Some examples of areas that need expansion are public health data infrastructure, health inspections of food establishments, harm reduction, violence prevention, Healthy Chicago Equity Zones, community health assessment and improvement planning, community health workers, and strengthening the response to maternal and child health inequities. Critically, these are examples, not an exhaustive list. We encourage Mayor Johnson and City Council leaders to work with CDPH to determine the best uses of additional City Corporate Fund dollars for public health, again, while maintaining appropriate flexibility so that CDPH can be nimble and responsive to the dynamic nature of public health threats.

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

In summary, CDPH has been underfunded and understaffed for decades. Chicago has vast health inequities that should prompt a much stronger public health response than we have seen thus far. Virtually all Chicagoans are harmed by the insufficient capacity at CDPH, not solely but especially 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 Chicago's public health staffing and infrastructure, we again respectfully request that you, Mayor Johnson, and members of City Council appropriate an additional \$25 million from the City Corporate Fund to CDPH in FY2025, totaling about \$101 million in local funding. This investment will benefit all Chicagoans and support people's health and well-being.

Sincerely,

1. Health & Medicine Policy Research Group
2. AFGE Local 704
3. AIDS Foundation Chicago
4. Black Researchers Collective
5. Black Treatment Advocates Network
6. Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
7. Chicago Center for Health and Environment
8. Chicago Family Doulas, LLC

9. Chicago Housing Justice Coalition
10. Chicago Jobs Council
11. Chicago Survivors
12. Chicago United for Equity
13. Chicago Volunteer Doulas
14. Chicago Women Take Action
15. Chicago Women's AIDS Project
16. Chicago Workers Collaborative
17. Chicagoland Healthcare Workforce Collaborative
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

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CC: Olusimbo "Simbo" Ige, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Public Health  
 Chicago Board of Health