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Sent August 29, 2024

(This version of the letter lists organizations signed on as of November 11, 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,

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| 1. Health & Medicine Policy Research Group | 9. Brighton Park Neighborhood Council |
| 2. Access Living | 10. Chicago Center for Health and Environment |
| 3. AFGE Local 704 | 11. Chicago Family Doulas, LLC |
| 4. AIDS Foundation Chicago | 12. Chicago Housing Justice Coalition |
| 5. Alternatives Youth | 13. Chicago Jobs Council |
| 6. ASI | 14. Chicago Survivors |
| 7. Black Researchers Collective | 15. Chicago United for Equity |
| 8. Black Treatment Advocates Network | 16. Chicago Volunteer Doulas |

17. Chicago Women Take Action
18. Chicago Women's AIDS Project
19. Chicago Workers Collaborative
20. Chicagoland Healthcare Workforce Collaborative
21. Children's Best Interest Project
22. Chinese American Service League
23. Collaborative for Community Wellness
24. Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County
25. Community Organizing and Family Issues
26. Complete Communications, Inc.
27. Cornerstone Community Outreach
28. Cook County College Teachers Union
29. Deborah's Place
30. DePaul University Master of Public Health Program
31. Employment & Employer Services
32. Equity in Health Advisors Network
33. EverThrive Illinois
34. Every Block a Village Community Stakeholders
35. Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation
36. Health in the Arts Program, UIC School of Public Health
37. HRDI Human Resources Development Institute
38. Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
39. Illinois Disability Housing Justice
40. Illinois Psychiatric Society
41. Illinois Public Health Association
42. Illinois Public Health Institute
43. Increase The Peace Chicago
44. Institute of Medicine of Chicago
45. Israel's Gifts of Hope
46. Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
47. Kaizen Health
48. Kindu 4 Humanity
49. Lawrence Hall Youth Services
50. Legal Council for Health Justice
51. Mental Health America of Illinois
52. Metropolitan Asian Family Services
53. Metropolitan Tenants Organization
54. Michael Reese Health Trust
55. Midwest Asian Health Association
56. NAMI Chicago
57. NAMI Illinois
58. NAMI South Suburbs of Chicago
59. National Association of Social Workers - Illinois Chapter
60. Nehemiah Trinity Rising
61. Northside Action for Justice
62. Northwest Center
63. ONE Northside
64. Open Communities
65. Padres Angeles community organizaci3n LV
66. People's Response Network
67. Phalanx Family Services
68. PODER
69. POWER-PAC IL
70. scaleLIT
71. Shriver Center on Poverty Law
72. Sinai Urban Health Institute
73. Sokana Collective Birth Justice Doula Agency and Training Academy
74. Southside Together Organizing for Power
75. Southwest Organizing Project
76. Start Early
77. The HAP Foundation
78. The Resurrection Project
79. The Southwest Collective
80. Thresholds
81. Trilogy Inc
82. Ujimaa Medics
83. Universidad Popular
84. University of Chicago Department of Psychiatry
85. University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health
86. West Suburban Midwife Associates, Ltd

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Health & Medicine Policy Research Group

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