

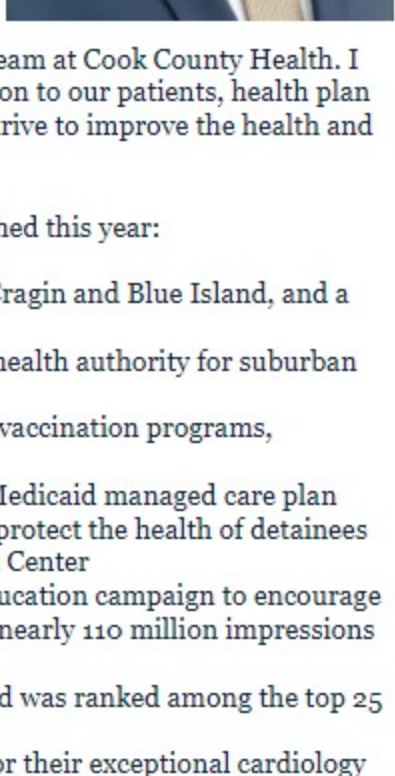
SYSTEM NEWS

December 2021

Letter from the CEO

Dear Cook County Health friends and partners,

With the holiday season upon us and 2021 coming to a close, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on and honor all we have done in the past year.



This week marks my one-year anniversary as CEO of Cook County Health. I joined CCH during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, before vaccines were available and when much of our region was still in lockdown. It was a unique time to be in health care, racing to contain a deadly virus, protecting our patients and staff, and also striving to provide people the ongoing primary and specialty care they need to stay healthy.

Even with the challenges presented by the pandemic, I am proud of all we have achieved in the past year. I know our successes would not have been attainable without the dedicated team at Cook County Health. I continue to be inspired by their expertise, resilience, and dedication to our patients, health plan members and residents. It is an honor to serve with them as we strive to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Here are just some of the highlights the CCH team has accomplished this year:

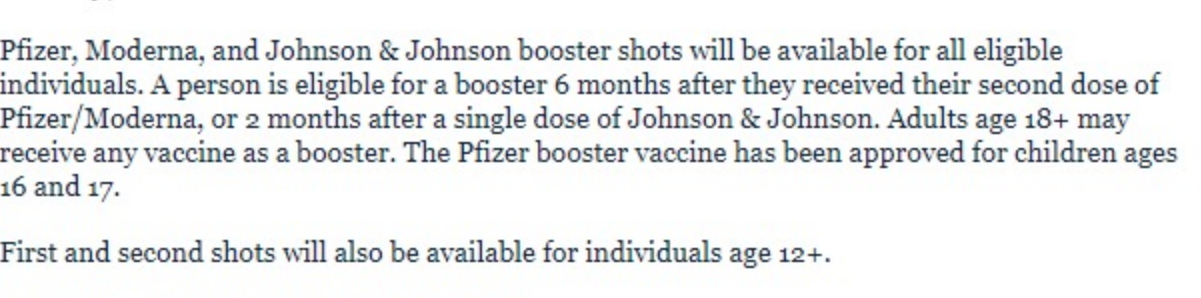
- Celebrated the opening of new health centers in Belmont-Cragin and Blue Island, and a dialysis center at Provident Hospital
- Worked to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic as the public health authority for suburban Cook County
- Stood up one of the nation's largest community COVID-19 vaccination programs, administering more than 918,000 doses
- Served more than 400,000 CountyCare members, CCH's Medicaid managed care plan
- Developed CDC-recognized COVID-19 mitigation plans to protect the health of detainees at the Cook County Jail and Juvenile Temporary Detention Center
- Launched an award-winning multimedia advertising and education campaign to encourage people to get vaccinated against COVID-19, which has had nearly 110 million impressions since launch
- Stroger Hospital received an "A" grade for health equity and was ranked among the top 25 in the nation for inclusivity by the Lowy Institute
- Recognition for our team by American Heart Association for their exceptional cardiology care, and by *U.S. News & World Report* as a high-performing organization for heart attack and heart failure, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia care
- Expanded of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and HIV testing at two community health centers

I remain grateful to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, the Cook County Health Board of Directors, and our many partners for their support. It has been a privilege to be entrusted with the future of this storied public health system and its historic mission to care for all. I am looking forward to the year ahead and all we can achieve together.

Sincerely,

Israel Rocha
CEO

COVID-19 Information and Guidance



What the New COVID-19 Variant Means for Cook County



Dr. Gregory Huhn, infectious disease physician and Cook County Health COVID-19 vaccine coordinator, shares the latest information on the COVID omicron variant.

More than 15 states, including Illinois, have reported cases of the COVID omicron variant in recent days. The variant has more than 30 mutations on its spike protein, the component that allows the virus to penetrate and infect other cells in the body. While research is ongoing, early reports show that the variant is more contagious but symptoms may be relatively more minor.

Preliminary research has also shown that vaccines, particularly boosters, remain the best measure to help avoid severe disease and hospitalizations in those who get COVID, including those who contract the omicron variant.

Other precautions such as masking, staying six feet apart and hand hygiene also help in warding off the virus. Finally, as people consider getting together for holiday events, it is recommended that you keep your gatherings small and consider getting tested (whether with an at-home test or a test done by a medical provider) before celebrating with others.

The virus looks for opportunities to elude our defenses so it can continue to mutate. We cannot let our guard down. We need to remain vigilant in our fight against COVID. The last two years have been challenging. This holiday season, let's take extra steps to protect the health of ourselves and those around us, and find a renewed energy to help us move past this pandemic.

Booster Vaccine Events Sunday, December 12

The State of Illinois and Cook County Health are hosting three community vaccination events on **Sunday, December 12**.

Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson booster shots will be available for all eligible individuals. A person is eligible for a booster 6 months after they received their second dose of Pfizer/Moderna, or 2 months after a single dose of Johnson & Johnson. Adults age 18+ may receive any vaccine as a booster. The Pfizer booster vaccine has been approved for children ages 16 and 17.

First and second shots will also be available for individuals age 12+.

No appointment is necessary. Just walk in!

Arlington Heights Health Center
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
3250 N. Arlington Heights Rd., Suite 300, Arlington Heights, IL 60004

North Riverside Health Center
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
1800 S. Harlem Ave., Suite A, North Riverside, IL 60546

Blue Island Health Center
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
12757 S. Western Ave., Blue Island, IL 60406

You are not required to show a photo ID or insurance card to get vaccinated.

With the new omicron variant circulating, booster shots are more important than ever before to increase your body's ability to prevent a COVID-19 infection. Getting vaccinated can help protect your health and the health of your family, friends and community.

Cook County Health Vaccination Locations

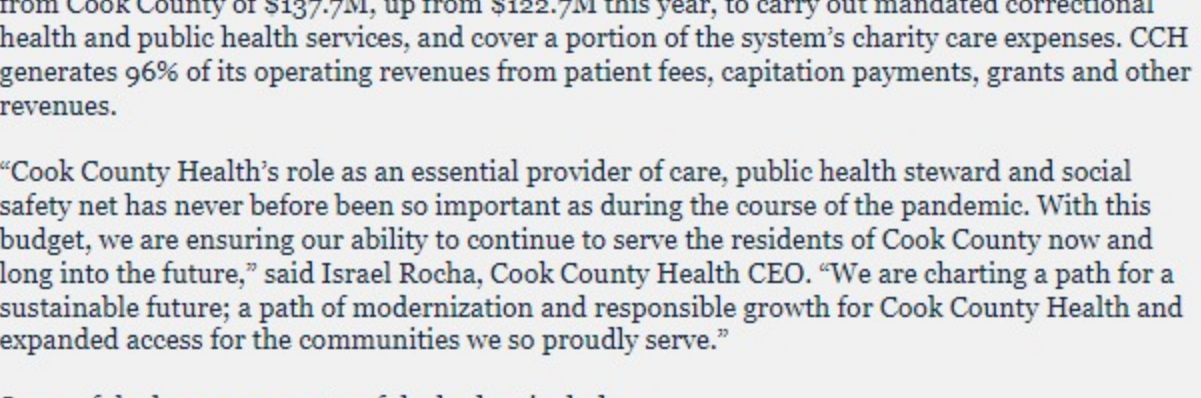
As the pandemic continues and new variants of COVID-19 emerge, it is more important than ever to get vaccinated.

Getting vaccinated protects not just your health, but the health of those around you, including people who are most vulnerable to severe illness or cannot get vaccinated.

The vaccines are safe and effective in preventing infection, serious disease, hospitalization and death. The Pfizer vaccine recently received full approval from the FDA, reinforcing that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe.

You can walk in to any Cook County Health site to get vaccinated, or make an appointment at vaccine.cookcountyil.gov. To find a CCH location nearest you, visit myshot.cookcounty.gov or download the flyers below. The Cook County Department of Public Health's [website](https://myshot.cookcounty.gov) offers additional sites, as well as information for homebound individuals, and how to host a mobile vaccine event.

Cook County, Religious Leaders Come Together to Urge Vaccinations During the Holiday, Winter Seasons



Area religious leaders joined Cook County officials to show support for the COVID-19 vaccine as a matter of faith and science. Left to right: Sheikh Hassan Aliy, Imam of The Mecca Center; Rabbi Shoshannah Conover, Temple Shalom of Chicago; Dr. Gregory Huhn, Cook County Health Vaccine Coordinator; Pastor Barry Tidwell, Rain or Shine Baptist Church; Apostle Carl White, Victory Christian International Ministries; Dr. Claudia Fegan, Cook County Health Chief Medical Officer; Israel Rocha, Cook County Health CEO; Dr. Rachel Rubin, Cook County Department of Public Health Co-Lead; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle; Rev. William Grogan, Chicago Archdiocese; Father Stamatios Sfikas, Annunciation Cathedral.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Health medical experts and local religious leaders gathered on December 2 to discuss the importance of vaccinations during the winter and holiday seasons.

"With the holiday season upon us and cold weather setting in, it's essential that everyone get their shot," President Preckwinkle said. "And if you've gotten vaccinated, get your booster."

"Our doctors have said the vaccine is safe and our faith leaders say it is an action you can do completely within your practice of religion," said Israel Rocha, Cook County Health CEO. "We are battling the virus of misinformation. Our goal is to empower you with the **information** to be safe."

Click [here](#) to read more about the event.

Cook County Health Expands PrEP and HIV Services to Belmont Cragin and North Riverside Health Centers As Demand Increases Across County

Cook County Health and Cook County HIV Integrated Programs (CCHIP) are expanding the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) program – a preventive HIV medication used for people who are at higher risk of contracting the virus – to two community health centers in Belmont Cragin and North Riverside. This will help accommodate the growing need for high-impact HIV prevention services.

"Expanding these programs is essential to ensuring equitable access to HIV care and supporting the Getting to Zero Illinois plan to end the HIV epidemic by 2030," said Israel Rocha, Cook County Health CEO. "We are committing to making it available across Cook County, especially in communities that have historically been underserved."

This new expansion will help Cook County Health increase access to services in areas disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS, including communities of color, and provide specialty care for patients closer to home.

Expanded services will include access to free or low-cost PrEP treatment, HIV testing, health education, medical monitoring, testing for sexually transmitted infections, supportive services to address social risk factors of health and greater accessibility to protection such as condoms.

"Our team focuses on reducing stigma through patient education and engagement, as well as offering PrEP in the primary care setting to help normalize the discussion of HIV and reduce barriers to testing, prevention and treatment," said Dr. Daniel Vittum, lead physician for Cook County Health's North Riverside Health Center. "Our initial successes give us hope that we can not only reduce, but eliminate HIV transmission in our communities."

Click [here](#) to read more.

Cook County Health Recognitions and Awards

Cook County Health is proud to celebrate team members who have recently received recognition for their outstanding care and leadership.

- **Dr. Sean Bryant**, Attending Physician in Emergency Medicine and Assistant Director for CCH's Toxicology Fellowship Program, has been elected to the Board of Trustees for the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology. The AACT is one of the two major clinical toxicology organizations in the country, and Dr. Bryant was elected to the prestigious position by a vote of his peers.

- **Dr. Tarlan Hedayati**, Attending Physician in Emergency Medicine, is the recipient of the University of Illinois Tamara O'Neal Health Justice Service Award for her continued dedication to medical education and addressing topics of social emergency medicine. Dr. Hedayati has devoted her career to working on the frontlines of patient care, taking pride in treating all patients regardless of immigration status or ability to pay, and is committed to the medical education and training of future medical providers.

- **Dr. Orlanda Mackie**, Chair of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, is one of seven awardees of the 2021 National Companionate Caregivers of the Year Award from the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare, a national nonprofit dedicated to putting compassion at the heart of health care. The Award recognizes extraordinary health care professionals from across the country who display exceptional compassion in the care of their patients, colleagues and communities.

- **Dr. Lakshmi Warrior**, Chair of Systems, is one of 22 women leaders representing public and private health care networks, state departments of health, payers and academic medical centers across the country who were welcomed into the Carol Emmott Fellowship Class of 2022, and she is one of four women to be awarded full scholarships. The Carol Emmott Fellowship is a prestigious, 14-month experience for exceptional, innovative women leaders who are making lasting change in their communities and institutions, and serving as exemplary advocates for equity in the workplace and beyond.

- At the Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative's ninth annual conference on October 28, 2021, Cook County Health was recognized with two awards – Birth Equity Outstanding Launch Award and Promoting Vaginal Birth Recognition Award. The Collaborative is part of a statewide effort to address the significant racial disparities in health outcomes that exist for pregnant and postpartum patients. Cook County Health OB/GYN and Maternal Child Health teams at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital have been working tirelessly to reduce maternal disparities, promote equity and help all mothers and babies thrive.

Cook County Health Budget Approved for FY2022

Last month, the Cook County Board of Commissioners passed the County's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY2022) budget, including Cook County Health's \$3.8B budget. CCH's budget was approved by the CCH Board of Directors on August 27, 2021. The County's fiscal year began on December 1, 2021.

CCH's budget contemplates returning to pre-pandemic volumes, enhancing specialty care and further expanding health services at Provident Hospital. The budget includes a tax allocation from Cook County of \$137.7M, up from \$122.7M this year, to carry out mandated correctional health and public health services, and cover a portion of the system's charity care expenses. CCH generates 96% of its operating revenues from patient fees, capitation payments, grants and other revenues.

"Cook County Health's role as an essential provider of care, public health steward and social safety net has never before been so important as during the course of the pandemic. With this budget, we are ensuring our ability to continue to serve the residents of Cook County now and long into the future," said Israel Rocha, Cook County Health CEO. "We are charting a path for a sustainable future; a path of modernization and responsible growth for Cook County Health and expanded access for the communities we so proudly serve."

Some of the key components of the budget include:

- Investing in critical service lines, including cardiology, neurology and oncology;
- Enhancing health care services on the South Side by expanding hemodialysis, ophthalmology and surgical services, reestablishing ICU operations, expanding med/surg capacity and restoring ambulance detaches at Provident Hospital;
- Caring for an increased number of detainees at Cook County Jail (currently more than 6,000, up from 4,000 in April 2020), providing COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, and accommodating COVID-19 distancing requirements that remain in place;
- Establishing an Equity and Inclusion Office and Strategic Planning and Implementation Office;
- Projecting monthly average CountyCare membership of 390,000 and growth in MoreCare (Medicare Advantage product) membership;
- Creating a \$10M investment fund contingent on excess revenue generation;
- Identifying \$12M in contract savings;
- Establishing a total Incurred But Not Received (IBNR) reserve of \$50M, a best practice to ensure timely payment of providers by CountyCare;
- Increasing FTEs by net 780 new positions, most in nursing and key clinical and operational areas.

CCH expects to spend \$384M on charity care next year, increasing from \$360 in 2021 as patient volumes continue to rebound. The current emergency Medicaid expansion and suspension of redetermination continue to allow for essential health coverage for many CCH patients.

Additionally, some CCH patients are expected to gain health coverage in 2022 thanks to the State of Illinois' expanded Medicaid program for 55–64-year-old residents who meet income requirements (138% FPL) regardless of immigration status.

Membership in CountyCare, CCH's Medicaid managed care health plan, is expected to average 390,000 in FY2022, generating more than \$2.6 billion in revenue. CountyCare revenue pays for care rendered to its members by both CCH and non-CCH providers. CountyCare is the largest Medicaid managed care plan in Cook County.

Comment on Illinois' Healthcare Transformation Collaborative Applications

In March 2021, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker signed the Healthcare Transformation Collaborative initiative into law, which allocated funding to health care and community collaboratives demonstrating innovative visions and equity-focused solutions in support of reimagining health care in Illinois. More than \$94M was awarded to the **first round of collaboratives**, including Cook County Health and its partners working on the West Side Health Equity Collaborative. A second round of collaborative proposals are currently under review and available for public comment through December 20, 2021. [Click here](#) to review the applications and provide comments.

Cook County Health Is Hiring!

Cook County Health in the News

Daily Herald: [What health officials know -- and don't know -- about omicron](#)

WBBM: [Be on guard as Omicron looms, official says: 'There cannot be COVID fatigue'](#)

Chicago Tribune: [From tearful interviews to summoning ambulances, contact tracing 'takes an emotional and psychological toll.' Cook County is offering mental health support.](#)

Crain's Chicago Business: [One year in, new Cook County Health CEO focuses beyond pandemic](#)

ABC 7 Chicago: [Chicago health officials working to make at-home rapid COVID tests free and accessible](#)

Block Club Chicago: [All Chicago Adults Can Get COVID-19 Booster Shots](#)

Univision: [¿Quieres vacunarte contra el coronavirus o recibir el refuerzo? En el condado puedes hacerlo sin cita](#)

WTTW: [Cook County Officials, Faith Leaders Urge COVID-19 Vaccinations, Boosters](#)

Visit our website at cookcountyhealth.org

If you would like to invite a representative from CCH to attend a community event, please send an email to events@cookcountyhhs.org.

To provide feedback on CCH Community News, update your contact information, or unsubscribe, please email Marcelino Garcia, Director of Community Affairs, at mgarcia6@cookcountyhhs.org.