



COOK COUNTY HEALTH

DEBRA D. CAREY
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Addendum to slide deck)
October 30, 2020

Activities and Announcements

Recent Events

- On October 1, 2020, Debra Carey, Interim CEO, participated in a roundtable discussion through the Michael Reese Health Trust focused on health and housing systems change efforts occurring through the Flexible Housing Pool.
- On October 7, 2020, CCH hosted a press conference to discuss the potential impact should the Affordable Care Act be repealed by the US Supreme Court. Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Congressman Bobby Rush (IL-1), Congresswoman Robin Kelly (IL-2), Congressman Sean Casten, (IL-6), Congressman Danny Davis (IL-7), Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-8), Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-9). See attachment.
- On October 28, 2020, Debra Carey, Interim CEO, moderated a panel discussion hosted by the Cook County Health Foundation Associate Board titled Prioritizing Health in All Policies (HiAP). The panel participants included Laticia Reyes-Nash, Director of Programmatic Services & Innovation at CCH; Steve Brown, Director of Preventive Emergency Medicine at UI Health and McKinley Nelson, Founder of ProjectsWish.

Supporting Patients Experiencing Homelessness

CCH Medical Respite Center (MRC): Together with Housing Forward and Cook County Economic Development, CCH is creating additional recuperative care capacity in Suburban Cook County. The MRC is the continuation of our COVID isolation facility for homeless patients at the South Side YMCA in the Spring. The MRC provides COVID isolation support to patients experiencing homelessness. The Center also supports patients in need of safe space to recover from post-acute care hospitalization. The MRC serves patients experiencing homelessness from Stroger and Provident Hospitals, homeless residents identified through the CCDPH Contact Tracing and residents exiting post-acute hospitalization in Suburban Cook County. CountyCare invested in the MRC as part of their HFS Pay for Performance community investment plan. The MRC will open in November in Oak Park.

Chicago Homeless and Health Response Group for Equity (CHHRGE): CCH is an active member of CHHRGE, a community coalition of hospitals (CCH, UIHealth, Rush), homeless service providers, FQHCs and the City of Chicago. CHHRGE serves as the command center for the homeless COVID response. CCH Departments of Emergency Medicine, Behavioral Health, Collaborative Research Unit and Housing participate actively in CHHRGE. The CCH Director of Housing was elected by CHHRGE membership to be the representative to the Leadership Team of the **Expedited Housing Initiative**, which will house 2000 Chicago homeless households over the next two years with CARES Act funding. CHHRGE was awarded the System Impact Award from the Chicago Continuum of Care at their Annual Breakfast in October.

Advancing Health Equity Learning Collaborative: Health Plan Services leads CCH's work in a national learning collaborative funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Advancing Health Equity Learning Collaborative seeks to advance health equity through innovations in Medicaid payment. The IL Team, led by Health Plan Services, includes membership from the IL Department of Healthcare and Family Services, ACCESS Community Health and

the CCH Housing Department and Collaborative Research Unit. Health Plan Services utilizes their investment of the Flexible Housing Pool as their payment innovation.

IMPACT 2023 Objective 5.1A, 5.1B, 5.1D

Food As Medicine

As access to healthy food remains a great need for our patients and communities, the Fresh Truck partnership between Cook County Health (CCH) and the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) continues. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required CCH and GCFD to develop and implement revised protocols for the Fresh Truck distributions that allow for appropriate screenings and social distancing to protect patients, as well as CCH and GCFD staff and volunteers. These revised protocols are in place until further notice.

Through October 6, CCH's Fresh Truck partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD) resulted in 285 visits to 13 CCH health centers – Arlington Heights, Austin, Blue Island, the CORE Center, Cottage Grove, Englewood, Logan Square, Near South, North Riverside, Provident/Sengstacke, Prieto, Robbins, and Woodlawn.

Collectively, the Fresh Truck distributions have resulted in the provision of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as some shelf stable items during the COVID-19 pandemic, to an estimated 36,061 individuals, representing 119,281 household members, totaling more than 750,000 pounds of food. Most of the individuals benefiting from the Fresh Truck screened positive for food insecurity at a CCH health center visit.

GCFD Fresh Truck Distributions

The Greater Chicago Food Depository's Fresh Food Truck visits for the month of November include the following ACHN Health Centers.

- November 5 – **Prieto Health Center** – 2424 S. Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60623
- November 10 – **Provident Hospital/Sengstacke Health Center** – 500 W. 51st Street, Chicago, IL 60615
- November 17 – **Woodlawn Health Center** - 6337 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634
- November 19 – **Arlington Heights** – 3520 N. Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60004
- November 20 – **CORE Center** - 2020 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60612
- November 24 – **Logan Square Health Center** - 2840 W. Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647

IMPACT 2023 Objective 5.1C

Community Advisory Councils

Cook County Health Advisory Councils include patients, community and religious organizations and serve as a way to promote our services in the communities where our centers are located. The Councils provide feedback to our staff and help strengthen our health center's relationships in the community. The councils meet quarterly to provide current information on Cook County Health and as an avenue for members to share information about their organizations. This past month, we hosted our first North Riverside meeting.

Upcoming CAC meeting dates:

Englewood: Thursday at 1:00 PM: December 17
1135 W. 69th Street, Chicago, IL 60621

North Riverside: Thursday at 1:00 PM: December 16
1800 S. Harlem Avenue, Suite A, North Riverside, IL 60546

Arlington Heights: Tuesday at 1:00 PM: November 10
3520 N. Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60004

Joint South Suburban: Thursday at 1:00 PM: November 19
Robbins: 13450 S. Kedzie Road, Robbins, IL 60472
Cottage Grove: 1645 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, Ford Heights, IL 60411

IMPACT 2023 Focus Area 5

Media, social media reports and other documents attached.

Legislative Update

Local

- On October 26, the Illinois Department of Public Health issued additional mitigation measures in suburban Cook County in response to increasing COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in the region. The new restrictions impact restaurants, retail establishments and other congregate settings.
- The Cook County Legislation and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee met twice in October to consider CCH related appointments. On October 16, the committee considered and approved the appointment of Israel Rocha as Cook County Health CEO by a unanimous roll call vote. On October 21, the committee approved the appointment of Joseph Harrington to the Cook County Health & Hospitals System Board by a voice vote. Both appointments were ratified by the Cook County Board on October 22.

State

- The Illinois Health Facilities Planning and Review Board conducted a three-day public hearing October 28-30 for the public to provide comments on the proposed closure of Mercy Hospital. The IHFSRB has tentatively scheduled the Mercy application to be heard at the December 15, 2020 meeting.

The initial hearing included 22 speakers – 6 in support of the application and 16 opposed. The 6 who spoke in favor were all affiliated with Mercy Hospital. Two of the speakers referenced the Provident ED in their comments one representing labor and one from the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO).

- Last spring a proposed merger of four 4 hospitals located on the south side fell through due to the lack of state financial support. In September, the South Side Health Transformation Project convened a listening session to hear from community leaders about concerns related to health care needs on the south side. A second meeting was convened in October to further discuss foundational priorities. Approximately 150 individuals participated in the sessions. Participants included elected officials and individuals representing faith-based, community-based and healthcare organizations including CCH.

Strategic Priorities

- Transformation will require a focus on the root causes or social determinants of health.
- The community is seeking tangible action.
- Healthcare equity is not just about outcomes but trust and partnership.
- Transformation must be vetted by south side residents.
- A transformative approach must be sustainable.

Tactical Priorities

- Focus on disease prevention through enhanced education.
- Integrate telemedicine to extend healthcare's reach.
- Enhance care coordination to close gaps between systems.
- Improve doctor-patient relationships.
- Integrate mental health services.
- Improve and enhance health facilities.
- Rethink emergency care
- Explore alternative funding options.

The South Side Health Transformation Project will continue to convene and is exploring funding opportunities including accessing state transformation funds allocated to address healthcare disparities.

- The Illinois General Assembly's Fall Session is scheduled for November 17-19 and December 1-3. No other session days are currently scheduled.
- Article 1 of [Public Act 101-0649](#), also referred to as the 2020 Medicaid Omnibus bill, requires the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services and the Illinois Department of Insurance to produce a feasibility study that explores options to make health insurance more affordable to low- and middle-income Illinois residents. The report is due to the Illinois General Assembly and Governor by February 28, 2021.

A variety of subject matter experts in Illinois and nationwide are assisting with the study and financial modeling. A preliminary list of options that could be pursued individually or collectively include:

1. Off Marketplace, Medicaid buy-in, which would be available to undocumented individuals
2. Marketplace public option
3. Basic Health Plan (an option under the Affordable Care Act, in place in New York and Minnesota)
4. Providing state-funded premium subsidies to purchase Marketplace plans
5. Providing state-funded cost-sharing reductions to make services Marketplace plans more accessible
6. Extending premium tax credit above 400% FPL for purchase of Marketplace plans
7. Transitioning to a state-based Marketplace

HFS is collecting public input through the Medicaid Advisory Committee and its subcommittees. Another round of stakeholder meetings will take place before finalizing the study, in order to share initial findings and financial modeling.

- On October 15, the [Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services issued a provider notice](#) announcing a new set of community-based services for children with complex behavioral health needs, consistent with the requirements of the N.B. Consent Decree. These services are anticipated to start July 1, 2021.

The same provider notice also announced that Integrated Health Homes (IHHs) for children and adults are *not* anticipated to start *prior* to July 1, 2021. IHHs have been described as enhanced care coordination for individuals with complex physical and behavioral health needs. IHH implementation has been delayed several times since the effort was first announced in 2017.

- Last week, the [Georgetown Center for Children and Families](#) released a report that showed a significant increase in the number of uninsured children throughout the United States. In Illinois, an estimated 120,000 children were uninsured in 2019, compared to 82,000 in 2016. An estimated 54,000 children in Cook County were uninsured in 2019, or about 4.6% of children under 19 years of age.

Study authors attribute the increases to federal efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, administrative barriers to enrollment, little to no dedicated outreach/enrollment assistance, and reluctance among immigrant families to enroll/re-enroll.

Eligibility for Illinois' All Kids health insurance program remains at 300% of the Federal Poverty Level and undocumented children continue to be eligible. Children's enrollment data shared with the [Medicaid Advisory Committee's Public Education Subcommittee](#) showed a slight increase in All Kids enrollment starting March 2020.

- Open enrollment for the Health Insurance Marketplace, also known as Get Covered Illinois, is November 1 through December 15, 2020. Individuals seeking Medicaid coverage can apply anytime throughout the year.

Federal

- On October 26, the Senate confirmed the President's appointment of Judge Amy Coney Barrett for the U.S. Supreme Court seat previously held by the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.
- **Budget and Appropriations** – On September 22, the House approved a continuing resolution (CR) set to run through December 11. The Senate followed suit on September 30 sending the bill to the President to be signed in the early hours of October 1, just as the new fiscal year was beginning. The bill includes a delay of the statutory Medicaid DSH cuts from December 1, when they were set to expire, to December 12, the expiration of the CR. Congress will need to address the DSH cuts as well as a longer term spending bill or another CR when it returns in the lame duck session after the election.
- **Coronavirus Relief Legislation** – Negotiations between the White House and congressional leadership have continued into October. On October 1, the House passed an updated version of the Heroes Act, which Democratic leaders characterized as their latest proffer in negotiations with the White House. The Senate has refused to take up the bill.

The \$2.2 trillion measure includes a number of health provisions of interest to CCH.

- **Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) Allotments** – Increases Medicaid DSH allotments to States by 2.5 percent for the duration of the public health emergency.
- **Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund** – Provides \$125 billion, including \$50.0 billion for grants to hospital and health care providers for reimbursement for expenses and loss revenue as a result of COVID-19 and \$75.0 billion for testing, contract tracing, and other activities related to COVID-19.
- **Health Care Provider Relief Fund** – Authorizes \$50 billion to establish the health care provider relief fund for the purposes of reimbursing eligible health care providers for expenses related to preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19, as well as lost revenues that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** – Provides \$13.7 billion including:
 - \$2 billion for state, local, tribal, and territorial public health departments;
 - \$7 billion for a COVID-19 vaccination campaign;
 - \$200 million for public health data modernization efforts; and
 - \$2.0 billion for grants to state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments to purchase personal protective equipment, among others.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)** – Provides \$8.5 billion including:
 - \$3.5 billion for Substance Abuse and Prevention Treatment Block Grant;
 - \$4 billion for the Mental Health Services Block Grants;
 - \$240 million for emergency grants to states; and
- **Core Public Health Infrastructure for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Health Departments** – Authorizes \$6 billion for public health departments to expand workforce, improve laboratory systems, health information, disease surveillance, and contact tracing capacity.

Talks continue to date, but a deal on a substantial package of coronavirus relief continues to face stiff headwinds.

- **Medicaid Fiscal Accountability Regulation** – While the rule has not been formally withdrawn, there are reports that CMS intends to continue pushing it after the election.
- **Affordable Care Act** – Oral arguments in *California v. Texas* will be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court on November 10. The appointment of Amy Coney Barrett will likely shift the balance of the Court enough to put the ACA in jeopardy.

- **HHS Allocation of CARES Act Provider Relief Funds** – On October 1, HHS announced a third general distribution of \$20 billion. Provider relief recipients can apply for an add-on relief payment, and at the same time opening the allocation to previously ineligible providers.

So far, HHS has distributed more than \$100 billion of the \$175 billion provider relief fund to physicians, hospitals and other providers since Congress created the fund in the CARES Act.

For the add-on payment HHS will consider a provider's change in operating revenues and expenses from patient care in addition to other payments received from the provider relief fund.

Protection of Medicaid remains a key priority for CCH at both the State and Federal level.

Community Outreach

Outreach Events Participation in November

November 2	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Día de los Muertos 2020 Fall Health & Resource Fair (Walk Up) , which is hosted by Youth Crossroads, Inc. at their facility located at 6501 Stanley Avenue in Berwyn.
November 3	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Cook County Department of Public Health Covid-19 testing event which is being co-sponsored by Commissioner Stanley Moore and which will take place on the Walmart parking lot located at 17625 Torrance Avenue in Lansing. CCDPH expects about 300 attendees at the event.
November 4	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Cook County Southland Juvenile Justice Council's Quarterly Meeting , which will take place in virtual form. The CCH/CC presentation will focus on the new Blue Island Health Center and the service lines available at the new clinic. In addition, CountyCare will present on the Open Enrollment period and the CountyCare Rewards program.
November 5	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at Metropolitan Family Services' Covid-19 Testing & Resource Event , which is hosted, by Metropolitan Family Services, the Illinois Department of Public Health, Commissioner Luis Arroyo and other elected officials of the Belmont-Cragin community. The event will take place at MFS' office located at 3249 N. Central Avenue in Chicago.
November 12	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the Cook County Department of Public Health Covid-19 testing event which is being co-sponsored by Commissioner Stanley Moore and which will take place on the River Oaks Shopping Center located at 96 River Oaks Drive in Calumet City. CCDPH expects about 300 attendees at the event.
November 13	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at Metropolitan Family Services' Covid-19 Testing & Resource Event , which is hosted, by Metropolitan Family Services, the Illinois Department of Public Health, Commissioner Luis Arroyo and other elected officials of the Belmont-Cragin community. The event will take place at MFS' office located at 3249 N. Central Avenue in Chicago.
November 19	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at Drive Up Turkey Distribution Sponsored by Meridian Health which will take place at the New Vision Community Church located at 2552 W. 21st Street in Chicago. There will be flu shots done by Jewel Osco Pharmacy along with other community organizations providing information on resources available to participants.
November 20	Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at Metropolitan Family Services' Covid-19 Testing & Resource Event , which is hosted, by Metropolitan Family Services, the Illinois Department of Public Health, Commissioner Luis Arroyo and other elected officials of the Belmont-Cragin community. The event will take place at MFS' office located at 3249 N. Central Avenue in Chicago.

- November 20 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Cicero Family Services Resource Fair & Turkey Distribution Sponsored by Meridian Health**, which will take place at the Cicero Family Services' Parking Lot of the Soccer Complex located at 1820 S. Laramie Avenue in Cicero.
- November 27 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at **Metropolitan Family Services' Covid-19 Testing & Resource Event**, which is hosted, by **Metropolitan Family Services, the Illinois Department of Public Health, Commissioner Luis Arroyo and other elected officials** of the Belmont-Cragin community. The event will take place at MFS' office located at 3249 N. Central Avenue in Chicago.

Additional October Events Attended not Previously Reported

- October 7 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Cook County Department of Public Health Covid-19 testing event** which is being co-sponsored by Commissioner Stanley Moore and which will take place on the River oaks Shopping Center located at 96 River Oaks Drive in Calumet City. CCDPH expects about 300 attendees at the event.
- October 14 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Malcolm X College Wellness Center Virtual Resource Fair**, which took place in virtual form. The Cook County Health and CountyCare presentation focused on the service lines available throughout the System. In addition, CountyCare presented on the Open Enrollment period and the CountyCare Rewards program.
- October 20 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Justice Advisory Council Monthly Meeting**, which took place in virtual form. The Cook County Health and CountyCare presentation focused on the service lines available throughout the System. In addition, CountyCare presented on the Open Enrollment period and the CountyCare Rewards program.
- October 21 Cook County Health and CountyCare promotion at the **Southland Ministerial Health Network Presentation**, which took place in virtual form. The Cook County health and CountyCare presentation focused on the new Blue Island Health Center and the service lines available at the new clinic. In addition, CountyCare presented on the Open Enrollment period and the CountyCare Rewards program.

Cook County Health Media Compilation

September 21 – October 23

Chicago Tribune



CRAIN'S
CHICAGO BUSINESS.

Media Dashboard: September 21 – October 23, 2020

Total Number of Media Hits: 70

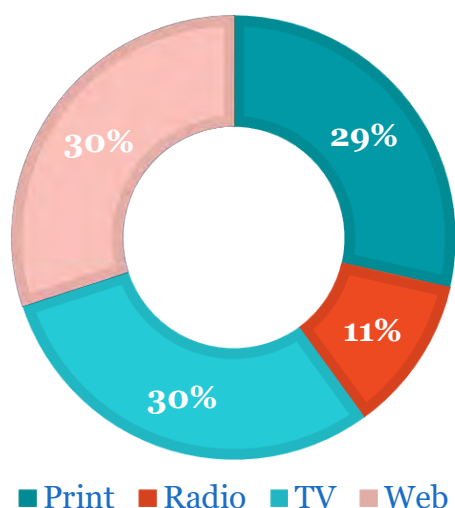
Top 5 Local Media Outlets

1. *Chicago Tribune*
2. *NBC-5*
3. *ABC-7*
4. *Chicago Sun-Times*
5. *WBEZ-FM*

Top 4 National Media Outlets

1. *Becker's Hospital Review*
2. *Modern Healthcare*
3. *Yahoo! News*
4. *Kaiser Health News*

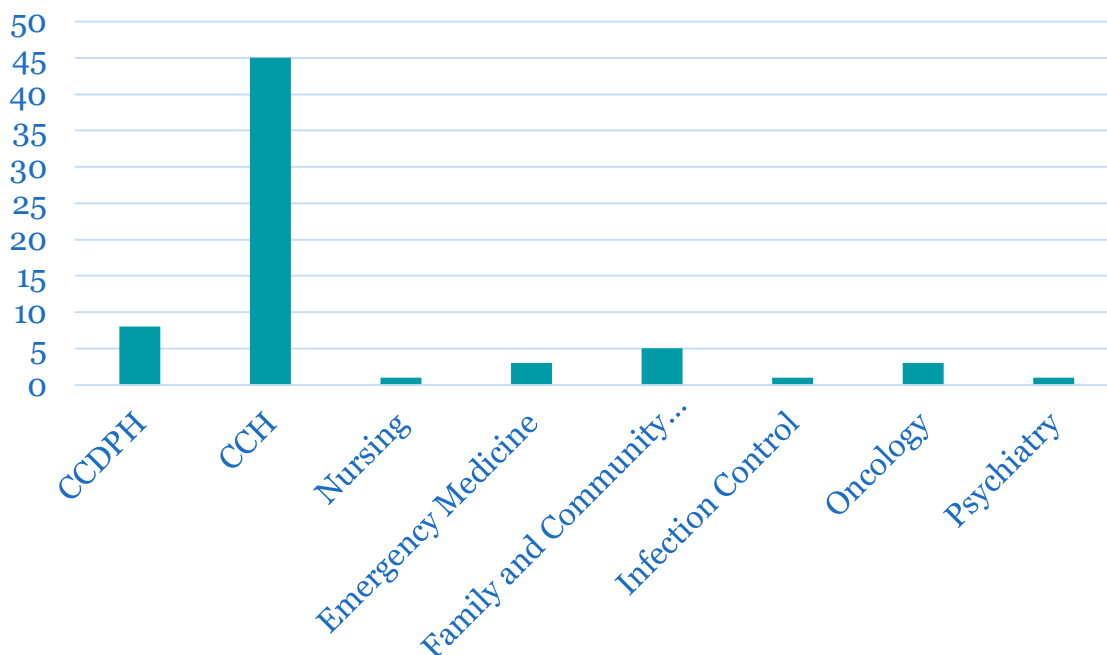
Media Outlet Type



Most Common Topics

1. New CEO
2. COVID-19 news stories: COVID-19 fatigue, Halloween safety, Masking, Flu and COVID-19, etc.
3. ACA Repeal
4. Cook County Budget
5. Cook County Health Budget
6. Voter
7. Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Media Mentions by Department





Meet the CEO who'll run Cook County Health

Stephanie Goldberg

October 22, 2020

https://www.chicagobusiness.com/health-care/meet-ceo-wholl-run-cook-county-health#adunit_path=news-data/covid-19-coverage

This year was among the most challenging of Israel Rocha Jr.'s career. And the months to come likely won't be a cakewalk, either.

After running two of New York City's busiest hospitals during the first U.S. wave of COVID-19, Rocha is set to take the helm at Cook County's public health system, just as hospitals here brace for another virus surge.

Like many hospital and clinic leaders, 42-year-old Rocha will face pressure to manage tectonic shifts in health care, driven partly by new payment models, and rein in mounting operating costs. But unlike many of those leaders, Rocha also will be responsible for an insurance company, medical services for detainees at the Cook County Department of Corrections and the county's Department of Public Health. He'll do it all while navigating a [public health crisis](#) that has resulted in 76,000 COVID cases and more than 2,300 deaths in suburban Cook County alone.

"The legacy and reputation of this organization is not lost on me," Rocha said in an interview this week, as the Cook County Legislation & Intergovernmental Relations Committee voted to approve his appointment. The move was unanimously approved today by the Cook County Board. He will start in early December.

"My first priority is to listen . . . and to understand what the needs are," Rocha said. "And then I want to do an evaluation of our operations and see what we're doing well, what we can do better and how we can make that happen as a team."

That approach has served Rocha well as a vice president at NYC Health & Hospitals, the largest public health system in the country, where he's been CEO of 545-bed Elmhurst Hospital since 2016 and CEO of 253-bed Queens Hospital since earlier this year. NYC Health has a total annual budget of \$8 billion. Cook County Health's budget this year is \$3.4 billion.

Elmhurst Hospital "is in the most ethnically diverse part of our entire country, with immigrants from a wide variety of countries, and he's universally loved," NYC Health & Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz said. "He does these street tours where he walks with the doctors and meets various storekeepers. He works closely with community groups."

Rocha demonstrated his commitment to serving the community by expanding hospital capacity, among other initiatives, during the pandemic, Katz said, noting that the two hospitals Rocha ran were hit hardest out of all 11 in the network.

"In many ways, the fact that people kept coming to Elmhurst, and felt safe to go to Elmhurst, was a testimony to the work he and his colleagues did at the hospital," Katz said.

But the influx of COVID cases at Elmhurst and Queens led Rocha to suspend his candidacy for the top spot at Cook County Health, which was battling the pandemic without a permanent leader. As time went by and social distancing caught on, the number of cases and hospitalizations fell in New York City—as well as in the Chicago area—and Rocha was able to pick up where he left off in the county's CEO hiring process.

In addition to his experience serving a diverse community, Rocha will be the first permanent Latino CEO of Cook County Health, which treats large numbers of poor and uninsured patients, many of whom are Black and Brown.

With African American and Latino communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, "it's a particularly appropriate time for a person of color to be leading this system," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

The significance is not lost on Rocha, who grew up in a small South Texas community at least 300 miles away from specialized medical care. While Rocha said the distance wasn't a barrier for his parents, an educator and a factory worker, he saw the toll it took on family and friends.

"Growing up in that way, when you don't have those services readily available, it leaves you with an impression that we have to fight to increase access," Rocha said. "It made a meaningful change in my life to see what can happen when you don't have health care."

A focus on increasing access to care has been a mainstay throughout Rocha's career, from working on health policy on Capitol Hill to leading safety-net hospitals that treat patients regardless of their ability to pay.

When he takes the helm at Cook County Health, commissioners will look to Rocha to leverage the work he did at Elmhurst Hospital—including increasing patient revenue and securing additional funds for infrastructure improvements—to [build financial strength](#) while reducing gaps in care here.

And with a new CEO on board, Preckwinkle said Cook County Health can [resume plans](#) to build a \$240 million facility to replace Provident Hospital in Bronzeville. The new facility, which was approved by the state late last year, will focus on outpatient services to prevent patients on the South Side from having to travel to Stroger Hospital, about 8 miles away.

Among challenges Rocha will face leading the health system, Preckwinkle said the rising burden of uncompensated care is toward the top of the list. The system's two hospitals provided more than half of all free care for low-income patients—about \$348 million worth—in the county in 2018, according to the most recent state data available.

"Clearly, the other providers in the Cook County ecosystem are not carrying their weight, and how to get them to do that has eluded me so far," said Preckwinkle, adding that she met with a number of local health system CEOs before the pandemic to discuss Cook County Health's disproportionate share of charity care.

In addition, the health care system is bracing for a potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act, which could result in more than 300,000 Cook County residents losing coverage. Oral arguments are scheduled to begin Nov. 10 in the U.S. Supreme Court to determine the fate of the landmark health care law, which expanded the state's Medicaid program and established a health insurance marketplace for uninsured individuals, among other protections.

Cook County Health estimates the impact on the health system of an ACA rollback would be roughly \$1.4 billion annually, including increased uncompensated care costs and lost revenue from CountyCare and other Medicaid managed care plans.

"When it comes to federal reimbursement and policy, there's a set amount of funds, and we use those to fund our hospitals in different ways through different programs," Rocha said. "Any time that's changed, you need to see what's coming forward. I would always advocate to make sure safety-net systems are covered and that they're empowered to render care."

As CEO, Rocha will get a base salary of \$650,000 with a 10 percent annual bonus opportunity. He'll move to Chicago soon after his appointment is confirmed. He said his wife, a prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice, will join him here eventually.

While Rocha said he plans to lean on clinicians, community members and other stakeholders to quickly get up to speed, he does have some insight from two former Cook County Health leaders.

Dr. Ram Raju, who led the system until 2014, when he took over at NYC Health & Hospitals, hired Rocha in New York. There, Rocha also worked alongside William Foley, Raju's predecessor at Cook County Health.

Asked what advice the former system CEOs gave him about running Cook County's public health network, Rocha said they told him, "Make sure to add to its legacy and its ability to serve."

The Daily Line

Confirmed by county board, health system CEO looks to chart long-term course to ‘fiscally resilient’ hospitals

Alex Nitkin

October 23, 2020

<https://thedailyline.net/chicago/10/23/2020/confirmed-by-county-board-health-system-ceo-looks-to-chart-long-term-course-to-fiscally-resilient-hospitals/>

The new top executive of Cook County’s behemoth health and hospital system plans to audit bill collections, enroll more patients in insurance plans and work with private hospital systems to keep the county’s public network “financially resilient” as it faces long-term mounting costs amid a historic pandemic, he said Thursday.

New York hospital executive officially appointed as next Cook County Health leader, vows to be 'fiscally, financially resilient'

Alice Yin

October 22, 2020

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/politics/ct-israel-rocha-cook-county-health-ceo-20201022-nwihph6mdndxxkk4pf2gmxiq6a-story.html#nt=msftsearch>

An executive who presided over two New York hospitals during one of the grimmest moments of the COVID-19 pandemic will lead Cook County's \$2.8 billion public hospital system as it confronts its own financial battles while bracing for a second wave of the coronavirus.

Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of Elmhurst and Queens hospitals at the New York City Health + Hospitals system, was ushered in with a 17-0 vote during a Thursday Cook County Board of Commissioners meeting, making him the next CEO of Cook County Health. He plans to start in December and will have a base salary of \$650,000 with a potential 10% bonus and 20 weeks' severance pay.

Rocha told reporters on Thursday that his mission is twofold: delivering the highest caliber of medical care, and tightening finances where needed.

"We have to make sure that we are fiscally, financially resilient to be able to chart a future that isn't in days or years, but in decades," Rocha said. "That means that we have to run a system that is resilient to be able to honor the trust of the people in the future."

Rocha's appointment means the end of a long search process that began in January following [last year's ouster](#) of Dr. John Jay Shannon as Cook County Health CEO. The system's [board of directors decided not to renew](#) Shannon's contract after investigative reports revealed hefty debts and pay raises that Cook County Health disputed.

Since then, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Board upped their authority over the independent board by giving themselves power to approve the next CEO, among other oversight measures.

The new leader of Cook County's public health system that runs Stroger and Provident hospitals will have to grapple ballooning costs from uncompensated medical care, of which the two hospitals provide the majority within the region, as well as likely budget cuts due to revenue shortfalls from the coronavirus pandemic. There also is the potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act, a landmark law that made possible the massive insurance program known as CountyCare. The county health system could lose about \$1.4 billion should the ACA be dismantled.

Preckwinkle told reporters on Thursday that the county's uncompensated care, which could balloon to \$487 million next year, would surely be one of Rocha's top priorities and that it was time the dozens of private hospitals in the area started pulling their weight. In the beginning of the year, Preckwinkle met with some of those hospitals' officials and told them the county would "revisit this issue" after appointing the next Cook County Health CEO.

"So I put them on notice," Preckwinkle said. "This was a challenge we are all going to have to try to address together. Let's put it that way."

Rocha, who turned around Elmhurst Hospital from being \$100 million in the red to breaking even within 36 months, said he is a “details person.” He intends for Cook County Health to diligently track down medical care reimbursements and match patients with the right insurance in order to ease costs for the safety net system, he said.

“We want to care for folks, we want to bring them in, and that’s great for this one episode,” Rocha said. “But we have to really be diligent in trying to qualify individuals for all of their care plans because we want to take care of them not only now but into the future.”

As for uncompensated care, Rocha wants to “leverage” private hospitals’ strengths in order to partner with them in tackling the issue, he said.

Rocha, a Texas native who once worked as a legislative staffer in Congress, also said he is prepared to mobilize for a potential ACA repeal. That would entail keeping up with each step of the process and working with Washington on communicating Cook County’s needs.

“One of the beautiful things about Cook County is that they’re a national leader,” Rocha said. “And when they say there are significant issues, people will pay attention. So immediately, we would do the research, then we would be not shy about advocating of what was needing to be done.”

But before any tectonic shifts in health care law would begin to materialize, the most immediate issue at hand is the coronavirus, which has already begun spiking again in Illinois and the Chicago area. Rocha, who guided the once-overflowing Elmhurst Hospital as it bore the brunt of the coronavirus’ early toll on New York, may again be in a fraught situation.

“We’ve got some real challenges in our health care system related to the second wave of the pandemic,” Preckwinkle said. “It’s not whether it’s coming; it’s just when.”

Modern Healthcare

Meet the CEO who'll run Cook County Health

Stephanie Goldberg

October 22, 2020

<https://www.modernhealthcare.com/people/meet-ceo-wholl-run-cook-county-health>

This year was among the most challenging of Israel Rocha Jr.'s career. And the months to come likely won't be a cakewalk, either.

After running two of New York City's busiest hospitals during the first U.S. wave of COVID-19, Rocha is [set to take the helm](#) at Cook County's public health system, just as hospitals here brace for [another virus surge](#).

Like many hospital and clinic leaders, 42-year-old Rocha will face pressure to manage tectonic shifts in health care, driven partly by new payment models, and rein in mounting operating costs. But unlike many of those leaders, Rocha also will be responsible for an insurance company, medical services for detainees at the Cook County Department of Corrections and the county's Department of Public Health. He'll do it all while navigating a [public health crisis](#) that has resulted in 76,000 COVID cases and more than 2,300 deaths in suburban Cook County alone.

"The legacy and reputation of this organization is not lost on me," Rocha said in an interview this week, as the Cook County Legislation & Intergovernmental Relations Committee voted to approve his appointment. The move is expected to be confirmed by the Cook County Board today. His start date is still being worked out.

"My first priority is to listen . . . and to understand what the needs are," Rocha said. "And then I want to do an evaluation of our operations and see what we're doing well, what we can do better and how we can make that happen as a team."

That approach has served Rocha well as a vice president at NYC Health & Hospitals, the largest public health system in the country, where he's been CEO of 545-bed Elmhurst Hospital since 2016 and CEO of 253-bed Queens Hospital since earlier this year. NYC Health has a total annual budget of \$8 billion. Cook County Health's budget this year is \$3.4 billion.

Elmhurst Hospital "is in the most ethnically diverse part of our entire country, with immigrants from a wide variety of countries, and he's universally loved," NYC Health & Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz said. "He does these street tours where he walks with the doctors and meets various storekeepers. He works closely with community groups."

Rocha demonstrated his commitment to serving the community by expanding hospital capacity, among other initiatives, during the pandemic, Katz said, noting that the two hospitals Rocha ran were hit hardest out of all 11 in the network.

"In many ways, the fact that people kept coming to Elmhurst, and felt safe to go to Elmhurst, was a testimony to the work he and his colleagues did at the hospital," Katz said.

But the influx of COVID cases at Elmhurst and Queens led Rocha to suspend his candidacy for the top spot at Cook County Health, which was battling the pandemic without a permanent leader. As time went by and social distancing caught on, the number of cases and hospitalizations fell in New York City—as well as in the Chicago area—and Rocha was able to pick up where he left off in the county's CEO hiring process.

In addition to his experience serving a diverse community, Rocha will be the first permanent Latino CEO of Cook County Health, which treats large numbers of poor and uninsured patients, many of whom are Black and Brown.

With African American and Latino communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, "it's a particularly appropriate time for a person of color to be leading this system," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

The significance is not lost on Rocha, who grew up in a small South Texas community at least 300 miles away from specialized medical care. While Rocha said the distance wasn't a barrier for his parents, an educator and a factory worker, he saw the toll it took on family and friends.

"Growing up in that way, when you don't have those services readily available, it leaves you with an impression that we have to fight to increase access," Rocha said. "It made a meaningful change in my life to see what can happen when you don't have health care."

A focus on increasing access to care has been a mainstay throughout Rocha's career, from working on health policy on Capitol Hill to leading safety-net hospitals that treat patients regardless of their ability to pay.

When he takes the helm at Cook County Health, commissioners will look to Rocha to leverage the work he did at Elmhurst Hospital—including increasing patient revenue and securing additional funds for infrastructure improvements—to [build financial strength](#) while reducing gaps in care here.

And with a new CEO on board, Preckwinkle said Cook County Health can [resume plans](#) to build a \$240 million facility to replace Provident Hospital in Bronzeville. The new facility, which was approved by the state late last year, will focus on outpatient services to prevent patients on the South Side from having to travel to Stroger Hospital, about 8 miles away.

Among challenges Rocha will face leading the health system, Preckwinkle said the rising burden of uncompensated care is toward the top of the list. The system's two hospitals provided more than half of all free care for low-income patients—about \$348 million worth—in the county in 2018, according to the most recent state data available.

"Clearly, the other providers in the Cook County ecosystem are not carrying their weight, and how to get them to do that has eluded me so far," said Preckwinkle, adding that she met with a number of local health system CEOs before the pandemic to discuss Cook County Health's disproportionate share of charity care.

In addition, the health care system is bracing for a potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act, which could result in more than 300,000 Cook County residents losing coverage. Oral arguments are scheduled to begin Nov. 10 in the U.S. Supreme Court to determine the fate of the landmark health care law, which expanded the state's Medicaid program and established a health insurance marketplace for uninsured individuals, among other protections.

Cook County Health estimates the impact on the health system of an ACA rollback would be roughly \$1.4 billion annually, including increased uncompensated care costs and lost revenue from CountyCare and other Medicaid managed care plans.

"When it comes to federal reimbursement and policy, there's a set amount of funds, and we use those to fund our hospitals in different ways through different programs," Rocha said. "Any time that's changed, you need to see what's coming forward. I would always advocate to make sure safety-net systems are covered and that they're empowered to render care."

As CEO, Rocha will get a base salary of \$650,000 with a 10 percent annual bonus opportunity. He'll move to Chicago soon after his appointment is confirmed. He said his wife, a prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice, will join him here eventually.

While Rocha said he plans to lean on clinicians, community members and other stakeholders to quickly get up to speed, he does have some insight from two former Cook County Health leaders.

Dr. Ram Raju, who led the system until 2014, when he took over at NYC Health & Hospitals, hired Rocha in New York. There, Rocha also worked alongside William Foley, Raju's predecessor at Cook County Health. Asked what advice the former system CEOs gave him about running Cook County's public health network, Rocha said they told him, "Make sure to add to its legacy and its ability to serve."



New York Hospital Exec Will Lead Cook County Health

Kristen Schorsch

October 22, 2020

<https://www.wbez.org/stories/new-york-hospital-exec-will-lead-cook-county-health/183da855-aa46-429e-8255-c26634e842a7>

The Cook County Board of Commissioners on Thursday voted unanimously to fill one of the most important roles in county government: CEO of the public health system.

In a 17 to 0 vote, commissioners [picked Israel Rocha Jr.](#), who comes from New York City's public health system, where he oversees two hospitals in the biggest public hospital network in the U.S. He'll replace Debra Carey, who became interim CEO of Cook County Health after the health system board last year [voted not to keep then-chief executive Dr. Jay Shannon](#).

During a virtual board meeting, commissioners touted what Rocha brings to the table: experience in public health and running hospitals that treat many people with no health insurance.

"Most importantly to me, he also brings an absolute commitment to diversity," said Democratic Commissioner Bill Lowry.

In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic that's [infecting Black and brown people the most](#), Rocha would take over a big public health system that largely treats people of color. Cook County Health includes John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital on the Near West Side, Provident Hospital on the South Side, a group of clinics and a Medicaid insurance plan with some 375,000 enrollees who are low-income or disabled. The plan is called CountyCare.

Cook County Health [treats far more uninsured people than any other hospital](#) in the region. But its mission to treat anyone who needs medical care cripples the county's finances. And that impacts the county's overall budget, which is [proposed to be nearly \\$7 billion in 2021](#).

This is among the biggest challenges for Rocha. Cook County Health expects to provide about \$418 million in medical care in 2020 that it won't get paid for, and around \$487 million next year. This is known as uncompensated care, and it's made up of two buckets: treating uninsured people without getting reimbursed, and not collecting bills from other patients, including those who have insurance.

It could have been much worse. Last year, Shannon predicted the tab of uncompensated care [would be nearly \\$600 million in 2020](#). Health system leaders say that's expected to be less because since mid-March, when COVID-19 started raging here, Cook County Health has seen fewer patients overall.

But the pandemic also cost the county some paying customers as well. Expecting a crush of people sick with the new coronavirus, hospitals around Illinois canceled elective surgeries, which bring in crucial dollars for hospitals, and switched from in-person to video visits with patients. WBEZ documented how [people in Cook County delayed medical care](#), potentially contributing to the coronavirus death toll. Doctors say [patients are starting to come back](#).

Another challenge for Rocha: wooing more patients who have private insurance and CountyCare members who now mostly choose other doctors in the vast insurance network instead of at Cook County Health. This would keep more money within the health system.

Rocha's plans for Cook County Health

In an interview Thursday afternoon, Rocha, 42, did not lay out specific details about how he'd tackle the challenges ahead, saying he hasn't yet started the job.

But he talked about some key strategies that would help generate revenue for Cook County Health. Focus on patient safety, he said, and make it as easy as possible for patients to quickly see a doctor. That will keep them coming back.

He said it's important too to see if patients who don't have health insurance qualify for a program to help cover the cost of their care, and make sure doctors document every service they provide, so that the health system gets paid for them. Rocha also plans to scrutinize the types of services Cook County Health offers to see what else the system could offer.

"We have to make sure we are fiscally and financially resilient to be able to chart a future that isn't in days or years, but in decades," Rocha said.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle often says other hospitals in the region need to treat more uninsured patients. On Thursday, she once again sounded that alarm, and named several prominent hospitals or their CEOs who she said she met with before COVID-19 struck.

"I put them on notice," Preckwinkle said, adding that she told the hospitals once a new Cook County Health CEO was hired, they'd be back.

Rocha said he favors rekindling those types of conversations.

"It's difficult, but it starts with coming to a table and to decide, OK, what are you willing to provide so that we help more patients," Rocha said.

When Elmhurst Hospital in New York City, which he runs, had a \$100 million budget deficit, Rocha said he was able to break even in less than three years. He said he did so by looking at every cost, department by department. He reinvested any savings by hiring more doctors and adding more services.

"Those services, in turn, bring in more revenue," Rocha said. "You can grow your way out of a shortage if you make the strategic investments."

For now, he said he's doing lots of research to create a roadmap of sorts to help him get to better know Cook County Health.

Rocha grew up in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas and graduated from Columbia University and New York University. Since 2017, Rocha has been a vice president at the NYC Health + Hospitals system and CEO of the group's OneCity Health, which implements various programs, like helping find housing for patients.

The New York City health system is vast, with 11 hospitals, five long-term care facilities, dozens of community clinics and a health plan that covers more than 500,000 people.

Before running hospitals, Rocha worked his way up to deputy chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Ruben Hinojosa, a Democrat in Texas. Rocha spent seven years working for the Congressman.

To run Cook County Health, Rocha will be paid \$650,000 a year, \$30,000 in moving expenses and is eligible for a 10% annual bonus. He would receive 20 weeks in severance pay if he left. Rocha would make more than Shannon, but would get less in severance. Even though it was part of his contract, [Shannon's severance deal set off a firestorm](#).

Rocha said he plans to start at Cook County Health in December.

New York health exec voted CEO of Chicago's public health system

Kelly Gooch

October 22, 2020

<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/hospital-executive-moves/new-york-health-exec-voted-ceo-of-chicago-s-public-health-system.html>

The Cook County Board of Commissioners has unanimously approved the appointment of Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of two hospitals in New York City's public health system, to serve as the next CEO of Cook County Health in Chicago.

Cook County Health confirmed Mr. Rocha's appointment was approved in a 17-0 vote Oct. 22. No start date has been set.

Mr. Rocha serves as CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals Elmhurst and Queens hospitals. He previously was CEO of OneCity Health, NYC Health + Hospitals' performance provider organization under New York state's Delivery System Reform and Incentive Payment program.

Given his qualifications and experience in New York City, the Cook County Health board of directors "is confident in Mr. Rocha's ability to lead CCH at this critical time in the organization and in the country," Cook County Health spokesperson Caryn Stancik told *Becker's*.

His appointment comes as Cook County Health is facing [financial challenges](#) that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Rocha will take the helm from Cook County Health interim CEO Debra Carey, who will stay at the health system as deputy CEO of operations.



New York hospital executive officially appointed as next Cook County Health leader

Alice Yin, Chicago Tribune

October 22, 2020

<https://news.yahoo.com/york-hospital-executive-officially-appointed-125700125.html>

An executive who presided over two New York hospitals during one of the grimmest moments of the coronavirus pandemic will now lead Cook County's \$2.8 billion public hospital system as it confronts its own financial battles.

Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of Elmhurst and Queens hospitals at the New York City Health + Hospitals system, was ushered in with a 17-0 vote during a Thursday Cook County Board of Commissioners meeting, making him the next CEO of Cook County Health. His base salary will be \$650,000 with a potential 10% bonus and 20 weeks' severance pay.

During a Monday committee meeting, Rocha addressed commissioners with his experience of guiding the once-overflowing Elmhurst Hospital as it bore the brunt of the coronavirus' early toll on New York. He said his leadership during that fraught time aligns with the mission of Cook County's health system to deliver health care with a racial equity lens.

"I have seen our systems of care from many perspectives: a patient, a family caregiver, a public servant, a health advocate and a health care administrator, and most recently, working collaboratively with my colleagues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic," Rocha said. "As the virus came to shore in New York, Elmhurst and Queens vowed that our patients would not suffer health inequity in this critical moment."

Rocha's appointment means the end of a long search process that began in January following [last year's ouster](#) of Dr. John Jay Shannon as Cook County Health CEO. The system's [board of directors decided not to renew](#) Shannon's contract after investigative reports revealed hefty debts and pay raises that Cook County Health disputed.

Since then, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the Cook County Board upped their authority over the independent board by giving themselves power to approve the next CEO, among other oversight measures.

The new leader of Cook County's public health system that runs Stroger and Provident hospitals will have to grapple ballooning costs from uncompensated medical care, of which the two hospitals provide the majority within the region, as well as likely budget cuts due to revenue shortfalls from the coronavirus pandemic. There also is the potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act, a landmark law that made possible the massive insurance program known as CountyCare. The county health system could lose about \$1.4 billion should the ACA be dismantled.

Preckwinkle told reporters on Thursday that the county's uncompensated care, which could balloon to \$487 million next year, would surely be one of Rocha's top priorities and that it was time the dozens of nonpublic hospitals in the area start pulling their weight. In the beginning of the year, Preckwinkle met with some of those hospitals' officials and told them the county would "revisit this issue" after appointing the next Cook County Health CEO.

"So I put them on notice," Preckwinkle said. "This was a challenge we are all going to have to try to address together. Let's put it that way."

Rocha listed six of his goals on Monday — and one of them included "be fiscally and financially resilient by ensuring continuous optimization." He pointed to his record in turning around Elmhurst Hospital from being \$100 million in the red to breaking even within 36 months.

“So many times as charity care institutions we forget to do things that we should because we always put and prioritize our care, which is right and the first thing that we should do, but we also need to make sure that we have a positive margin,” Rocha said.

Preckwinkle agreed with Rocha that his expertise in New York is needed in Cook County as the area braces for another spike of the coronavirus.

“We’ve got some real challenges in our health care system related to the second wave of the pandemic,” Preckwinkle said. “It’s not whether it’s coming; it’s just when.”

Rocha, a Texas native who once worked as a legislative staffer in Congress, does not have a medical degree, unlike many CEOs at hospital systems. But Preckwinkle pointed to her own nontraditional background before joining politics as proof Rocha will succeed.

“Now, I happen to be a history teacher, but I think I’ve done all right in this job,” Preckwinkle said. “And furthermore, he comes to us from running hospitals in New York City. So it’s not like this is something just completely out of the box for him.”



AbilityLab rewards employees for weathering COVID storm • Cook County Health's new CEO • Vaccine plan draft unveiled

Jon Asplund_

October 23, 2020

<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/health-pulse/abilitylab-rewards-employees-weathering-covid-storm-cook-county-healths-new-ceo>

ISRAEL ROCHA JR. COMES TO COOK COUNTY HEALTH JUST IN TIME FOR THE NEXT VIRUS SURGE: This year was among the most challenging of Israel Rocha Jr.'s career. And the months to come likely won't be a cakewalk, either.

After running two of New York City's busiest hospitals during the first U.S. wave of COVID-19, Rocha has been confirmed as CEO of the public system, set to take the helm just as hospitals here brace for another virus surge. [Learn more about him.](#)



Chutes & Ladders—Cook County Health nabs new CEO from NYC Health + Hospitals; Blue Cross NC promotes CMO

Tina Reed

October 22, 2020

<https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/hospitals/chutes-ladders-blue-cross-nc-promotes-medical-chief-olive-hires-three-execs>

Israel Rocha Jr. was named CEO of Cook County Health in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Rocha is vice president of NYC Health + Hospitals and has served as CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst since July 2016. He also serves as CEO for OneCity Health, a subsidiary of NYC Health + Hospitals.

The [Chicago Tribune reported](#) earlier this month that the Cook County Health board of directors chose Rocha for the role as CEO. Earlier this week, he received final approval from the county's board of commissioners, [according to new reports](#).

Before joining NYC Health + Hospitals, Rocha was previously the CEO of Doctors Hospital at Renaissance (DHR) Health System in Edinburg, Texas. He also formerly worked for 10 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Griffin's Battle Royale — Police Chief's Take on Violence — Madigan Loses a Backer

Shia Kapos

October 23, 2020

<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/illinois-playbook/2020/10/23/griffins-battle-royale-police-chiefs-take-on-violence-madigan-loses-a-backer-490692>

COOK COUNTY AND COLLARS

[New York Hospital exec will lead Cook County Health](#): “In a 17 to 0 vote, commissioners picked Israel Rocha Jr., who comes from New York City’s public health system, where he oversees two hospitals in the biggest public hospital network in the U.S. He’ll replace Debra Carey, who became interim CEO of Cook County Health after the health system board last year voted not to keep then-chief executive Dr. Jay Shannon,” by WBEZ’s Kristen Schorsch.



'COVID fatigue' blamed for second surge in coronavirus cases; Chicago health experts warn people not to let their guard down

Sarah Schulte
October 21, 2020

Seven months into the pandemic and Illinois residents say they're suffering from a bad case of COVID-19 fatigue.

"My coworkers and I were having the conversation about the fact that we have been letting our guard down," said Chicago resident Denise McLaurin.

People letting their guard down has led to the second surge of cases, according to Chicago health officials. And the coldest and hardest months are still ahead.

"With any lifestyle change we see difficulty sustaining it, it is not sustainable," said Dr. Mark Loafman of Cook County Health.

Loafman suggests the best way for people to mentally live through a pandemic during the winter months is to reframe it from a hardship to community service.

"This is volunteer community service work, we are all doing to take care of one another that should make us feel good it should make us want to do that more," said Loafman.

While living with COVID-19 and staying diligent may be draining, doctors want to remind people the country is much further along than it was a few months ago. There is now more testing, better treatments and a vaccine is right around the corner



Illinois health officials announce highest one-day case total with 4,015 new cases, 53 deaths

WGN Web Desk, Marcella Raymond, Shannon Halligan
Oct 15, 2020

CHICAGO — Illinois health officials announced 4,015 new confirmed cases of COVID-19, the highest single-day increase statewide since the pandemic began. State officials also reported 53 additional deaths.

Illinois health officials say the deaths were reported in the following counties:

- Adams County: 1 female 80s
- Bureau County: 1 male 70s
- Carroll County: 1 female 70s
- Champaign County: 1 female 60s
- Christian County: 1 female 60s
- Clark County: 1 male 70s, 2 females 80s
- Clay County: 1 male 70s, 2 females 80s
- Cook County: 1 male 60s, 1 female 70s, 3 males 70s, 3 females 80s, 1 male 80s, 2 males 90s
- DuPage County: 1 female 60s, 1 female 80s, 1 male 80s, 1 female 90s
- Fayette County: 1 male 80s
- Jackson County: 1 female 70s
- Jefferson County: 1 female 90s
- Kane County: 2 males 80s
- Kendall County: 1 male 60s
- Knox county: 1 male 20s
- Lawrence County: 1 male 80s
- Marion County: 1 male 70s, 1 female 80s, 1 male 80s
- McLean County: 1 male 60s
- Moultrie County: 1 male 70s
- Peoria County: 1 female 90s
- Richland County: 1 female 60s
- Rock Island County: 1 female 70s
- Saline County: 1 female 70s
- Shelby County: 1 male 70s
- St. Clair County: 1 female 80s
- Tazewell County: 1 female 70s
- Wabash County: 1 female 60s
- Will County: 1 male 50s, 1 male 70s, 1 male 80s, 1 female 90s
- Winnebago County: 1 male 80s, 1 male 90s

Health officials warn case counts could continue to rise if people do not continue to wear masks and socially distance. The state's positivity rate has risen 1.2% since last week.

Dr. Kiran Joshi of the Cook County Health Department warns that new mitigation measures could be instituted if the positivity rate continues to rise.

"This thing is real. We are seeing potentially the beginning of another surge here," Joshi said.

Currently, IDPH is reporting a total of 331,620 cases, including 9,127 deaths in 102 counties in Illinois.

The preliminary seven-day statewide positivity for cases as a percent of total tests from October 9 to October 15 is 4.9%.

Within the past 24 hours, laboratories have reported 67,086 specimens for a total of 6,531,009.

As of Wednesday night, 1,932 people in Illinois were reported to be in the hospital with COVID-19. Of those, 388 patients were in the ICU and 147 patients with COVID-19 were on ventilators.

County Board President Toni Preckwinkle outlines \$6.9 billion budget plan: ‘This pandemic has dealt Cook County and its residents a catastrophic blow’

Alice Yin

October 16, 2020

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle outlined her plans Thursday for a \$6.9 billion 2021 budget that would plug an overall projected \$409 million coronavirus-driven shortfall through layoffs, tapping reserve funds and new revenue from online sales, weed and gambling taxes.

During a Cook County Board of Commissioners special meeting, Preckwinkle presented her tentative budget in a speech driving home her mission to deliver racial equity through government and enunciating the deep pain the pandemic has inflicted on people and businesses both locally and across the country.

“This was worse than any rainy day we had feared,” Preckwinkle said. “But despite the precipitous drop in revenue, through a decade of tough decisions and strategic management, I can stand here today and say the budget that I present weathers the 2020 storm.”

Cook County government’s general fund is expected to face a \$222.2 million deficit, while the health fund, which includes the CountyCare insurance program and Stroger and Provident hospitals, has a projected \$187 million shortfall, officials said.

Preckwinkle’s proposed budget, which is expected to be finalized in a Nov. 24 vote, would be balanced and still increase spending by \$700 million [from this year](#), Preckwinkle’s budget director Annette Guzman said on Wednesday. Most of the additional spending would be attributed to CountyCare’s increasing membership, and the budget was modeled on the assumption that no more federal stimulus funds are coming.

Commissioner John Daley, finance committee chairman, said he is grateful the budget proposal doesn’t raise taxes nor shirk the county hospitals’ now-routine charity care for patients who cannot pay.

“This is a very good budget — a budget in very difficult times,” Daley said. “During this pandemic, people are hurting. ... Anytime a budget is presented with no new taxes, I would assume the taxpayers are happy.”

After stressing how the pandemic, like so many other historic disasters, has aggravated existing inequalities in the county, Preckwinkle warned that the human and financial toll this year cannot repeat itself anytime soon.

“I will not mince words here: This pandemic has dealt Cook County and its residents a catastrophic blow,” Preckwinkle said. “Cook County cannot — cannot — absorb another financial calamity in 2021.”

Among other things, Preckwinkle’s budget proposal calls for a one-time transfer of \$76.8 million from the county’s general fund reserve, which is estimated to be a little more than \$400 million, to avoid tax increases and more critical cuts as the pandemic hammers local government revenues. Just under \$2 million will be generated in increased fees from the medical examiner, building and zoning, and environmental control offices.

In addition, 659 vacant positions, about 300 from the sheriff’s office, would be purged, and some health and hospital system employees would be laid off. The plan also anticipates a revenue jump from Chicago tax increment financing and

county sales tax projections as well as \$50 million in reimbursements from federal CARES Act money before it expires in December.

More than 60% of the \$1.89 billion general fund budget would go to public safety. But the budget for the Cook County sheriff's office, which has become a target of numerous advocacy groups who want to defund and reallocate its budget, would drop about 4%, under Preckwinkle's proposal. Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart wrote in a statement Thursday that the elimination of the positions is "significant" but "necessary."

The \$3.39 billion health fund budget also would be increased by \$563.4 million from 2020's total, mostly to account for an increase in membership for CountyCare as well as more staffing at the jail's hospital due to social distancing and a commitment to dole out an anticipated \$312 million in uncompensated care. The proposal also would inject \$30 million more in the county's tax allocation to the system, bringing it to \$122.7 million.

But the proposed budget, which includes some hospital system downgrades and consolidations in addition to 130 potential layoffs, is already meeting stern opposition from health care workers unions. About a dozen people in a protest organized by National Nurses United gave their own speeches outside the Cook County downtown building Thursday morning, dinging Preckwinkle's commitment to Black and Latino residents while they chanted, "People over profit."

"It saddens me to know that these politicians and our Cook County elected officials feels like politics is more important than people," Tyrone Hawthorne, a Stroger Hospital employee and SEIU Local 73 member, said. "Why would you want to cut these jobs that serve these underprivileged communities? Somebody say, 'That ain't right.'"

Despite the proposed cuts, the budget plan reflects some of Preckwinkle's messaging on fighting inequalities during the pandemic as well, and the county president was sure to center her Thursday speech on those themes.

In Preckwinkle's budget plan, an additional \$20 million would go toward public safety efforts in the next two years such as violence prevention programs, reentry for formerly incarcerated people and restorative justice courts. Another \$20 million would bolster small business assistance, workforce development and housing assistance. And more than \$350,000 would head to the public defender's office to establish a unit for immigration help.

Invoking the Black Lives Matter movement that brought out thousands to march against racial injustice in the streets of Chicago this year, Preckwinkle slowly recited the long list of Black people killed by police in America this year before sharing her own personal experience with being called a racial slur growing up.

Preckwinkle said she was not alone in experiencing "that vile, racist, hate-filled word that was hurled my way during my childhood far too often." And in 2020, after a pandemic often shouldered most by Black and Latino residents, she said her budget plan prioritizes them.

"We refuse to balance this budget on the backs of the residents and the businesses who need resources the most, especially during a pandemic," Preckwinkle said.

Correction: An earlier version of this story misstated how much the Cook County sheriff's office budget would be decreased under Toni Preckwinkle's plan. It would be decreased by 4%, not 7%, under her proposal.

A Cook County budget built to ‘weather the storm’ — but the rain had better be moving on

CST Editorial Board

October 15, 2020

Since the pandemic first swept in, we have argued that it’s important for local governments to continue functioning as normally as possible.

That’s a tall order given how COVID-19 has driven up costs and decimated tax revenues. But a government that can’t provide essential services now — when those services are most needed — is failing in its basic responsibilities.

We’re encouraged, so far, by Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle’s proposed [\\$6.9 billion county budget](#) for 2021, presented to the public on Thursday.

The coronavirus played a big part in gouging a \$409.2 million hole into the budget. But Preckwinkle nonetheless proposes to maintain services and even expand healthcare without raising property taxes.

In a budget address delivered remotely, Preckwinkle said the strain on the county finances this year has been “worse than any rainy day we feared” but the county will weather the “storm.”

If there’s a lesson in this, it’s that responsible elected officials prepare for hard times long before storm clouds form. When Preckwinkle first took office 10 years ago, the county government’s rainy day fund was a modest \$40 million. She has since built up the fund, year after year, to a healthy \$400 million. This allows her now to tap those reserves for \$77 million to shore up the 2021 budget.

Preckwinkle’s administration also proposes to close out 659 currently vacant positions and possibly lay off 130 employees at Cook County Health, a threat that immediately alarmed Teamsters Local 743, which represents some of the targeted workers.

“With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not the time to remove these crucial jobs and critical health care resources from the people who are most vulnerable and most at risk,” said Teamsters Local 743 President Debra Simmons-Peterson.

Painful cuts, yes. But imagine how much worse things could be. The pandemic has hammered the local economy, even as federal aid has been limited.

“We refused to balance this budget on the backs of the residents and businesses who need resources the most,” Preckwinkle said. “Especially during a pandemic.”

Tough times, but less-so for counties

Across the country, the budgets of large counties like Cook have been faring better under the coronavirus.

David Berry, director of the budget in Harris County, Texas, which contains the city of Houston, said last month that the virus had left his county’s finances “much less rosy” but still “manageable.” The county is even considering a modest property tax cut.

Los Angeles County faced a \$37.6 billion budget deficit for fiscal year 2020-2021 and warned of massive layoffs. But layoffs were avoided, in part, by requiring every department to cut spending by 8%.

Cook County has received \$429 million in federal stimulus funds. Much of that money was applied to a budget shortfall for this year and to helping out the suburbs. The county plans to put another \$50 million of that cash toward the 2021 budget.

Wrinkle in the plan

The biggest wrinkle in the proposed plan is that it calls on the Cook County Sheriff's Office to cut 300 staff positions by attrition.

That cut would seem to be understandable given that the county jail houses far fewer detainees now, in no small part due to monitored releases intended to stem the spread of COVID-19 at the jail. But in an August report, the non-profit Coalition to End Money Bond reported that the jail's population is bumping up again, from a low of 4,031 in May to 5,159 in September.

"The elimination of the positions are significant," Sheriff Tom Dart said in a statement, but "all county agencies are facing similar hardships."

It's too early to understand the full possible ramifications of next year's proposed county budget, but for now we'd say it points to the wisdom of resisting the easy quick fix, like selling off the Chicago Skyway.

Expanded services, including health care

We're also glad to see a plan that, hard times or not, actually provides for an expansion of some county services.

The county's healthcare and hospital system is to receive an additional \$40 million, allowing it to create a new 12-chair kidney dialysis center, expand diagnostic services such as CT scans and upgrade radiology rooms and MRIs.

A county clinic in Woodlawn and another clinic on the Near South Side are to be moved into Provident Hospital of Cook County. And Preckwinkle said plans are moving forward on a new \$200 million Provident Hospital.

Wait'll next year

Preckwinkle's budget is premised on an assumption that no further federal stimulus money will be forthcoming, and that's certainly prudent. But we should all be a little nervous. This is a budget that gambles significantly on a strong local economic recovery next summer.

"So that is what what we are assuming," Cook County Chief Financial Officer Ammar Rizki said. "But it could go really badly from there. Or it could be better than that, depending on how the vaccine comes on — and there's a lot of other factors."

That's a mighty big "if."

The Reading Room: Lung Cancer Screening Misses At-Risk African American Smokers

Whitney J. Palmer

October 15, 2020

Current lung cancer screening guidelines could be overlooking African American smokers who are at risk for developing lung cancer.

According to a study published in the Sept. 15 [Journal of the American College of Radiology](#), the current guideline based on the 30-pack-year threshold sets the bar too high, as most African American smokers self-report a less than 30 pack-year history. This determination sounds an alarm bell because African Americans have a high incidence of and worse outcomes from lung cancer.

"There is growing concern that there are healthcare disparities in lung cancer screening guidelines and programs," said lead study author Anupam Basu, M.D., a diagnostic radiologist in Cook County Health. "Evidence suggests that the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST) and Preventive Services Task Force inclusion threshold of a 30-pack-year smoking history excludes a portion of African American patients at risk for lung cancer."

Even though African Americans are more significantly impacted by lung cancer, the team said, they still only account for 4 percent of the NLST. Based on existing evidence this group does have a smoking duration history similar to their white counterparts – but, they actually smoke fewer packs a day. Consequently, they have a shorter pack history – the benchmark providers use to determine who should undergo lung cancer screening.

The team, therefore, suggested lung cancer screenings would be much more accurate and impactful if they adopted a 20-pack-year threshold.

To identify a threshold that could better identify more African American smokers who could benefit from lung cancer screening, the team retrospectively reviewed low-dose CT scans from patients in their public hospital between September 2017 to December 2019. All total, they reviewed data from 784 patients, 57.5 percent of whom were men with an average age of 62. The majority were African American (66.2 percent), followed by white (20.4 percent), Hispanic (8.3 percent), Asian (4.8 percent), and Native American (0.3 percent).

Of the group, three-quarters – 75.5 percent – were active smokers, and just more than half – 51.5 percent revealed a pack history of fewer than 30 years. Total years smoked did not vary much by race, the team said. But, the African American experience was somewhat different, and it painted a grim picture.

"African Americans smoked fewer packs per day and had fewer pack-years compared with other races," the team said. "African Americans were more likely to be active smokers but also more likely to report [less than] 30 pack-years compared with other races."

Low-dose CT findings determined that lung cancer incidence did not vary by race, but African American had an incidence of 2.5 percent while whites experience 1.9 percent. Fortunately, the majority of cancers identified (75 percent) were Stage 1, and all patients had the cancerous tissues successfully removed with surgery.

Looking at lung cancer diagnosis specifically in the context of smoking brought more bad news. African Americans were the only race diagnosed with lung cancer when their self-reported pack-year history was less than 30. For smokers in this

group with more than 30-pack-year histories, the incidence rate was 2.2 percent. For those with less than 30 years, it was 2.7 percent.

“We are concerned that the 30-pack-year threshold in the African American population may exclude a portion of patients who are still at risk for lung cancer,” the team said. “We propose prospective study of African Americans with [less than] 30-pack-year histories to determine the potential benefits and harms of [lung cancer screening] in this unique underserved population.”

Cook County Health to add 466 positions for contact tracing, social distancing

Kelly Gooch

October 15, 2020

Cook County Health, Chicago's public healthcare system, expects to add 466 new positions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a spokesperson.

Budget documents shared with *Becker's Hospital Review* show most of the new positions (374) are at the Cook County Department of Public Health for contact tracing and the rest are to accommodate social distancing at the Cook County Jail.

The contact tracing and jail positions are both part of Cook County Health's budget plan for fiscal year 2021, which begins Dec. 1.

As part of budget planning, the healthcare system is investing to continue to address issues related to the pandemic, Caryn Stancik told *Becker's Hospital Review*.

Cook County Health's plans also include [filling](#) a \$187 million budget shortfall for fiscal year 2021 through 130 layoffs, outpatient clinic consolidation and reduced reliance on contract workers.

The healthcare system includes two hospitals, a network of more than a dozen community health centers, the Cook County Department of Public Health, Correctional Health Services, and a Medicaid managed care health plan for Cook County residents. It also includes the Ruth M. Rothstein CORE Center and a Medicare Advantage plan.



County Board President Toni Preckwinkle outlines \$6.9B budget plan

*WGN Web Desk, Glenn Marshall, Julian Crews
October 15, 2020*

CHICAGO — Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle proposed Thursday morning a 2021 budget of \$6.9 billion. The plan comes without a tax hike, but does include hundreds of job cuts.

Despite a projected \$92 million drop in general revenue funds, mostly due to the negative impact of COVID-19, Preckwinkle is boosting county spending by \$700 million.

Breakdown of \$6.9 Billion 2021 Cook County Budget:

- Healthcare: \$3.4 Billion
- Public Safety: \$1.3 Billion
- Annuity & Benefits: \$543 Million
- Capital Projects: \$517 Million
- Finance & Administration: \$416 Million
- Property & Taxation: \$115 Million

As always, Stroger Hospital and Cook County Healthcare, along with public safety, making up 88% of the operating budget.

With the elimination of 659 vacant positions, many of those openings at the Cook County Jail and the Sheriff's Department, the county hopes to save \$61 million.

Preckwinkle, finding \$100 million for racial and economic equity initiatives with grants to social service organizations, focused on violence reduction, charity health care programs and reduced Metra fares and other transportation enhancements to benefit low-income South Side commuters.

But the budget also relies on drawing down \$76 million from the county's reserve funds. Preckwinkle says she's not counting on any federal bailouts or additional COVID-19 recovery dollars from Washington.

The budget has drawn ire from some residents, including union leaders with National Nurses United, who pointed to recent layoff notices.

"We feel like we've been lied to. Somebody told us we were essential workers. How essential can you be when you got layoff letters saying, 'we no longer need your services?'" one nurse said.

Preckwinkle is also allocating \$100 million for racial and economic equity initiatives. The money will go towards organizations focused on violence reduction, charity health care programs and reduced transportation fares.

County residents will have a chance to weigh in on the budget. Public Hearings will be scheduled in the days ahead. The Cook County Board expected to vote on the 2021 budget by the end of November.



Preckwinkle's 2021 Budget Plan Avoids Tax Hikes, Counts On Extra Money From Online Sales Taxes, Marijuana, And Sports Betting

CBS 2 Chicago Staff
October 15, 2020

Despite a projected \$410 million budget shortfall next year in large part due to the pandemic, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle is proposing a \$6.9 billion budget plan that avoids any new taxes, by counting on a mix of “modest” layoffs, eliminating vacant positions, and bringing in additional tax revenue from online shopping, sports betting, and legal marijuana.

“Given the extraordinary times, I’m grateful for the hard work of our team not just this year, but reflects I think the hard work of the last decade, to put us in a place where we can deal with this rainy day so effectively,” Preckwinkle said at a budget briefing Wednesday afternoon, ahead of her budget address to the Cook County Board on Thursday.

Preckwinkle’s spending plan for next year relies on a mix of staffing reductions, increased revenue from existing tax streams, and drawing down on reserve funds.

Under the 2021 budget plan, the county would reduce its overall employee headcount by 254 positions. That includes eliminating 659 vacant full-time positions, and 130 proposed layoffs in the county’s health and hospital system. However, the county also expects to hire hundreds of other new positions, including approximately 400 contact tracers amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The county also expects to hire 142 other full-time positions within the health and hospital system, primarily at Stroger Hospital.

The county also will be able to use federal coronavirus relief funding to help close its budget gap. That federal funding expires Dec. 31, but because Cook County’s fiscal year begins Dec. 1, the county will be able to use \$50 million in COVID relief funds for 2021, according to chief financial officer Ammar Rizki. The county is not counting on any additional federal coronavirus relief funds next year.

For the first time in 2021, Cook County also will be bringing in revenue from online sales taxes collected by the state, as well as from legal marijuana sales and from legalized sports betting. Budget officials said the county expects to collect about \$80 million in online sales tax revenue, \$14 million in marijuana taxes, and \$3.6 million from sports betting taxes.

The county also plans to use about \$77 million from existing reserves to help balance the budget. Rizki said the county currently has about \$400 million in reserves.

Next year’s budget includes plans to move two clinics — the Near South and Woodlawn health centers — to Provident Hospital, which county officials said would allow for expanded services and better access, even though Provident Hospital is approximately 3 miles away from both clinics. Provident Hospital’s emergency room also will be converted to a “standby” emergency department similar to an urgent care facility, with a greater focus on outpatient care. The standby emergency room will remain open 24/7.

Provident Hospital also is close to opening a new dialysis center, a new lifestyle center, and a new colon cancer prevention program.

Stroger Hospital's inpatient pediatric unit also would be suspended, due to a low volume of patients. Andrea Gibson, Cook County Health's chief business officer, said it's a national trend that pediatric patients are more likely to require outpatient treatment or, in severe cases, at specialty hospitals like La Rabida or Lurie Children's Hospital.

Meantime, the county plans to expand its outpatient mental health programs, as well as coverage for children with special needs under County Care, a Medicaid-funded program serving low-income residents.

Preckwinkle's budget team said the 2021 spending plan also includes \$40 million for a COVID-19 contact tracing program, as well as \$20 million over the next two years for various "restorative justice" programs:

- \$2.5 million towards adult anti-recidivism, violence prevention, and restorative justice grants to community-based organizations in the suburbs.
- \$2.5 million towards youth violence prevention, restorative justice, development, and leadership programs in the suburbs.
- \$5 million for housing support programs for convicted criminals recently released from prison and pre-trial defendants on electronic monitoring.
- \$2 million for violence reduction and outreach programs in the suburbs and the city of Chicago.
- \$3 million for re-entry services for recently released convicts, including mental health and substance abuse programs and workforce training.
- \$5 million for felony drug diversion programs, restorative justice supportive services, and bond court peer support.

The budget plan also includes \$5 million for small business assistance programs, \$2 million for workforce training programs, and \$13 million for housing assistance in low-income communities.

Although the budget plan could be considered good news for taxpayers for now, budget officials cautioned that the pandemic could deal another blow to the county's finances, especially if there is not a widespread vaccine available within the next year, and if there is not further federal relief funding should the economy take another hit. Under such a worst-case scenario, Preckwinkle's budget team expects the county's finances could take a \$328 million hit by 2022.

2021 pandemic budget plan from Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle includes dipping into reserve fund, no tax hikes

Alice Yin

October 16, 2020

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle is scheduled to unveil a \$6.9 billion plan for next year's budget on Thursday that would not raise or introduce taxes but would dip into reserves in order to help plug an overall projected \$409 million hole amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Preckwinkle will propose making the one-time transfer of \$76.8 million from the county's general fund reserve, which is estimated to be a little more than \$400 million, to avoid tax increases and more critical cuts as the pandemic hammers local government revenues across the U.S.

In addition, hundreds of vacant positions, largely in the sheriff's office, would be purged, certain fees would go up, and some health and hospital system employees would be laid off, according to a presentation with reporters on Wednesday. After a series of hearings, county board members are expected to vote on the budget on Nov. 24.

"Frankly, we've worked for a decade to put the county in a good place financially and we had, as a result, sufficient reserves to deal with this calamity," Preckwinkle said.

With a \$222.2 million forecast gap in next year's general fund, which includes the finance, public safety and president's offices, and a \$187 million projected shortfall in the health fund, which includes the CountyCare insurance program and Stroger and Provident hospitals, the proposed budget would be balanced and still increase spending by \$700 million [from this year](#), Preckwinkle's budget director Annette Guzman said. Most of the additional spending would be attributed to CountyCare's increasing membership, and the budget was modeled on the assumption that no more federal stimulus funds are coming.

"This has been an extraordinarily challenging year," Preckwinkle said. "A combination of the pandemic and the economic collapse of course have wreaked havoc with our families and our government at every level. But we're very pleased to present to you today a budget that requires no new taxes."

Besides the use of reserves, Preckwinkle's plan to fill the general fund gap calls for the \$61.3 million-saving elimination of 659 full-time equivalent vacant positions, an expected \$27.7 million revenue jump from Chicago tax increment financing and county sales tax projections, and \$50 million in reimbursements from federal CARES Act money before it expires in December.

The general fund budget would add up to \$1.89 billion, a slight dip from this year, and 60.5% of it would go to public safety. But the budget for the sheriff's office, which has become a target of numerous advocacy groups who want to defund and reallocate its budget, would drop about 4%, under Preckwinkle's proposal. Revenues, hit hard by the pandemic, are overall likely to continue decreasing by about 4.8% next year despite a new influx of online sales, cannabis and sports betting tax revenues.

Preckwinkle's plan would introduce some cuts to personnel and services at the public hospital system to balance the deficit, spurring a nurse's union to announce an upcoming protest outside the county's downtown headquarters following her planned budget speech on Thursday. That [plan includes laying off](#) 130 workers by the end of Dec. 1, and enacting consolidations and downgrades across hospitals.

Her proposal also would inject \$30 million more in the county's tax allocation to the system, bringing it to \$122.7 million, and predicts additional money from rate negotiations, immigrants living in the country without legal permission enrolling in a Medicaid-like plan under a new state law, revenue cycle improvements and more.

The \$3.39 billion health fund budget also would be increased by \$563.4 million from 2020's total and would account for a \$465 million increase in membership for CountyCare, more staffing at the jail's hospital due to social distancing and a commitment to dole out an anticipated \$312 million in uncompensated care.

Despite the proposed cuts, the budget plan reflects some of Preckwinkle's messaging on racial equity during the pandemic as well. An additional \$20 million will go toward public safety efforts in the next two years such as violence prevention programs, reentry for formerly incarcerated people and restorative justice courts. Another \$20 million will bolster small business assistance, workforce development and housing assistance.

"(The pandemic has) highlighted the need for looking at racial equity in the programming and services that we invest in and the resources that we have at our disposal," Preckwinkle said. "It's shone a bright light on the impacts of inequity, particularly in terms of who got the disease, who succumbed to the disease and the impacts on Black and brown communities."

Nonetheless, long-term trouble looms for Cook County's finances. Should the pandemic follow a "worst-case scenario" without a working vaccine until 2022, there could be a \$328.3 million dip in the fund balance compared with the current middle-of-the-ground projection. And even without that development, the projected deficit could land at around \$86.7 million due to expenses outpacing revenues. Some of that is because the county's base property tax levy has failed to keep up with inflation.

"Sustaining our investment in equity, making sure that we're not raising taxes, especially in a time where a lot of our residents are hurting, and also avoiding a critical cost," county Chief Financial Officer Ammar Rizki said. "We're hitting on all fronts to be able to address the needs across the board."

Layoffs, cutting vacant jobs all part of Preckwinkle's \$6.9 billion budget plan to ride out COVID-19 storm

Rachel Hinton

October 15, 2020

Cook County officials plan to propose a \$6.9 billion budget Thursday, closing a \$409.2 million shortfall through a mix of layoffs, cutting vacant positions and tapping into reserves to effectively weather the long feared “rainy day” elected officials always worry about.

In the recommendation that Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle is expected to unveil for the county's general operating budget, 659 vacant positions — 300 of them in the sheriff's office — are slated to be cut as part of a plan to close a gap of \$222.2 million.

At Cook County Health, 130 people could be laid off as part of a proposed plan to address a separate \$187 million budget deficit, though officials say the number of layoffs could wind up being half that by the time the spending plan is final.

County budget officials said Wednesday they face a “unique challenge” due to the pandemic, but residents can expect to see no new taxes, though “nominal” increases in some fees are expected to bring in an aggregate of \$2 million in three main areas — the medical examiner's office, building and zoning and environmental control.

The ultimate impact of COVID-19 on the budget is still uncertain, but Ammar Rizki, the county's chief financial officer, said he and others on the financial team are “projecting, basically a square root recovery.”

“Our hope is that, by summer of next year, the recovery goes back into Phase Five [of the state reopening plan] where now we can go safely back into stadiums, concerts — and things like that are back in play” and generating tax revenue, Rizki said. “So, that is that is what we're assuming, but it could go really badly from there or it could be better than that, depending on how the vaccine comes on and there's a lot of other factors.”

Along with cutting the vacant positions, Preckwinkle and her team are also proposing reducing non-personnel costs, such as travel and training for employees, into next year to address the \$222.2 million gap in the general fund, which covers the offices of the sheriff, state's attorney, assessor, chief judge and clerk to name a few.

Revenues from tax-increment-financing districts in Chicago, a rise in projected revenue from the county's sales tax, as well as \$50 million in reimbursements from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act and \$76.8 million from the county's reserves also helped close the gap.

Addressing the proposed layoffs in Cook County Health, Andrea Gibson, the health system's interim chief business officer, said she thinks the number will “end up being about half that” based on “available vacancies, some resignations and retirements” that have happened and they likely won't know a final number until late November.

The proposed county budget doesn't rely on any additional federal funding.

Last month, Mayor Lori Lightfoot made a similar assumption — though she may have to turn to tax increases and budget cuts, including layoffs, furlough days and pay cuts to bridge the city's \$1.2 billion budget gap, top mayoral aides have said.

Preckwinkle will unveil her budget recommendation to the public and commissioners at a special meeting Thursday morning. Commissioners will likely vote on the budget Nov. 24.

6 recent hospital, health system CEO moves

Kelly Gooch

October 14, 2020

The following hospital and health system CEO moves were reported in the last week.

1. Boston Children's Hospital tapped [Kevin Churchwell](#), MD, as its next CEO.
2. Doshier Memorial Hospital in Southport, N.C., tapped [Brad Hilaman](#), MD, as CEO.
3. Erika Kaye was selected as CEO of Reunion Rehabilitation Hospital Denver, which is slated to open in March, according to a [LinkedIn post](#).
4. Pender (Neb.) Community Hospital CEO [Melissa Kelly](#) is resigning.
5. [Israel Rocha Jr.](#), CEO of two hospitals in New York City's public health system, was selected to lead Cook County Health in Chicago.
6. Greenwood (Miss.) Leflore Hospital named Jason Studley CEO, according to [The Greenwood Commonwealth](#).



CDC Report: Teen gave COVID-19 to 11 relatives across 4 states, including Illinois, during 3-week family vacation

WBBM Newsradio Staff

October 13, 2020

A CDC report with a local connection shows that children can be super-spreaders of COVID-19.

According to a [Centers for Disease Control report](#), a 13-year-old girl in Cook County infected 11 people across four states - including Illinois - during a three-week family vacation over the summer.

The report said the initial patient was exposed to COVID-19 during a large gathering in June. A rapid antigen test four days after her exposure came back negative, before her symptoms began, the Tribune reported. Two days later she had some nasal congestion - her only symptom. That day she traveled with her parents and two brothers to attend a large family gathering, which began the following day, according to the CDC report.

She was one of 14 relatives ranging in age from 9 to 72 who shared a five-bedroom, two-bathroom home for three weeks, the report said. The CDC said relatives did not wear face masks or practice social distancing.

Eleven other family members contracted the virus. One was hospitalized and another went to the emergency room for treatment of respiratory symptoms, but both recovered, according to the report.

The three-week family gathering involved five households from four states, according to the CDC report. The report in a footnote mentioned public health departments in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Georgia, as well as the Cook County Department of Public Health; it did not give any other information about where the family gathering took place or the states where various relatives lived.

The CDC noted that the case highlights the risk of exposure during gatherings, as well as the benefits of social distancing.

"SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) can spread efficiently during gathering, especially with prolonged, close contact," the CDC report said. "Physical distancing, face mask use and hand hygiene reduce transmission; gatherings should be avoided when physical distancing and face mask use are not possible."

The report went on to say this outbreak highlights several important issues.

"First, children and adolescents can serve as the source for COVID-19 outbreaks within families, even when their symptoms are mild. Better understanding of transmission by children and adolescents in different settings is needed to refine public health guidance," the report said.

The Cook County Department of Public Health added the case shows that kids and teens can contract and spread the virus. It also serves as a cautionary tale before the holiday season.

"(The) outbreak highlights several important issues that are good to review before the holidays," a Cook County Department of Public Health spokeswoman said in an email.

"Regardless of negative test results, persons should self-quarantine for 14 days after a known exposure or after travel when mandated by state, territorial, tribal or local authorities."

CDC says teen gave COVID-19 to 11 relatives across 4 states during a family vacation.

October 12, 2020

A COVID-19 outbreak that infected 11 people across four states began with a 13-year-old girl who transmitted the virus during a three-week family vacation over the summer, according to a Centers for Disease Control report.

In Illinois - one of the states involved - a Cook County Department of Public Health spokeswoman said that the community where some of the family members live is not currently at risk from this particular outbreak, which occurred months ago.

But the case shows that kids and teens can contract and spread the virus, public health experts say. It also serves as a cautionary tale before the holiday season, a traditional time for many large family get-togethers.

"(The) outbreak highlights several important issues that are good to review before the holidays., a Cook County Department of Public Health spokeswoman said in an email.

The CDC noted that the case underscores the risk of exposure during gatherings, as well as the benefits of social distancing.

"SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) can spread efficiently during gathering, especially with prolonged, close contact," the CDC report said. "Physical distancing, face mask use and hand hygiene reduce transmission; gatherings should be avoided when physical distancing and face mask use are not possible."

The three-week family gathering involved five households from four states, according to the CDC report, which was released earlier this month. The report in a footnote mentioned public health departments in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Illinois and Georgia; it did not give any other information about where the family gathering took place or the states where various relatives lived.

The report said the initial patient, a 13-year-old girl, was exposed to COVID-19 during a large outbreak in June. A rapid antigen test four days after her exposure came back negative, before her symptoms began. Two days later she had some nasal congestion, her only symptom. That day she traveled with her parents and two brothers to attend a large family gathering, which began the following day, according to the CDC report.

She was one of 14 relatives ranging in age from 9 to 72 who shared a five-bedroom, two-bathroom home for eight to 25 days, the report said. The relatives did not wear face masks or practice physical distancing, according to the report.

Eleven other family members contracted the virus; one was hospitalized and another went to the emergency room for treatment of respiratory symptoms, but both recovered, according to the report.

"This outbreak highlights several important issues," the report said. "First, children and adolescents can serve as the source for COVID-19 outbreaks within families, even when their symptoms are mild. Better understanding of transmission by children and adolescents in different settings is needed to refine public health guidance."

Six additional family members did not stay at the home but did visit on different occasions, maintaining physical distance from relatives from other households. None of those individuals developed symptoms, and four tested negative for the virus, the CDC found.

“None of the six family members who maintained outdoor physical distance without face masks during two visits to the family gathering developed symptoms; the four who were tested for SARS-CoV-2 had negative test results,” according to the report.

Local public health experts added that the report shows the importance of isolating after possible exposure to the virus, even if a COVID-19 test comes back negative. Rapid antigen tests in particular tend to have a lower sensitivity compared to nasal swab and saliva tests, and negative tests should be confirmed with other forms of testing when there’s a high probability of infection, such as known exposure, the CDC report noted.

“Regardless of negative test results, persons should self-quarantine for 14 days after a known exposure or after travel when mandated by state, territorial, tribal or local authorities,” the Cook County Public Health Department said.



Several Cook County Residents Contracted COVID-19 From Teen Relative During Family Vacation: CDC

October 12, 2020

A 13-year-old girl transmitted COVID-19 to 11 relatives, including several from suburban Cook County, during a three-week family vacation at a shared house this summer, according to local health officials and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC released detailed findings of the case in an online report Friday, emphasizing the outbreak highlights several important issues, including that children and adolescents can efficiently transmit SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The teenage girl was exposed to the virus during a large outbreak in June 2020, and because of her exposure, she sought testing after returning home, according to the CDC.

A rapid antigen test performed four days after exposure, when the teen was asymptomatic, was negative. Two days later, the 13-year-old experienced nasal congestion, her only symptom of the virus. That same day, she, her parents, and two brothers traveled to a gathering with 15 other relatives.

It's not known if the girl and her immediate family members are from Cook County.

A total of 14 relatives from four states, including the patient, stayed in a five-bedroom, two-bathroom house for 8–25 days and did not wear face masks or practice physical distancing.

An additional six relatives visited on two occasions, one of which was when six individuals staying in the home were potentially infectious. The six visiting relatives maintained physical distance and remained outdoors, but did not wear face masks.

Of those who stayed in the house, 12 individuals, including the teen girl, were found to have COVID-19.

One person who contracted the coronavirus was hospitalized and another sought emergency department care for respiratory symptoms; both recovered, officials said. None of the six relatives who remained outdoors and maintained physical distance developed symptoms.

The Cook County Department of Public Health confirmed that several individuals involved were from suburban Cook County, but didn't provide additional information, citing privacy concerns.

County health officials that the community is not at risk as a result of the cases.

According to the CDC, the investigation of the case provides evidence of the benefit of physical distancing as a strategy to prevent the virus.

The situation also reinforces the recommendation that person should self-quarantine for 14 days after a known exposure or after travel when mandated by local authorities.

While the CDC didn't say where the gathering took place or which states the family members resided in, a footnote in the article cites the Rhode Island Department of Health, the Georgia Department of Health, the Cook County Department of Public Health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.



COVID-19 Discussion with Dr. Gregory Huhn

October 12, 2020

Discussion on Covid-19 and the importance of practicing safety precautions. This program was recorded on October 9, 2020 at Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV).

The Daily Line

News in Brief: Cook County Health CEO revealed; Preckwinkle warns ACA repeal would ‘cripple’ health system

Alex Nitkin

October 8, 2020

<https://thedailyline.net/chicago/10/08/2020/tld-chicago-morning-briefs-thursday-october-8th/>

Leaders of the Cook County Health system have landed on New York hospital executive **Israel Rocha Jr.** to be the next CEO of the county’s \$3 billion health and hospital network, county officials confirmed Wednesday. The health system board voted last month to select a new CEO but hid the person’s identity, saying they would not release the name of “Candidate A” until his nomination is confirmed by the Cook County Board of Commissioners later this month. But on Tuesday, *WBEZ* [reported](#) that Rocha, the CEO of the Elmhurst and Queens public hospitals in New York City, was the choice. Cook County Board **President Toni Preckwinkle** tacitly confirmed that reporting on Wednesday, saying during an unrelated press conference that the county board was poised to tap a “young man” who “comes from New York” to lead Cook County’s sprawling health system. Preckwinkle added that the CEO-in-waiting shares her “commitment to racial equity and inclusion, and we look forward to working with him.” Rocha’s confirmation brings to end a 10-month search for a new CEO that began in December, when the county’s health system board cut loose former **CEO Jay Shannon**.



What's in store for the exec tapped to lead Cook County Health

Stephanie Goldberg and A.D. Quig

October 8, 2020

<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/health-care/whats-store-exec-tapped-lead-cook-county-health>

In the midst of the gravest public health crisis in generations, Cook County Health has been searching for a permanent leader. They found one in Israel Rocha Jr., an executive at NYC Health + Hospitals, the largest public health system in the nation.

Cook County Health's independent board of directors has proposed Rocha as CEO, and the Cook County Board of Commissioners is expected to weigh in later this month. Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said today that she intends to support Rocha's appointment.

"The young man who's been proposed to lead our health and hospitals system comes from New York and shares, I think, that commitment to a focus on racial equity and inclusion in his own health care experience, and we look forward to working with him," Preckwinkle told reporters at an unrelated press conference. "This is a very challenging time for health care professionals at every level, particularly in public hospitals. As you're probably aware, half of our patient load in Stroger (hospital) was COVID-19 patients, so we had a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for pandemic patients. I'm sure that was his experience in New York as well."

Cook County Commissioner Dennis Deer, chair of the Health & Hospitals Committee and a member of the CCH board, declined to say how the health board decided on Rocha. As for how Rocha will fare with commissioners, Deer said most are concerned about three things: the financial stability of the system, how Rocha would handle CCH's rising uncompensated care costs, and how he will get up to speed on local issues.

Rocha, 42, declined an interview request through a CCH spokeswoman. "Out of respect for the formal process, it would be premature for me to say anything more than I look forward to the next steps," he said in an email from the spokeswoman.

As a vice president at NYC Health + Hospitals, Rocha has served as CEO of Elmhurst Hospital since 2016 and CEO of Queens Hospital since earlier this year.

The 11-hospital system, with 42,000 employees, was inundated with COVID-19 cases this year, having gone from no hospitalized coronavirus patients on March 1 to 3,700 patients by April 1, system CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz recently told Modern Healthcare. The experience challenged the system to think differently about keeping up with demand, as inflating staffing numbers only hikes costs, Katz said.

Rocha "has deep experience with handling the unexpected twists and turns of this virus. . . . He has run a hospital that is of similar size and scale and has a similar payer base and population," said Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer, (D-10). "He also has a lot of experience politically. This is a hospital in which you need to be both able to run a strong clinical organization but navigate a political one as well."

The Cook County Board of Commissioners recently regained more control over hospital system decisions, granting Preckwinkle a direct appointment to the independent board and the power to approve all future CEOs.

Additionally, Rocha will have to manage a number of constituencies—everyone from maintenance workers to doctors, the health system's board, Cook County commissioners, and the board president, Gainer said. Plus a diverse mix of payers and different clinical settings at hospitals, clinics and the county jail.

Cook County Health covers Stroger Hospital on the Near West Side, Provident Hospital on the South Side, a network of clinics, an insurance company and medical services for detainees at the Cook County Department of Corrections, as well as the county's Department of Public Health.

Rocha is no stranger to the challenges that come with working at a public health system with a mission to care for all patients regardless of ability to pay. Under his leadership, Elmhurst Hospital increased patient revenue by about \$50 million a year, improved clinical quality measures and patient satisfaction, eliminated its operating budget deficit, and secured money to build a new emergency department, neurosciences center and ambulatory surgical center, according to his bio on the NYC Health + Hospitals website.

Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin said a committee vote will likely be held Oct. 19 or 21 and that Rocha's compensation package will be discussed in executive session.

Suffredin added that Rocha's experience guiding Elmhurst through COVID during the worst of the city's experience with the virus is a point in his favor, as is his work with OneCity Health, a subsidiary of NYC Health + Hospitals similar to CCH-run CountyCare.

Rocha's experience in Washington, D.C. might also help CCH navigate federal funding, Suffredin said, noting that "he's a transformational leader." He worked for Texas congressman Ruben Hinojosa from 2000 to 2007, starting as a legislative assistant and working his way up to deputy chief of staff.

Before he joined NYC Health + Hospitals, Rocha was CEO of the Doctors Hospital at Renaissance Health System in Edinburg, Texas. He worked there from 2009 until 2016 and helped transition it from a general acute-care hospital into a comprehensive academic medical center affiliated with the University of Texas System. He is a Texas native with degrees from Columbia University and New York University.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Cook County Health was under pressure to cut spending and address a rising burden of uncompensated care without a permanent leader. Now, facing a projected \$187 million budget deficit for fiscal 2021, the system is planning a series of cost-cutting initiatives, including layoffs and outpatient clinic consolidations.

Plans to build a \$240 million, mostly outpatient facility to replace Provident were put on hold until a permanent CEO takes the helm. But other changes at the hospital appear to be underway, including consolidating patients and services at Provident from the system's Woodlawn and Near South outpatient clinics, which are closing; moving some elective surgeries to Provident from Stroger, and converting Provident's emergency department into a standby emergency department, which means a registered nurse is on duty at all times and a doctor is on call.

"Deb Carey has done a terrific job as interim CEO and I think everybody will be relieved and excited to have a permanent leader in place that can help navigate these troubled times," said Margie Schaps, executive director of the Health & Medicine Policy Research Group.

Carey, who previously was deputy CEO of operations and is to return to that role, took the helm on an interim basis in January after John Jay Shannon's contract was not renewed by the health system's independent board.

"Having come from New York, I have confidence that (Rocha) understands the pandemic well and the challenges of big cities that have a lot of people whose lives are challenged by a lot of things that relate to health—social determinants like food insecurity, housing insecurity, job insecurity," Schaps said.

In addition to the COVID-related challenges facing Cook County Health and other providers, the health care system is bracing for a potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act. Oral arguments are scheduled to begin in Nov. 10 in the

Supreme Court to determine the fate of the landmark health care law, which expanded the state's Medicaid program and established a health insurance marketplace for uninsured individuals, increasing the number of people in Illinois with health insurance by more than 800,000. An unknown additional number have gained coverage under ACA provisions banning insurers from rejecting people based on pre-existing conditions and allowing young adults to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26.

A repeal would not only impact coverage for pre-existing conditions and preventive services like cancer screenings, but also result in at least 300,000 Cook County residents losing coverage.

The loss of coverage would result in higher charity care costs for health care providers and Cook County Health in particular. The system's two public hospitals, Stroger and Provident, provided more than half of all free care for low-income patients—about \$348 million worth—in the county in 2018, according to the latest state data.

WBEZ first reported that Cook County Health's independent board proposed Rocha as CEO.

Preckwinkle: Repeal of ACA would 'financially cripple' Cook County Health

October 8, 2020

A judicial repeal of the Affordable Care Act could lead to hundreds of thousands of Cook County residents losing their coverage and cause significant financial challenges for Cook County Health, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said Wednesday.

Preckwinkle, joined by Cook County Health's interim CEO Debra Carey and members of the Illinois congressional delegation, said there was a real threat this time of the law being repealed. The U.S. Supreme Court is set to take up a challenge to the law in November and it's possible that Amy Coney Barrett, President Donald Trump's selection to fill the vacancy left by the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, will weigh in on the matter.

"Here's the bottom line, the repeal of the ACA would not only financially cripple Cook County Health by dramatically increasing the amount of uncompensated healthcare we provide, it would be catastrophic - catastrophic - for the patients we serve," Preckwinkle said.

Over 300,000 Cook County residents could lose their coverage if the law is repealed, including about 94,000 who became newly eligible for Medicaid under the law and another 214,000 residents who are enrolled through other Medicaid programs expanded under the law.

That estimate does not include those who would be thrown off their parents' coverage or those with pre-existing conditions who may lose coverage, Carey said.

She said they estimate the health system could lose \$1.4 billion annually if the law is repealed. That loss includes \$600 million in CountyCare capitation revenue, at least \$100 million from reimbursements from Medicaid managed care organizations for ACA members the health system cares for, and \$700 million for the anticipated increase in charity care for uninsured residents.

"To those elected officials and others who would allow the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, you are choosing politics over primary care, rhetoric over responsibility and heartlessness over humanity," Carey said. "We have the experience of COVID-19 right before us as an example of the havoc to our lives when politics overrules what we know is the right thing to do."

Her comments echoed similar concerns she raised last month to the health system's board of directors.

When asked by reporters, Preckwinkle said they have no backup plan if the law is repealed.

"We have made it quite clear what our position is, and we hope that our view of healthcare in this country carries the day," she said.



Preckwinkle says 'it would be catastrophic' if Obamacare is repealed

October 8, 2020

CHICAGO -- Should Obamacare be repealed, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the impact on county residents and government would be devastating.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said if the Affordable Care Act is repealed more than 300,000 Cook County residents would lose coverage with no backup plan.

"Here's the bottom line, the repeal of the ACA would not only financially cripple Cook County health by dramatically increasing the amount of uncompensated health care we provide, it would be catastrophic for the patients we serve," she said.

Preckwinkle said this should not be a political issue. She noted we have been down this road before and rational minds have always prevailed, but she said we are at a different point today.

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky said it is really hard to imagine anything more cruel.

"What kind of malice would it take," she said. "It is really hard to imagine anything more cruel, especially at this moment of dire need in this country."

STALEMATE IMPERILS CHICAGO — SPRINGFIELD IS A GO, FOR NOW — LOSS FOR A HOFFA

Shia Kapos

October 7, 2020

<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/illinois-playbook/2020/10/07/stalemate-imperils-chicago-springfield-is-a-go-for-now-loss-for-a-hoffa-490543>

COOK COUNTY AND COLLARS

— **SCOOP:** [A New York hospital exec has been chosen to lead Cook County Health System:](#) “Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of two hospitals in the giant NYC Health + Hospitals system has been chosen to lead Cook County’s Health System. He has to be approved by the county board,” by WBEZ’s Kristen Schorsch.

ISRAEL ROCHA JR. CHOSEN AS NEXT CEO OF COOK COUNTY HEALTH

October 7, 2020

Israel Rocha Jr. has been selected to serve as the next CEO of Cook County Health, pending approval by the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

New York hospital exec named CEO of Chicago's public health system

Kelly Gooch

October 7, 2020

Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of two hospitals in New York City's public health system, has been selected to lead Cook County Health in Chicago, a county health system spokesperson confirmed to *Becker's*.

The Cook County Health board of directors chose Mr. Rocha to become the next health system CEO and "is confident in Mr. Rocha's ability to lead CCH at this critical time in the organization and in the country," spokesperson Caryn Stancik said in an email.

The Cook County Board of Commissioners must still sign off on the CEO selection, and a decision is expected this month.

Mr. Rocha currently serves as CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals Elmhurst and Queens hospitals. He previously was CEO of OneCity Health, NYC Health + Hospitals' performance provider organization under New York state's Delivery System Reform and Incentive Payment program.

If approved for the new Chicago role, Mr. Rocha will take the helm from Cook County Health interim CEO Debra Carey.

Cook County Health board chooses New York hospital executive to be its next leader

Alice Yin

October 7, 2020

An executive who presided over one of New York's worst-hit hospitals during the height of the coronavirus pandemic was selected by Cook County's public hospital system to be its next CEO.

The Cook County Health board of directors has chosen Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of Elmhurst and Queens hospitals at the New York City Health + Hospitals system, to be its leader, Cook County Health spokeswoman Caryn Stancik wrote in a Wednesday statement. The candidate still needs to be confirmed by the Cook County Board of Commissioners, which is expected to review his qualifications and vote on him later in October.

Rocha's experience, which includes [guiding the once-overflowing Elmhurst Hospital](#) as it bore the brunt of the coronavirus's early toll on New York, aligns with the needs of Cook County's health system that overwhelmingly serves the poor and also was inundated with COVID-19 patients earlier this year, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said.

"This is a very challenging time for health care professionals at every level, particularly in public hospitals," Preckwinkle said Wednesday. "The height of the pandemic, half of our patient load in Stroger Hospital was COVID-19 patients, so we had a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for pandemic patients. And I'm sure that was his experience in New York, as well."

Rocha, leader of two hospitals in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrant, working-class families, also understands Preckwinkle's vision of racial equity for Cook County, she said.

"I've been committed from my first day in this office to work for racial equity and in particular to try to address the challenges faced by our African American and Latinx communities," Preckwinkle said. "The young man who's been proposed to lead our health and hospital system comes from New York and shares, I think, that commitment to a focus on racial equity and inclusion in his own health care experience."

Stancik wrote that Rocha's appointment comes at a "critical time" for the health system that runs both Stroger and Provident hospitals. Cook County Health, which continues to provide most of the county's uncompensated charity care, also is [looking at likely budget cuts](#) due to revenue shortfalls from the coronavirus pandemic.

Internally, the financially struggling hospital system has gone through a series of upheavals, beginning with the [ouster of Dr. John Jay Shannon as CEO](#) last year. Cook County Health's board of directors decided not to renew his contract following investigative reports revealing hefty debts and pay raises that the health system disputed. Since then, Preckwinkle and the Cook County Board [upped their authority](#) over the independent board by giving themselves power to approve the next CEO, among other oversight measures.

Rocha's potential exit from the New York City Health + Hospitals systems was met with warm, if bittersweet, congratulations from its top executive.

"When you have great people in your organization, you know that someday they may be lured away," President and CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz wrote in a statement. "Israel Rocha is an extremely talented, compassionate leader and it's no surprise that the Chicago Cook County Health and Hospitals system has tapped him as their next CEO. We will be sad to lose him but also are very proud that he will be leading one of the great public systems in the US."

Cook County Health taps New York hospital executive as next CEO

Brett Chase

October 7, 2020

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/10/7/21506190/cook-county-health-hospital-new-ceo-israel-rocha-commissioners>

A New York hospital executive has been named to lead Cook County's public health system, which faces a \$187 million budget deficit for 2021.

Israel Rocha Jr., chief executive of the Elmhurst and Queens hospitals in the NYC Health + Hospitals system, was selected by the Cook County hospital system board; county commissioners will consider him when they meet later this month, a spokeswoman said.

If approved, Rocha, 42, would replace Dr. John Jay Shannon, who left last year after the hospital board decided against renewing his contract. Cook County Health operates John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital, Provident Hospital, 17 health clinics and Cermak Health Services, which treats county jail detainees.

"The board is confident in Mr. Rocha's ability to lead CCH at this critical time in the organization and in the country," spokeswoman Caryn Stancik said.

The board of commissioners is expected to consider Rocha's hire at its October 22 meeting, she said.

Rocha's hiring [was first reported by WBEZ](#).

Rocha, who didn't return a call seeking comment, would be the first full-time CEO at the Cook County system since William Foley resigned in 2011 who isn't a medical doctor.

Debra Carey, previously deputy CEO of operations, was named interim chief executive at the beginning of the year.

In August, Carey announced [a plan to lay off 130 employees and shut two clinics](#) to help fill the budget gap.

Rocha joined NYC Health in July 2016 after heading a hospital system in Texas. He has a master's in public administration from New York University, according to his NYC Health bio.

"When you have great people in your organization, you know that someday they may be lured away," NYC Health Chief Executive Dr. Mitchell Katz said in a statement. "Israel Rocha is an extremely talented, compassionate leader."



Health Officials Say Repealing Obamacare Would Be ‘Catastrophic’ For Cook County

Mariah Woelfel
October 7, 2020

Cook County Health officials are warning that hundreds of thousands of Chicago-area residents could lose their health insurance if the nation’s highest court repeals the Affordable Care Act.

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to hear arguments in a Trump administration challenge to Obamacare a week after the Nov. 3 election. If the administration prevails, people with pre-existing conditions would lose protections, and insurance for 22 million people nationwide would be gone.

Across Illinois, nearly 630,000 people are now on Medicaid under the ACA and could lose their insurance. Half of them live in Cook County.

The county government would have to reckon with a grim future for the health insurance program it was able to create under the ACA, known as CountyCare. The health plan has about 370,000 members.

Of those, around 94,000 became newly eligible for Medicaid under the ACA. This group, who are adults with no children, would lose coverage if the ACA is repealed, officials said at a news conference Wednesday.

Another 214,000 Cook County residents are enrolled through other Medicaid programs that were expanded under Obamacare. That means a total of more than 300,000 residents could lose coverage if the ACA is repealed, officials said.

“This is yet another hit on Black and brown communities who disproportionately comprise the Medicaid population in Cook County and who have experienced the most negative impact of COVID-19,” said Debra Carey, interim CEO of Cook County Health, the government-run health care system that oversees CountyCare.

“But if the impact on people’s lives doesn’t resonate, perhaps the financial impact will,” she said.

Officials also announced an estimated \$1.4 billion loss if the ACA is fully repealed. The estimate is based on lost Medicaid reimbursements and increased expenses if the county is forced to care for more uninsured patients than it already does.

Cook County Health is already the biggest medical safety net for the poor and uninsured in the county. And the county health system is already struggling to bear the burden of providing medical care to patients who can’t or won’t pay their medical bills.

When asked whether the county has a back-up plan if the Affordable Care Act is fully repealed, Democratic Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle said: “The short answer is no.”

“We have made it quite clear what our position is, and we hope that our view of health care in this country carries the day,” she said.

Trump’s newest supreme court nominee, Judge Amy Coney Barrett, has been highly critical of previous Supreme Court rulings that have allowed Obamacare to survive. Barrett’s confirmation hearings in the U.S. Senate are set to begin next week – about a month before the high court is set to hear arguments in the Obamacare case.

300,000 patients could lose insurance if Obamacare repealed, analysis warns

*By Brett Chase
October 7, 2020*

Cook County's public health system would take a \$1.4 billion hit and more than 300,000 residents would lose their insurance if Obamacare is repealed, according to an analysis announced Wednesday.

The estimates reflect the number of patients who are enrolled in Medicaid expansion plans made possible by the 2010 law, officials said.

Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle, joined by six Democrats from Illinois' congressional delegation, said she believes the law, known as the Affordable Care Act, is in danger because President Donald Trump's administration has taken aim at repealing it and his Supreme Court nominee, Amy Coney Barrett, has been critical of it.

"A repeal of the ACA would not only financially cripple Cook County Health by dramatically increasing the amount of uncompensated health care we already provide, it would be catastrophic to the patients we serve," Preckwinkle said at a news conference.

Health system officials say they already provide half of the charitable health care in Cook County.

Debra Carey, interim chief executive of Cook County Health, said the \$1.4 billion estimated loss represents revenue the health system brings in through Affordable Care Act plans and a projection that half of more than 300,000 patients depending on the law would become uninsured and would require charity care.

Cook County Health, which includes John H. Stroger Hospital on the West Side and Provident Hospital on the South Side, treats patients enrolled in multiple Affordable Care Act health plans, Carey said.

"This is a real threat to our organization, the progress we have made under the Affordable Care Act and the people who have been served by it," Carey said.

Carey may not be at the top job of the county health system much longer as New York hospital executive Israel Rocha Jr. has been named to the full-time position, pending approval from the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

Preckwinkle and Carey were joined by U.S. Reps. Sean Casten, Danny Davis, Robin Kelly, Raja Krishnamoorthi and Jan Schakowsky, who all expressed concerns about the 2010 law being overturned.

They were also joined by Sheila Roberson, a 47-year-old patient of Cook County's Provident Hospital who worries that she won't be able to receive her annual wellness checkups and mammograms if the law is repealed.

Carey and other health officials warn that extremely expensive emergency room visits will replace preventative care if the uninsured ranks rise.

More than 300,000 Cook County residents could lose insurance if ACA were repealed, officials say: 'It is really hard to imagine anything more cruel'

Alice Yin

October 7, 2020

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle made it clear on Wednesday: There is no Plan B for the hundreds of thousands of her constituents who risk losing health insurance should Republicans in Washington succeed in repealing the Affordable Care Act.

She warned of a possibly cataclysmic blowback within Cook County's public hospital system that runs a massive insurance program made possible by the ACA, also known as Obamacare. Without it, there is no backup for many of the 370,000 low-income enrollees who have come to rely on the county's largest Medicaid managed care plan to access health care, she said.

"Here's the bottom line: The repeal of the ACA would not only financially cripple Cook County Health by dramatically increasing the amount of uncompensated health care we provide, it would be catastrophic — catastrophic — for the patients we serve," Preckwinkle said at a news conference with several Democratic congressmen at Cook County Health's Chicago headquarters.

Illinois Democrats have sounded the alarm on the implications of repealing the Affordable Care Act before, but Preckwinkle said Wednesday that now more than ever, there is "a very real threat this time around."

That's because the U.S. Supreme Court is slated to hear arguments on the law's constitutionality on Nov. 10 after GOP officials sued the federal government in 2018 to strike down Obamacare. And with the pending confirmation of President Donald Trump's nominee Amy Coney Barrett to the nation's highest court, the cards could be stacked against the ACA.

About 308,000 Cook County residents potentially would lose health insurance under an ACA repeal: nearly 94,000 CountyCare enrollees who qualified for Medicaid under the Obamacare expansion, and about 214,000 patients on other Medicaid plans. Financially, the cost is at least \$1.4 billion due to loss of CountyCare capitation revenue and reimbursements for other ACA patients within Cook County Health as well as an overwhelming uptick in charity care for the uninsured.

Cook County Health interim CEO Debra Carey said she worries the human toll could mean patients discontinuing medications, going back to frequenting local emergency departments or not seeking care until they are acutely ill, she said.

"The potential for a repeal of the ACA will be devastating to the patients we care for and will put the fundamental mission of this organization in jeopardy," Carey said. "To those elected officials and others who would allow the repeal of the Affordable Care Act: You are choosing politics over primary care, rhetoric over responsibility and heartlessness over humanity."

Other political officials at the news conference said this year is the worst time to be considering a rollback in health insurance, given a pandemic that has hit the U.S. especially hard.

“It is really hard to imagine anything more cruel, especially at this moment of dire need in this country,” Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Evanston said.

The president, who was diagnosed last week with COVID-19 and has received top-notch government-funded health care, should not be treated any differently than Cook County’s poorest residents, Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi of Schaumburg said.

“I wish him well,” Krishnamoorthi said. “I understand that he is receiving world-class care as we speak. That’s a good thing. But the American people deserve no less. The people of Cook County deserve no less. And advocating for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act at the same time that you yourself have COVID and there’s a global health pandemic is just plain wrong.”



A New York Hospital Executive Has Been Chosen To Lead The Cook County Health System

Kristen Schorsch

October 6, 2020

<https://www.wbez.org/stories/ny-hospital-exec-chosen-to-lead-cook-county-health-system/4cebbffe-d021-450b-882d-ad581afe71d7>

A New York hospital executive has been tapped to lead Cook County's public health system, WBEZ has learned.

Israel Rocha Jr., CEO of Elmhurst and Queens hospitals in the giant NYC Health + Hospitals system, is 'Candidate A,' a county health system spokeswoman confirmed. That's how the county health system board referred to their selection last month. They did not publicly name the candidate or his compensation package.

"The Board is confident in Mr. Rocha's ability to lead CCH at this critical time in the organization and in the country," the spokeswoman said in a statement.

Rocha has accepted the offer, but the full county board must approve the new health system CEO along with his pay. A vote is expected this month.

Rocha did not respond to a message from WBEZ. He would bring to Cook County experience running hospitals in the largest public health system in the U.S., in a city rocked by COVID-19. The NYC public health system has 11 hospitals, compared to Cook County's two medical centers, as well as a group of community health centers, long-term care facilities and a health insurance plan.

If approved, Rocha would be the second Cook County Health CEO in nearly a decade to come from the NYC public health system.

Debra Carey has been interim CEO of Cook County Health since the county health system board nearly a year ago decided not to renew then-CEO Dr. Jay Shannon's contract.

Cook County Health is the biggest medical safety net for the poor and uninsured in Cook County. The health system includes John H. Stroger Jr. on the Near West Side and Provident Hospital on the South Side, as well as a group of outpatient clinics and a Medicaid health insurance plan that covers more than 300,000 low-income and disabled people.

Older people will soon receive health coverage in Illinois regardless of immigration status under first-in-nation program: 'It's a relief'

By Laura Rodriguez Presa
October 5, 2020

When Ananias Ocampo, 76, learned that in December he'll finally have access to health care coverage even though he lacks legal immigration status, he smiled and managed to get up from the chair next to his ice cream cart despite his trembling and extreme knee pain because of arthritis.

He could not believe it.

"Enserio, no lo puedo creer, que alivio!" cried out Ocampo while selling ice cream on the corner of 18th and Paulina streets, as he has done every day during the summer despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

He is at a high risk of contracting the virus because of his advanced age and health conditions, including diabetes. But because of his immigration status, Ocampo does not qualify for Medicare, Social Security, or any sort of federal assistance, despite paying taxes for decades.

But in December, Ocampo will be one of hundreds of older immigrants eligible for Medicaid-like coverage in Illinois for low-income immigrants age 65 and older regardless of their immigration status. Initially, between 400 and 2,000 people are expected to sign up for the program, which was part of the state budget passed this spring.

Illinois is the first state to fully fund this type of health coverage program for noncitizen immigrant older people, according to Hayley Burgess of the National Immigration Law Center.

But the change comes as a new study shows the number of older immigrants without legal status in Illinois is expected to grow exponentially in the next 10 years. The study suggests that the expansion of health care was only a first step, said Graciela Guzman, director of the Healthy Illinois Campaign. The group has advocated for a bill that would guarantee health care for all Illinoisans regardless of income or immigration status since 2016.

"At least now I can be at peace knowing that if I get sick, I can go see a good doctor that can help me heal without having to worry about not having the money to pay for the treatment," Ocampo said in Spanish.

Like many uninsured older immigrants, Ocampo cannot afford to isolate himself during the pandemic because he needs to work to pay for rent and groceries.

But this is nothing new for Ocampo, who has for decades survived paycheck to paycheck, as he became estranged from his family in Mexico because of their separation from him.

When he could no longer work at a factory because of illness about five years ago, he turned to the only job he knew he could do as he felt his knees weakening and his body trembling worsen: selling *paletas*, a job he had been doing for years on his days off.

He now relies on an ice cream cart to stand and walk slowly from Cafe Emmanuel, 1915 W. 19th St., to the corner where he sets up shop.

Since arriving in Chicago 30 years ago from Guerrero, Mexico, Ocampo has worked steadily, he said. But like many older immigrants, he sent much of his money to his parents in Mexico and was unable to save money to retire and doesn't qualify for Social Security.

An unpublished study by Rush University Medical Center shows that the population of older immigrants with circumstances similar to Ocampo's will "substantially" grow in Illinois in the next 10 years, said Padraic Stanley, a program coordinator at Rush who conducted the study with Chicago researcher Rob Paral.

The 65 to 74 age group should experience a twelvefold increase, while people without legal immigration status who are age 75 to 84 should increase elevenfold. That means there will be more than 55,000 older Illinoisans without legal immigration status in 2030, Stanley said.

The study, which will be published in coming weeks, finds that many immigrants came to the country during their late 20s to 40s in the 1980s, which means that they are now reaching what, under most pension plans and Social Security, would be their retirement years.

"It ultimately shows that we need structural solutions because currently, undocumented older adults are being serviced (in health care institutions) with a patchwork of resources and people or certain organizations making exceptions to find creative solutions for patients," Stanley said. "As the population grows, care managers, hospitals, and institutions aren't going to be able to do as many creative solutions due to the extreme need."

Unlike many in his situation, Ocampo has been able to rely on help from friends.

Last year, the community came together to support Ocampo after learning of his story when Marta Rios, owner of Cafe Emmanuel, shared the struggles of the men who rent her paleta carts. Rios also took on the responsibility of accompanying Ocampo to his appointments at Stroger Hospital to translate for him because he has no family members to help him, she said.

Ocampo is receiving basic medical care at Stroger thanks to CareLink, a county program that helps provide free or low-cost medical care to patients at any Cook County health facility. Though it covers many expenses, it does not cover all preventive care or costly long-term treatments to help the pain in Ocampo's knees, to go away, he said.

That is why the Medicaid-like program taking effect in December gives him some hope.

"Maybe I can see another doctor, a specialist, figure out if I need surgery or get a treatment that might help, sooner," Ocampo said.

Junghye Chang, 65, an immigrant from South Korea, said through an interpreter that becoming eligible for the state program has alleviated her anxiety and fear about her medical care.

Since she arrived in this country in 1996, she has realized that being treated in a hospital or seeing a doctor is expensive, so she has depended on home remedies and over-the-counter medicines.

When she does seek out a doctor, Chang often has relied on community organizations that provide medical care for those living in the country without permission to get mammograms and other preventive care.

Although the full benefits and rules for the new program are expected to be finalized by the state in mid-October, Guzman said that she hopes it will provide preventive care benefits and provide a safety net during the pandemic.

The program was championed by the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus, in response to data showing uninsured older people who got COVID-19 could risk more severe coronavirus complications, incurring more expensive medical bills the state would end up paying, said Rep. Delia Ramirez, D-Chicago.

The expansion is expected to cost the state \$5 million, said Evan Fazio, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. But that's a small amount compared to the tax contributions of the group covered, advocates say. A 2017 study found Illinois residents without legal immigration status contributed more than \$758 million a year in state and local taxes, said Andrea Kovach, a senior attorney with the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, who has worked with backers of the bill.

While the program will benefit all noncitizen seniors 65 years and older below the poverty line, the majority of immigrants in that age range happen to be Latino, Ramirez said.

For now, advocates are focused on how the program will help some of those, such as Ocampo, who are most vulnerable in the coronavirus pandemic. But Guzman said they are aware of the possible challenges and the increase in cost as the population grows.

"Many of our street vendors, who are mostly undocumented elders, will finally have access to health care," she said.

Because the program is funded by the state, it is not subject to what's known as the public charge rule, which allows federal authorities considering applications for legalized immigration status to take into account whether someone has received federal welfare benefits, Guzman said. The enrollment for the program will begin in December, with the option to apply for retroactive coverage which will cover health care bills from the past year. Those eligible can apply through the state website and call centers.

Although Ocampo is hopeful he will now have access to better care, he fears that it is too late.

"I worry that I won't be able to walk anymore because I won't be able to work, and if I don't work, how am I going to make money to pay rent? Where am I going to live?" Ocampo said.

Carmen Velasquez, founder and retired executive director of Alivio Medical Center, which serves uninsured people in the Chicago area, said thousands of seniors who have did not have access to preventive care in their youth are now suffering the consequences.

State leaders made the right decision with the health coverage expansion but it doesn't go far enough, Velasquez said.

"It's the first step, but we need to get back to work aggressively on how we can go about covering more people soon," she said.



Illinois Coronavirus Updates: Veteran Chicago Teacher Dies, Cook County Seeks Participants for Drug Trial

Published October 5, 2020

A veteran Chicago Public Schools teacher died from COVID-19 after a three-week battle with the illness, according to the Chicago Teachers Union.

That death came just before the state surpassed the grim milestone of 300,000 coronavirus cases since the pandemic began.

Meanwhile, Cook County Health is seeking individuals to take part in a clinical trial evaluating an experimental treatment called Regeneron, which officials say President Donald Trump took following his diagnosis.

Here are the latest updates from across Illinois on the coronavirus pandemic today (Oct. 5):

Veteran Chicago Public Schools Teacher Dies From COVID-19

A veteran Chicago Public Schools teacher died Thursday from COVID-19 after a three-week battle with the illness, according to the Chicago Teachers Union.

Olga Quiroga, who most recently taught first grade at Funston Elementary in Logan Square, worked at the school district for 30 years, the Chicago Sun Times reported.

According to the CTU, Quiroga had been working in her school "on and off for weeks."

Starting Monday, CPS plans to have resources available for students in wake of the veteran teacher's death.

Illinois Reports 1,453 New Coronavirus Cases, 17 Additional Deaths Sunday

Illinois' seven-day positivity rate on coronavirus cases took another dip on Sunday, as the state reported 1,453 new coronavirus cases and 17 additional deaths over the last 24 hours.

According to new data published by the Illinois Department of Public Health, Sunday's new coronavirus cases bring the state's total to 301,541 since the pandemic began. The state eclipsed the 300,000 confirmed cases mark on Saturday, marking another big milestone in the state's battle against the disease.

Sunday's 17 additional deaths puts the statewide number of COVID-19 fatalities at 8,791.

According to Sunday's data, 51,656 new tests were returned to state laboratories over the last 24 hours. Those tests put the state's rolling seven-day positivity rate at 3.3%, its lowest level since July 22.

The state's current reported recovery rate, defined as the percentage of patients reporting no symptoms six or more weeks after their first positive test, remains at 96%, according to the IDPH.

Hospitalizations in the state ticked up slightly on Sunday, with 1,521 patients currently hospitalized statewide. Of those patients, 361 are in intensive care units, and 140 are on ventilators.

Regal Cinemas Temporarily Closes U.S. Theaters, Including 8 in Chicago Area

Regal Cinemas is temporarily suspending operations at all 536 of its theaters in the United States due to continued revenue losses from the coronavirus pandemic, its parent company Cineworld announced Monday.

"This is not a decision we made lightly, and we did everything in our power to support safe and sustainable reopenings in all of our markets – including meeting, and often exceeding, local health and safety guidelines in our theatres and working constructively with regulators and industry bodies to restore public confidence in our industry," Mooky Greidinger, CEO of Cineworld, said in a statement early Monday morning.

The theaters will close on Thursday, and the company will continue to monitor the market and adjust their plans accordingly, the announcement said. Regal is the second-largest theater chain in the U.S. after AMC.

The company operates a total of eight theaters in the Chicagoland area, and 11 more in Indiana. In Illinois, the theaters are located in Bolingbrook, Chicago, Crystal Lake, Lake Zurich, Lincolnshire, Round Lake Beach and Warrenville.

The news comes after MGM revealed that it would delay the release of the latest James Bond film, "No Time to Die," until April 2021.

The chain had reopened some theaters in the United States, but business has continued to be sluggish as moviegoers turn to other options to see movies, including streaming services like Disney Plus and Netflix and direct-to-cable releases, with some films like "Trolls: World Tour" available to rent on their theatrical release date.

Some states, including Illinois, have instituted occupancy limits for theaters amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, leading some companies to keep their theaters shut to avoid operating facilities at an ongoing loss.

Cook County Health Seeks Participants for COVID-19 Experimental Drug Clinical Trial

Cook County Health is seeking individuals to take part in a clinical trial evaluating a coronavirus treatment called Regeneron, [a cocktail of antibodies which has been called one of the most promising approaches](#) to preventing serious illness from a COVID-19 infection.

Following his coronavirus diagnosis, [President Trump received a single dose of the experimental drug through](#) an IV Friday. The president was taken to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center as a precaution in the evening.

Regeneron is in late-stage testing and its safety and effectiveness are not yet known. No treatment has yet proved able to prevent serious illness after a coronavirus infection.

The drug cocktail, which is also being used in Cook County, is showing "promising early results in terms of reducing the viral load," according to Sybil Hosek, a clinical psychologist with Stroger Hospital at Cook County Health.

Additionally, Hosek is looking for individuals to commit to clinical trials, so she and other scientists will be able to better fight the pandemic.

"The idea is that for those folks who don't mount a natural immune response against coronavirus, or delayed in mounting that response, this gets those antibodies into the system right away," she explained. "And [it] can decrease the amount of [the] virus in your body by preventing the activity. And also potentially making less infectious to other people as well."

[Click here](#) for more information about clinical trials in Cook County.



Trump at Walter Reed: President receives experimental drug Regeneron; Cook County Health also testing the possible coronavirus treatment

Jesse Kirsch
October 3, 2020

As part of his COVID-19 treatment, President Donald Trump received the experimental drug Regeneron Friday; Cook County Health is currently seeking volunteers to participate in its clinical trials for the same treatment option.

Trump is waking up Saturday in the hospital out of what the White House is calling an "abundance of caution." He's at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. The White House said he was experiencing mild symptoms from COVID-19.

He was taken to Walter Reed after suffering from a low-grade fever, chills, nasal congestion and a cough, multiple sources told ABC News.

The president is being treated with remdesivir and an experimental antibody cocktail from Regeneron, which is also being tested at Cook County Hospital.

"The idea is what they attach to that spike protein and prevent the virus from being able to replicate in the system," said Sybil Hosek, a clinical psychologist and principal investigator at Cook County Health. "So for somebody who has already been infected for early treatment, this gives them a boost of antibodies, particularly if their system doesn't launch its own robust attack against the virus. And that's the case of the president; he's getting this as an early treatment, potential early treatment for prevention."

Cook County Health is one of several major medical centers across the U.S. and the second site in Illinois to begin enrollment into the Phase III clinical trial, medical officials said. Cook County Health researchers are seeking asymptomatic, healthy adults who are close household contacts to an individual who has recently tested positive for COVID-19.

The Regeneron clinical program consists of three separate study populations: hospitalized COVID-19 patients, non-hospitalized symptomatic COVID-19 patients and uninfected people with close exposure to a COVID-19 patient or living with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Cook County Health is seeking adults who have not tested positive for COVID-19 but live with an individual who was recently diagnosed with COVID-19.

Study participants must be adults over the age of 18 and in good health, be asymptomatic with sustained close exposure with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, live and remain in the same household with the person who has COVID-19 and be willing to consent to and comply with study visits and related procedures.

Participants will be asked to participate in one initial and two follow-up visits at the clinic. Other visits will be conducted by home health care teams.

For more information, visit [regeneron.com/covid19](https://www.regeneron.com/covid19).

Cook county health's lead researcher on the Regeneron study said the antibody treatment is a temporary fix and cannot replace a vaccine.



Cook County Health Seeks Participants for COVID-19 Experimental Drug Clinical Trial

Natalie Martinez
October 2, 2020

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[Click here](#) for more information about clinical trials in Cook County.



The viral antibody cocktail Trump took is being studied in Chicago

Steve Miller

October 3, 2020

President Trump has received an experimental antibody cocktail that may be able to lower the level of coronavirus in the body. The same cocktail is in clinical trials here in Chicago.

Cook County Health has a study up and running that looks at the product developed by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, based in New York.

Six people here are enrolled so far. They are healthy, but live with someone who is COVID-positive.

"I've seen some comments about folks being concerned that the president is taking something that's experimental. But really, that's all we have right now," Dr. Sybil Hosek, the Chicago study's principal investigator, said Friday.

"And until we complete these trials and are able to get good data on treatment and prevention, we won't have anything to offer people that isn't experimental."

Dr. Hosek says that's why people are needed to volunteer for the antibody study.

The president is receiving monoclonal antibodies, and that's the same thing that Dr. Hosek's study uses.

Monoclonal antibodies are human antibodies "engineered in the laboratory to fight a particular illness," she said.

"In this case they've been engineered to attach to the spike protein of the coronavirus. And in Regeneron's view, having more than one antibody, as opposed to just one antibody, is better — less chance that the virus would escape," Hosek says.

There should be some results within months, she said.



President Trump's COVID-19 Diagnosis Highlights Push for Contact Tracing

Lisa Chavarria
October 2, 2020

Can you remember who you were close to yesterday? What about a couple of days ago?

It might be hard to remember exactly who you were with and for how long.

But, that's what contact tracers want you to think about when they call you - if you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for the coronavirus.

"Some people are not good historians, unfortunately," said Anna Pannarale, case investigation contact tracing manager for DuPage County. "But, we just try to jog their memory. We ask specifics."

Contact tracing is well into effect at the White House after President Trump and First Lady Melania Trump tested positive for the coronavirus.

This is a very public display of how quickly COVID-19 can spread.

"A few simple steps, hand sanitizing, wearing a mask and physical distancing could prevent all of that," said Dr. Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer & co-lead at the Cook County Department of Public Health.

If you receive a call from a contact tracer, it's vital to be honest when sharing information about where you've been and who you have had contact with.

"We look at those location to try and figure out if it's a place they may have picked up the virus or where they may have transmitted the virus," Pannarale added.

The Departments of Public Health says you should be as honest as you would be with your own doctor.

"You want to be...as truthful to a contact tracer so they can then go about doing their business, identifying potential contacts and reaching out to them," said Dr. Joshi.

The main reason behind all of this, if you've been around someone with the virus, you will need to quarantine.

"That it's important for them to quarantine for 14 days since they were last exposed," added Dr. Joshi. "That prevents any inadvertent exposures that those folks may continue to transmit."

Notre Dame president tests positive for COVID-19 days after not wearing mask at White House ceremony

Brett Chase

October 2, 2020

Notre Dame President Rev. John Jenkins, who apologized earlier in the week for not wearing a mask and shaking hands with others during a crowded White House ceremony, has tested positive for COVID-19.

The university relayed the news to students and faculty in a letter Friday, saying Jenkins is entering into “an extended period of isolation.”

Last weekend, Jenkins attended the Rose Garden nomination of Notre Dame alum and faculty member Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, an event that left local health experts aghast at the absence of basic protections against the virus such as masks or social distancing.

On Monday, Jenkins said he regretted not taking widely recommended precautions to guard against COVID-19.

“I regret my error of judgment in not wearing a mask during the ceremony and by shaking hands with a number of people in the Rose Garden,” Jenkins said in his letter Monday. “I failed to lead by example at a time when I’ve asked everyone else in the Notre Dame community to do so. I especially regret my mistake in light of the sacrifices made on a daily basis by many, particularly our students, in adjusting their lives to observe our health protocols.”

Jenkins was not the only person in the Rose Garden on Saturday who ignored health officials’ safety recommendations during the pandemic. Widely circulated video show U.S. Sen. Mike Lee of Utah without a mask embracing others at the event. Lee said on Friday that he tested positive for the coronavirus, according to his Twitter account.

The night before, President Donald Trump announced that he and Melania Trump both tested positive for the virus.

Jenkins said he was tested for the virus on Saturday just prior to the Rose Garden event and the result was negative. He and others who tested negative “were told that it was safe to remove our masks,” Jenkins said in his letter.

“What’s interesting in that White House setting, is people feel safe because of the testing,” said Chicago Public Health Commissioner Allison Arwady. “Testing in and of itself does not protect you from COVID-19.”

‘Superspreader’ could have caused outbreak

One infectious disease expert said if the infections are traced to the Rose Garden event, they may have been started by a highly contagious superspreader. Despite the rapid tests taken before the event, those results could change within days or even hours, said Dr. Robert Murphy, executive director of the Institute for Global Health at Northwestern University.

“Whoever got this thing going is a superspreader,” Murphy said.

The infections could have been avoided if masks were worn and social distancing was practiced, he said.

“The virus does not have a brain,” Murphy said. “The virus just attacks. If you don’t avoid the virus, you’re going to get it.”

“It highlights just how transmissible the virus can be. It also highlights the importance of the tried and true public health measures we’ve been talking about,” said Kiran Joshi, senior medical officer at Cook County Department of Public Health.

“With any public officials, I would recommend they follow the science and good public health guidance. I think that’s really crucial to setting a good example,” Joshi added. “That would go a long way to control COVID-19.”

Jenkins symptoms ‘mild’

In a statement Friday, the university said Jenkins “learned that a colleague with whom he has been in regular contact tested positive for COVID-19” and that he personally has “mild” symptoms. “The positive test is a good reminder for me and perhaps for all of how vigilant we need to be,” Jenkins is quoted as saying.

A university spokeswoman said Friday that neither Jenkins or anyone else at the school would comment beyond the statement.

In May, Jenkins wrote an opinion piece for the New York Times defending his decision to bring students back to campus for the fall semester despite the pandemic and scientists’ warnings about spread of the virus.

“For questions about moral value — how we ought to decide and act — science can inform our deliberations but it cannot provide the answer,” Jenkins wrote.

Shortly after the semester began, an outbreak of cases forced the university to temporarily suspend in-class teaching and moved to online learning.

Barrett, who tested positive for the coronavirus over the summer and more recently tested negative, has been teaching classes in person at Notre Dame, the Washington Post reported Friday.

Chicago won't cancel Halloween; Mayor Lori Lightfoot unveils pandemic rules for the holiday

Gregory Pratt
October 1, 2020

Halloween in Chicago isn't canceled after all.

Wearing a black and red outfit with a cape emblazoned with "Rona Destroyer," Mayor Lori Lightfoot on Thursday unveiled a series of COVID-19 rules for the upcoming holiday that she said will allow people to celebrate safely, including a requirement that everyone wear masks.

People handing out candy also are asked to leave a light on or hang a sign in their window letting others know whether they're participating in the holiday while following social distancing rules and providing hand sanitizer, Lightfoot and public health Commissioner Dr. Allison Arwady said.

Trick-or-treaters are asked to stay on the move in groups of six people or fewer, avoid sticking their hand into candy bowls and wait until they get home and wash their hands to eat candy, they said.

The city doesn't want to see any haunted houses this year and also forbids house parties "large or small," they said.

Telling people not to trick or treat would be unrealistic, Lightfoot said, so the city's emphasis is on creating public health guidelines.

"This year more than ever it is important to celebrate Halloween safely and responsibly," Lightfoot said.

The city also will host what it calls "**Halloweek**" activities, including programs from the Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Library, which will be available at chicagohalloweek.org.

Earlier this year, the idea of a Halloween that in any way resembles pre-COVID-19 times would have been hard to imagine. Lightfoot last month said she doesn't expect to see "mass crowds of trick-or-treating like we have in years past."

But the city recently has been touting its gains against the coronavirus while relaxing stringent pandemic guidelines.

Last week, Lightfoot announced the city would be loosening pandemic rules to allow bars that don't serve food to welcome patrons inside.

Lightfoot has been eager to showcase Chicago as America's most open big city during the pandemic, while also pledging to heed scientific advice on how much leeway to give businesses and other public places where people congregate.

On Wednesday, the Illinois Department of Public Health released state guidelines for trick-or-treating this Halloween, which falls on a Saturday this year.

While the state said "the safest way to celebrate is to stay home," IDPH said trick-or-treaters this year should only travel with other members of their household. And, both trick-or-treaters and those passing out candy must wear masks and maintain a 6-foot distance at all times.

Cook County residents also should heed the state's advice, Rachel Rubin, senior medical officer and colead for the Cook County Department of Public Health, said at a Wednesday news conference announcing mask distribution.

"No haunted houses. No haunted houses," she said. For trick-or-treaters, she said "the idea is to use common sense. Maintain the social distancing, only trick or treat with your own household, wash your hands when you come home before you enjoy the treats and wear a mask at all times while you're out."

If the county department hears about a haunted house skirting those rules, officials will notify law enforcement and ask it to cease operations immediately, Rubin said.

Haunted houses are prohibited under Gov. J.B. Pritzker's phase four reopening plan, but one-way haunted forests or walks are allowed in Illinois as long as 6-foot distance is maintained. State guidelines also allow for adult or bar parties have to follow the limit of 50 people or under 50% of the building's maximum capacity, whichever is fewer.

"No haunted houses, at least not traditional ones," Arwady said. "They are truly spooky and dangerous this year."



Illinois Health Officials Issue Guidance on Halloween During the Coronavirus Pandemic

October 1, 2020

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DR. MARK LOAFMAN

COOK CO. HEALTH

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Illinois officials on Wednesday released new public health guidance on several Halloween festivities like trick-or-treating, costume parties, pumpkin patches and more as the coronavirus pandemic continues. NBC 5's Natalie Martinez runs down all the details.



In Chicago, a Regional Funding Pool is Helping the Chronically Homeless Get Off the Street and Into a Permanent Home

Barbara Ray

September 29, 2020

Joanne was short of breath. It was 2017 and she was homeless, living on the streets in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. Joanne (a pseudonym) has bipolar disease and self-medicates with alcohol and crack-cocaine, according to the local alderman, James Cappleman. She's been arrested at least 18 times and picked up by police far more than that. Joanne is also well-known to the staff at Weiss Hospital in the neighborhood. Cappleman was with Joanne when she became short of breath. A 911 call went in, and within minutes a police car, firetruck, and ambulance pulled up and greeted her by name.

"The EMS driver told me that Joanne had been calling 911 twice a day for the past two years," Cappleman wrote in an email, "and that there were literally hundreds of Joannes out there in Chicago who do the same thing every day of the week."

While Joanne may be calling 911 frequently, Eric (also a pseudonym) wants nothing to do with the ER and typically refuses medical care. Eric, too, is homeless, and his health is extremely fragile. He is bipolar, has a serious eye infection with open sores that need attention, and he is addicted to drugs. He has been arrested 25 times. He told Cappleman that he didn't care if he lived or died.

Like many people experiencing chronic homelessness, Eric and Joanne are in fragile physical states. Nationally, people who are chronically homeless living on the street have mortality rates as high as many cancers. A chronically homeless individual can expect to live to only age 52. Homelessness is a health risk at any time, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's an even greater risk. Legislators are looking at ways to better cope with the problem. The Better Health Through Housing demonstration program in Chicago along with a new funding pool to expand the services can offer some guidance. Since November 2015, Better Health Through Housing has worked with four hospitals to house 104 homeless individuals like Joanne and Eric.

"Homelessness is more than lacking a home," says Stephen Brown, a licensed clinical social worker and director of Preventive Emergency Medicine at the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System, a public hospital in Chicago and a participant in the Better Health Through Housing pilot. "It is a dangerous health condition."

"Chronic homelessness is a major social determinant of health," Brown said. Individuals like Eric and Joanne who are unsheltered and on the streets for sometimes years have health care costs that can be 2.5 to 160 times higher than an average patient at University of Illinois Health systems, he said.

Despite the dire health consequences, for years there was little Chicago hospitals could do to help these vulnerable and often very sick individuals get off the street, out of the ER, and into a safe and stable home. But now, thanks to the success of the Better Health Through Housing pilot, a novel source of funding and a group of cross-sector partnerships have emerged to help some of Chicago's most needy homeless get off the street.

Organizations Band Together to Create a Flexible Funding Pool

In 2019, Chicago's two major public hospitals — University of Illinois Health Hospital and Clinics and Cook County Health — along with city and county offices, the Chicago Housing Authority, and several other private-sector and philanthropic organizations, banded together to create a flexible pool of funds to support a comprehensive supportive housing system.

Modeled on a similar funding pool in Los Angeles, the funding pool in Chicago is designed for men and women who are homeless and high users of public crisis services, including emergency rooms. The Flexible Funding Pool helps identify, locate, and — most importantly — house these most vulnerable homeless individuals.

Chicago's Flexible Housing Pool has received approximately \$13.4 million for the next three years. The money funds a monthly housing subsidy and in-depth wraparound support services for homeless individuals who have cycled through three public systems within the last two years: Cook County hospital; the Cook County jail, which daily houses 9,000 inmates, one-third of who report mental illness; and one of any of the city of Chicago's homeless shelters.

The largest contributors to the Flexible Housing Pool are the City of Chicago and the Chicago Housing Authority, with approximately \$10.5 million, followed by Cook County Health and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation with approximately \$2 million invested over the next three years. The remainder comes from Advocate Aurora Health and University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences System. Several philanthropies are providing support for planning and early development of the pool. The Corporation for Supportive Housing provides collaboration and project management. The Center for Housing and Health and its subcontractors handle the support services for tenants.

"This Flexible Housing Pool creates the financing to allow these different groups to band together in a way that can move the needle on this hard issue," said UIC's Stephen Brown.

The program is in line to house half of the homeless super users the program identified in Cook County Hospital, or about 140 people.

Identifying Homeless in Need

The program begins when a person experiencing homelessness shows up in a hospital's emergency room, often Cook County hospital. Cook County hospital, the Midwest's largest public hospital, serves 83 percent of the city's known single adult homeless population, according to Christine Haley, director of housing at the hospital.

A novel alert system within the electronic health record informs hospital staff if the person has been a persistent user of both the health system and the homeless system in the last two years. In spring 2020, 300 people met that criteria. A social worker then lets the patient know that an apartment awaits if he or she wants to get off the street.

That they are identifying patients by frequency of use *across* systems, not just in one system, is novel, said Haley. "We're very excited about this approach," she said. "It's these persistent, high-use patients who will most benefit from supportive housing."

Finding Housing

Once the person agrees to join the program, a team at the Center for Housing and Health steps in to locate an apartment. The Center can tap into a network of apartments, mostly privately owned buildings, said Peter Toepfer, the Center's executive director. When COVID-19 hit, Toepfer said, they added empty hotel rooms to the stock, working to move the most vulnerable into those rooms for the interim, including those in encampments, crowded shelters, and the immunocompromised.

While there are some hurdles, like criminal backgrounds, landlords are typically open to the program, he said, particularly given that the rent subsidy is handled by the Center for Housing and Health. It can take 74 days on average to get a person settled into a permanent apartment, and interim "bridge" housing is provided by nonprofit community

development corporations (CDCs), affordable housing developers, or private landlords. “We would be open to more,” Toepfer added.

The Center pays the landlord using the subsidy from the Flexible Housing Pool, and the tenant contributes 30 percent of his or her income, whether from employment or a disability check. If tenants have no source of income, they do not pay rent until they have a secure income. A typical monthly rent is \$1,000.

This emphasis on housing, said Dennis Culhane, the Dana and Andrew Stone Chair in Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania and a national expert on homelessness, is an important feature. “Responsibility cannot stop at the hospital door with this population. If responsibility stops there, they’re homeless on the other side of the door.”

The referral options for hospitals are limited, and many hospitals turn to medical respite services instead of accumulating the uncompensated costs of excess hospital days among this population, Culhane said. Medical respite services are acute and post-acute medical care for homeless persons who are too ill or frail to recover from a physical illness or injury on the streets but are not ill enough to be in a hospital. But, as Culhane notes, medical respite centers “are not solving the housing problem” — the source of the poor health to begin with.

The Flexible Housing Fund, he said, “is a far better approach” and an important exemplar, particularly as states such as California require hospitals to have a discharge plan for homeless individuals. The California “Dignity in Discharge” law ([SB-1152](#)), for example, forbids hospitals from releasing homeless individuals from the ER without a written discharge care plan and a place to go.

Increasingly health systems recognize the strong connection between a safe, stable home and health and are thinking about how to ensure their patients have quality housing. As we’ve written, health systems in Ohio, California, Richmond, VA, and elsewhere are partnering with CDCs and community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to build affordable housing for low-income families in their communities.

Toepfer is hoping that this funding pool can provide an entry point for local health systems to think more deeply and collaboratively about community investment in supportive housing.

“While I don’t think health systems are going to get into the property management business,” said Toepfer, “they are certainly recognizing their role in housing as a social determinant of health.”

Caseworkers — the Lynchpin to Success

In the Chicago program, once an apartment is found, a team of caseworkers from both the Center and Cook County Health ensures that the person is settling in to their new home and getting connected to an array of supports as needed. Community-based caseworkers help set up health care appointments and help the person manage medications. A housing case manager links the person to the appropriate benefits or employment options and helps with budgeting and other issues. If problems arise with the landlord, they act as the go-between.

This care coordination is one step beyond what most supportive housing programs offer, said Cook County Hospitals’ Christine Haley. “In traditional supportive housing you have the case managers and housing management. We’re adding in care coordination support.”

In addition, the Cook County staff meets twice a month with the housing specialists and housing case managers to talk about where people are in the housing process and whether they might need additional health or behavioral health supports as they make the move into a permanent home.

“We are continuously communicating with Center to provide the support,” said Haley. “Once they’re housed, we ensure that the housing case manager and care coordinator know each other and are coordinating their efforts.”

Toward Collective Impact

Providing a home is attractive to health systems despite the costs. A [recent preliminary study](#) that Build Healthy Places Network supported shows that, nationally, the return on investment on a \$90 million community development project generated \$351 million in health returns over the life of the project — a 291percent rate of return that accrued to a range of organizations including hospital systems.

At University of Illinois Health system, ER use decreased by 67 percent among Chicago program participants.

In Chicago, the next stage of the program is to expand beyond the original partners to include such possibilities as EMS, the police, mental health providers, and substance use treatment. With more organizations on board, they can better divert homeless people before they end up in jail or homeless shelters, which for people with serious mental illness is the worst place for them, said UIC's Stephen Brown.

"It's really complicated system that is not functional collectively, and we are not moving fast enough," said Brown. The result, said Toepfer is that people feel like a pinball.

"If we're not working together in a holistic way with the vulnerable person at the center, then all the systems are failing that person. And we are failing thousands right now," Brown said.

The Flexible Housing Pool's aim is collective impact, said Haley. "It has enormous potential to bring other eyes and partners to the table."

Partnerships and coordinated planning will be critical to success, professor Culhane thinks. "You can't improvise a solution like this." He recommends that communities have a planning council of hospitals, insurers, homeless providers, community development organizations and CDFIs, all in the room putting together a plan, "because the problem is bigger than any one smaller initiative," he said.

Culhane would also add experts on aging, given the impending crisis of an aging homeless population. By his estimates, the homeless population over age 65 is set to triple by 2030, and their health care costs are consistently higher across the board than the younger homeless population. Getting this population housed, he said, is where managed care can truly save money.

But the needed trust and cooperation to make cross-sector partnerships work don't happen overnight. It's complicated, Brown concedes, "but there is a will to make it work," he said. "The misery of living out doors demands it."

Toepfer, too, is excited by the tremendous spirit of collaboration around the table. It is gratifying to sit alongside these many people and organizations all working to make a better system, he said. "My most visceral response is a lot of hopefulness. This funding pool is one of the major tools that is helping us advance this cause because if we want to truly end homelessness in our region, then we need a much wider group of people who are willing to stand up and say, 'we need to do something about this.'"

"People need a home to be healthy, and at the end of the day," said Toepfer, this Flexible Housing Pool and the housing and supports it provides "is an important way to stand behind the belief that housing and health care are human rights."



Breast Cancer Awareness Month brings renewed push for screenings

Tanja Babich
September 28, 2020

There's a renewed push this October for women to get screened for Breast Cancer.

The push is timely as October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Dr. Julie Wescler, a breast surgeon at Cook County Health, discussed the importance of screenings Monday morning.

"Women should start screening mammograms no later than age 50," she said.

Wescler said it is important for women to discuss certain risk factors with their doctor.

"If you notice a change in what is normal to you, then you really should seek out a doctor and discuss that," Wescler said.

CRAIN'S CHICAGO BUSINESS 2020

NOTABLE

EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

These 46 marketers hail from virtually all the industries doing business in the Chicago area: banking, real estate, construction, health care, law, manufacturing and logistics, as well as nonprofits, consultancies and ad agencies.

They have adapted quickly during the pandemic, whether offering news and educational programs or fundraising to help those afflicted. Many pivoted and figured out new ways to pitch and win business.

They juggle a range of responsibilities including branding, public rela-

tions, communications, partnerships, recruiting, training and data analytics. Technology, of course, has transformed marketing, and digital is the sweet spot: email marketing, e-commerce, web design, social media and apps. Analytical tools enable marketers to quickly gauge the effectiveness of their efforts, whether incremental measurements of page views or broader assessments of brand awareness. They are an adaptable bunch and quick on their feet.

By Judith Crown

METHODOLOGY: The executives featured did not pay to be included. Their profiles were drawn from nomination materials submitted. This list is not comprehensive. It includes only executives for whom nominations were submitted and accepted after an editorial review. To qualify for the list, the honoree must be serving in a senior-level role at an organization or agency and using their skills to advance their organization or their client's.



MICHELE ANDERSON

Chair, U.S. brand
Edelman

Michele Anderson joined Edelman this year and is responsible for leading a significant part of the agency's business in the



U.S. During the pandemic, Anderson has launched an initiative to unearth opportunities to help clients solve a problem or address

a new opportunity. Anderson updated the agency's strategy for generating new business using a methodical approach by gathering staff input, pursuing targets and establishing a continuous effort to mine for opportunities. Anderson joined Edelman from Ogilvy, where she was head of PR and influence for the U.S. There she led teams in a client portfolio that included BP, Kimberly Clark, Sargento, Tyson Foods and the Chicago Blackhawks. Originally from South Africa, Anderson co-founded a PR agency, Magna Carta, and worked with Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

PATRICK BERGNER

Chief marketing officer
Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices
Chicago

As chief marketing officer, Patrick Bergner has led a department that rebranded the company,



launched websites, created programs and campaigns and opened new offices, all while supporting nearly 1,400 real estate agents

and their clients. In the past 18 months, Bergner guided the rebranding and name change from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices KoenigRubloff Realty Group to Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Chicago. He helped lead the "Get Noticed" ad campaign that included print and digital ads as well as billboards. This year, Berkshire Hathaway launched a "Chicago Strong" ad campaign to underscore the city's resilience during the pandemic. Bergner has helped to garner partnerships including Spacio, an open house app, and Curbio, a home renovation service. He has been with Berkshire Hathaway and predecessor real estate brokerages for more than 20 years.

PATRICK BERNARDI

Senior vice president and chief
marketing officer
HuFriedyGroup

Patrick Bernardi is charged with managing the HuFriedyGroup brand following the company's



acquisition last year by Cantel Medical. When COVID-19 disrupted business, the dental instruments maker supported customers by

providing education on infection prevention, PPE products and overall best practices. The Back-To-Practice initiative led to a 40 percent increase in site visits and a 34 percent increase in new site users, as well as a pipeline of sales leads. Earlier, Bernardi transformed the marketing and brand management department, focusing on data analysis, customer relationship management and integrated communications to segment and target end users. He has been a speaker or panelist at events hosted by the Chicago American Marketing Association, Incite Marketing Summit and other organizations. Bernardi joined Hu-Friedy in 2009 and was named CMO in 2014.

SUZANNE BOOSE

Chief communications officer
Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices
Chicago

Chief Communications Officer Suzanne Boose has been involved with marketing, communications



and technology in the real estate industry for more than a decade. She leads a marketing team in the Berkshire Hathaway Chicago corporate office

handling internal and external communications, branding, public relations, luxury marketing, social media and companywide events. In the past 18 months, Boose guided the communications plan for an executive leadership change in July 2019 and a company rebranding and name change in December from Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices KoenigRubloff Realty Group to Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Chicago. Boose has worked in marketing and communications at Berkshire Hathaway and a predecessor company, Koenig & Strey, since 2006. She worked with colleagues to establish the Kindness Foundation, which has raised \$800,000 for charitable organizations since 2011.

CHRISTINA BOTTIS

Chief marketing officer
Coyote Logistics

As chief marketing officer at the third-party logistics provider, Christina Bottis oversees go-to-market strategy, lead generation



and sales enablement. Her team of 20 runs integrated marketing programs that drive sales growth and revenue through the

delivery of qualified leads. Bottis also oversees the management and advancement of the Coyote brand and strategic positioning. In the past 18 months, Bottis' team launched an end-to-end e-commerce platform and redefined global messaging and creative. She launched a new subbrand to bring industry experts together to solve supply chain problems. She also established a forum for shippers and a customer advisory board. Bottis joined Coyote in 2018 and was named CMO last year. Previously, she was head of digital marketing at USG. She founded the Women's Leadership Group at Coyote.

SPOTLIGHT ON MARKETING MANAGERS

20,760

people were employed in Illinois as marketing managers in 2018. The only state with more was California. In the Chicago area, there were 18,270 people with that title for the same time period.

\$62.55

was the mean average hourly wage for marketing managers in Illinois in 2018. In the Chicago area, they were paid slightly more, at \$63.55 per hour.

\$130,110

was the mean annual wage for marketing managers in Illinois in 2018. In the Chicago area, they were paid slightly more, at \$132,170 per year.

\$181,780

was the average wage for top-earning (75th percentile) marketing managers in the U.S. in 2018. Those in the 50th percentile averaged \$134,290 a year, the 25th percentile earned \$95,770 on average, and the 10th percentile made \$69,840.

NOTABLE 2020 EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

DAWN BRADSHAW

Chief marketing officer
Wintrust Mortgage

At Wintrust Mortgage, Dawn Bradshaw led her team to design, implement and monitor omnichannel marketing strategies to reach consumers buying a home or looking to refinance. The team develops print materials and uses digital media including email marketing, display ads, paid search and paid social media. The team applies the agile approach to quickly test and adjust digital ads. Bradshaw implemented automated marketing outreach to support more than 230 loan originators, driving an incremental \$18.1 million in volume since the launch in March. Before joining Wintrust in 2018, Bradshaw held marketing positions at Adtalem Global Education, formerly DeVry University, where she led a turnaround. She has also cycled across Tanzania to raise funds for orphaned and homeless children in Africa for the International Childcare Trust.



'A combination of education and building trust'

As a marketer for MillerCoors, **Greg Butler** became interested in cannabis—whether it would become a competitive threat or be used on different occasions than alcohol. In 2018, Butler joined Minimal, an agency that was handling marketing and design for Cresco Labs, which was just starting as an integrated cannabis supplier. Butler focused on the medicinal market in Illinois and prepared for recreational sales, which became legal this year. The firm serves medicinal or recreational markets in nine states. Butler joined publicly traded Cresco Labs full time this year as chief commercial officer.

CRAIN'S: What moved you to work in the cannabis field?

BUTLER: I was fascinated by how cannabis provided relief to so many different people in different ways and how the stigmas of the past were causing misinformation and distrust. Many associate cannabis with just escapism, which is a part of its use, but there are so many others that rely on it to help live a better life—an alternative to opioids for chronic pain, a more natural aid to sleep or to help deal with anxiety.

Is marketing cannabis a B2B or B2C exercise, or both? How do you reach both types of customers?

Very much both. For consumers, build-

ing brands is a combination of education and building trust. However, dispensaries are at the tip of the spear for not only providing access to cannabis, but for influencing how brands are selected by consumers. They provide education on benefits and the forms that their customers are looking for. We must work to earn and build their business through consistent inventory availability and reliable deliveries.

What media/channels are most effective and what type of campaigns?

Whether you are experienced with cannabis, education is the most effective communication. For those who are more familiar with cannabis, we concentrate our education on what makes our brands special and different. Some of our brands focus on the medical-use consumer, like Remedi. We direct our education to how cannabis can be used as an alternative to help with pain and sleep. Older consumers are driving disproportionate growth of the cannabis market and finding a more natural solution for pain and sleep. The Wonder Wellness brand will focus on lower-dose, fun-to-use forms that help new and less-frequent consumers enjoy cannabis. The Cresco brand is for the experienced consumer.

Is it more mass, or targeted?

Given the current media restrictions on cannabis, national media buys are not possible. Regional and local buys are available including print, radio, out-of-home, direct mail and local digital media. Social media and support from key influencers throughout our communities present opportunities.

Are the approaches similar to traditional CPG, or more different? How so?

Cannabis can build itself by embracing modern marketing. It is not tethered to metrics and frameworks from the past. At its core, building brands in cannabis requires understanding that the audience for your brand is not by segment, but rather by people who will consume

MARKETING CANNABIS ISN'T TETHERED TO METRICS AND FRAMEWORKS FROM THE PAST.

on certain occasions with specific needs. We're building brands that are distinctive and expressed through experiences. We're building content around brands that can move hearts and not just minds, that leverages data to ensure there is quality messaging in real time and not just a quantity of messages based on an algorithm.

GREG BUTLER

Chief commercial officer
Cresco Labs

As chief commercial officer, Greg Butler is responsible for demand and commercial strategic planning for the integrated cannabis operator. He was named to the



newly created position in February after a year serving as an operating partner at an agency handling Cresco's marketing. Butler launched the Sunnyside retail brand with stores in six states. He repositioned four legacy brands and launched three new ones. Brand distribution expanded from two states to nine. With new store openings and the conversion of operating locations under a single marketing strategy, quarterly sales increased from less than \$8 million in 2018 to a run rate of \$100 million per quarter this year. Butler previously was vice president of growth strategy at MillerCoors. Earlier he held marketing positions at Kraft Foods Group and Walgreens.

ALLEN CHICHESTER

Chief marketing officer
Barnes & Thornburg

At Barnes & Thornburg, Allen Chichester supervises a staff of 41 professionals and is responsible for advertising and marketing, attorney coaching, business



development and client services. Chichester launched the law firm's legal operations department, with a focus on meeting client needs by hiring staff with pricing, project and client management skills, as well as by onboarding key software and systems. The department manages \$58 million in legal fees for clients and attorneys. Chichester expanded the staff to 41 professionals from 13 and in the past year oversaw year-on-year revenue growth of 15 percent. Chichester joined Barnes & Thornburg in 2009. Earlier, he was chief marketing officer at DLA Piper. He spent nearly 19 years at Leo Burnett, including a stint as CEO for the greater China region.

LEE CONCHA

Chief of staff
Rosalind Franklin University

As chief of staff and senior vice president for university enhancement, Lee Concha leads advertising, social media, media relations, and brand and reputa-



tion management. During the past two years, Concha directed government relations during development of the university's 100,000-square-foot Innovation & Research Park in North Chicago, which opened in 2019. The university includes a medical school and 30 graduate programs in science and health professions. Concha led a July celebration of the birthday centennial of British scientist Rosalind Franklin, for whom the university is named. The commemoration was meant partly to underscore the importance of women in STEM. Concha joined Rosalind Franklin in 2011 and was named chief of staff last year. Earlier, she was vice president for PR and communications at YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

MATTHEW DOUBLEDAY

Senior vice president, chief marketing officer
Wintrust Financial

At Wintrust Financial, Matthew Doubleday leads the team responsible for marketing efforts covering more than 100 brands



and dozens of business units. Over the past 18 months, Doubleday's efforts have contributed to 39 percent growth in assets, a 33 percent increase in loans and a 37 percent increase in deposits. Wintrust positions itself as hyperlocal, the community bank in its towns and neighborhoods. The institution established partnerships with the Chicago Cubs and White Sox and with Northwestern and DePaul universities. Doubleday notes that when a competitor makes a misstep, his team will target their customers at the Wintrust and local bank level. Doubleday joined Wintrust in 2002 and has been chief marketing officer since 2007. He is on the board of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicago-land & Northwest Indiana.

DENISE MOY DUFFY

Vice president, marketing
Clune Construction

At Clune Construction, Denise Moy Duffy played a pivotal role in the company's national rebranding, including the redesign of marketing materials and the



creation of brand standards. She conceptualized a national client relationship management program for marketing, business development and communications staff. Duffy participated in the redesign of Clune's intranet and streamlined management of the company's photo portfolio using digital asset management software. Initiatives in marketing and communications contributed to a 60 percent increase in engagement across Clune's social media platforms over the past 18 months. Duffy joined Clune in 2013 as marketing coordinator and was named to her current position in 2016. She has been involved in the company's partnership with the Chicago Blackhawks, assisting in the development of a sponsorship program to benefit the Chicago Blackhawks Foundation.

Rush University System for Health congratulates **Ryan Nagdeman, Chief Marketing Officer,** on his well-deserved recognition as one of Crain's Notable Executives in Marketing.

You make us more creative. You make us more strategic.
You make us more effective. And you make us laugh.



Thank you for your spirit, your passion and your unwavering commitment to Rush.



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CONGRATULATES

NATASHA PATLA, EVP OF MARKETING

2020 CRAIN'S NOTABLE
EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

Livewire, optimist, mentor, planner, visionary, producer, motivator, leader, mom, and friend.

Natasha - you and your incredible marketing team routinely achieve the impossible and continue to take @properties to new heights. On behalf of the 3000+ @properties agents and employees you impact each day, thank you and congratulations!

We are so proud of you.

love,

Mike & Thad

NOTABLE 2020 EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

ERIN FIEGEL
Marketing director
Executive Construction

At Executive Construction in Hillside, Erin Fiegel established a central database for managing client relationships that includes projects, sales and contact information. The company quadrupled its mailing list to nearly 6,000 and targeted communications. Fiegel coordinated with HR to support talent recruitment, development and engagement through internal communications, event planning and training programs. She established a social media plan that engaged universities and enhanced recruiting. Fiegel collaborated with top leadership to establish a foundation. Additionally, she's helping to facilitate the company's strategic plan for 2024, when it will mark 50 years in business. She joined Executive Construction in 2017 from Wight. Trained and licensed as a landscape architect, she has been active in the Illinois chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.



CASEY FOSS
Chief marketing officer
West Monroe

As part of the executive team at the consultancy, Casey Foss helps shape strategy and corporate development decisions. Over 12 years, she has elevated marketing from a support function with five marketers to a 29-member team charged with brand building, driving new business and strengthening client relationships. Foss led a rapid response to the pandemic by reimagining thought leadership, events and advertising, resulting in a 63 percent traffic increase from display advertising and media coverage. She managed a refresh of the brand, focusing on West Monroe's roots in technology. In May, the launch of a redesigned website resulted in year-over-year increases of 7 percent in web traffic and 11 percent in return visitors. She joined West Monroe in 2008 from Discover Card.



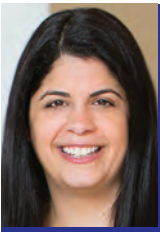
JEANINE GAFFKE
Chief marketing officer
Azek Building Products

Jeanine Gaffke oversees marketing and communications at the building products company. She was active on the team that handled the readiness and roadshow for Azek's IPO. The company began trading on the New York Stock Exchange in June. She led the company's "Better Tech, Better Deck" branding campaign that emphasized sustainability and innovation. In her first year at Azek, Gaffke revamped the marketing department, leading a rebrand and creation of a national omnichannel advertising campaign, including spots during the 2018 Super Bowl. She serves on the company's COVID-19 response team as well as the environmental, social and corporate governance team. Gaffke joined Azek in 2018 from Emerson Commercial & Residential Solutions. She is on the board of the Association of National Advertisers and previously was board president.



SIVAN KOENIG GALINSKY
Chief marketing officer
Brinks Gilson & Lione

At the intellectual property law firm, Sivan Koenig Galinsky collaborates with firm leaders to develop business plans for the three major practice groups. She manages the business development budget and its RFP and pitch processes, responding to requests from current and prospective clients and drafting proposals. Before Galinsky's arrival, some attorneys focused on their individual qualifications in pitches. Galinsky created a collaborative and team approach and included statistical analysis for some pitches. Galinsky worked with firm management to reduce the marketing budget by 40 percent while elevating the effectiveness of the spend. She also developed a development training program for attorneys and patent agents. Galinsky joined Brinks Gilson & Lione in 2017. Previously she held marketing positions at Sidley Austin and Foley & Lardner.



MAILEE GARCIA
Chief of communications and marketing
Heartland Alliance

At the anti-poverty organization, Mailee Garcia is responsible for brand awareness, marketing, media and public relations, and crisis communication. During the pandemic, Garcia has developed content to inform audiences of Heartland's work to support vulnerable people. She relaunched Heartland's Instagram and LinkedIn channels. Under Garcia's leadership, Heartland launched a refreshed integrated marketing campaign that included a brand video, style guides, collateral templates and newsletters. This campaign also included a structural and content website overhaul that resulted in increased page views and site visit times and reduced exit and bounce rates. Digital and social marketing produced high open rates and a social media following increase of 22 percent. Garcia joined Heartland in 2017 from GE Transportation. Earlier, she held marketing and public relations positions at Walgreens, Diners Club and Discover.



THEADORA GERBER
Director, marketing and communications
Tawani Enterprises

As director of marketing and communications, Theadora Gerber leads a team in planning, marketing and public relations for the more than 10 Tawani brands and two foundations. During the pandemic, Gerber has led her team to rethink strategies, which helped future bookings for the real estate businesses and boosted sales in other areas such as publishing. She also works to promote Tawani's pro-diversity and inclusion leadership through op-eds, statements and speeches. Over the past 18 months, Gerber created successful marketing communications campaigns for Tawani launches, including the 1323 W. Morse development in Rogers Park. The digital, print, radio and transit campaign resulted in the property being near capacity at presale. Gerber joined Tawani in 2017 from SapientRazorfish. She earlier held positions at AbelsonTaylor and Hill Holiday.



KELLY JO GOLSON
Chief marketing officer
Advocate Aurora Health

Kelly Jo Golson has guided Advocate through the COVID-19 crisis as well as the 2018 merger of Advocate Health and Aurora Health. She unveiled the new Advocate Aurora brand and launched the LiveWell app, which provides personalized wellness information as well as listings for care sites and physicians. Investments in technology positioned Advocate to quickly respond to demand for telemedicine during the pandemic. Advocate Aurora hosted more than 500,000 virtual visits (video, telephone and e-visits) with clinicians in the first half of 2020—more than 20 times the original goal of 25,000 visits for 2020. Golson assumed the CMO post for the combined health system after serving as CMO of Advocate Health since 2007. Previously, she held leadership roles at Houston health care organizations.



MICHAEL HASKE
President and chief operating officer
Paylocity

As president and COO, Michael Haske is responsible for sales, marketing and operations at Schaumburg-based Paylocity, which provides cloud-based payroll and HR services. Haske and his team led a rebranding and new website, launched in July, that includes a new logo and tagline, "Forward Together." The unveiling coincided with the company's outreach to clients during the pandemic, when it was able to provide tools for remote work and new workplace requirements. The initiatives generated more than 80,000 interactions with clients and prospects within two months. Haske joined Paylocity in 2007 as senior vice president for sales and marketing and was named to his current position in 2017. Earlier, he was director of marketing and business development at Paychex, where he managed a team of more than 300 employees.



JOHN HERBST
Creative director
Transwestern

John Herbst leads marketing and communications for the real estate company's Midwest region. During the pandemic, Herbst developed a remote process to pitch business, which led to the firm being awarded the leasing of 191 N. Wacker Drive. The team led the marketing of Mural Park, a two-building redevelopment in Pilsen that in May signed a lease with the parent of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Illinois. Herbst served on a committee that prepared the Chicago office to reopen after the COVID-19 shutdown. Earlier, he assisted in the marketing of FBRK Impact House, which supports the philanthropic community. Herbst started at Transwestern as a temporary employee answering phones in a construction trailer and then took photos of the site, which led him to doing design and marketing for the project.



WILLIAM "SKIP" HIDLAY
Senior vice president, chief communications and marketing officer
University of Chicago Medicine

At UChicago Medicine, William "Skip" Hidlay helped lead the institution's COVID-19 response through educational content, public service announcements and messaging around video visits and telehealth. His team also launched a thank-you campaign for health care workers that garnered more than 6,000 messages of support and 2 million digital impressions. Hidlay led UChicago Medicine's digital platform transformation, a comprehensive cancer cause marketing campaign, and the marketing of a \$20 million ambulatory location. Under his leadership, web traffic grew 70 percent. In late 2018, when two patients received the world's first back-to-back triple-organ transplants, Hidlay launched a content marketing plan to tell the story, resulting in 1 billion aggregated impressions and more than 800 media mentions. He joined UChicago Medicine in 2016 from Ascension Via Christi Health in Kansas.



Aimee Lerner
Field Marketing Director
Coldwell Banker Realty

WINDY CITY
STAR POWER

Coldwell Banker Realty is proud to celebrate one of our best and brightest stars.

Congratulations to Aimee Lerner, named one of *Crain's* Notable Executives in Marketing for 2020. On behalf of over 3,300 local agents, we want to thank Aimee for all her contributions to their success. Aimee, you are a guiding light in the Coldwell Banker Realty family.

ColdwellBankerHomes.com
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Congratulations to Lisa Randall and Jim Stadler on being named as Crain's 2020 Notable Executives in Marketing.



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NOTABLE 2020 EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

MARILYN JACKSON
Chief strategy and engagement officer
United Way of Metro Chicago

Marilyn Jackson developed the digital framework to support the Chicago Community COVID-19 Response Fund and the Illinois Response Fund, collectively raising \$65 million in 90 days. She negotiated and helped secure more than \$500,000 in in-kind media support to build awareness of the Chicago fund. Earlier, Jackson launched a digital marketing strategy that included a new website and updated social media. United Way increased its Facebook reach to 88,992 for the eight months ended in February, an increase of 16,081 over the year-earlier period. She also boosted Twitter and LinkedIn impressions. Jackson joined United Way in 2016 as vice president of marketing communications and was named to her current post last year. Earlier, she was vice president of marketing and membership at the Chicago Architecture Foundation.



LAINIEY JOHNSON
Head of paid media, Americas marketing
Ernst & Young

At Ernst & Young, Lainiey Johnson has overseen paid media investments of more than \$20 million. She launched EY's first business-to-consumer media campaign supporting its Tax Chat app. Johnson started a digital marketing campaign on cryptocurrency. And she expanded EY's media presence to network TV, including CNBC Business Day. Johnson led development of a content series on CNBC that kicked off at the height of the pandemic. It featured 45 top executives and CEOs in 38 episodes promoted via digital, social media and TV. The campaign aired across 500 network spots and achieved 3.5 million video views. Johnson joined EY in 2016 as brand, marketing and communications associate director and was named to her current position last year. Earlier she was marketing communications manager at McDonald's.



GENEVIEVE JUIILLARD
President, marketing services and data quality
Experian

Genevieve Juillard oversees Experian Marketing Services, which delivers data and analytical insights to support targeted engagements with customers. She also manages Experian Data Quality, which provides software to improve enterprise data quality and management. During the pandemic, Juillard has developed tools and resources to help guide clients. The team used data assets and technology to help government agencies and nonprofit organizations identify those most impacted. The team also provided clients with access to research on shifting consumer sentiment, which provided businesses with data to help them better market to customers and prospects. Juillard has been with Experian for nearly 15 years and has held positions in Chile, Australia and the U.K. In 2015, she took a leave from the company to manage a microfinance bank in Malawi.



AIMEE LERNER
Field marketing director
Coldwell Banker Realty in Greater Chicagoland

Aimee Lerner oversees strategy for Coldwell Banker marketing in the Chicago area, overseeing a field marketing team of 13 managers and specialists. Based in Highland Park, she sits on the senior leadership team and works to recruit and retain talent as well as help train new leaders. Recently, Lerner has been involved in rolling out Coldwell's recent rebranding with its North Star logo. She has trained staff on programs that agents use to market listings to consumers and potential clients. She planned and executed retention events for agents and staff at the Peninsula hotel, Navy Pier and Wrigley Field. Lerner also has trained agents on using technology and digital marketing techniques. Lerner joined Coldwell Banker in 2017. Earlier she was director of marketing at Tishman Speyer.



LAURA LUCKMAN KELBER
Senior vice president, marketing
Flexera

As senior vice president for marketing, Laura Luckman Kelber oversees brand communications for the Itasca enterprise software company. In the past 18 months, Luckman Kelber expanded the marketing department to 30 from 10, adding expertise to the team's capabilities. She relaunched the Flexera brand and website. And she helped integrate the acquisition of two enterprise cloud management providers. Luckman Kelber also raised and maintained the company's profile with industry analysts including Gartner and Forrester. Kelber joined Flexera in 2018 from ad agency Merge. Earlier she was chief strategy officer at digital agency Sandstorm Design. She also held positions at Euro RSCG, now Havas, and DDB. She serves as a mentor through She Runs It, a nonprofit that promotes women in advertising, marketing, media and technology.



DAN MCCOY
Vice president of marketing
Beltone

Dan McCoy oversees brand management, marketing, events and customer service at the maker of hearing aids in Glenview. During the pandemic, McCoy has led efforts to inform the public of telehealth and offerings like curbside care and drop-off service. He supported business owners with low- and no-cost marketing materials. McCoy's expertise in digital marketing has led to a much-needed adoption of digital tools and platforms by the business owners. He brought to market an online shop for hearing aid batteries and accessories, improving patient access to vital supplies. The site received dozens of orders since its June launch, without paid advertising. McCoy joined Beltone last year from medical equipment maker GI Supply. Earlier, he held marketing positions at GE Healthcare and Baxter.



CHRISTOPHER MEAD
Chief marketing officer
Gallagher

At insurance giant Gallagher, Christopher Mead led the global marketing communications team in producing 2,500 client and prospect brochures, advisories, webinars and videos focused on COVID-19 mitigation, working from home and returning to work. Mead has advanced Gallagher's global name recognition through partnerships, beginning in 2018 with the Chicago Cubs and Gallagher Premiership Rugby in the U.K. The Rolling Meadows-based company subsequently entered partnerships with the San Diego Padres, the owner of the Atlanta Falcons and Special Olympics International. Mead advanced diversity and inclusion efforts by teaming with organizations including the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the United Nations Girl Up Program. Before joining Gallagher in 2017, Mead was managing director of marketing at CME Group. He was a board member of CME Ventures, the CME Group's venture-capital fund.



EMILY MOEN
Vice president, public relations and marketing
Thresholds

Emily Moen has led strategic internal communications and donor communications during the COVID-19 crisis. The mental health and substance use agency serves more than 10,000 clients annually. More than 100 internal communications were paired with a web FAQ on swiftly changing organizational policies to support a large essential workforce with up-to-date safety measures and operating procedures. Digital and mailed appeals helped garner hundreds of thousands in COVID-19-related donations. Earlier, Moen led a redesign of the organization's website, adding mobile adaptability and an improved user experience. The redesign contributed to a 27 percent increase in donations made online and a 130 percent increase in total dollars donated online compared to the year-earlier period. Moen joined Thresholds in 2012 from Chicago Community Loan Fund.



STEPHEN MOFFAT
Chief marketing officer
Guaranteed Rate

As CMO, Stephen Moffat manages a team of 100 and oversees marketing for 700 offices nationwide. Moffat leaned on his sports marketing experience to strike brand-building partnerships with NASCAR, UFC, NHL, MLB and World Team Tennis, while making the most of the company's collaboration with the Chicago White Sox. His team helped grow the firm's business development platform, using CRM software and other tools to support the Guaranteed Rate sales force. Moffat also led efforts to expand content across video, digital and social media, and average monthly site traffic increased fourfold. Moffat joined Guaranteed Rate in 2017 from Google, where he was head of industry and brand adviser. Earlier he was senior director of marketing on PepsiCo's Gatorade brand. Moffat serves as president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago guild board.



RYAN NAGDEMAN
Associate vice president, marketing and communications
Rush University System for Health

At the start of the pandemic, Ryan Nagdeman's team switched gears to educating consumers and patients about health precautions. The team then shifted into recovery marketing, striking the balance between health and safety and the importance of not delaying care. Patient adoption of virtual tools grew more than eightfold. About two months into recovery, patient volumes had returned to 95 percent of pre-pandemic levels. Since joining Rush in 2013, Nagdeman brought together four teams across the system, comprising 60-plus professionals, under a single marketing and communications organization. Rush in 2018 launched a brand campaign, "excellence is just the beginning," which boosted calls for appointments, new patient visits, website sessions and consumer awareness. Before joining Rush, Nagdeman was director of marketing communications at Loyola University Health System.



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NOTABLE EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

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Photo Credit: Tom Sibley Photography

NOTABLE 2020 EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

KERRI NEIS

Associate director, field marketing
KPMG

Kerri Neis is charged with elevating the KPMG brand across the Midwest region, with an emphasis on Chicago, KPMG's second-largest market. She



works with firm leaders to design marketing tactics that showcase audit, tax and advisory services. Her efforts include working with business associations, community organizations and local publications. Neis created a campaign that focused on growth, workforce, customer and technology. It included events in Chicago and online that featured KPMG thought leaders. A series of four technology-focused LinkedIn Live events were viewed 80,000 times during the summer. Digital advertising impressions reached 1 million, and client engagement opportunities stemmed from the campaign. Neis, a CPA, joined KPMG in 2013. She is on the board of the Chicago chapter of 100 Women in Finance.

EMILY OLSON-TORCH

Vice president of marketing and e-commerce
Honey-Can-Do International

Emily Olson-Torch leads a team of 15 individuals responsible for strategic planning marketing, e-commerce and customer service at the



Berkeley marketer of home organization and storage products. This includes digital strategies for promoting the brand and products online, including influencer campaigns, social media and paid advertising. Olson-Torch helped grow revenue in the company's mature e-commerce channel over the past four months to represent three-quarters of company revenue from less than half previously. She developed a successful paid advertising campaign with major search engines and online retailers. And she led an investment in creating digital assets to grow online revenue. Olson-Torch also led development of a new brand, logo and packaging, including a style guide. Before joining Honey-Can-Do in 2015, she held marketing positions at Flor and Zappos.

JOHN O'REILLY

Chief marketing officer
OppLoans

At OppLoans, John O'Reilly leads a team of 31 marketers handling customer acquisition through direct mail, strategic partnerships, digital channels and search engine optimization. The fast-growing company aims to fill a gap between banks and payday lenders for borrowers with



poor credit scores. Revenue last year doubled to \$268.1 million. O'Reilly arrived at OppLoans in 2016 when it was an early-stage startup and built the company's marketing structure. He pursued extensive market research to glean insights into the firm's customer base. Last year, O'Reilly oversaw the launch of a referral program allowing applicants to opt in and have OppLoans check on their behalf to see if they qualify for a sub-36 percent APR small-dollar installment loan elsewhere. Earlier, he held positions at OptionsHouse and Navistar.

NATASHA PATLA

Executive vice president of marketing
@properties

Natasha Patla implemented marketing and operational strategies that enabled @properties to triple its sales volume and nearly triple its number of agents since she joined in 2013. The brokerage emerged as the region's market leader last year, according to



Colorado-based Real Trends. Patla strengthened @properties' position in the luxury market with programs to attract agents and clients in affluent markets. Patla elevated @properties' events programming, including an awards celebration recognizing the top-producing agents. She assumed responsibility for the firm's charitable foundation and boosted annual fundraising to \$200,000. Last year she produced a fundraiser at the Chicago History Museum, which raised more than \$118,000 for the Lynn Sage Cancer Research Foundation. Before joining @properties, Patla was director of external affairs at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

KERRY PENNY

Director, global lead of digital marketing
Kearney

At Kearney, Kerry Penny manages a global team responsible for digital content and marketing and data analytics. Penny led the digital side of a corporate rebranding that rolled out in January in which the consultancy changed its name from



A.T. Kearney to simply Kearney. It included an updated approach to content with key pages written for search, resulting in a 32 percent increase in daily web traffic. It also involved a social media initiative that resulted in a 28 percent increase in web referrals. Penny also created Kearney Answers, a free advice platform. She joined Kearney in 2015 as marketing manager and was named to her current position in 2018. Earlier, she held marketing and social media positions at Apollo Light-speed and Cars.com.

THOMAS POHLMANN

Chief marketing officer
Ahead

As CMO and executive vice president of customer success, Thomas Pohlmann is responsible for corporate marketing, communications and demand generation. During the past 18 months, Pohlmann spearheaded the company's shift in positioning from a reseller of comput-



er hardware to a services-led provider of digital infrastructure, including cloud-based platforms and applications. Pohlmann led the company's recent rebranding related to its acquisition of three companies and merger with Data Blue in 2019. The January rebranding tripled the number of unique website visitors each month and realized a model that delivers an average of 1,000 inbound leads for sales each month. Before joining Ahead in 2017, Pohlmann was head of values, strategy and brand at Mu Sigma. Earlier, he spent nearly 14 years at Forrester Research.

LISA RANDALL

Senior vice president, marketing director
First Midwest Bank

As the line-of-business marketing director, Lisa Randall heads programs for retail, commercial, wealth management and small-business operations. Last year, Randall led the bank in entering paid social media, which enabled it to reach more consum-



er, small-business and commercial audiences. She established a website that promoted First Midwest bankers as thought leaders, which generated more than 100 business leads. Randall worked with sales leadership to create an incentive program recognizing the highest-performing commercial bankers. Last year the program generated \$18 million in new business. Another program resulted in \$28 million in new loans to the commercial banking pipeline. Randall joined First Midwest in 2017 from Win-trust Financial, where she was director of commercial marketing. Earlier, she held positions at Royal Bank of Scotland and LaSalle Bank.

MAGGIE SCHMERIN

Managing director, advertising and social media
United Airlines

Maggie Schmerin leads the global advertising and social media team at the airline. During the pandemic, 60 percent of social media content has performed higher than average channel benchmarks, the company says. Schmerin has evolved social content to cover trend-



ing topics and start conversations with other brands. Earlier, Schmerin tapped in-house social media influencers from United's workforce to share behind-the-scenes stories and insights. Schmerin joined United in 2017 and assumed responsibility for social and digital media last year. She added advertising to her portfolio in June. Previously, she spent more than six years at Edelman and was part of a crisis communications team embedded at Penn State University following the Jerry Sandusky scandal. She worked on a Shell campaign that converted a neglected soccer field in Rio de Janeiro.

JEFF SCHMITZ

Senior vice president and chief marketing officer
Zebra Technologies

At Zebra Technologies, Jeff Schmitz oversees marketing functions that include the company's partner program, business market intelligence and employee and executive communications. During the pandemic, Schmitz has worked with the sales team to hold 450



virtual events reaching 43,000 partners and end users. Shortly after the shelter-in-place period began in March, Zebra launched a campaign to pay tribute to front-line essential workers. The global campaign provided practical information on how to disinfect Zebra devices used by front-line employees in retail and health care. It was Zebra's most successful social media campaign, with more than 46,000 impressions. Before joining Zebra in 2016, Schmitz was executive vice president at telecommunications testing company Spirent Communications in Germantown, Md. He speaks on trends in health care and retail technology at IoT Slam conferences.

SHERI SCOTT

Associate vice president, marketing and communications
Edward-Elmhurst Health

Sheri Scott is responsible for strategic and digital marketing, creative services and communications. During the pandemic, Scott has led a campaign to highlight safety measures at Edward-Elmhurst locations. She coordinated the launch of a mobile app to make health



care accessible from a phone or tablet. Scott led the development of a campaign featuring doctors, nurses and staff speaking about the cardiac care they provide. The campaign was linked to the completion of more than 3,000 heart scans and 5,000 online assessments, about 15 percent of which showed a risk for heart disease and required further evaluation. Before assuming her current post in 2018, Scott was system director of communications and creative services for Edward-Elmhurst Health and executive director of marketing and public relations for Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare.



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THE FOREFRONT OF LEADERSHIP

The University of Chicago Medicine congratulates William "Skip" Hidlay on his recognition as one of Chicago's Notable Executives in Marketing by Crain's Chicago Business. Skip is a dedicated leader of marketing, strategic communications, creative services, digital content creation and web management. He works tirelessly to help patients and consumers make better healthcare decisions through powerful stories and educational content that show how science advances treatment, health and wellness at UChicago Medicine.



AT THE FOREFRONT
**UChicago
Medicine**



William "Skip" Hidlay

Senior Vice President
Chief Communications and Marketing Officer

UChicagoMedicine.org

NOTABLE 2020 EXECUTIVES IN MARKETING

JIM STADLER

Chief marketing and communications officer
First Midwest Bank

At First Midwest, Executive Vice President Jim Stadler leads marketing and corporate communications, customer relationship management and client experience functions. During the pandemic, Stadler used customer relationship management to handle 6,400 applications for the SBA Paycheck Protection Program, helping 135,000 families. Marketing contributed 32 percent in incremental revenue to the bank's retail effort last year. The marketing department launched a new website and improved conversions by 20 percent. The bank generated more than 200 incremental commercial leads by introducing a multiyear "We Have Ideas" campaign. Stadler brokered a multi-year ESPN Chicago partnership to increase brand awareness. Before joining First Midwest in 2018, Stadler was managing partner at ad agency Schafer Condon Carter and worked on the Chicago Cubs account during the team's World Series win.



CARYN STANCIK

Chief communications and marketing officer
Cook County Health

Caryn Stancik oversees marketing communications for one of the nation's biggest public health systems, comprising two hospitals, a dozen community clinics and CountyCare, a Medicaid health plan with more than 350,000 members. Stancik, who is based in Countryside, spearheaded the rebrand of Cook County Health. An eight-month campaign generated 61.8 million impressions and 114,400 website clicks. Informed by extensive market research and utilizing a multiplatform strategy, CountyCare advertising delivered a 40 percent increase in web traffic. Stancik positions Cook County Health executives and physicians as thought leaders on key issues including gun violence, opioids and housing. She served as the executive lead and the primary author of Cook County Health's most recent three-year strategic plans. She is the elected treasurer for the city of Countryside.



ANGELA TENUTA

Executive vice president, client services
Intouch Group

Angela Tenuta leads account and client service teams of 250 employees across seven affiliates and six national office locations at the pharmaceutical and life sciences marketing agency. In the Intouch Chicago office alone, Tenuta's team delivers more than 1,500 projects annually across more than 20 brands. She scouted and opened three Intouch offices last year, in San Francisco, San Diego and Boston. This year, Tenuta championed and helped launch another affiliate, Intouch Seven, to serve a more diverse client base and provide safeguards when working with brands that may compete. She developed a program to help high-potential leaders grow to the next level that is being scaled to include more participants. Tenuta joined the agency in 2006 from FCG, where she was director of account services.



TRICIA VAN HORN

Vice president, marketing and communications
Related Midwest

At Related Midwest, Tricia Van Horn has marketed several high-profile projects. Van Horn worked to establish 70-story residential high-rise One Bennett Park, designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects, as a top luxury offering. It landed coverage in Architecture Digest and the New York Times, and its rentals are 90 percent leased. Van Horn led the process that led to the naming of the 78 mixed-use riverfront development, envisioned as the 78th neighborhood in Chicago. She has also led strategy for the mixed-income Lathrop development at 2000 W. Diversey Parkway, targeting tenants for affordable and market-rate apartments. The first phase is 93 percent leased and occupied. Van Horn joined Related Midwest in 2012. Previously she was vice president of marketing at Magellan Development Group.



JEFF WHITE

Vice president, marketing
USG

Jeff White oversees USG's B2B brand, product and digital marketing. He managed messaging through USG's acquisition by German manufacturer Knauf, which was completed last year. Starting in 2017, White overhauled the company's website marketing to improve user experience, navigation and search. The investments yielded increased daily website usage, including time spent on the site and product information downloads. It yielded a 30 percent increase in page views per session, a 60 percent jump in average session duration and a 35 percent reduction in bounce rate. For the past two years, Gartner has included USG in its top 10 Digital IQ index for B2B manufacturing companies. White joined USG in 2005 as director of strategy and business development and was named to his current position in 2016.







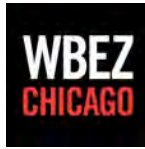
Congratulations, Kerri Neis

for being recognized as one of Crain's
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As Winter Approaches, Are Chicago's Health Care Systems Better Prepared For COVID-19?

Kristen Schorsch
September 25, 2020

It's been half a year since COVID-19 upended people's lives in Illinois.

Since businesses sent employees to work from home, and many shut down. Schools closed and shifted classes online. Parents scrambled to juggle both work and their kids' learning. Isolation — and loneliness — set in as people tried to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Buzz words like social distancing became the norm, as well as masks covering most of peoples' faces (and littering streets and empty playgrounds).

Illinois public health officials say COVID-19 has so far killed more than 8,500 people in Illinois and infected more than 280,000. That's just cases that have been confirmed through testing.

WBEZ is revisiting several COVID-19-related health care issues we explored in the past six months to see what's changed — or hasn't.

The Challenge of Transferring Patients

During the height of the pandemic this spring, when hospitals in Chicago were overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, some small hospitals, with the least amount of resources and mainly treating low-income people of color, were stuck. They couldn't get many other hospitals to take their patients.

In Illinois, there's no agency coordinating how patients flow from one hospital to another. And there's no agency that has the power to force hospitals to take patient transfers.

The major gap has created a patchwork transfer system that has led hospitals to rely on old friends and connections to help move patients when they're overwhelmed.

This remains the status quo. But hospitals are no longer brimming with patients sick with the coronavirus.

Still, with a potential uptick in cases in the coming months, it's time to fix the issue now, said Illinois State Rep. La Shawn Ford, who represents some West Side communities hit especially hard during the pandemic. He said he plans to propose legislation when lawmakers meet in November to address hospital transfers for COVID-19 patients.

"The pressure is not where it was," Ford said. "But that's when we have to make sure that we fix it. We've learned from the times when it was a crisis."

He said the balancing act will be to get more hospitals to take transfers, without overwhelming them.

"It could have unintended consequences," Ford said, like patients lingering in emergency departments, waiting longer to get treated.

A spokeswoman from the Illinois Department of Public Health, which regulates hospitals, did not comment.

Norwegian American Hospital in Humboldt Park on the West Side had to work the phones this spring to get patients transferred. One day, Norwegian contacted 21 hospitals, some in suburbs nearly an hour's drive from the West Side, and were able to transfer just two patients.

Heather Khan, Norwegian's vice president of patient care services, said the hospital is in a better place now, with just two or three COVID-19 patients a day compared to nearly 40 a day for most of April and May.

"I think it would take a lot to get to where we were before, because the beds have emptied out," Khan said.

But if and when Norwegian does get slammed again, the hospital would likely work the phones again, leaning on friends at other hospitals, Khan said.

Rush University Medical Center, a teaching hospital on the Near West Side, fielded hundreds of transfers from other hospitals in the spring, including from Norwegian.

Short of new rules that would help hospitals transfer patients, Rush has been partnering with Chicago public health officials to create a dashboard that would show where in real time there are available critical care beds for the sickest patients. The idea is to steer patients to those beds, even though public health officials can't force transfers.

But some hospitals are still reluctant to share that information, said Rush's chief medical officer, Dr. Paul Casey. Many hospitals are in bad financial shape after they had to cancel money-making elective surgeries during the beginning of the pandemic. The idea of having to share where you have a bed available, instead of using it for your own patient who could generate money for a hospital, could be tough for many hospitals.

"The threat or the thought for hospitals that just went through a pandemic that independently was an incredibly challenging time, but on top of that taking away the financial driver of being able to do procedures, really leaves a lot of hospitals in a bit of a tailspin from a financial and operational perspective," Casey said.

People Dying At Home

In May, a WBEZ investigation found a dramatic drop in the number of people seeking medical care since the pandemic took off in March, potentially contributing to the climbing death toll during the pandemic.

Then earlier this month, a national poll by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Harvard University revealed even more. Of nearly 530 people surveyed in Chicago, more than one in five people said they weren't able to get medical care for a serious problem when they needed it during COVID-19. A majority of those respondents said they got sicker because of it.

In the early days of the coronavirus, hospitals told people to stay away. They needed all the available beds for patients with COVID-19. Doctor's offices largely moved online, visiting with patients over video or on the phone.

NorthShore University HealthSystem in the northern suburbs was among hospitals where patients stopped showing up. At the time, cardiologist Dr. Mark Ricciardi told WBEZ he believed that some people could be ignoring their symptoms, like chest pain, and dying at home.

Now, Ricciardi said he's busy again and that people are likely more comfortable coming back, especially with constant messaging from hospitals and doctors that they are safe, that they won't get COVID-19 at the hospital or in a doctor's office.

"In April and May, I think the acuity of patients was worse," Ricciardi said. "In other words, they were a little sicker. Now I think that acuity has returned to the level of acuity that we became accustomed to pre-COVID."

The emergency departments at NorthShore's four hospitals are busier, too. People are coming back for the "usual stuff," such as chest pain, heart attacks and strokes, said Dr. Ernest Wang, chief of emergency medicine.

And while the number of patients with coronavirus NorthShore treats has dwindled, like it has at other hospitals, Wang still worries the deadly disease could come back with a vengeance as people get used to living with it in their communities.

"One of my colleagues walked into the ED yesterday and said, 'COVID is back,'" Wang said during an interview on Wednesday. "I think we haven't seen the real sick, dramatic presentations as much, so when we see it ..."

He trailed off.

Another sign more patients are returning to the doctor's office? At Esperanza Health Centers, a group of clinics on the Southwest and West sides, the number of deaths for their typically low-income and uninsured patients jumped early on in the pandemic, to 15 deaths in May. By July, the number was back to normal, with around three deaths, said Esperanza's chief medical officer Dr. Andrew Van Wieren.

"I see a lot of people who previously were scared to come into the health center now want to come in," Van Wieren said, to get a flu shot or lab work done. "I feel like I still do see a pretty significant divide. Some patients still don't want to come in at all. Some patients are willing to come into our health center but not willing to go to the hospital, because they determine that's higher risk in their mind, and then other patients are willing to go anywhere at this point."

Hospital Staffing

When COVID-19 took off in Illinois in March, state public health officials and hospitals advertised top dollar to staff up quickly to treat an expected surge in patients.

Dr. Eileen Murphy, a local obstetrician and gynecologist, was among physicians who were paid some \$200 an hour to work at a field hospital set up inside the McCormick Place Convention Center just south of downtown Chicago.

"I did meet a fair number of people from out of state," Murphy said, describing her two tours of the field hospital. "They literally flew in for the day. One woman was from the Midwest. Another was an ER type doc from Florida. I met a lot of nurses from out of state."

She never ended up working a shift. The field hospital, meant to relieve hospitals by taking their less sick COVID-19 patients, wound down after treating just 38 people. The venture cost about \$65 million.

The state ended up hiring at least 400 health care workers to help treat patients in the spring and recruited more than 36,000 volunteers, a spokeswoman said. Some of those contracts have since ended.

Loretto Hospital, a small facility in Austin on the West Side that mainly treats low-income and elderly Black patients, feared that its nurses would get lured by McCormick's high salaries. CEO George Miller said that didn't end up happening, though the hospital did lose a group of physicians to the field hospital that were meant to staff Loretto's emergency department.

Now he's in hiring mode for more nurses.

"We thought when flu came, there's going to be a second wave," Miller said. "We're preparing for that."

University of Chicago Medical Center, a teaching hospital in Hyde Park on the South Side, has hired more than 200 nurses since June to fill vacancies and beef up staffing in the coming months. And the University of Illinois Hospital on

the Near West Side plans to add at least 160 nurses as part of a tentative deal with its unionized nurses after they went on strike for a week.

But as some hospitals hustle to recruit more employees, other facilities are cutting staff or pay, even as COVID-19 could flare in the coming months.

“Nobody wants to talk about this because they’re frankly afraid of losing their jobs,” said Dr. Jay Chauhan, a head and neck surgeon in the suburbs and past president of the Chicago Medical Society. “And really, where are you going to go?”

To cut \$187 million from its budget, the Cook County Health system is closing two clinics, suspending inpatient pediatric care at one of its hospitals and converting the emergency department at its other hospital into a 24-hour standby department. The health system is the largest provider of medical care by far than any other hospital in the area for people who can’t afford to pay for it.

Mercy Hospital in Bronzeville on the Near South Side plans to close entirely next year.

Ironically, Mercy’s planned closure has been a boon for another financially-stretch hospital: Roseland Community on the Far South Side. CEO Tim Egan said he’s fielding calls and resumes from Mercy employees as he looks to staff up. He recently hired a Mercy physician to be the medical director of Roseland’s emergency department.

What to Watch for in the Coming Months

Jaline Gerardin, an assistant professor at Northwestern University who models COVID-19 data for Illinois public health officials, is keeping a close eye on whether Illinois could have another bump in COVID-19 cases.

“Intervention fatigue is a real thing,” Gerardin said. “If there is an increase in transmission, are we going to detect it quickly, or are we going to only notice it once there’s already kind of substantial transmission and more hospitalizations and deaths happening?”

And then there’s the flu colliding with COVID-19 this fall and winter. Doctors are pushing flu shots, hoping to control the spread of one disease while scientists work to create a coronavirus vaccine. Then figure out a way to get the public vaccinated.

Another thing doctors are focusing on while waiting for a vaccine? Testing more people for COVID-19 to contain the spread.

Progressive policy is good for public health

Health is a requirement for the freedom we prize in our society, yet too often we make policy decisions that disproportionately harm those who are most vulnerable.

Kiran Joshi and Rachel Rubin

September 24, 2020

As leading African American abolitionist and social reformer Frederick Douglass once wrote, "A man is worked upon by what he works on. He may carve out his circumstances, but his circumstances will carve him out as well."

A wealth of scientific evidence suggests that health is strongly influenced by environmental and social determinants, which are distributed unequally and unjustly in our society.

There are considerably higher rates of COVID-19 illnesses and deaths among African Americans and Latinx people. This is not surprising to those of us in public health, as Latinx and African American residents have historically been disproportionately affected by heart and lung diseases, cancer, diabetes and other underlying conditions that put them at increased risk for more severe illness and even death from COVID-19 and other chronic and communicable diseases. These health outcomes are the result of years of racist policies like redlining, limited access to health insurance and health care, community disinvestment and the criminal justice system that incarcerates people of color disproportionately.

Furthermore, people of color are more likely to be essential workers who must go to work and repeatedly risk getting COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) or face the prospect of their families going hungry. This is an impossible choice, and one that is clearly unjust.

Public health institutions, including the Cook County Department of Public Health, have acknowledged these injustices for decades. Health is a requirement for the freedom we prize in our society, yet too often we make policy decisions that disproportionately harm those who are most vulnerable.

The differences in health outcomes we see between Black and Brown people and their white counterparts do not stem from SARS-CoV-2 infection or differences in behaviors such as masking, but rather the history of racial injustices inflicted upon them. This has only been compounded by present-day policy decisions, such as the failure to pass comprehensive coronavirus-relief legislation and the lack of universal health care.

Our health system and health department have worked for over a century to prevent disease, promote and protect health, and care for the most vulnerable residents of Cook County. The Cook County Department of Public Health has worked with partners to advance policy changes such as paid sick leave and increase the minimum wage that would benefit and protect low-wage workers. This challenging, nontraditional public health work is crucial in order to protect those who have been most impacted by COVID-19.

Cook County Health has been a leader in addressing social determinants of health by investing tens of millions of dollars in grant funds and net health plan revenues to respond to the public health crises in our communities—from the opioid epidemic to gun violence, behavioral health to food and housing insecurity. These are critical services designed to improve health outcomes in vulnerable populations. Federal and state legislation and funding are needed to maintain these programs and should be part of all clinical health systems.

As public health physicians, we have the unique responsibility, perspective and privilege of not only bearing witness to the impacts of the social determinants on our individual patients, but the manner in which societal forces act to shape them.

If we are ever to become the society we aspire to be, we must acknowledge the acutely contemporary effects of long-standing, historical racial injustice and work—together—to advocate for progressive policy change. We are approaching the most important election of our lifetimes. We can all make a difference by registering and voting this November. This is a necessity if we hope to avoid our society being "carved out" by racism, injustice and the resulting inequities.

Dr. Kiran Joshi and **Dr. Rachel Rubin** are co-leads and senior medical officers at the Cook County Department of Public Health.

On the virus front lines: Alums caring for most vulnerable

Kate Arthur and Nick Erickson
September 23, 2020

For months, the nation has been bombarded with details of how the coronavirus (COVID-19) has brought heartache to families as loved ones perished. Health care workers became our heroes who worked with limited supplies and at their own peril to care for the ill, many of whom died with a nurse at their side because visitors were not allowed.

A second prominent and repeated headline has been the economic impact. Jobs were lost and unemployment soared during the weeks of mandatory quarantine. Businesses permanently closed and countless families were left with debt that mounted as resources disappeared.

Those hardest hit by the pandemic consequently fall on opposite ends of the spectrum— from health care to the homeless. Each group has been the focus of an alum determined to make a difference in the lives of those who have struggled to survive the pandemic.

Nursing through a nightmare

by Kate Arthur

Mennonite College of Nursing graduate Angel Pulido works 12-hour shifts on a COVID-19 unit at a Chicago hospital.

Sometimes it's difficult to breathe. Over a 12-hour shift, Angel Pulido '15 feels each warm breath under a sealed mask. Each day he pulls on a mask, gown, and gloves. He knows that no matter how careful, his precautions might not be enough.

"Being on the front lines and having to expose yourself to the virus, it's scary," he said. "You think to yourself, 'Am I going to get the virus today? Am I going to get sick?' There's a lot of uncertainty. Every day is new. It gets exhausting."

As a nurse on the medical/surgical unit in the John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County Health in Chicago, Pulido usually cares for patients recovering from surgery or suffering heart failure, kidney or lung disease. In March, his floor turned into a COVID-19 unit, where he cared for patients who were stable but so weak some couldn't hold a toothbrush.

Everything changed. The most difficult transition wasn't learning a new procedure or treatment. It was instead something he couldn't do—spend time talking to patients, hearing their stories, getting to know their families. No visitors were allowed, and he had to move in and out of rooms quickly to minimize his exposure.

"It's hard because some of these patients have been in for weeks and have to go through this alone," he said. "I can't imagine myself in that situation. I would be devastated because my family is everything to me."

At the end of his shift, he stores the mask that he uses up to two weeks. He disposes of his gloves, gown, and shoe covers and begins the 45-minute commute to his apartment. What used to be a smooth transition from work to home, now takes miles to clear his mind.

"Our job in the nursing field is to help you get to where you were before you got sick, to make sure you can go live your life," he said. "Now we have cases where patients sometimes don't recover, or take a lot longer to recover. Sometimes I come home and think, 'What if I would have done this differently today? Would that have affected the outcome?'"

Like everybody else, Pulido had plans before the pandemic. He and his girlfriend wanted to go to Disneyland. They were going to visit Mexico, the country his grandparents left as immigrants.

Instead he spent months in his apartment, only leaving for work and to get essentials, dropping groceries off to his parents who live 10 minutes away. He couldn't watch the news. He started teaching himself guitar to relax.

Pulido grew up on the north side of Chicago. His mother worked factory night shifts to provide for him and his sister. College didn't seem like a possibility, but he knew he wanted to do something where he'd interact with people.

"I've always had a big heart and want to help people anyway I can," he said.

When former ISU recruiter Dave Marcial, M.A. '07, visited his high school, they talked about Pulido's dreams. He didn't know how to apply to colleges and had never set foot on a campus. Marcial invited him to tour Illinois State. Pulido made that visit and connected with other Hispanic students.

"It was all people who looked like me, people of color," he said. "It really felt like I was joining a family right away." His mother encouraged him, even though it was two hours from family, which was a long way for Pulido.

"She wasn't going to let me not go to college," he said. "She kept track of the deadlines. It was because of her strength and courage that I was even able to consider it."

He applied to the Mennonite College of Nursing program, but didn't get in. He came to campus anyway, hoping to earn his way in and planning to transfer if he didn't. "That motivated me to put even more work into classes because I didn't want to leave campus." He was admitted as a sophomore.

"You learn how to cope and be mindful of controlling what you can."—Angel Pulido

Pulido found a second home in the Office of Admissions, where he worked three years as an ambassador. Now he's encouraging a generation that won't enter college until 2032, his 5- and 6-year-old nieces.

"I tell them, 'Just because we're Hispanic and of color, and statistics don't really work with us, that doesn't mean it's impossible.'"

Graduation day was emotional for Pulido and his family.

"To be able to put on your cap and gown, to cross the stage and shake hands with the dean, to take the oath you take as a nurse, it's just surreal. Hearing your name, looking for your family and waving to them, it was one of the greatest moments of my life."

Five years later, he's in a far different moment in the middle of a global pandemic, caring for those sickened by a virus that's infected more than 14.5 million worldwide.

"You learn how to cope and be mindful of controlling what you can," he said. "It's been tough but at the same time, it's fun being able to be on the front line and part of something I could never have imagined in a million years."

Cook County Health officials send Board of Commissioners \$3.4B budget plan as pandemic shortfall looms: 'We're looking at a compromise here, no question'

Alice Yin
September 22, 2020

Cook County Health's board of directors sent the county's Board of Commissioners its preliminary \$3.4 billion 2021 budget plan this week that would enact cuts across departments aimed at closing a projected \$187 million deficit.

In an 8-3 vote, with one director absent, the health system's board on Monday approved its budget recommendation, despite discord over how much additional tax revenue Cook County should provide the health system that makes up about half of the total county budget. The proposal, which includes slightly more revenue funding from the county, but less than what system officials previously requested, heads to the County Board for further consideration.

The health system board's initial request had been for an additional \$23 million in order to stave off some of the layoffs and other reductions slated for the next fiscal year, but the directors went along with the lesser amount of \$10 million in new funds offered by the county.

"Ten million is less than \$23 million," board Chair Hill Hammock said during the meeting. Hammock, who voted yes for the plan, said although the need is great enough that the system could receive an extra \$50 million and still be in want, "we have to be realistic. ... The county has indicated, to me anyway, that (\$23 million) wasn't available. So we're looking at a compromise here, no question about it."

Director Bob Reiter, chair of Cook County Health's finance committee, voted against the proposed budget because it did not include his \$23 million ask.

"It's completely appropriate for us as a body to push back against the county and ask for more on a tax allocation — that's the only thing that we can ask them for," Reiter, also president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, said. "\$23 million is less than 1% of the hospital system's total budget and half a percent of the county's total budget. ... Not to sound pejorative, but it's a rounding error."

Now, the county Board of Commissioners has the preliminary budget and will make a procedural vote on Thursday to send it to board President Toni Preckwinkle. She's expected to present the county's full 2021 budget plan in October, and it must be finalized by November. The 2021 fiscal year begins on Dec. 1.

The original proposal from budget officials already had an additional \$30 million county tax revenue allocation for the operating budget. Now, the total tax allocation for operating expenses lands at \$123 million. That money would go toward public health and health care for the jail and is in addition to county funding for pensions and debt service.

The public health system, which operates Stroger and Provident hospitals and is tasked with providing health care for some of the county's poorest residents, already was facing a ballooning crisis in uncompensated medical care when the coronavirus pandemic hit, potentially inflicting a \$187 million shortfall for fiscal year 2021. The two hospitals continue to provide most of Cook County's charity care, with a projected cost of \$312 million for the 2021 fiscal year, up from an anticipated \$268 million this year.

The proposed \$3.4 billion budget, while an increase from last year's \$2.8 billion, nevertheless includes a plan to lay off 130 workers by the end of Dec. 1 and enact consolidations and downgrades across hospitals. Of those layoffs, 46 already took place in June. Seventy of those 130 workers would be union employees.

The two clinic locations that would close — Woodlawn and Near South Health Centers — would merge patients and employees with the John Sengstacke Health Center at Provident Hospital, which is almost 3 miles away from both. Provident's emergency department also would wind down into a "standby" emergency room, which is more similar to an urgent care facility, and Stroger's inpatient pediatric unit would be suspended.

About \$2.2 billion of next year's expected revenue would come from CountyCare, the health system's massive Medicaid program serving low-income residents. The insurance plan is seeing an enrollment resurgence during the pandemic and is now expected to see membership peak in November before it plateaus to about 350,000 for most of next year, potentially offsetting all claims payments.

Throughout the health system board of director's September budget meetings, dozens of health care union members chimed in with public comments urging them to stop the cuts. They argued that amid the pandemic is the worst time to be scaling back services and employees.

"Cook County Health and Hospital System should be expanding mental, behavioral and general health services instead of cutting services that poor, uninsured, underinsured, and Black and Brown communities rely upon," SEIU Local 73 President Dian Palmer wrote in Monday testimony.

Financial fallout from COVID-19: 9 hospitals laying off workers

Ayla Ellison

September 22, 2020

The financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have forced hundreds of hospitals across the nation to furlough, lay off or reduce pay for workers, and others have had to scale back services or close.

U.S. hospitals are estimated to lose more than \$323 billion this year, according to a [report](#) from the American Hospital Association. The total includes \$120.5 billion in financial losses the AHA predicts hospitals will see from July to December.

Lower patient volumes, canceled elective procedures and higher expenses tied to the pandemic have created a cash crunch for hospitals. Though Congress has allocated \$175 billion in relief aid for hospitals and other healthcare providers, it isn't enough to cover the lost revenue and higher expenses some are experiencing due to the pandemic.

Hospitals are taking a number of steps to offset financial damage. Executives, clinicians and other staff are taking pay cuts, capital projects are being put on hold, and some employees are losing their jobs. More than 260 hospitals and health systems furloughed workers this year and dozens others have implemented layoffs.

Below are nine hospitals and health systems that announced layoffs since Aug. 1.

1. Springfield, Ill.-based [Memorial Health System](#) laid off 143 employees, or about 1.5 percent of the five-hospital system's workforce. The health system cited financial pressures tied to the pandemic as the reason for the layoffs.
2. Watertown, N.Y.-based [Samaritan Health](#) announced Sept. 8 that it laid off 51 employees and will make other cost-cutting moves to offset financial strain linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Chicago-based [Cook County Health](#) is laying off about 130 workers due to a budget shortfall of \$187 million for fiscal year 2021. Rising demand for charity care coupled with financial strain of the pandemic contributed to the budget shortfall.

4. Citing patient volume changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, MemorialCare's [Long Beach \(Calif.\) Memorial Medical Center](#) laid off 40 staff members. The layoffs, which occurred in August, mainly affected administrative and management positions.

5. Citing financial hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Barnstable, Mass.-based [Cape Cod Healthcare](#) said it will lay off 118 employees and extend 10 percent salary reductions for senior executives.

6. The [University of Texas Medical Branch](#) in Galveston is laying off 200 workers as it faces a budget shortfall of \$174 million. Interim President Ben Raimer, MD, said the budget shortfall is due to financial damage linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The layoffs will affect approximately 1.5 percent of UTMB Health's workforce.

7. Indianapolis-based [Community Health Network](#) saw revenues decline in the first six months of this year and ended the period with an operating loss. The health system implemented several cost reduction initiatives to help reduce financial strain. As of June 30, the health system cut 80 jobs, eliminated the match component of its 401(k) plan from Aug. 1

through Dec. 31, announced plans to close its inpatient rehabilitation hospital in Kokomo, Ind., and consolidated revenue cycle and other information systems to eliminate \$61.6 million in costs.

8. Martha's Vineyard Hospital in Oak Bluffs, Mass., cut 11 administrative positions. The hospital cited financial challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason for the layoffs. The hospital said it is adding patient care-related positions.

9. Yuma (Ariz.) Regional Medical Center said Aug. 4 it will cut 34 positions. The hospital said the layoffs primarily affect those in support roles and are due to lower inpatient volume.

Going to a Chicago ER? Now you can register to vote while you're there.

Lisa Schencker

September 22, 2020

The effort to register as many voters as possible for the November election has expanded into a new, unlikely front: hospital emergency departments.

Doctors in at least a handful of Chicago hospitals — including Stroger, Rush, University of Illinois, and St. Bernard hospitals — are taking part in a nationwide initiative called VotER, in which physicians are helping patients start the voter registration process at appointments and emergency visits.

The doctors and other medical providers wear lanyards around their necks with badges that say “Ready to Vote?” and the badges contain a QR code. Patients can use their phones to scan the QR code, which will then take them to turbovote.org, a website that guides them through the voter registration process.

More than 130 hospitals nationwide are taking part in the project and similar initiatives, according to VotER, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. In Illinois, people may go online to register to vote through Oct. 18, may register by mail by Oct. 6, and may register in-person at various locations through Election Day.

“We know that our patients often feel left out of the decisions that affect them,” said Dr. Shane Borkowsky, an internal medicine physician at University of Illinois Hospital and Health Science System, which sits on the West Side of Chicago. “This is a way to create a bridge for them to register to vote.”

Doctors interested in participating will get the badges in coming days, Borkowsky said. They’ll be encouraged to talk to patients while they’re waiting or not too busy.

No one will be urged to start on voter registration while they’re in the throes of a medical crisis, she said.

“The idea is to get patients when there’s not much going on, so you’re not taking away from their health care,” she said. “You’re just giving them the opportunity to use that wait time to do something.”

Doctors say it’s an especially important initiative at hospitals that serve many low-income patients, such as Stroger. About one-third of Stroger’s ER doctors are wearing the lanyards, said Dr. Rashid Kysia, an emergency medicine physician at Cook County Health, which is working to expand the program to Provident Hospital.

In the first week that Stroger doctors wore the badges, about 30 patients participated, he said.

“Our patient population is poor, and they’re disproportionately affected by issues that often they’re not voting for,” he said. “People in Chicago deserve a voice, and particularly our patients because they’re some of the most unheard voices in the city.”

Dr. Daria Terrell, an orthopedic surgeon at St. Bernard Hospital in Englewood, started wearing her badge about a month ago. She said a doctor in psychiatry and a nurse practitioner at the hospital are also wearing them.

“I bring the topic up sometimes as a part of taking a social history,” Terrell said. “Do you smoke? Do you drink? Are you registered to vote?”

It's also been an opportunity, she said, to help clear up misconceptions about voting. When she recently asked one patient if he was registered to vote, he said he wasn't because he had been previously incarcerated. She told him that he could still register to vote and helped him do so.

She saw another patient Monday who asked her which candidate he should support. The Internal Revenue Service prohibits charitable organizations from advocating for one candidate or another, though they may encourage voter and civic engagement in a nonpartisan way.

"I told him, 'I can't tell you who to vote for,'" Terrell said. "I told him, 'You have to think about what issues are important to you. Who do you think has your interests?'"

It's National Voter Registration Day, details on how some doctors are helping register patients

Kristina Miller

September 22, 2020



Today is National Voter Registration Day and Cook County Health is helping patients register to vote in the Emergency Room area.

Cook County Health Emergency Physicians Helping Patients Register to Vote with the VotER program.

Emergency medicine physicians and staff at Cook County Health are helping patients register to vote while they wait to be seen in the emergency room. Cook County Health is among the more than 60 institutions across the U.S. participating in VotER, an online voter registration, ahead of the November election.

To register to vote and/or request a mail-in ballot, go to <https://vot-er.org/?s=cook+county>, text VOTE COOK COUNTY to 34444, or scan the QR code that are also on posters on the medical campus at Cook County Health.



Register to vote: That's the message Cook County officials want the youth to hear

Evelyn Holmes

September 22, 2020



Dr. Trevor Lewis, Cook County Health

Foot Locker stores aren't just a place to buy your favorite athletic wear anymore; they're now a place where you can register to vote.

"We need to vote and I think that's a good idea," said Marcellus Brown, Chicago resident.

Starting Tuesday, anyone who wants to can register to vote or check their voter registration status through kiosks at Foot Locker's roughly 2,000 stores or a voter registration portal on the company's website.

The initiative, in partnership with Rock the Vote, hopes to reach the millions of young people now eligible to vote, and is just one of many efforts coinciding with National Voter Registration Day.

"From who gets a lifetime position on the Supreme Court to whether or not the Affordable Care Act continues to be constitutional, your vote matters now more than ever," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

National Voter Registration Day is a nonpartisan campaign to register voters every year on the fourth Tuesday in September that began in 2012. It's resulted in nearly 3 million registrations, according to its website.

Emergency medicine doctors and staff at Cook County Health are continuing their own effort, called Vote ER, which helps patients register while they wait to be seen in the emergency room.

Illinois election officials prepare for voting during COVID-19 pandemic

With the pandemic and a national reckoning on race, local election officials are gearing up for an increase in mail-in voting.

"My office is currently processing mail-in applications and we will actually begin mailing them to voters beginning this Thursday," said Cook County Clerk Karen Yarborough.

While Marcellus Brown, who's already registered to vote, supports Tuesday's efforts, he said the only thing that really matters come November 3 is the people.

"Go vote," he said.

Early voting in Cook County begins on October 9 and ends on November 2.



Suicides Surge in 2020, Chicago-Area Health Officials Say

September 21, 2020

Chicago-area health officials are asking everyone to keep an eye on loved ones as suicide rates rise in 2020.

The DuPage County coroner says there were 54 suicides from January 1 to June 30, 2020, compared to 44 suicides during the same time frame in 2019. That's a 22.7% increase.

"Certainly the anxiety and the issues surrounding COVID-19 have not helped," said Karen Ayala, Executive Director of the DuPage County Health Department.

Ayala wants families to know there are resources out there, including a wide range of services at the Behavioral Health Services division of the DuPage County Health Department, which has treatment programs at public health centers in Wheaton, Addison, Westmont and Lombard.

"Don't wait for the, for the perfect words to come to you. Don't worry about saying exactly the right thing to those individuals. It's much more important simply to say that you're concerned about them and you know where to go for help," Ayala said.

Also startling, nearly 80% of the suicides in DuPage County for the first half of 2020 were men.

It's something Dr. Mark Loafman, Chair of Family and Community Medicine for Cook County Health is seeing as well, particularly among African Americans.

"It's really honest to look at this as a public health crisis, particularly for men of color, who just face these overwhelming odds of despair," Loafman said.

In Cook County, there have been 71 suicides in the Black community so far in 2020, compared to 56 in all of 2019. The Cook County Medical Examiner's Office says 2020 is on pace to be the worst year for suicides in the Black community in a decade.

"I think there's more isolation, there's more frustration, there's more of a sense of despair and I think it's even more important that we reach out to those (people). Our system is trying hard to reach out, both electronically and virtually, and also in real ways to know that we're here," Loafman said.

Health experts are asking families to pay attention to their loved ones' behavior and to reach out to mental health experts if they're concerned.

Social Media Dashboard



Insights and Activity Report

September 21 – October 23, 2020



COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Social Media Summary

September - October Activity

During September 21 – October 23, the communications team posted content on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn for Cook County Health.

Posts included content such as COVID-19, interviews with local media, recognition for physicians and the hospital and health tips.

Facebook: 48 posts

<https://www.facebook.com/Cookcountyhhs/>

Instagram – 37 posts (*does NOT include stories*)

<https://www.instagram.com/cookcountyhealth/>

Twitter – 58 (*includes retweets*)

<https://twitter.com/CookCtyHealth>

LinkedIn – 11 posts

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cook-county-health/>

Social Media Insights

As of October 26

Twitter (28-Day Summary)

- Impressions: **23.9K**
- Profile visits: **458**
- Mentions: **123**
- Followers: **3,150** (up **54**)

LinkedIn (30-Day Summary)

- Impressions: **12,085**
- Unique visitors: **446**
- Followers: **5,598** (up 135)

Facebook (28-Day Summary)

- Post reach: **8.9K**
- Post engagement: **3,356**
- Page views: **1,213**
- Page likes: **4,651** (up **57**)
- Page followers: **5,846** (up **61**)

Instagram (7-Day Summary)

- Impressions: **2,297**
- Reach: **650**
- Profile visits: **167**
- Followers: **1,967** (up **83**)

Top Social Media Posts

September 21 – October 23

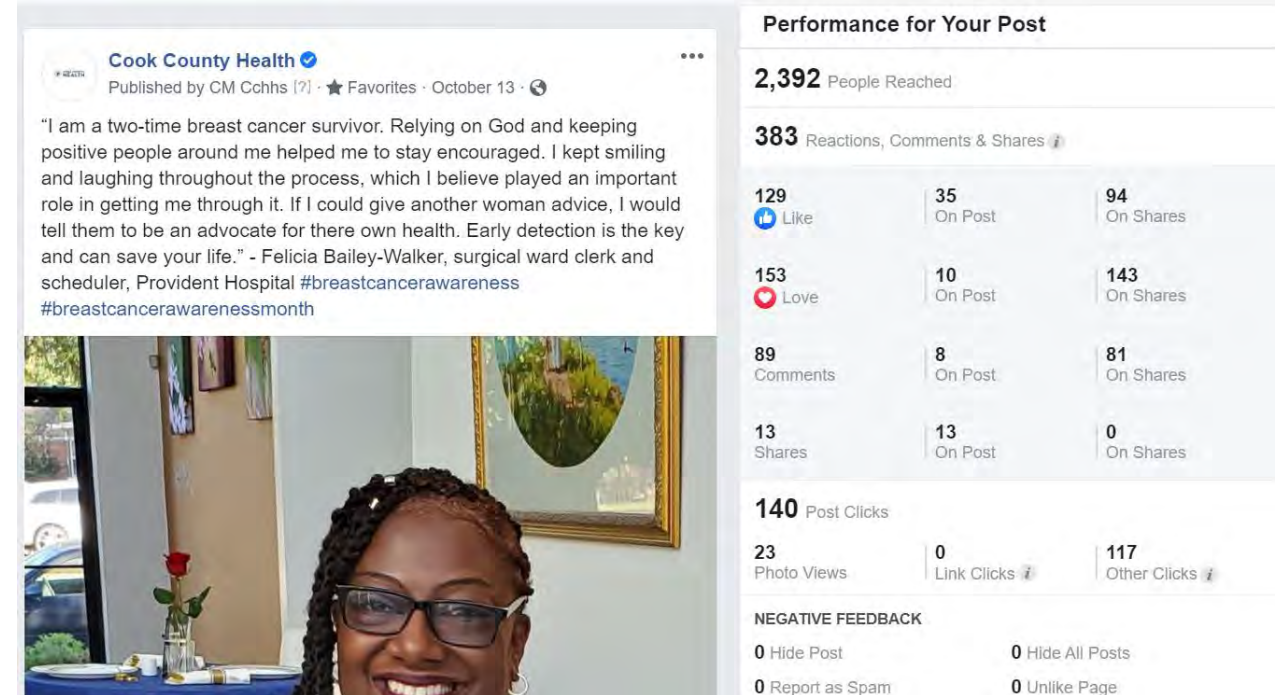


COOK COUNTY
HEALTH

Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

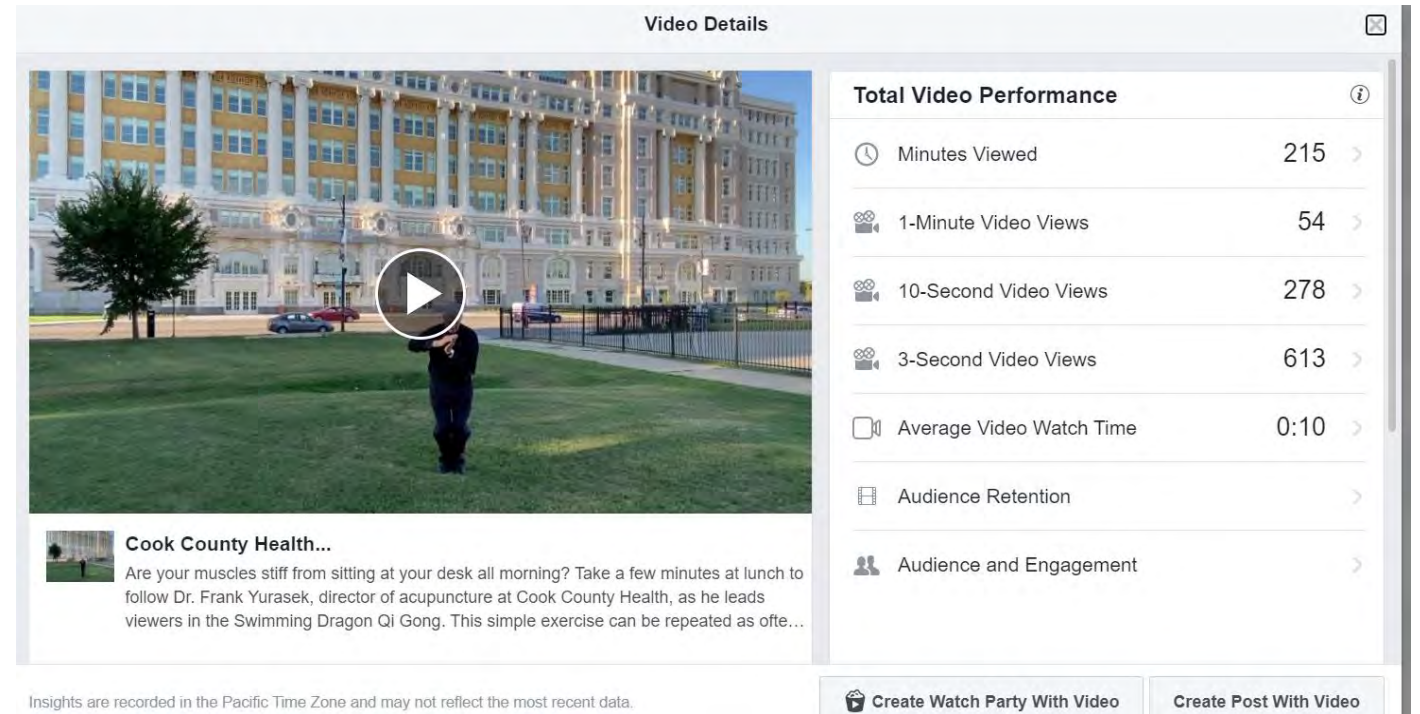
- Reach: **2.4K**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **383**
- Clicks: **140**



Top Social Media Posts: Facebook

Post Performance

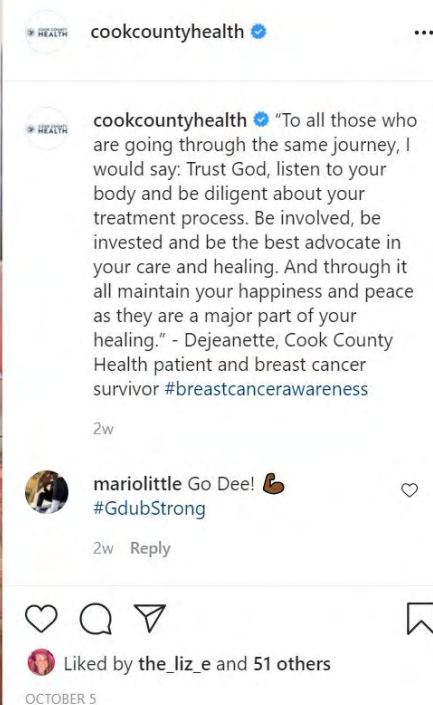
- Reach: **1.2K**
- Reactions, comments and shares: **40**



Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

- Impressions: **689**
- Reach: **628**
- Profile visits from post: **9**



Top Social Media Posts: Instagram

Post Performance

- Impressions: **714**
- Reach: **643**
- Profile visits from post: **6**



Top Social Media Posts:

Twitter

Post Performance

- Impressions: **1,487**
- Total engagements: **33**
- Engagement rate: **2.2%**



Cook County Health @CookCtyHealth

Masks are most likely to slow the spread of COVID-19 when they are widely used. Wear a mask when you are around people not living in your household, especially when social distancing is difficult to maintain.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html> ...

#MaskMonday #MotivationMonday
pic.twitter.com/jqiOwclRIs

Top Social Media Posts: Twitter

Post Performance

- Impressions: **1,476**
- Total engagements: **38**
- Engagement rate: **2.6%**



Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Post Performance

- Impressions: **2,270**
- Clicks: **42**
- Engagement rate: **1.85%**



Top Social Media Posts: LinkedIn

Post Performance

- Impressions: **1,932**
- Clicks: **311**
- Engagement rate: **16.1%**

