

EVER THRIVE ILLINOIS

CHAMPIONS FOR HEALTH EQUITY



EXECUTIVE LETTER

In 2022, EverThrive Illinois (EverThrive IL) has been focused on elevating the communities we serve in a world still recovering and rebuilding in the wake of the pandemic. COVID-19 exacerbated the challenges many Illinoisans already faced due to decades of systemic racism: lack of access to stable housing, food, childcare, and a continuing source of income.

The lingering public health crisis of COVID-19, increasing economic challenges, and the rollback of the landmark Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Decision has further underlined the stark disparities in health outcomes experienced in Black and Brown communities. Now more than ever, we know it is critical to ensure that vaccines and reproductive health care resources are available to communities most impacted by injustices.

This past year we achieved so much through our comprehensive, coordinated strategies to promote health, wellbeing, and justice in Illinois.

Among our accomplishments in FY2022 were:

- We used the results of the surveys and focus groups to develop a **community-based health education campaign called “The Gathering,”** aimed at explaining maternal mortality and morbidity and offering community resources to prevent future deaths.
- We continued and strengthened our work in **robust vaccine outreach, education, and immunization efforts prioritizing the most underserved communities in Chicago through our COVID-19 digital campaign.** This campaign targeted misinformation and solidified our voice as a trusted source for accurate information.

This is just a snapshot of our work from this past year, which you can explore further throughout this report. Our team is excited to build on our successes from this year and to continue to innovate new strategies to combat health disparities in 2023.

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded that this work would be possible without the partnership of the communities we serve and supporters like you. Thank you for partnering with us to ensure that all Illinoisians have the resources needed to thrive

In partnership,



Chi Chi Okwu, MPH
Executive Director



Anna Assenmacher
Board Chairperson

¹ EverThrive IL recognizes that reproductive justice issues impact people of all gender identities. Currently, reported maternal deaths in Illinois are represented as “women.” For this reason, we use “women” through out this report. Additional improved data collection and research is needed to understand better whether transgender or gender diverse people have been impacted by maternal mortality and morbidity

Even before the pandemic tore through our country, women in the United States were experiencing a steady 20-year rise in maternal morbidity and mortality, with pregnant women today facing a 50 percent higher risk of mortality than their mothers. The most vulnerable are women of color who have experienced long standing disparities in access to quality health care.²

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed cracks in the health system leading to circumstances where infectious disease grossly impacts the most vulnerable, especially pregnant women. The deadly, lingering pandemic in 2022 has demonstrated just how precarious community health is and why public health should be a dire concern to all.³

According to 2022 Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) data, as of 2020, **the gap in life expectancy between Black and white Chicagoans increased to 10 years.** For the first time in decades, **life expectancy for Black residents of Chicago fell below 70 years.** **Chicago Latinx residents saw a more than 3-year drop in life expectancy** between 2019 and 2020, the steepest decline for any group, and have lost a total of 7 years of life expectancy since 2012.

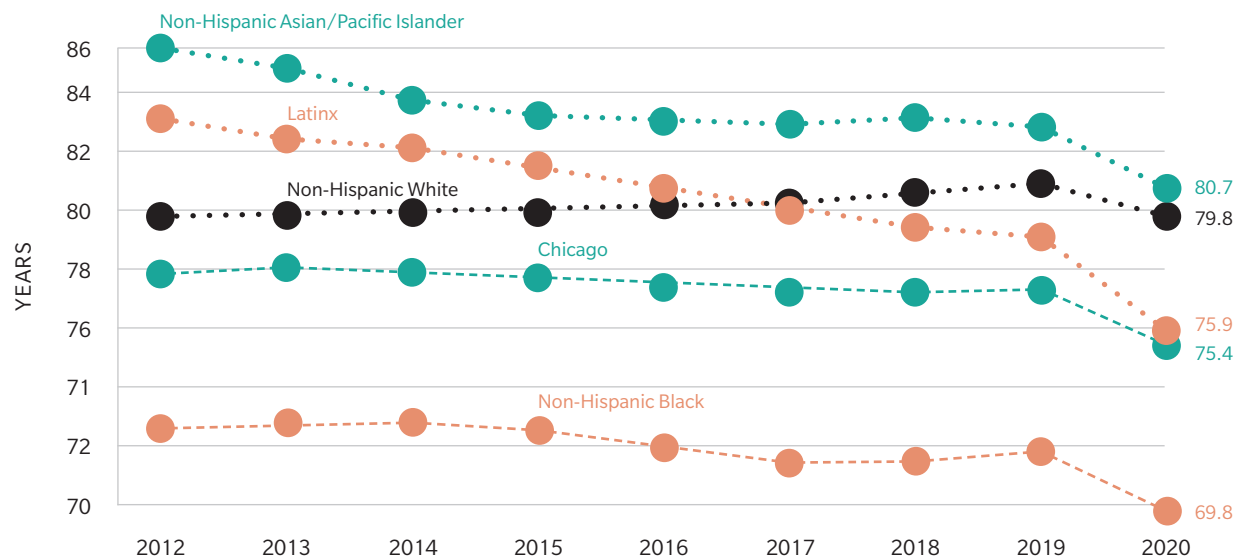
In so many ways, this racial life expectancy gap is a story about the despair and disconnection caused by COVID-19 and related social upheaval and deeply rooted structural racism.

In 2022 the CDPH Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Report found evidence of what we have known to be fact for some time: Non-Hispanic Black women and women living in communities with higher economic hardship, or worse economic conditions, bear the largest burden of maternal morbidity and mortality. And we know why: disparities in maternal and infant mortality are rooted in racism.

Racism including systemic and structural racism and provider bias is the leading contributor to why Black women are not receiving optimal health care and are dying.

This year, EverThrive IL put our mission into action, to fight for health care equity for individuals, families, and marginalized communities. We work tirelessly to achieve reproductive justice in the health care ecosystem through community-driven partnership, policy action, and systems change. Successfully achieving our mission means that every person who lives in Illinois has the resources and support necessary to determine if, when, and how to become a parent and to parent their children in safe and sustainable communities. In order to make this reality, we must continue to confront the inequities highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Life expectancy in Chicago declined during pandemic's first year with biggest drops among Black and Latinx residents



² Gorodetsky et. al, 2021

³ Gorodetsky et. al, 2021

In FY22, EverThrive IL reached 6,289 individuals through our community outreach, provider trainings, and coalition work. Some of our key accomplishments in FY22 included:

Training 91 social service providers on the maternal mortality crisis and identifying opportunities for community-based organizations (CBOS) to support pregnant and postpartum people in communities.



Developing and launching our COVID-19 digital campaign to address myths and encourage families, pregnant people and caregivers to get vaccinated. This campaign had a reach of 234,302 people.

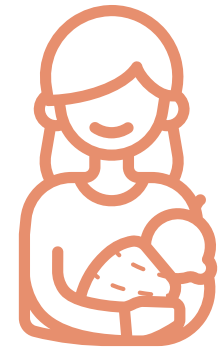


Educating 24 providers in Roseland, Woodlawn, and Englewood on common community myths around the COVID-19 vaccine and how to address them.

Partnering with the Healthy Illinois Coalition to successfully advocate for the expansion of Medicaid coverage for undocumented individuals ages 42 years of age and up.



Developing and launching a community-centered health education campaign “The Gathering” to help pregnant and postpartum people in areas with high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity understand postpartum warning signs and better advocate for themselves with health care providers. This campaign responded to findings from 330 surveys.



In conjunction with Family Connects Pilot Program (a universal nurse home visiting program) worked to identify gaps in care and resources for postpartum individuals and their families in the south side of Chicago.



We hosted widely attended roundtables and town halls, including:

- In June 2022, EverThrive IL and the CDPH hosted a “Roundtable Discussion: Increasing COVID-19 Vaccination Rates Among Black/African Americans in Chicago.” Attendees brainstormed recommendations on how the City and partners can continue to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates for Black/African American Chicagoans.
- Throughout the year, EverThrive IL has hosted four successful Maternal and Child Health Virtual Town Halls with over 760 attendees total. The town halls focused on the impact that housing insecurity, substance abuse and treatment, not getting the COVID-19 vaccine, and Medicaid health plans have on pregnant and postpartum people.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Increasing Vaccine Confidence

For almost 20 years, EverThrive IL has been involved in community-centered vaccine education efforts focused on diseases like measles, flu and HPV in Chicago and Illinois. Since the beginning of the pandemic we have increased our vaccine outreach, education, and immunization efforts focused on communities with the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates to support families in Illinois trying to make the educated decision for themselves.

In addition to providing evidence-based COVID-19 resources, we incorporated our flu promotional and educational materials to both reduce the likelihood of twin epidemics and to begin to address the myths surrounding vaccines in general.

Our approach is driven by community partnership and direct feedback from the communities most impacted by the health injustices. To continue to develop our community-centered vaccine education campaigns and strategies, we worked with existing community advisory groups to solicit feedback on the needs in their communities and to advise in the development of programs.

One example of this type of partnership was the Roundtable Discussion: **“Increasing COVID-19 Vaccination Rates Among Black/African Americans in Chicago.”** We co-hosted this event in partnership with the CDPH and had over 75 community leaders and CBO representatives in attendance. Participants brought their lived and community experience to the table to brainstorm new innovative strategies to increase COVID-19 vaccination rates among Black/African American Chicagoans.

Recommendations included:

1

Increase alignment of COVID-19 messaging across sectors, ensuring educational materials are representative of Black/African American communities and include testimonies from trusted community members.

2

Expand events and tailored messaging toward specific communities or populations.

3

Expand the use of community members as vaccine ambassadors/educators to build trust within communities.

4

Maintain practices that reduce access barriers for each appointment in the vaccine series.



In the coming year, EverThrive IL will continue to work with CDPH and other community partners to implement these recommendations and reduce the disparities in vaccination rates. We will continue to build and strengthen our community outreach worker teams to serve as influential messengers and address the concerns of those most impacted by the disparities on an individual basis.

Our work would not be successful without our amazing team of outreach workers who conduct 1:1 educational outreach within their own communities.

The reproductive justice tenants include working to ensure that everyone has the right to raise their families in safe and sustainable communities and the last few years have reminded us that healthy communities cannot exist without equitable access to vaccinations. We are committed to ensuring that all communities in Illinois, specifically those with the most disparities, have the resources and access they need to make the best choices for their families.

Additional immunization accomplishments in FY22 included:

- Creating a new COVID-19 curriculum, expanding our long-standing Community Immunization Education Guide Toolkit with up-to-date content on COVID-19 and addressing vaccine hesitancy with patients.
- Preparing healthcare and social service providers for ongoing response to COVID-19 and the resulting aftermath in communities we focused on providing regular information and resources for understanding and addressing vaccine hesitancy and helping them to understand what community members were prioritizing.
- **Educating 24 providers** in Roseland, Woodlawn and Englewood on common community myths around COVID-19 vaccine and how to address them.
- Developing and launching our **COVID-19 digital campaign** to address myths and encourage families, pregnant people and caregivers to get vaccinated. **This campaign had a reach of 234,302 people.**
- Providing 1:1 health education through Chicago-based outreach for **1,975 individuals.**



Outreach Worker Testimonial

"I'm an EverThrive IL outreach worker with diabetes and high blood pressure. I got the vaccine and booster shot to keep my family safe and protect my health. I also wanted to continue going out into the community and keep people around me safe. Thankfully, when I did get COVID-19, I only had a mild cough. When I'm doing outreach work, I share my experience about getting the vaccine with residents.

As outreach workers, we are passionate about what we do in the community. You can find us in neighborhoods passing out COVID-19 vaccine information, key chains, sanitizers, and masks. People are happy to get these things to keep themselves safe. What makes EverThrive IL different from other organizations doing this work is that our outreach workers speak to people individually or as a group. We are listening, answering questions, and building trust. When we do these things and provide good information, residents bring more people to connect with us. This allows us to create a stronger community network."

—Mary Gray, EverThrive IL Outreach Worker

2022 BY THE NUMBERS



234,302

people viewed
our COVID-19
digital campaign



6,289

individuals reached
through our
community outreach,
provider trainings,
and coalition work

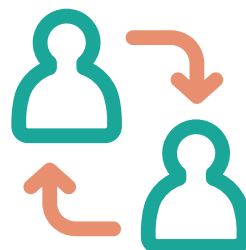
91

social service
providers trained
on the maternal
mortality crisis



760

people attended
our Maternal
and Child Health
Virtual Town Halls



1,975

individuals provided
with 1:1 health education
through on the ground
outreach



24

providers educated
on how to address
common myths
around COVID-19
vaccine

LOOKING FORWARD



As we enter into a new fiscal year and the second year of our strategic plan, we will continue to make strides to ensure that all people in Illinois have the access, resources, and health care necessary to create and sustain healthy families on their own terms.

In FY23, we will work to:

ACHIEVE BIRTH EQUITY BY ...

Training social and health providers on the maternal mortality crisis in Chicago to address the root causes, and also reaching 30,000 community members with the highest maternal morbidity and mortality rates in Chicago through The Gathering Campaign

Expanding our partnership with CDPH/ Family Connects through leadership of community alignment boards (CAB's) on the southside of Chicago. These CAB's will be focused on identifying and addressing the gaps in resources for postpartum individuals and families

INCREASE VACCINE CONFIDENCE BY ...

Educating 10,000 Chicagoans in communities with the highest disparities about the importance of COVID-19 and flu vaccines through peer-to-peer health education

Promoting infant and child vaccinations statewide
Training social service providers on immunizations messaging and equipping them to address current and emerging myths

Launching a city-wide Equitable Vaccine Advisory Council

ADVANCE CONTRACEPTIVE JUSTICE BY ...

Building power with a social education campaign providing community members with updated policy information around contraceptive justice care

EXPAND ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE BY ...

Conducting focus groups to better understand the telehealth experience of Medicaid recipients

Supporting school-based health centers and providing technical training focused on the needs of adolescents

Advocating for the expansion of Medicaid for undocumented people of reproductive age

Together, we can continue to make reproductive justice a reality.

SUPPORTERS

Thank you to the health champions who made this work possible in FY22!

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