

Champions for Health Equity



EverThriveIllinois
Champions for Healthy Communities

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Executive Letter

Some years, the inertia of change feels like a tidal wave pushing us forward. Other years, progress feels more like the agonizing drip of a broken faucet, delivering small measures of hope painstakingly slow. It is the greatest test of our commitment that, despite this past year feeling much more like the latter, we hold on to the pursuit of our vision for the future.

For over three decades, EverThrive Illinois has been building the world we know is possible where families and communities can truly thrive. This work has taken shape through many different projects, programs, and coalitions, but central to this mission are three distinct approaches:

- By **partnering with communities**, we learn first-hand their needs and priorities and collaborate with community members in shaping policies, programs, and services.
- By **fostering collaboration and innovation**, we help health care and social service professionals work together to close gaps and advance health equity.
- By **advocating for long-term systemic policy change**, we advance accessibility to affirming, equitable care and eliminate health disparities for communities.

COVID-19 has presented a multitude of challenges, but each one is an opportunity to build a stronger, healthier, more equitable system that prioritizes the needs of women, children, and families. We are excited to share with you in this report how we are committing to that work every day.

In partnership,



CHI CHI OKWU, MPH
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



ARIEL THOMAS, MS
BOARD CHAIRPERSON

Snapshot

While there was a lot that we couldn't predict, COVID-19's biggest threats came from the problems we already knew existed - racial and economic inequities in health, an eroding social safety net, and inadequate health care access for all.

One place where this was immediately apparent was the blood pressure cuff.

In late spring, EverThrive IL learned from partners that this simple device was the center of a growing disparity for pregnant women. Private insurance made it relatively easy for a provider or patient to request a blood pressure cuff, allowing that patient to check this critical vital from home during telehealth appointments. Providers could monitor blood pressure – a key indicator for the health and safety of both mother and baby – while their patients could attend appointments from home. It was a win-win.





This was not the case for those with Medicaid coverage. There was little guidance or clarity for pregnant people and their providers for getting a blood pressure cuff without out-of-pocket cost. People denied this safe way to monitor their health and pregnancy from home had to continue attending prenatal appointments in-person, needlessly risking exposing them, their families, and their providers to the coronavirus.

EverThrive IL got to work, appealing to the Illinois Departments of Public Health and Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), as well as Governor Pritzker. As a trusted partner and community link, we brought this disparity to light and offered solutions to make immediate change. Within a few months, HFS and the Illinois Association of Medicaid Health Plans released guidance on getting blood pressure cuffs without out-of-pocket costs. Since then, national groups have reached out to learn from Illinois' example for neighboring states.

Highlights

EverThrive IL's successful advocacy is making a difference for families right now, but this story also illustrates an essential lesson for adapting to COVID-19. The problems we face now are not that different from the issues that we have worked on for decades. Importantly, systems built on a legacy of bias and oppression threaten people of color, and Black women especially are paying with their lives for this injustice.

These problems will not be fixed until we resolve to build a different kind of system. One that prioritizes the needs of people before profit, that centers the lived experience of women, children, and families, and builds a network of support for communities, no matter what they might face.

Here's how EverThrive IL is building that kind of system through our five key focus areas.





HEALTH REFORM

- We **expanded health care access** to thousands of Illinoisans over 60, regardless of their immigration status, by successfully advocating for the Healthy Illinois Act.
 - We **removed barriers to health services** for Illinois families during COVID-19 by successfully advocating for expanded telehealth services.
 - We built on previously successful advocacy to **expand Medicaid coverage through the first full year postpartum**, annualizing this in the FY21 Illinois State Budget.
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MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

- We **distributed more than 12,000 reusable, cloth face masks** to pregnant people across Chicago in just four months as a founding member of Masks for MOMs IL.
- We **addressed longstanding inequities** in the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Food Assistance Program by advocating for systems change, driven by the experiences of families.
- We launched a COVID-19 response webinar series for social service providers to deliver vital updates on public benefits and **support their caring for families** during the public health crisis.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

- We **published our landmark Contraceptive Justice Report** assessing the barriers to contraceptive care, which garnered state and national praise of this work as the “gold standard” in reproductive health.
- We **partnered with researchers** in the nationwide PRIORITY study to recruit participants from BIPOC and queer communities to contribute to this research on how COVID-19 impacts pregnancy and birth outcomes.



IMMUNIZATIONS

- We **promoted timely vaccination** by providing education and resources to more than 14,000 people through on-the-ground outreach across Chicago.
- We **partnered with community members** to test pro-vaccine messaging that is now being used by county health departments across Illinois.

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CARE

- We **secured \$3 million in emergency funding** for school-based health centers affected by COVID-19 school closures to ensure they could remain open and available when students safely return.
- We **testified before the Illinois Legislative Children's Health Caucus** on behavioral and mental health services provided at SBHCs alongside students sharing their personal stories.



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THANK YOU TO THE HEALTH CHAMPIONS WHO MADE THIS WORK POSSIBLE IN FY20!

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