

2023  
ANNUAL  
REPORT



# EXECUTIVE LETTER

As we reflect on our accomplishments in 2023, the word *hope* resonates powerfully in every step we took. This year was marked by exciting growth and an unwavering commitment to the communities we serve. We have nurtured new connections, hosted engaging community events, and expanded the vital face-to-face interactions that foster trust and understanding.

In Illinois, the need for meaningful intervention in reproductive health has never been greater. Despite strides in health care availability, deep-seated racial disparities persist in areas of maternal and infant health, vaccine confidence, and access to comprehensive health care. But the data also points to untapped opportunities for impact. As we gather the threads of hope and set the loom for rebuilding, we see a future where targeted efforts can transform these statistics into stories of success and resilience.

The urgency of these disparities requires an unwavering focus on closing gaps in health insurance, increasing access to quality care, and addressing the underlying social and economic factors that continue to perpetuate racial inequalities.

In the past year, we made great strides in Illinois to address these disparities by leveraging our comprehensive and well-coordinated strategies to advance health, wellbeing, and justice.

## AMONG OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN FY2023 WERE:

- **Increasing Vaccination Rates Among Black and Latinx Communities in Chicago:** Our work to increase vaccine confidence is a critical foundation for reestablishing trust in our health care systems and with each other in our community. Over the last year, we've harnessed the power of digital platforms to provide evidence-based vaccine education to an expansive virtual audience, reaching 26,919 people. Our efforts extended beyond the digital realm through community programs, where we've made personal connections with an additional 19,032 individuals, inviting them into a safer, more informed world.

These are stories of transformation and community empowerment. From parents who transitioned from vaccine skepticism to vocal advocacy, to communities previously clouded by misinformation now equipped with evidence-based knowledge, each statistic represents a human narrative. Local health care leaders, equipped with our resources, have become advocates of change, challenging and shifting the status quo at the grassroots level.

- **Launching and Expanding *The Gathering*:** Over the past year, we've launched and expanded *The Gathering*, leveraging digital promotion and outreach to educate and support communities most in need. Through this effort, we have undertaken extensive training programs for health care providers and other professionals who serve Black pregnant and postpartum individuals, equipping them with the tools to offer better patient care. We are pushing for impactful policy changes that both meet the immediate needs of our communities and provide a sustainable framework for long-term equity and justice.

The accomplishments highlighted above are glimpses of what we've achieved together in the past year. There is so much more to explore and you will find the detailed accounts of our work throughout this report. With a foundation laid on innovation and success we advance into 2024 with renewed energy, devising new strategies to dismantle health disparities in Illinois.

We could not have accomplished our achievements without you. Thank you for standing by us, for partnering with us, and for believing in the vision that every person in Illinois should have the resources they need to thrive.

In partnership,



**Chi Chi Okwu, MPH**  
Executive Director



**Barbara Staples King**  
Board Chairperson

# YEAR IN REVIEW

In a year marked by complexity and change, we centered our vision in hope and rebuilding. As we seek to bridge gaps in maternal health and vaccine confidence, we recognize the urgent need to rebuild trust and create equitable access to quality health care.

There is still so much work to be done: a recent CDC report found that **1 in 10 Black patients experienced mistreatment** because of their race or ethnicity compared with about 1 in 100 white patients. Some of our key accomplishments in FY23 include:



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Working in partnership with organizations in Chicago's South Side neighborhoods like Roseland, Englewood, and Woodlawn, EverThrive IL disseminated evidence-based vaccine education to pregnant individuals and caregivers, aiming to increase vaccination rates among Black Chicagoans.



## HEALTH EQUITY

Hosting three town halls with a total of 558 attendees which focused on birth equity and maternal and child health for service providers, discussing topics like addressing trauma, resilience in maternal and child health, and perinatal mental health treatment and prevention



## COLLABORATION

Collaboration with the Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative to provide consultation on best practices for engaging community members in quality improvement teams in birthing hospitals, connecting community members to give feedback on birth equity initiatives.

# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

165,433



viewers of our Senior Flu Campaign, geared towards seniors and their caregivers, highlighting the urgency of vaccinations due to heightened risks of flu-related complications.

101



social service providers equipped with essential knowledge and resources focused on maternal mortality.

129,343



individuals mobilized through our National Infant Immunization Week campaign, which raised awareness and fostered discussions about the importance and safety of infant immunizations.

6



distinct Family Council Regions in Chicago unified through community engagement and inclusive decision-making. These councils are pivotal arenas where families can articulate their concerns, offer valuable insights, and directly contribute to the development of community health initiatives.

49,502



people introduced to *The Gathering*, our health education campaign to help pregnant and postpartum individuals.

39,253



individuals reached by EverThrive IL in FY23 through our community outreach and provider trainings.

558



attendees at 3 town halls, which focused on birth equity and maternal and child health for service providers.



## Increasing Vaccine Confidence through the Equitable Vaccine Advisory Committee in Illinois

EverThrive IL has long been a leading force in community-centered vaccine education, and the formation of the Equitable Vaccine Advisory Committee (EVAC) signifies a landmark step in this journey. For nearly 20 years, efforts have been concentrated on diseases like measles, flu, and HPV in Chicago and Illinois. Since the onset of the pandemic, the focus has been expanded to communities experiencing the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rate.

The EVAC plays a pivotal role in these efforts. By convening key community leaders, the committee works diligently to increase vaccination rates, particularly against COVID-19, in Chicago's BIPOC communities. The recommendations from a community assessment, completed at the summer 2021 vaccine roundtable, form the bedrock of the coalition.



### KEY GOALS OF THE EVAC INCLUDE:

- Synchronizing COVID-19 messaging across sectors, ensuring materials authentically represent Black/African American communities, enriched with testimonies from trusted community members.
- Expanding events and tailored messaging to specific communities or populations.
- Extending the use of community members, including EVAC council members, as vaccine ambassadors/educators to instill trust within communities.
- Maintaining practices that diminish access barriers for each vaccine appointment.



## EVAC Member Testimonial

“It is important for me to participate in the EVAC because my work is directly informed by my experience working with youth and families in the southwest side of Chicago. I have organized in my community since the age of 16 and understand the different ways poverty and disinvestment have contributed to inequities within the medical field. It takes community care and community building to be able to relay crucial information back to communities successfully. EVAC is also important to under-resourced communities because those impacted by systems of oppression should be the ones speaking for their communities.

My participation also helps inform institutions on a more inclusive and informed society. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities have had a history of disparities in health care access, which can and has resulted in unhealthy living conditions. Immunizations are essential to protect the most vulnerable members of BIPOC communities.

Immunizations have slowed the spread of COVID-19 in my community and allowed families to continue going about their everyday lives. Thankfully, my loved ones had access to immunizations, allowing us to keep our families’ most vulnerable safe. EVAC has also allowed me to meet other like-minded individuals who care about their communities and want to see them thrive. I’m grateful for spaces pushing systems to do better for future generations.”

—Diego Garcia, Equitable Vaccine Advisory Committee Member

Through the EVAC, EverThrive IL has facilitated opportunities for community leaders to offer their insights and bolster vaccination campaigns coordinated by CDPH and EverThrive IL. The council assesses and evaluates the execution of existing and future immunization work, identifies and shares best practices, and reviews vital citywide COVID-19 data.

In the upcoming year, EverThrive IL, in collaboration with the EVAC, will continue to strategize and implement these recommendations to reduce disparities in vaccination rates. The committed EVAC council members will be at the forefront of this endeavor, working closely with other community partners.

The reproductive justice tenets, emphasizing the right to nurture families in safe and sustainable communities, guide our work. Healthy communities are inextricable from equitable access to vaccinations, and the EVAC stands as a testament to our dedication to this principle.

The collective wisdom and passion of the EVAC council members drive our commitment to ensuring that all communities in Illinois, especially those grappling with the starkest disparities, have the resources and access they need to make the best choices for their families.

**Recent years have underscored the understanding that the health of communities hinges on equitable access to vaccinations. With an unwavering commitment, we pledge to equip all communities in Illinois, particularly those facing the gravest disparities, with the necessary resources and access to empower them to make informed choices for their families.**

**As we embark on a new fiscal year, our commitment remains steadfast in our efforts to guarantee that everyone in Illinois possesses the access, resources, and health care to raise healthy families on their own terms.**

## NEXT STEPS

As we reflect on the past year and look toward the future, we find ourselves in a time of great promise, driven by a collective vision of hope and rebuilding. Our vision has always been a world where every individual has the resources and opportunities to thrive, and in the coming year, we will continue to drive forward our commitment to achieving reproductive justice for all.



## THE FOLLOWING SHOWS SOME OF OUR HIGH-LEVEL GOALS FOR 2024:

**Strategy 1:** We will extend our reach in the community, with ambitious plans to connect with nearly 35,000 individuals on critical health issues. Our initiative, *The Gathering*, serves as a cornerstone in this effort. We are also promoting immunization education, particularly for COVID-19 and the flu, to build vaccine confidence in underserved communities.

**Strategy 2:** Parallel to our outreach efforts, we are focused on elevating the skills and awareness of health care and social service providers. By offering comprehensive training programs that address maternal mortality, immunization, perinatal mental health, and other barriers to care, we are crafting a cadre of well-equipped service providers.

**Strategy 3:** We will lead policy change at the state level. We are mobilizing partners, spearheading research, and raising public awareness on issues pivotal to reproductive justice, including expanding access to insurance for undocumented adults, providing compassionate care for those dealing with substance use disorders during and after pregnancy, and advocating for a statewide system of universal newborn supports and services.

**As we usher in another year, we do so with a renewed spirit of hope and a steadfast commitment to the principles of justice, equity, and community well-being that have always been our guide. Together, we will make 2024 a landmark year in our continued journey toward reproductive justice and equitable health care for all.**



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**Through collaboration and empathy, our collective efforts will transform reproductive justice.**

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