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SOUTH SIDE HEALTH TRANSFORMATION PROJECT AWARDED FUNDS FROM THE STATE TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES IN VULNERABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

Led by community input, 13 care providers unite to solve healthcare access and equity challenges on Chicago's South Side

Yesterday, the South Side Health Transformation Project was awarded state funds for its healthy community model, designed to enhance and maximize collaboration and technology to drive better health outcomes and health equity on Chicago's South Side. Details about the exact funding amount are expected in the coming weeks.

The state funds are a result of The Hospital and Healthcare Transformation Bill that unanimously passed the Illinois legislature in January and was signed into law in March by Governor JB Pritzker. The bill dedicates \$150 million each year for the next five years to address health equity by sustainably improving access and outcomes.

"We are enormously grateful to the Governor, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, every state legislator who unanimously voted to authorize the use of these transformation dollars and especially our South Side legislators who empowered this project," said Charles Holland, CEO of St. Bernard Hospital. "We are excited, humbled and ready to roll up our sleeves and start having an impact on the health and health equity in our communities."

The funding marks a significant step forward for the South Side Health Transformation Project, an unprecedented coalition of 13 Chicago hospitals, health systems and federally qualified health centers that came together last year seeking ways to work together to address the many health challenges on the city's South Side, where the majority of residents are African American.

As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and drew attention to poor health outcomes in communities of color across the country, the project's participants—all long-time South Side care providers—sought community input to fundamentally reimagine access to care and ultimately improve the well-being and longevity of South Side residents.

With the infusion of these much-needed funds, the group plans to establish a new, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization – the South Side Healthy Community Organization (SSHCO) – as the vehicle by which it will facilitate, in partnership with the community, health care transformation on Chicago's South Side.

The SSHCO plans to focus on primary and specialty care access, preventive and chronic care management, care coordination and management, provider collaboration, community engagement, and a connected digital and technological infrastructure.

Specifically, the SSHCO plans to hire additional primary care physicians and hundreds of community health workers, increase access to specialists, build community partnerships around social determinants of health like access to food and transportation, establish a Community Advisory Council and start developing a technology platform that will connect all South Side healthcare providers.

The coalition includes Advocate Trinity Hospital, Beloved Community Family Wellness Center, Chicago Family Health Center, Christian Community Health Center, Friend Health, Jackson Park Hospital, Near North Health, The New Roseland Community Hospital, St. Bernard Hospital, Sinai Chicago – Holy Cross Hospital, South Shore Hospital, TCA Health, and University of Chicago Medicine.

The SSHCO will be governed by a board made up of one member from each of the 13 healthcare partners and three community leaders.

For decades, the 900,000 residents of the South Side of Chicago have experienced health disparities ranging from materially higher disease incidence and comorbidities to significantly lower life expectancy. These health disparities reflect a history of racial inequities and underinvestment – both of which have contributed to a fragmented healthcare delivery landscape with limited resources.

A report released June 16th by the city’s public health department revealed jarring disparities in health outcomes for Black Chicagoans. Called “The State of Health for Blacks in Chicago,” the report examined the top drivers for the growing life expectancy gap between Black and non-Black residents. Among many findings, the report estimates Black people in Chicago live 9.2 fewer years than non-Black people, have a 70 percent higher death rate for diabetes-related issues, account for half of people living with HIV, are three times more likely to experience opioid-related overdose deaths, and experience infant mortality rates that are nearly three times higher than non-Black children.

Some of these numbers are even worse on Chicago’s South Side.

“We all deserve better. Coming together as a community with our healthcare providers has made our plan for transformation very real, actionable and, most importantly, impactful on the health equity issues we must resolve to have a chance at good health in our neighborhoods,” said Christa Hamilton, CEO and Executive Director of Centers for New Horizons, one of the three community board members for the new SSHCO. “We are enormously grateful to our state leaders for the financial support needed to start making health transformation a reality.”

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