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LIFE EXPECTANCY IN CHICAGO DECLINED DURING THE PANDEMIC'S FIRST YEAR WITH THE BIGGEST DROPS AMONG BLACK AND LATINX CHICAGOANS

CHICAGO - Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, Commissioner of Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) Allison Arwady M.D., and community leaders today announced an update on life expectancy in Chicago during the pandemic's first year. In line with national trends, life expectancy in Chicago dropped almost two years from 2019 to 2020, the first year of the pandemic, CDPH reported today. This finding represents one of the sharpest single-year decreases in life expectancy on record, and the steepest declines were for Black and Latinx Chicagoans. COVID-19 deaths were a significant driver of this trend. However, the virus was only the second leading cause of death in 2020 – behind heart disease, which also increased along with other chronic diseases like diabetes. The city also saw higher than expected increases in deaths from accidents (overdoses, car crashes) and homicides. Life expectancy declines were seen in all races and nearly all community areas.

“COVID has taken a terrible toll on the health and wellbeing of our city’s residents particularly those who are Black and Latinx,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “Without formally acknowledging this detrimental impact, and its roots in structural racism, we will never be able to move forward as a city. That’s why my administration and our partners remain laser-focused on equitable investments and policy changes that will promote health and wellness to help all our communities thrive.”

Other key life expectancy findings from CDPH include:

- As of 2020, the gap in life expectancy between Black and white Chicagoans was ten years, up from 8.8 years in 2017. For the first time in decades, life expectancy for Black residents of Chicago fell below 70 years
- Chicago Latinx residents saw a more than a 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
- Asian/Pacific Islander life expectancy showed a 2-year drop from 2019 to 2020, while white Chicagoans’ life expectancy declined by one year



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- 18 to 44-year-old Chicagoans experienced a 45% increase in death rates from 2019, outpacing even 65+ Chicagoans (30% increase) despite COVID's especially severe impact on that population

Overall, the main drivers of the racial life expectancy gap are chronic disease (heart disease, cancer, diabetes); homicide; infant mortality; HIV, flu, and other infections; and opioid overdose. However, these health outcomes are rooted in the daily challenges many Chicagoans face. The pandemic exacerbated social issues like lack of access to stable housing, food, childcare, and stable income.

“The life expectancy gap isn’t just about the causes that show up on the death certificate most often, but what drives those causes,” said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D. “There is no miracle cure, no shortcut to closing the life expectancy gap. Collectively, the City and its partners must do the work to fundamentally transform the conditions in which people live – by ending the pandemic and by addressing its impacts on access to services, housing, education, and economic opportunities, as well as people’s mental health.”

CDPH is working to address the life expectancy gap through [Healthy Chicago 2025](#), a five-year action plan to close this gap by addressing the root causes of health, including structural racism. Since the plan launched in 2020, CDPH has committed \$30 million to establish the Healthy Chicago Equity Zones (HCEZ), strengthening community infrastructure and neighborhood networks so that people most affected by inequities have the power and resources to promote health and racial equity in their neighborhoods and citywide.

“For the past year, HCEZ regional and community lead organizations have been leading hyperlocal outreach efforts to get people vaccinated, with equity at the heart of this work,” said Tina Sanders, Executive Director of Phalanx Family Services, which leads the Far South HCEZ region and hosted the roundtable. “This May, the Equity Zones serving Chicago’s least-vaccinated neighborhoods will participate in a summit to get resources, share best practices and develop new strategies to build community trust and meaningfully increase vaccine uptake.”

A series of new and upcoming CDPH initiatives will complement the HCEZ strategy and aim to improve access to a robust array of health and social services that empower Chicagoans to take charge of their health. Last week, CDPH announced the launch of a new, bi-weekly Instagram Live talk program to discuss various topics within the Black community regarding health disparities, health care, wellness, mental health, and other related issues. The new program, Dr. Taylor’s Table, is hosted by Dr. Erica Taylor, the medical director for congregate settings at CDPH. In the coming months, CDPH will invest \$24 million to launch a Community Health



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Response Corps (CHRC) that will continue the fight against COVID-19; link community members to resources to mitigate the social, economic, and health impacts of the pandemic; and equip them with health knowledge. Building on the ChiTracing Corps, the CHRC will create new pathways to employment for people who live in communities that are most affected by health and economic inequities.

“Like the City, our South Side Healthy Community Organization (SSHCO) – a coalition of hospitals and community health centers – is committed to a community-based model of connecting people to preventive care,” said Brenda Battle, Senior Vice President of Community Health Transformation, Urban Health Initiative and Chief Diversity, Inclusion & Equity Officer for UChicago Medicine, a founding member of SSHCO. “As we collectively hire, train, and deploy hundreds of community health workers to serve Chicago’s South Side, we’ll make it easier for people to find and tap into critical health services and social supports so they can achieve their health goals.”

Additionally, Mayor Lightfoot’s \$1.9 billion Chicago Recovery Plan (CRP) aims to catalyze an equitable, sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The CRP mobilizes an all-of-government approach to address root causes of health inequality through transformational investments like direct cash assistance to families, food equity work, climate resilience initiatives, and community development funding for formerly disinvested community areas. The CRP also includes investments that directly target the top drivers of the racial life expectancy gap.

- \$20 million to fund the citywide expansion of trauma-informed centers of care, a network of mental health service providers that provide services regardless of ability to pay, health insurance status, or immigration status. This expansion, which will be in place by June 2022, will strengthen ongoing CDPH initiatives to combat opioid deaths such as a fentanyl test strip program which has distributed over 5,500 test kits and over 30,000 test strips to more than 60 organizations and 250 individuals since October 2021 as well as a partnership with Chicago Public Libraries to distribute Narcan to treat opioid overdose
- \$25 million to fund the citywide expansion of the Family Connects program, which provides free, in-home health supports to new mothers and babies
- \$85 million to fund direct violence prevention services, including continuing to strengthen the City’s network of street outreach providers, a program that a recent Northwestern study found reduces participants’ likelihood of fatal and non-fatal gunshot injuries by 20% in the first 18 months of participation

“The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of life in our city,” said Mayor Lightfoot, “As a response, our once-in-a-generation investments in everything from



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community safety, to expanding access to mental health and substance use treatment, to supporting economic opportunity for families is how we're going to close this pernicious life expectancy gap, redress the harms of structural racism, and make Chicago the most equitable city in America.”

Detailed information on hundreds of health indicators can be found at ChicagoHealthAtlas.org, and more information on the impacts of COVID can be found at chicago.gov/COVIDimpact.

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