

Department of Public Health
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Opening Statement to the City Council for 2024 Budget Hearing
October 19, 2023

Good morning Chairperson Ervin, Vice Chairperson Lee, and honorable members of City Council. The work of public health – to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy – is collective. At CDPH, our work is guided by health equity and focuses on closing the racial life expectancy gap. I want to thank you for your collaboration and support in this collective effort.

We do work in many different areas but today I am going to highlight COVID changes, respiratory virus season, Healthy Chicago 2025 including environment, mental health support, overdose prevention, services for families with children, and syndemic infectious diseases. This year saw the end of the public health emergency for COVID-19, which brought changes with impacts for health equity. Vaccine is no longer provided free of charge to local health departments and providers; it is now up to insurers to provide coverage. All state Medicaid agencies have to restart required annual redeterminations which means some recipients who no longer qualify will lose insurance coverage. CDPH has been working across agencies and sectors to mitigate loss of coverage, and mobilize forces on the ground to support Chicagoans at greatest risk of losing health coverage, training our Community Health Response Corps and partners at 211 Metro Chicago to support Medicaid redeterminations to ensure our children and families stay connected to care. Even though the public health emergency is over, we know Chicagoans are still navigating the layered effects of COVID-19 and disparate impacts across race and place. And CDPH must still respond.

Another significant change is the end of COVID era funding, which enabled us to make robust investments into both traditional public health activities and addressing the root causes of health disparities. CDPH has consistently relied on federal grant funding, which makes up 89% of our budget. This type of funding is challenging – it is often flat from year to year, tied to a specific disease state or use, and as we saw again during COVID, comes from one-time grants. We continue to work closely with our funders, emphasizing the need for increased flexibility and growth in funding over time. We also continue to strategize and make the most effective use of all our funding, and this budget seeks to continue CDPH's critical work and make investments in CDPH and staff. But there will be other work to do to stabilize funding.

Respiratory virus season is upon us. Updated COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots are available now and are an important part of protecting Chicagoans against currently circulating virus variants. This year, for the first time, RSV vaccine is available for seniors and pregnant people and a treatment is available to protect infants. This year, *where* you get the updated COVID-19 vaccine may be different because of the end of the public health emergency. For people without health insurance, CDPH will continue to provide COVID and flu vaccine at our clinics, through our At Home Vaccination program, and family vaccination clinics at City Colleges. Vaccines will also be available at Federally Qualified Health Centers. For those with private or public health insurance, the best option is to go to a pharmacy or doctor's office to get your updated COVID-19 and flu

vaccines. Also, thanks to the partnership of members of this body, we will provide COVID and flu vaccine to Chicagoans at City Hall and ward events throughout the city. Our first vaccination at City Hall was this Monday and we there was great turnout – we provided 615 doses of COVID and flu vaccines combined

CDPH is making progress towards our Healthy Chicago 2025 priorities, through Chicago Recovery Plan investments in environmental justice, behavioral health, and youth and family health.

In September, CDPH, the then Office of Climate and Environmental Equity and our community partners stood with Mayor Johnson to release the findings and recommendations from the first citywide Cumulative Impact Assessment, which provides data on how environmental burdens and other stressors vary in impact across different communities. This Assessment, co-led and co-designed with people and organizations who live with these issues every day, identifies environmental justice neighborhoods that experience the greatest cumulative impacts and provides strategies and policy recommendations to guide decision-making. We look forward to collaborating with you to codify these policy recommendations.

I'm excited by the shared commitment of CDPH, this administration and this body to ensuring access to mental and behavioral health services for all Chicagoans. We have made great strides in this area, investing in our existing clinics to offer extended hours and child and adolescent services; ensuring mental health clinical services are available through all 80 homeless shelters across the city; and embedding CDPH clinicians at Chicago Public Library locations. The City's Crisis Assistance Response and Engagement or CARE Program pilot ensures that 911 calls with a behavioral health component are met with a behavioral health response. CDPH mental health crisis clinicians have responded to over 1,220 calls. We are pleased to be able to share that, with your support, we will expand the alternate response model from this pilot next year, providing increased geographic coverage and extended hours. We will also add two CDPH-run mental health clinics in 2024. We look forward to collaborating with other departments and community partners through the Treatment Not Trauma working group to plan for further expansion of mental health services in 2025 and beyond.

I'm proud of the work of the substance use team to find new ways to prevent fatal opioid overdoses and increase access to substance use treatment. Earlier this year, through our CARE program we began sending peer recovery specialists to follow up with individuals who have recently experienced a non-fatal overdose, providing follow-up support and service referrals. The program to provide Narcan at Chicago Public Libraries has expanded to all 81 libraries and over 10,000 Narcan kits have been distributed. We are starting to install and operate five public health vending machines in areas of the city most affected by opioid overdose, starting with the CTA Red Line station at 95th Street. Finally, CDPH has provided training to community partners and Aldermanic staff to make Narcan and other harm reduction materials available in ward offices. To those that have participated, thank you for your partnership and if you haven't yet, please reach out and we can bring this to your ward office too.

Turning to the health of our youth and families. CDPH leads implementation of Family Connects, a universal newborn nurse home visiting program to support the health and well-being of birthing people, newborns and their families. This year saw 3 more of Chicago's birthing hospitals join us in this work, bringing Family Connects to a total of 7 hospitals. We also fund community alignment boards in all regions of the city, ensuring connections to essential local resources for families with newborns. With funds from the Chicago Recovery Plan, the Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Homes program will assist an estimated 1,700 families to ensure their homes are lead-safe.

Our Syndemic Infectious Disease Bureau continues to seek ways to make funding more accessible to the communities most impacted by and vulnerable to HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, mpox, TB, and viral hepatitis. CDPH's Innovative Community Development Sponsorships are funding opportunities for community partners in these communities that serve priority populations. The purpose is to provide these organizations with the skills and connections necessary to compete for larger grants in the future and to support entities that do not typically receive CDPH grants, with an eye toward readying them for future funding opportunities. This year, CDPH sponsored 57 projects and events, primarily in south and west side communities.

I am proud of the work of this department, and I want to thank City Council for your support as we work together to promote a more just, equitable, and healthy Chicago.