

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



BACKGROUND

In partnership with The Social Consult, the YMCA of Metro Chicago completed a community assessment of four communities in Suburban Cook County, IL: Niles, Des Plaines, Elmwood Park, and Riverside. The goal of the project is to understand how community members feel about COVID-19, and how their feelings impact their choices. Members of the Community Health Equity Network (CHEN) co-lead the project, coming up with the questions we asked and the ways we asked them. Funding for this project was made possible by the Office of Disease Control, through the Illinois Department of Public Health.

METHODS

Information for the community assessment was collected in November and December 2022. We used the following methods to understand how community members feel and act:

- Public data from sources like the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Census
- 13 interviews with community members
- 25 surveys about COVID-19 experience and beliefs
- 13 sets of responses to poll/access questions (yes/no questions about access to COVID-19 resources)

RESULTS

COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Rates

- Elmwood Park is the only target community which has a lower COVID-19 vaccination rate than the general region at the time of the report. However, specific demographic groups within each community are below average and should be prioritized.

Access

- Only one survey respondent in the Region 10 West communities was unvaccinated. They reported difficulty in accessing a vaccination site.
- The most trusted sources of COVID-19 information in the West communities were the Center for Disease Control and Physicians.

Thoughts, Feelings and Perceptions

- Death/critical illness from COVID-19 was reported as one of the most common impacts on community members' lives.
- COVID-19 created economic challenges for many community members. Some faced job loss, reduced wages, and general economic uncertainty.
- Community members also highlighted the social emotional impact of COVID-19 on children.
- Community members reported mixed feelings about COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

Other Key Health Conditions

- Community members listed flu, mental health, poverty, and access to healthcare as the other major issues affecting health in their community.



The full report can be accessed at ymcachicago.org/covid19support or by scanning the QR code. Questions about the YMCA Community Assessment? Contact Kelsey Barnick at kbarnick@ymcachicago.org.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a list of key recommendations based on the information we reviewed in the community assessment. The complete list of recommendations can be found in the full report.

TO INCREASE COVID-19 VACCINATION CONFIDENCE AND UPTAKE:

Testing

- Increase access to testing in the western part of Riverside and in Elmwood Park.

Communication

- Create an open space for conversation between vaccinated and unvaccinated community members.
- Communicate to non-English speaking populations in all Region 10 West communities.
- Host education events that focus on the long-term effects of COVID-19 versus the long-term effects of the vaccine. Include stories from people who were healthy but ended up having long COVID.

Vaccination

- Encourage people getting their boosters to bring not fully vaccinated friends and family with them.
- Do outreach at unemployment and cash benefit offices to reach unvaccinated community members.
- Increase vaccination for white, and 65+ populations in all Region 10 West communities. This will help close the biggest vaccination gaps.
- Focus vaccination efforts in Elmwood Park to close the largest community vaccination gap.
- In Des Plaines, Riverside, and Niles, focus on vaccination efforts for the Asian population.
- In Elmwood Park, focus on vaccination interventions for the 18-49 year old population.

TO ADDRESS OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS:

- Find ways to understand how COVID-19 has affected mental health. Come up with strategies to help affected community members.
- Work with health care partners, funders, and CHEN to come up with ways to target the root causes of health inequities, such as poverty and access to health care.
- Consider joint efforts that target both the flu and COVID-19 together.



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