

Dear Participants,

Thank you so much for joining the first meeting of our 2021 Research Council Convening on March 23rd! We truly appreciate all of you who attended the meeting and shared wonderful ideas and thoughtful questions. We hope you found the session just as valuable as we did.

We had great interest for this meeting and hope to continue the momentum for the next two meetings! The date for the second meeting will be shared within the next few weeks. Please find this session's recordings and notes below.

[Main Session Recording](#)

[Breakout A](#)

[Breakout B](#)

Health Chicago 2025 Presentation

Genny Turner, Director of Health Equity and Strategic Partnerships at the Chicago Department of Public Health, gave a high-level overview of [Healthy Chicago 2025](#), the current version of the City's community health improvement plan. She highlighted the themes and initiatives tied to the plan, as well as food access and housing inequities, which are two of the plan's priority areas.

Attendees were then split into breakout groups to discuss both food and housing insecurities.

Food Insecurity Discussion

Facilitators:

- Taryn McCook, Greater Chicago Food Depository
- Dr. Howard Rosing, DePaul University - Irwin W. Steans Center for Community-based Service

Food insecurity has been affecting low-income communities of color for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic is shining the light on structural inequities and the need to build a more resilient food system in Chicago. During the pandemic, food insecurity increased by 51% and communities mostly affected were in the South, Southwest, and West sides of Chicago. People mostly affected were households with children and people with disabilities.

Gaps/issues discussed (especially around the pandemic):

- Drivers of food insecurity are:
 - Racial inequities and discrimination
 - Low income
 - Policies that keep people in poverty
 - Unemployment, underemployment
- Food insecurity intertwines with housing insecurity, income instability, and access to technology

- Food system is not equipped to handle sharp demand
- Besides the crisis, there was a low participation in nutritious programs, such as SNAP/WIC
- Food pantries are struggling for funding to support free food distribution during the pandemic
- The food system workforce is not always made aware of updates and proper information; producers had issues connecting with individual households directly and saw an increase in their operating expenses
- Small food businesses in need of better technical support and education to navigate the food system
- Lack of financial support for food services, such as restaurants and catering businesses, to provide free meals
- Residents are not able to access and navigate the emergency food landscape in Suburban Cook County

Initiatives:

- Activation of 800+ nutritious programs in the City, such as SNAP benefits, P-EBT, After school lunch
- Food distribution led by community organizations

Community assets:

- Community garden initiative led by the Chicago Botanic Garden, which has a gardening project to encourage families to grow their own gardens
- Underutilized City lots and vacant storefronts that could be repurposed
- Mutual aid groups: groups the community already trusts that demonstrate solidarity within the community; they want to work with each other and advocate on behalf of the community
- There is a wealth of knowledge in the community, which should be utilized to help address food insecurity

Research opportunities:

- Address knowledge gap, literacy gap, and technology divide
- Evaluation and implementation of the Good Food Purchasing Policy
- Assess the Chicago food system landscape: What do we know? What do we want to know? What data are missing?
- Help build a more resilient food system
- Promote healthy living
- Use existing data to push for policy implementation, such as SNAP/WIC, to address challenges (e.g., water access challenges for community gardens in the City)
- Help build a community review board
- Help strengthen mutual aid networks in the community and help highlight successful models in the community (firefighters associations)

- Examining the “how” more so that the “what” is being collected – this could have direct impact on advocacy, policy level, and program design
- Make sure to be intentional about involving communities in research; understand community value and build on community strength. There is a wealth of knowledge in the community and researchers should not discount that. Foster genuine partnerships with the community and follow-through with research projects and their benefit.

Housing Insecurity Discussion

Facilitators:

- Corie Darling, Heartland Human Care Services
- Dr. Janet Smith, UIC - Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement

Affordable housing, like food insecurity, has been a chronic problem for decades. The COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on renters in communities of color, which have seen an increase in rental assistance demands particularly in households with children.

Gaps/issues discussed (especially around the pandemic):

- Housing affordability is a must in the City of Chicago
- There is a need for better rent control policies
- Housing should be seen as a need for all, not as a commodity
- Not enough support/subsidized housing
- Some people that need affordable housing are not eligible. Restrictions in place prevent access to subsidized housing (eligible criteria, incomes etc.)
- Threshold for homeless definition needs to be revised
- Higher property taxes in communities of color
- Housing not built for families, particularly intergenerational households

Initiatives:

- Homeless prevention services support people that are behind in rent and mortgage payments; able to receive 6 months of assistance with a documented financial crisis
- Homeless prevention center put in place through 311
- Subsidized housing from CHA and other programs; these programs allow residents to have stable housing and the ability to navigate other life challenges during the pandemic
- Healthy Homes projects (home repairs for seniors)
- Tax credits for low-income building
- Fair housing work, such as the anti-displacement work in Woodlawn; the goal is to preserve affordable housing in Woodlawn
- Troubled building initiative; funding available to rehabilitate abandoned buildings

Community assets:

- Alternative housing models: collective housing, cooperative housing, and boarding homes

Research opportunities:

- Bring a racial equity lens to housing policies
- Generate data to support better rent control policies and lower eligibility criteria for subsidized housing
- Identify flexible funding streams to support housing initiatives (Federal and State funding streams are not very flexible)
- Identify particular housing needs for special populations, such as cancer patients
- Identify existing and successful housing models and find the right partners to join the efforts
- Better definition of affordable housing
- What is needed to see more affordable housing in the City of Chicago?