

ANNUAL COMMUNITY REPORT **2023**



# ***Community Health Connections: Bridging Gaps in Cancer through Conversations***

Join Our Cause through  
Education, Health Care, and  
Research



***Celebrating 8 years!***

## THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WORK



The Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC) is an organization of researchers, faculty, students, and community members working together to reduce cancer rates and improve health outcomes for our communities.

We recognize that Chicagoans who live in neighborhoods that are underserved or who are members of racial and ethnic minoritized groups are more likely to suffer from cancer and less likely to receive the care they need. We want to change that. Our goal is cancer health equity. **All Chicagoans should have access to the best available resources to prevent, diagnose, treat, and manage cancer and to live satisfying lives as cancer survivors.**

Since 2015, ChicagoCHEC has taken great strides in supporting our mission. **We must stress that these successes would not be possible without the guidance, engagement, and continued encouragement from our community partners – the true foundation of our work.**

We recognize the need for inclusive, effective, and innovative approaches to cancer research, training, education, and community engagement. ChicagoCHEC is in a unique and powerful position to bring the fruits of research findings into direct action that can make a difference in Chicago's communities.

As we enter this 8<sup>th</sup> year cycle, we aim to keep our mission and goal of achieving cancer health equity at the front of everything we do. We hope that you can join us for this next phase!

In this 2023 report, we highlight key accomplishments across the three core areas of ChicagoCHEC: *community engagement, meaningful research, and training and education.*

# SNAPSHOT: ChicagoCHEC in 2023

*An overview of community engagement, research, education, and training events ChicagoCHEC has been part of in 2023.*

## Spring 2023

- ChicagoCHEC co-hosted the **6<sup>th</sup> Annual Women in Science Conference** at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) focused on women in the field of public health.
- NEIU hosted their **2023 Spring Health Fair** that provided students and community members with health resources, education and information. Additionally, ChicagoCHEC provided the NEIU community with cancer health prevention resources and information.
- ChicagoCHEC was also provide cancer health prevention information to attendees of **The State of Black Health 2023: Raising Awareness in Celebration of Minority Health Month** that aimed to empower the community so that Black Chicagoans and members from disadvantaged groups can be informed on the state of their health.
- ChicagoCHEC also participated in Wellness House's **Walk for Wellness House**.
- ChicagoCHEC provided cancer health prevention resources and information to attendees of the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation's **Spring Heath Fair on the Block**.

## Fall 2023 & Beyond

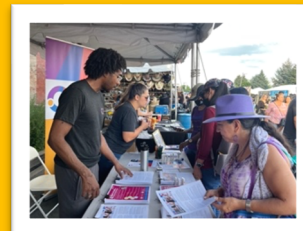
- ChicagoCHEC will continue their engagement with community events such as **NEIU's Fall Health Fair** and the American Cancer Society's **Annual Great American Smokeout** initiative.
- The **8<sup>th</sup> annual ChicagoCHEC Community Form – Community Health Connections: Bridging Gaps in Cancer through Conversations** – will take in person at the Arturo Velazquez Institute on Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
- ChicagoCHEC will co-host a **CHEC-In** in collaboration with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center to better understand the cancer health needs of their community members.

## Winter 2022

- ChicagoCHEC and the University of Illinois of Chicago Cancer Center co-host the **Love Your Lungs: Breathe Healthy, Live Happily** event, a virtual community conversation with medical doctors, a former smoker and lung cancer survivor about lung health.
- ChicagoCHEC continued to support cancer health education and awareness of minority groups at the **Health and Wellness Expo** hosted by 100 Black Men of Chicago. Topics covered included health careers, anti-racism in healthcare, and various adult and youth sessions.
- At the **Taking Care of Me** seminar, ChicagoCHEC hosted discussions and workshops regarding cervical cancer awareness, barriers, and facilitators to HPV vaccination in rural populations.
- ChicagoCHEC hosts a virtual conversation with **Dr. June McKoy** on the legal rights for those disabled by cancer.

## Summer 2023

- ChicagoCHEC selected 19 fellows for the **2023 ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program** where fellows engaged in various community site visits including a visit to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center where Fellows met with executive director and co-founder José López.
- ChicagoCHEC's Dr. Keith Naylor presented on strategies to improve early detection of early onset colorectal cancer at the **Annual Illinois Colorectal Cancer Round Table Meeting**.
- ChicagoCHEC and the University of Illinois of Chicago Cancer Center co-hosted **Surviving and Thriving: Community Connection – A Cancer Survivorship Event** where the cancer community was invited to join collaborative discussions to improve cancer care, inform research, and learn from about advocacy and survivorship resources.
- ChicagoCHEC also participated in **Fiesta del Sol** and the **17<sup>th</sup> Annual Vive tu Vida! Get Moving! Chicago Family Health and Wellness Fair**, where team members engaged with the community in educating cancer prevention.



# MEET OUR COMMUNITY STEERING COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

## ChicagoCHEC is excited to welcome and introduce our new Community Steering Committee (CSC) Co-Chairs – Maigenete Mengesha, PhD, and Tom Wilson!

**Tom Wilson** is a long-time community advocate for people with disabilities and was the Community Development Organizer for Health Care at Access Living for nearly 29 years before retiring in 2019. He has a long history of community organizing on healthcare for people with disabilities. At Access Living Mr. Wilson advocated for, helped design, and supervised Access Living's component of the Illinois transition program that has moved many thousands of nursing home residents into community living. Mr. Wilson is deeply committed to issues of social justice and health care equity for under-served populations, especially persons with disabilities. Additionally, he has been a ChicagoCHEC Community Steering Committee (CSC) member since 2016 prior to taking on the role as CSC Co-Chair.

**Dr. Maigenete Mengesha** is the Director of Cancer Health Equity Initiatives at Wellness House. She has facilitated countless supportive oncology groups for the past nine years with the most vulnerable participants, many of which were among historically marginalized populations with the heaviest cancer burden, and has a lengthy track record of advancing health equity at Wellness House. In this role, Dr. Mengesha leads the Wellness House community in implementing initiatives to enhance the culture of cancer health equity among participants, within staff community, as well as with their external partner relationships. Her role works to monitor the success of their partnership model to ensure we are integrating our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and continuous quality improvement across all programs offered at Wellness House.



"It has been very rewarding working with the large cohort of researchers, cancer survivors, educators, advocates, students and community members that are part of ChicagoCHEC to advance the prevention and treatment of cancer. I have been able to use my years of experience facilitating groups and in organizing people to advocate for the changes they need."

**Thomas J Wilson**

"I joined ChicagoCHEC in 2021 and became co-chair shortly thereafter. I'm passionate about advancing cancer healthy equity among all people impacted by cancer and look forward to integrating my supportive oncology community-based worldview and expertise into my role as CSC Co-Chair."

**Maigenete Mengesha, PhD**



### Words of Welcome from Our Former CSC Co-Chairs

"Let me offer ¡Felicitaciones! and warm applause of welcome to Maigenete Mengesha and Tom Wilson now serving as the Co-Chairs of the Community Steering Committee (CSC). I look forward to working with Tom and Maigenete whose experience, energy, and leadership will continue ongoing effort, bring new insight and accomplishment to Chicago CHEC and its CSC strive for improved cancer health access and equity for the Chicago communities we respectively dedicate service and respectfully serve."

**Henrietta Barcelo**, CSC co-chair, 2015-2022, INSTITUTO del Progreso Latino, Health Sciences Career Academy, founding industry liaison, retired

"Greetings all Stakeholders, with a warm and confident heart I welcome the new Co-Chairs of the Community Steering Committee (CSC), Maigenete Mengesha and Tom Wilson, the opportunity to continue to lead the community efforts in addressing disparities, social determinants of health with collaborative efforts to share best practices and advocacy for healthy outcomes. ChicagoCHEC represents a leader in the community, research and academic with on-going opportunities for strong and effective partnerships. Thank you CHEC for taking my lived experiences, expertise, and vision as part of the thread of hope to a healthy community. Time to pass the baton, go for it Maigenete & Tom, as I too cheer you on."

**Joanne Glenn**, RN, MBA, CSC Co-Chair 2015-2022, President & Founder of W.O.T. Foundation, Women on top of their Game, Foundation, [www.wot.com](http://www.wot.com)



**Former CSC Co-Chairs, Joanne Glenn (left) & Henrietta Barcelo (right)**



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Community Conversations

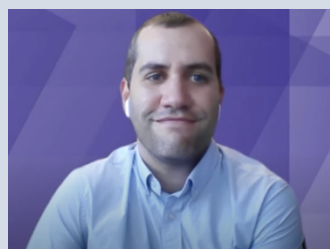
ChicagoCHEC is committed to working alongside communities to identify and address their cancer health needs. We continue to follow COVID-19 guidelines and requirements for in-person gatherings. Following the model we established in 2020, we have focused our efforts in continuing to engage with our communities using virtual and hybrid formats.

**ChicagoCHEC's Virtual Community Conversations** provide an online platform for community members to speak about cancer and health concerns. Working with our Community Steering Committee, we identify topics and community members and invite them to meet with experts to answer questions and have meaningful discussions. Our goal is to provide a safe space to learn from each other and share experiences around cancer prevention and care. Below are conversations we had this year!

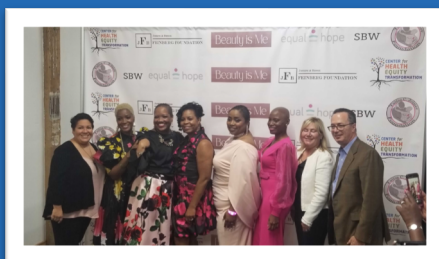


***Love Your Lungs: Breathe Healthy Live Happily*** This virtual, one-hour, community conversation was held with providers and survivors tackling lung health and smoking cessation. This event was in recognition of the American Cancer Society's national Great American Smokeout held annually that brings awareness to the dangers of tobacco smoking and resources to community members in need of support. Click [here](#) to find the recording.

***What's Legal About Cancer:*** This virtual community conversation focused on the legal rights of those disabled by cancer. It was presented by Dr. June McKoy, Professor of Medicine (Geriatrics), Medical Education, and Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Find the recording [here](#).



***Financial Toxicity of Gynecological Cancers:*** This presentation was a part of the CHETchat Spotlight Series and focused on the financial hardship and financial concerns experienced by patients with gynecological cancers and its related treatments. Dr. Dario Roque is an Assistant Professor of Gynecology at Northwestern University. Find the recording [here](#).



# RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

We are committed to supporting cancer research with a health equity lens that integrates community organizations as equal partners in addressing research questions. Since its inception, ChicagoCHEC has funded **twelve** research teams through the ChicagoCHEC Incubator, Catalyst Grant Program, and NCI supplement funding. Such grants are intended to encourage collaborations among diverse teams of investigators (including students and trainees) across our three institutions. They are also designed to be inclusive of community partners and organizations; therefore, each research team consists of one or more community stakeholders as an integral member of the research team.

## Engaging Community Members to Participate in Lung Cancer Screening

### The SHARED Project

*(Community Partner: To be identified)*

This project is dedicated to reducing lung cancer disparities among African American men, a group that bears the highest incidence and mortality rates for lung cancer in the U.S. Our strategy is multifaceted, combining culturally targeted educational materials, patient navigation, and a lung cancer screening decision-aid. This approach is designed to enhance knowledge, refine risk assessment, offer decision-support, and ultimately decrease lung cancer risk among eligible smokers. By involving community advocates, referred to as Citizen Scientists, and high-risk individuals, we aim to improve the uptake of lung cancer screening and smoking cessation.



## Using Smartphones to Advance Cancer Screening, Treatment, and Survivorship Support

### WeCanManage Project

*(Community Partner: Survivor Scientists)*

This project is developing an innovative and interactive mobile Health application called WeCanManage to empower cancer survivors with disabilities to proactively manage cancer and its consequences as a chronic condition.



## Addressing Racial Disparities in Survival: Assessing the Role of Platinum Resistance

### Ovarian Cancer Pilot Project

*(Community Partner: Black Cancer Collaborative)*

This pilot project explores whether cisplatin resistance is a potential factor and/or driver of observed racial disparities in ovarian cancer outcomes and investigates whether arsenoplatins demonstrate therapeutic potential against cisplatin-resistant ovarian cancer cells. If successful, this study will address knowledge gaps in the factors driving racial disparities in ovarian cancer survival, uncover new drug discovery strategies, and help support healthier communities.

## Exploring Geographical Location and Microbiome Diversity

### Microbiome Pilot Project

*(Community Partner: Gilda's Club)*

This pilot project is designed to lay the groundwork for an ecological analysis of variation in microbiome diversity. The study will demonstrate the feasibility of analyzing the association of microbiome diversity with early clinical outcomes amongst stem cell transplant patients residing in the Chicago area.



To learn more about these research projects, scan one of the QR codes



# COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We are committed to engaging, mobilizing, and supporting community capacity building efforts to improve health outcomes among Chicago's underserved communities. ChicagoCHEC's Community Steering Committee, a board of over 20 community leaders, guides the direction of ChicagoCHEC along with trained Community Health Educators (CHEs). Meet our Community Steering Committee and Leaders!

## OUR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

**Maigenete Mengesha** (Co-Chair), Director of Programs, Wellness House

**Tom Wilson** (Co-Chair), Former Community Organizer, Access Living (retired)

**Henrietta Barcelo** (Co-Chair 2016-2022), INSTITUTO Health Sciences Career Academy & Instituto del Progreso Latino (retired)

**Joanne Glenn** (Co-Chair 2016-2022), W.O.T. Foundation Inc.

**Patricia Canessa**, Illinois Public Health Association

**Dolores Castañeda**, Community Activist

**Laura Huaracha**, American Lung Association in Greater Chicago

**Mickayla Pittman**, American Lung Association in Greater Chicago

**Kassandra Billups**, Gilda's Club Chicago

**Jasmine Carrasco**, Gilda's Club Chicago

**Jose López**, Puerto Rican Cultural Center

**Carmen Garcia**, Puerto Rican Cultural Center

**Linda Rae Murray**, former Chief Medical Officer, Cook County Health & Hospital System

**Kirsten Peachey**, The Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation

**Amy Wong**, Chinese American Service League

**Fred Rachman**, Alliance Chicago Community Health Services, LLC

**Howard Brown Health**

**Joanna Rudnicka**, Amber Coalition, Polish American Breast Cancer Program

**Berenice Tow**, Chicago Department of Public Health

**Esther Sciammarella**, Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition

**Carmen Velásquez**, Founder and former Executive Director of Alivio Medical Center

**Esther Corpuz**, Executive Director of Alivio Medical Center

**Judith Guitelman**, Executive Director, ALAS-WINGS

**Candace Henley**, Chief Surviving Officer, The Blue Hat Foundation

**Araceli Lucio**, Health Advocate, The Resurrection Project

**Marcus Murray**, Executive Director, Project Brotherhood



**Project Brotherhood**



THE RESURRECTION PROJECT

Building Relationships. Creating Healthy Communities.

[resurrectionproject.org/](http://resurrectionproject.org/)



[thebluehatfoundation.org/](http://thebluehatfoundation.org/)



Asociación Latina de Asistencia y  
Prevención del Cáncer de Mama  
Latina Association for Breast Cancer

[alas-wings.org/](http://alas-wings.org/)



ALIVIO MEDICAL CENTER  
An Active Presence for a Strong Community

[aliviomedicalcenter.org](http://aliviomedicalcenter.org)



Innovating for better health

[alliancechicago.org/](http://alliancechicago.org/)



**Amber Coalition**  
[ambercoalition.org/](http://ambercoalition.org/)



[lung.org/about-us/local-associations/illinois.html](http://lung.org/about-us/local-associations/illinois.html)



[faithhealthtransformation.org/](http://faithhealthtransformation.org/)



[nearnorthhealth.org/](http://nearnorthhealth.org/)



**Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition**  
[chicagohispanichealthcoalition.org/](http://chicagohispanichealthcoalition.org/)



**Chinese American Service League**  
[caslservice.org/](http://caslservice.org/)



[gildasclubchicago.org/](http://gildasclubchicago.org/)



[howardbrown.org/](http://howardbrown.org/)



[institutochicago.org/](http://institutochicago.org/)



[prcc-chgo.org](http://prcc-chgo.org)



[wellnesshouse.org](http://wellnesshouse.org)



[wotfoundation.com/](http://wotfoundation.com/)



For more information on our community partners  
please *CHEC* out our Community Resource Guide!  
<https://chicagohec.org/resources/resource-guide/>





# OUR FUTURE LEADERS

Every summer, ChicagoCHEC hosts its Summer Research Fellows Program. This eight-week training program provides Chicago university students from underrepresented groups with the opportunity to learn about cancer health equity from doctors, researchers, professors, and community organizers. Our goal is to both inform and inspire these Fellows as the next generation of physicians and cancer researchers who will carry ChicagoCHEC's mission forward.

## 2023 ChicagoCHEC Research Fellows



Alyssa Purvis



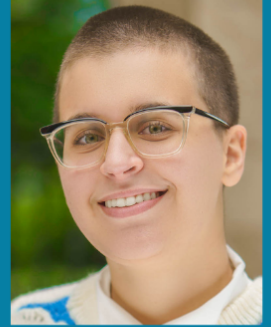
Amna Dafalla



Andrea Penrose



Brittani Rouse



Charlie Sutcuoglu



Clovis Njei



Fabiola Solano



Hellen Sales



Jaweriya Azeem



Jesus Correa



Julie Paska



Justin Vaughn



Laila Zatar



Marissa Aseves



Megan Gonzalez



Olalekan Babalola



Petros Basourakos



Sorayya Nazari



Taneil Johnson



## RESEARCH PROJECT COORDINATORS



Erin Chen



Feda Taha

## SENIOR FELLOWS



Eyitomilayo Anako



Temi Sodipe

## LEaP Fellows

Former ChicagoCHEC Fellows are encouraged to apply to our postfellowship program, Learning Experiences and Programs (ChicagoCHEC LEaP), which offers a more traditional one-on-one mentoring experience. Through LEaP, fellows are matched with a mentor and provided an immersion experience in cancer research.



William Mati



Norma Marshall



Leslie Diaz



Jordon Shaw



Anelly Cardenas



Melania Anton



Kimberly Nu-Tall

## INTERNS



Chisom Chima



Imani Bah



Angel Jimenez



Mina Seals



Norma Marshall

# YOUR VOICE, YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR HEALTH

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

### Stay Involved with ChicagoCHEC

The ChicagoCHEC's website is full of information and resources, along with information on the many ChicagoCHEC-sponsored community events throughout the city. Visit [www.chicagochec.org](http://www.chicagochec.org) for more information.

### Be a Partner with ChicagoCHEC

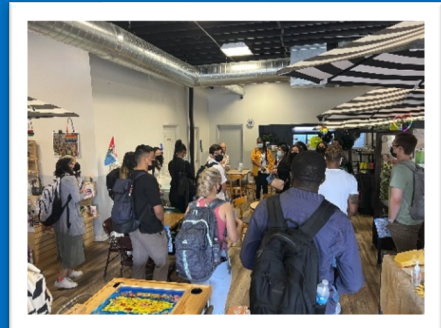
We want to hear from you and your community organizations! We work with organizations like yours by collaborating to provide education and outreach events, training opportunities, and other cancer health initiatives. Help us tailor programming to meet the needs of your community.

### Be a Connector

Network with other organizations, listen to the voices of residents, and serve as a connector for resources and linkages to reduce health disparities!

### Help us Empower Our Future

Are you or your organization working with underrepresented minorities who are interested in science and medicine? Link them to ChicagoCHEC! We have an annual CHEC Fellows Program and more! We have opportunities for undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students.



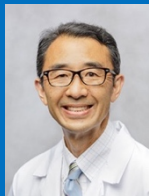
ChicagoCHEC Summer Fellows met with Senator Dick Durbin to discuss the importance of pursuing health equity research careers.



## ChicagoCHEC Leadership



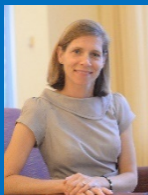
Melissa Simon, MD, MPH  
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive  
Cancer Center of  
Northwestern University



Masahito Jimbo, MD, PhD,  
MPH, FACP  
University of Illinois Chicago



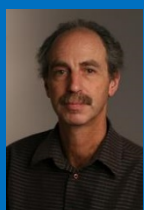
Marian Fitzgibbon, PhD  
University of Illinois Chicago



Christina Ciecierski, PhD  
Northeastern Illinois University



Lidia Filus, PhD  
Northeastern Illinois University



Joseph Feinglass, PhD  
Northwestern University

We are indebted to our community leaders and partners, faculty members, research and administrative staff, and students/trainees for their engaged participation and continued support.

**We look forward to seeing you at  
next year's 2024 Annual Community  
Forum!**

Funding support for ChicagoCHEC is provided by the National Cancer Institute (grants U54CA202995, U54CA202997, an U54CA203000).

The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

We welcome questions and comments from our readers. Please direct correspondence to [info@chicagohec.org](mailto:info@chicagohec.org).

Further information can be found at <http://chicagohec.org/>

Twitter: @ChicagoChec

Facebook: ChicagoCHEC

Instagram: @teamchicagohec

YouTube: ChicagoCHEC

Copyright © 2023 ChicagoCHEC



**THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
ILLINOIS  
AT  
CHICAGO**

