

ANNUAL COMMUNITY REPORT **2024**



# ***Nothing About Us Without Us: Community- Driven Cancer Solutions***

Join Our Cause through  
Education, Health Care, and  
Research



***Celebrating 9 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 9<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 2024 report, we highlight key accomplishments across the three core areas of ChicagoCHEC: *community engagement, meaningful research, and training and education.*

# SNAPSHOT: ChicagoCHEC in 2024

*An overview of community engagement, research, education, and training events ChicagoCHEC has been part of in 2024.*

## Spring 2024

- ChicagoCHEC co-hosted the **7<sup>th</sup> Annual Women in Science Conference** at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) focused on women in the field of public health. This year's Conference also included a Math Modeling Workshop and a Datathon.
- NEIU hosted the **2024 Spring Health Fair**, providing students and community members with valuable health resources, education, and information. Additionally, ChicagoCHEC provided the NEIU community with cancer health prevention resources and information.
- ChicagoCHEC attended several community events including: **More Than Pink – An Evening with Survivors**, showcasing additional stories from the Butterflies group; the **NEIU Latino College Expo**, providing resources for the Latinx community; and **Chicago's Underrepresented Asian Cultures: A Celebration**, highlighting the work of various underrepresented Asian cultures.

## Fall 2024 & Beyond

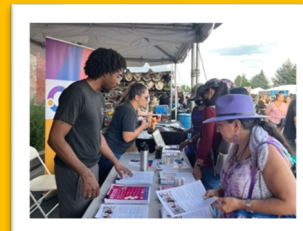
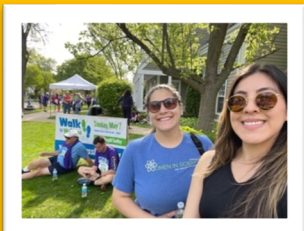
- ChicagoCHEC continues to engage with community events such as **NEIU's Fall Health Fair**; GAGDC's 19<sup>th</sup> annual **79<sup>th</sup> Street Renaissance Festival**; and Wellness House's inaugural **Stronger Together: Cancer Community Summit**.
- The **9<sup>th</sup> annual ChicagoCHEC Community Form – Nothing About Us Without Us: Community-Driven Cancer Solutions** – will take in person at the Arturo Velazquez Institute on Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

## Winter 2023

- ChicagoCHEC sponsored and supported The Resurrection Project's **ELLAS Caminata Walk-a-thon** event, an annual fundraiser to support breast cancer programming for community members.
- ChicagoCHEC continued to support cancer health education and awareness of underrepresented groups at the **NEIU Fall Health Fair** hosted by NEIU.
- ChicagoCHEC hosted a CHEC-In with members of the disability community, to better understand the needs of the community.
- ChicagoCHEC co-led the first **Butterflies Book Signing Event**, commemorating the hard work and personal stories of several breast cancer survivors, known as the Butterflies.
- At **The Importance of Diversity in Clinical Trials** virtual community conversation, ChicagoCHEC hosted a panel discussion centering the significance of having diverse populations participating in clinical trials.

## Summer 2024

- ChicagoCHEC selected 19 fellows for the **2024 ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program**, where fellows engaged in various community site visits including a visit to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and a visit with Senator Dick Durbin.
- ChicagoCHEC and the University of Illinois of Chicago Cancer Center co-hosted the second annual **Surviving and Thriving: Community Connection – A Cancer Survivorship Event** where the cancer community was invited to engage in collaborative discussions to improve cancer care, inform research, and learn about advocacy and survivorship resources.
- ChicagoCHEC also participated in several community events: **Man-Up**, hosted by Instituto Del Progreso Latino; GAGDC's **Health Fair on the Block**; **We Are Chinatown**, hosted by the CBCAC; and the **18<sup>th</sup> Annual Vive tu Vida! Get Moving!**, where team members engaged with the community to highlight the importance of cancer prevention.



ChicagoCHEC is committed to working alongside communities to identify and address their cancer health needs. Following the model we established in 2020, we have focused our efforts in continuing to engage with our communities using virtual and hybrid formats through CHEC-In Community Conversations and Virtual Community Conversations.

**ChicagoCHEC's CHEC-In Community Conversations** are discussions with small groups of community members with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of different communities' experiences and concerns on cancer health, barriers to care and other intersecting areas of interest. We hope these discussions will help create a cancer health network of information and cancer resources.

**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!



***The Importance of Diversity in Clinical Trials*** This virtual, one-hour, community-focused conversation was held with a family medicine provider and researcher, Dr. Masahito Jimbo, and a dedicated community-informed researcher, Dr. Karriem Watson, and was moderated by ChicagoCHEC's very own, Dr. Aida Giachello. The conversation focused not only on the significance of clinical trials, but the importance of ensuring diversity across all types of clinical trials, especially related to diseases that disproportionately impact diverse communities of color. With helpful information for all, we encourage everyone (from community members to academic researchers, and everyone in between) to CHEC-out this informative conversation. Click [here](#) to find the recording.

***CHEC-In Community Conversation Among Community Members Living with Disabilities.*** This in-person CHEC-In conversation facilitated by Dr. Susan Magasi and Ryan McGraw, focused on better understanding the cancer experiences and perspectives of people living with disabilities. ChicagoCHEC is grateful to all who participated and shared their stories and experiences with cancer. We aim to raise awareness of the disparities faced by people with disabilities and to highlight community voices in future programming.





# 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 **fourteen** 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.

## 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.

## Using Mindfulness as an Intervention to Reduce Colorectal Cancer risk

### Chronic Stress for Colorectal Cancer (CRC) Risk Reduction Project

*(Community Partner: Wellness House)*

This project will test an 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) intervention delivered in a hybrid format (synchronous and asynchronous sessions) among 40 Black females at elevated risk of CRC, who reside in vulnerable communities and who report moderate to high perceived stress. The specific aims are to: test the feasibility and acceptability of the intervention and evaluate the preliminary effect on stress and weight, fasting glucose, inflammation markers, and the gut microbiome – risk markers and risk pathways associated with CRC. While relieving social stressors is the paramount goal, addressing chronic stress at the individual level is achievable now, with implications for CRC risk reduction.

## Exploring How Structural Racism Can Impact AML Disparities

### Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML) Disparities Project

*(Community Partner: Equal Hope)*

This project aims to better understand the role of structural racism on AML disparities by measuring exposures historically so that they can account for the long latency of cancers such as AML. The project team will link measures of structural racism to patients' residential histories and define cumulative, time-weighted exposure measures. Finally, using a mixed methods approach the team will connect their findings to the burdens and barriers that patients experience. Our work will strengthen collaborations across the three academic institutions and a cancer disparities focused community-embedded non-profit organization, inform future translational studies linking specific aspects of structural racism to disease pathogenesis, and inform resource allocation and targeted interventions to overcome the widening Black-White AML survival disparity.



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.

**Paris Thomas**, Executive Director, Equal Hope

**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

**Qianna Ragan**, Howard Brown Health

**Julia Wnorowska**, President, Polish American Medical Student Action

**Evelyn Figueroa**, Director, Pilsen Food Pantry

**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)



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



[equalhope.org/](https://equalhope.org/)



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



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



**Pilsen Food Pantry**

[pilsenfoodpantry.com](https://pilsenfoodpantry.com)



**Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition**

[chicagohispanichealthcoalition.org/](https://chicagohispanichealthcoalition.org/)



**Chinese American Service League**

[caslservice.org/](https://caslservice.org/)



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



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



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



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



You'll feel better inside.

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



[wotfoundation.com/](https://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.

## 2024 ChicagoCHEC Fellows



Joselyn Vasquez



David Bastos



Epiphany Sosa



Jeanette Nguyen



Thuan Quan



Vanessa Pineda



Launatica Walters



Orlando Flores



Jose Munoz



Maggie Sabagic



Hannah Paik



Tlara Nimico



Marbella Flores



David Perez



Salmah Abdulkadir



Jasmin Mohammed



Mark Reyes



Masuma Khan



Rowan Dunbar



## Senior Fellows & Summer Intern



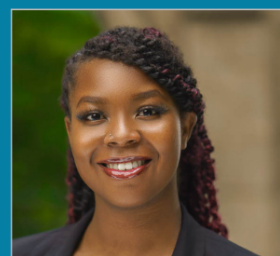
Marissa Aceves



Leslie Diaz



Alivia Heuer



Alyssa Purvis

## 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 and community research.



Jaweriya Azeem



Clovis Njei



Fabiola Solano



Jesus Correa



Sorayya Nazari



Amna Dafalla



Tosin Okoh

## Staff Team



Erin Chen



Lauren DeMaat



Ana Hernandez



Sydney Alairys

# 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

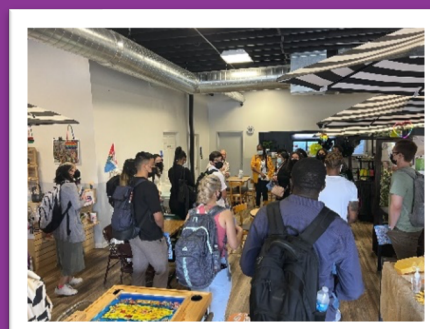
Network with other organizations, listen to the voices of residents, and serve as a connector for resources and linkages to reduce health disparities!

### 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.



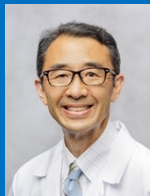
ChicagoCHEC Summer Fellows met with Senator Dick Durbin to discuss the importance of pursuing health equity research careers.



## ChicagoCHEC Leadership



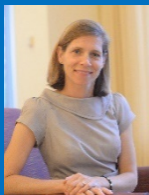
Melissa Simon, MD, MPH  
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive  
Cancer Center of  
Northwestern University



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



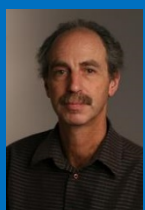
Marian Fitzgibbon, PhD  
University of Illinois Chicago



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 2025 Annual Community  
Forum!**

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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

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YouTube: ChicagoCHEC

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