

Summary Report from September 10th South Side Health Transformation Project Listening Session

Nearly 150 South Side community leaders participated in the September 10th event regarding health transformation on the South Side of Chicago. Participants represented the healthcare sector, faith communities, community-based organizations, city and state government, and more. Breakout session discussions were both strategic and tactical, providing much-needed input for the South Side Health Transformation Project. The feedback and recommendations from these sessions are summarized below.

Strategic Priorities

Across the breakout sessions, a few foundational strategic priorities were shared:

- **Transformation will require a focus on the root causes or social determinants of health:** An effective healthcare transformation model must examine and effectively address the root causes of healthcare disparities. For example, patients are often advised to adopt healthier diets for chronic conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. However, this recommendation simply isn't actionable for patients that live in a food desert. Joblessness, substandard housing and transportation challenges were also mentioned as social determinants that lead to adverse health outcomes. Healthcare literacy, awareness and education were recommended as tools in this area.
- **The community is seeking tangible action:** Healthcare disparities on the South Side are not a new phenomenon. Those disparities came into even sharper focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, just the latest tragic evidence of a systemic problem. Participants stressed that the transformation efforts must not "confuse effort with results." The community will be looking for real change that can be experienced in their daily lives.
- **Healthcare equity is not just about outcomes but trust and partnership:** Participants expressed frustration over the ways in which South Side residents are treated within healthcare systems and by providers. There was a sentiment that there are different standards within healthcare for different people. There is a desire amongst participants to "bridge the trust divide" and for there to be "more healthcare providers of color," as a few examples.
- **Transformation must be vetted by South Side residents:** It was recommended that more voices be heard through this process to transform health delivery. A number of participants urged conveners to extend the listening and information gathering

phase of the South Side Health Transformation Project. This effort should go deeper into the community to include grassroots input from patients and faith community members who are community residents and also from healthcare and medical workers in both hospitals and outpatient clinics.

- **A transformative approach must be sustainable:** Whatever healthcare transformation strategy and plan is developed through this community input/ideation process, the result must be sustainable. The group agreed that there is no quick fix ; and so, the transformation model must be structured to accommodate emerging situations, as well as systemic changes to the way healthcare is delivered at the community level.

Tactical Priorities

Participants also discussed more granular operational issues that must be included in a transformation plan that improves better health outcomes for the long term, including:

- **Focus on disease prevention through enhanced education:** Healthcare starts with disease prevention. Residents are seeking educational resources to support prevention and chronic disease management.
- **Integrate telemedicine to extend healthcare's reach:** Participants expressed interest in sustained and expanded telehealth, with the purpose of supplementing rather than replacing, primary and specialty care.
- **Enhance care coordination to close gaps between systems:** Several healthcare leaders in the breakout sessions highlighted the various siloed efforts that healthcare systems have taken to improve the health of South Side residents. Efforts to transform healthcare must bridge gaps between systems via care coordinators (boots on the ground) and/or shared decision-making and patient records (technology).
- **Improve doctor-patient relationships:** Participants were eager to identify ways to build provider-patient trust and to develop models where physicians get to know patients over a period of time. Some participants highlighted the importance of intentional education for health care providers about specific community needs especially regarding the social determinants of health.
- **Integrate mental health services:** Participants largely agreed that mental health services should be addressed as a matter of public health rather than public safety. Integrating mental health services into broader healthcare programs (e.g. primary care) both increases access points for community members to receive care and normalizes mental health care helping to remove stigma.

- **Improve and enhance health facilities:** Inadequate healthcare facilities and crumbling healthcare infrastructure make people feel like second-class citizens. Whether or not appearances reflect inferior healthcare services, it is evident that perception shapes reality. Sustained investment is needed not only for vital health care services, but also for the infrastructure that houses and supports those services.
- **Rethink emergency care:** Emergency rooms have long been a “go to” for many South Side individuals and families because of systemic gaps in availability of and accessibility to primary, preventive and specialty care. Lack of insurance plays an important role in where residents believe they can get care.
- **Explore alternate funding options:** While the State of Illinois has allocated \$150 million to address healthcare disparities, breakout participants suggested that the SSHTP explore additional funding sources beyond the State to support a sustainable healthcare transformation process—including foundations and corporate social responsibility initiatives. It was recommended that dollars flowing to the South Side for healthcare transformation, from any source, be invested broadly and in ways that create and enhance equity.

Thank you again to those who participated in this important starting point to a process of transforming healthcare on the South Side.