



## **Rush Office of Community Health Equity and Engagement**

2021 Impact Report | Committed to Community



# The Community Health Equity and Engagement leadership team

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## Committed to Community

When we reported on the work of the Rush Office of Community Health Equity and Engagement (CHEE) last year, we were in the midst of helping the communities we serve navigate the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past year, we've doubled down on our efforts.

The CHEE team strives to improve the health of individuals and communities through a broad range of economic, educational, structural and health-related initiatives to combat decades of systemic racism, poverty, lack of access to quality education and a shortage of well-paying jobs. We do this work in close collaboration with people and organizations in the 10 neighborhoods that lie between Rush University Medical Center and Rush Oak Park Hospital.

Again and again, our team and our communities have proved themselves to be incredibly resilient as we work to address disparities on the West Side. Together, we fed more people, prepared more people for rewarding careers, helped more people improve their health and invested more in the community. Working side by side during these intense months has created an even stronger connection between Rush, our partners and the communities we serve.

We don't want to get back to normal after the pandemic ends, because "normal" left a lot of people out. We've set our sights higher: We aspire to create a more just and equitable society by working together to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

### **Darlene Oliver Hightower, JD**

Vice President, Community Health Equity



## Community health: Connecting with underserved communities

Decades of disinvestment in many West Side neighborhoods mean that people have less access to resources and opportunities essential to good health. These disparities help explain why COVID-19 hit communities of color so hard — and why removing those obstacles is essential to achieving health equity. When the pandemic struck, we quadrupled our team of community health workers. They continue to provide screening for the social determinants of health and connect people to resources and health education; their additional duties now include contact tracing, testing and educating people about vaccines.



**1,274**  
cases of COVID-19 **contact-traced**  
after being identified at Rush testing sites

**2,215** people contacted  
for COVID-19  
**vaccine education** and **scheduling**



**293**  
people screened for the social  
determinants of health  
(outside of contact tracing and vaccine outreach calls)



**20,000**  
people received  
**free, healthy food**  
distributed by Rush  
employee volunteers



## Education: Creating opportunities

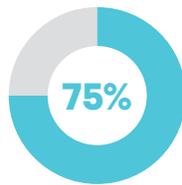
The Rush Education and Career Hub (REACH) provides innovative, hands-on STEM learning for underrepresented students to increase postsecondary achievement and to build diversity in health care and STEM professions. During the pandemic, REACH continued its educational programming virtually. The team also expanded its efforts to connect with families in response to COVID-19, hosting webinars about the virus, distributing meal kits to those in need, distributing personal protective equipment and more.



# 4000+

students, parents, educators  
and community members served

Students were:



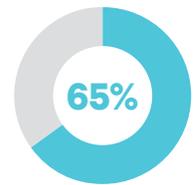
Female



West Side residents



Black and Latinx



First-generation college attendees

# 180+

high school and college  
students interned/  
apprenticed through  
MedSTEM programs



# 45%

of MedSTEM participants  
and families received **wraparound supports:**  
technology, food, transportation and other resources



# 100%

of college students  
in REACH programs persist in a  
**STEM** or **health care** major

## Community-Based Practices: Meeting people where they are

The Rush Community-Based Practices team brings health care to people who face barriers to accessing care. We provide primary care, reproductive health care and mental health services to young people in conveniently located clinics on the West Side, and inclusive, affirming care for the LGBTQ+ community throughout the Rush system. During the pandemic, the team provided telehealth services along with health education through webinars and workshops. They also reached out to patients and their families to connect them with resources like mental health services, food and housing.

### Affirm: The Rush Center for Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Health

Affirm: The Rush Center for Gender, Sexuality and Reproductive Health is working to close gaps in the health care system for LGBTQ+ people. Longstanding internalized stigma, trauma and socioeconomic inequities contribute to health disparities in this community, so the Affirm team helps providers across the Rush system provide affirming care and services for everyone.



55

letters of readiness  
written for transgender  
patients seeking surgery



221 patients connected to affirming  
services at Rush and in the community



291 training hours  
provided for Rush clinicians;



13 hours for  
community providers



### School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) and the Adolescent Family Center (AFC)

In three public school-based health centers on the West Side, we provide a full range of clinic services for young people, including physicals and immunizations, primary care, treatment of injuries and mental health services. The Adolescent Family Center on the Rush University Medical Center campus provides confidential, age-competent health care, including prenatal and reproductive care, for those ages 12 to 25.

**1,405**  
mental health  
visits provided



Children and  
adolescents served:  
**768**



**539** phone calls made to SBHC  
families to **screen for social  
determinants of health**



**1,702**  
students and adults reached  
through sexual health  
education programming



**122**  
teen pregnancies  
prevented  
through family  
planning services

## Community health and engagement: Making connections

People who live in the communities we serve are the ones who know best what would help them and their neighbors get and stay healthy. We build relationships and work closely with community members, community-based organizations, clinics and public health agencies to develop strategies for fostering healthier, more equitable communities. During the pandemic, these relationships were invaluable in guiding our work to help feed, educate, vaccinate and care for our communities.

### Faith-based initiatives

Houses of worship are some of the most trusted anchor institutions on the West Side, and their leaders are authoritative voices in the community. They were close collaborators as we worked to test for COVID-19, educate people about the virus and encourage them to get the vaccine — a critical effort because COVID-19 had a disproportionate impact on Black Chicagoans, who were more likely to be hospitalized and to die from the virus than Latinx and white residents.



**1,200**  
community members tested

### 9 West Side and South side partner churches served as COVID-19 testing sites



**386** walkers

### West Side Walk for Wellness

This summer program was designed to engage West Side residents in regular exercise and educate them about health issues that disproportionately impact their communities. Held virtually in 2021 because of COVID-19 restrictions, the program was able to expand to all of Chicagoland and beyond. Participants walked on their own and engaged with each other and health experts via Zoom. They developed such a strong sense of connectedness during the pandemic that the program was extended for an additional three weeks.





## Adopt-a-Family

Through this longstanding holiday partnership with West Side churches and social service agencies, Rush employees and outside partners provide personal care items, clothing, toys and more to West Side families experiencing hardship. For more than 25 years, Adopt-a-Family has been a beloved tradition at Rush.

**251** families served during the 2021 holiday season



**1,167**

people served, including children, teens, parents and grandparents



**36** community members trained

## Mental Health First Aid

West Side residents consistently identify mental health resources as something their communities need. Rush's Mental Health First Aid training empowers community members to respond appropriately when someone needs help. More than that, it empowers neighbors to help neighbors without having to rely on large health care or social services institutions. Participants learn how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of mental illness and substance use disorders, reaching out and providing initial support until professionals can take over.



**3**

Mental Health First Aid  
**community trainings** held

## Anchor Mission: Building health by building community

Shorter life expectancies on the West Side aren't caused by genetics or poor choices, but by the impact of social determinants of health like poverty and a lack of access to healthy food, high-quality education and family-supporting jobs. Through our Anchor Mission strategy, we commit to using our economic power to improve West Side economic vitality by hiring, purchasing, investing and volunteering locally. During the pandemic, we paid particular attention to supporting local vendors, recruiting employees from the West Side and providing food and vaccinations.

### Hiring locally

We work with citywide community-based organizations to align our hiring needs with job candidates' skills and offer programs to help our entry-level employees advance their careers within Rush. Our goal is to hire people into stable jobs that offer both a living wage and growth opportunities — an “outside in and inside up” approach.



**100%**  
of patient care technician  
pathway program  
participants hired by Rush



**17%**  
of all new hires at  
Rush University  
Medical Center  
came from  
**Anchor Mission  
communities**



### Spending locally

Every dollar spent at a small business recirculates within that community 33% more than a dollar spent at a chain store or restaurant. We encourage Rush departments to purchase through local businesses; bring local restaurants onto the Medical Center campus; and hire community residents to staff the Concordance Healthcare Solutions warehouse that keeps us stocked with medical supplies.

**\$8 million** spent with local vendors

**40%** of employees at the  
**Concordance Healthcare Solutions warehouse**  
live in Anchor Mission communities



## Investing locally

We invest in Rush's "first community" of employees, many of whom live on the West Side, by helping them build their own household wealth through increased 403(b) contributions and free financial education. We also take part in local impact investing projects that address the social determinants of health, and have signed a national pledge to allocate 1% of our portfolio—\$7.5 million over the next five years—to these investments. And our contracts for capital projects include goals for local hiring and spending.

**\$11.4 million**  
loaned to West Side social impact  
projects through **impact investing**  
with our partners



**15%** more  
Rush employees began  
saving at least 6% of  
their paychecks for  
retirement

**\$4 million**  
spent with Anchor  
Mission communities  
on capital projects

## Volunteering locally

The Rush Employee Volunteer Program (EVP) lets employees take time during the work day to volunteer on the West Side. We address issues that improve health and well-being and reduce hardship, and work to provide volunteer opportunities that enrich and inspire employees.



**22,588**  
people served

**490** employee volunteers **distributed food**  
and staffed COVID-19 vaccination clinics



**Community Health Equity  
and Engagement**

[www.rush.edu/chee](http://www.rush.edu/chee)

