

SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY DOCUMENT

YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago*

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*In partnership with the South
Side Community Assessment
Stakeholder Group

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WHY WE DID THIS

At the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago (the Y), our communities' goals and dreams drive what we do daily. We value opportunities to learn from each other and build understanding to ensure our services and strategies align with our partners and communities. This is why we have embarked on an intentional journey to connect with our communities, building an understanding of their experiences, and naming actions we can take in collaboration with our partners to better connect people with their purpose, potential, and each other.

The Y is working to deepen our impact and strengthen our presence in the South Side, and we knew it was vital that we take time to learn from the experiences of those working and living in the area. We also wanted to create a brave space to build meaningful partnerships that translate conversations into impactful actions. With these goals in mind, we led a community assessment of five community areas on the South Side of Chicago from September 2023 to April 2024: Hyde Park, Kenwood, South Shore, Washington Park, and Woodlawn. Throughout this report, these areas are referred to by name or as the South Side, South Side community, or South Side Community Assessment areas. To ensure inclusivity and broad representation in building understanding and recommending actions, the Y completed the assessment in partnership with the South Side YMCA in Woodlawn and the South Side Community Assessment Stakeholder Group. The Stakeholder Group included representatives from local community-based organizations and community members.

These regular meetings invited stakeholders to review data about the South Side and discuss how these data did or did not reflect what they experienced in the region. These reflections inform how this report analyzes data and the ultimate action items recommended. The Y intends to continue facilitating these stakeholder conversations, using the findings and actions outlined here to guide future efforts to support the South Side.

APPROACH

The assessment centers on the social determinants of health (SDOH) framework to understand the assets, needs, and wants of the Hyde Park, Kenwood, South Shore, Washington Park, and Woodlawn communities and identify actions that partners can take to better support those who live there. This framework critically considers the structural and social factors contributing to one's health and well-being. Research has demonstrated that only 20% of a person's health correlates to their medical care.¹ The remaining 80% is associated with the structures and climate of the community where a person lives, works, and spends their time. These structures and climates are inclusive of historical and present-day structural racism, political climate, and other systems of oppression that contribute to health disparities across axes of identity (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and ability). While this report focuses on each determinant individually, it is important to note that the five domains intersect. For example, having access to quality health care improves one's odds of keeping stable employment. As a result, actions in one area may, and hopefully will, have indirect effects on the other areas. Using the SDOH framework, the assessment examines how factors like the economy, education, health care access and quality, neighborhood environment, and social context affect health outcomes in the South Side community (Figure 1). With this insight, we can collaborate to improve the well-being of all community members.

To understand how these five determinants affect a community, we used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data included secondary community-level data from public sources like the Chicago Health Atlas. We selected 150 indicators to get a holistic view of the five communities. To understand Hyde Park, Kenwood, South Shore, Washington Park, and Woodlawn better, community stakeholders chose Lakeview and the City of Chicago

as comparison communities. Lakeview represents a well-resourced area, while the South Side is seen as under-resourced. We also used a community survey with 70 respondents, which provided valuable insights despite not being representative.

For qualitative data, we conducted four interviews with community members and agency representatives to capture strengths and needs not reflected in the quantitative data. Combining these insights, we worked with our assessment partners to understand the South Side community's health and recommend actions to support the community better.

FIGURE 1
Social Determinants of Health Domains



KEY FINDINGS



ECONOMIC STABILITY

Residents of the South Side community experience more poverty compared to Lakeview and the City of Chicago.² They also face more economic hardship.³ The percentage of the unemployed workforce in the South Side community is nearly double that of residents across the City of Chicago and almost four times as much as in Lakeview.⁴



NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

South Side community residents are often more rent-burdened (paying more than 30% of their income toward rent) compared to those in Lakeview and Chicago.⁵ They also have lower homeownership rates.⁶ More South Side residents use SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits, but they have less access to food than residents in Lakeview and across Chicago.^{7,8} Despite these challenges, the South Side community has many assets like green spaces, community-based organizations, and libraries.



EDUCATION ACCESS & QUALITY

South Side community residents have similar levels of educational attainment as Chicago but lower levels of higher education than Lakeview residents.⁹ Additionally, the South Side has lower preschool enrollment rates than Lakeview but higher rates than the Chicago average.¹⁰



SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The social vulnerability index for the South Side neighborhoods is higher than in Lakeview and the average for Chicago.¹¹ Residents of the South Side also report feeling less safe and experiencing more violence in their neighborhoods compared to those in Lakeview and Chicago.¹² However, South Side residents feel just as connected to their neighborhood as the average Chicago resident.¹³



HEALTH CARE ACCESS AND QUALITY

The rate of residents in the South Side community without health insurance is higher than in Lakeview but lower than the average across Chicago.¹⁴ However, the self-reported overall health status of South Side residents is lower than Lakeview and Chicago.¹⁵ Also, even though South Side residents have lower rates of moderate or serious psychological distress, they have higher rates of unmet treatment for mental health conditions.¹⁶



ONE YEAR ACTION PLAN

By reviewing data and insights of the South Side and discussing how these findings do or do not align with their lived experiences, members of the South Side Community Assessment stakeholder group developed a series of action items they plan to take over the next year. The South Side Y and Community Assessment Stakeholder Group plan to work together to do the following:

- Design and provide resources to promote financial stability, such as financial literacy programming and job training.
- Collaborate to launch and expand food distribution programs that increase access to fresh produce and healthy options.
- Create and distribute accessible and informational resources to caregivers that outline the different resources available to youth and caregivers, especially for learners with disabilities, disengaged youth, etc.
- Partner to plan and promote community events to enhance engagement and overall sense of community belonging.
- Partner to expand and promote enrollment in behavioral health services for individuals experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress.

The accompanying one-page overviews outline anticipated longer-term action items. We expect to provide annual updates for the next few years on the status of these action items. The Y is excited to continue collaborating with our South Side partners to realize South Side community members' dreams. Any interested stakeholders are invited to reach out to Jarquetta Egston at jegston@ymcachicago.org to join the conversations about implementing these action plans. The more people who are aware and involved in the process, the better the odds are of implementing the action plans and improving the health and well-being of the South Side Community Assessment areas.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

THE SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT STAKEHOLDER GROUP COMPRISES REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ORGANIZATIONS LISTED BELOW, AS WELL AS OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND ORGANIZATIONS NOT LISTED. WE THANK OUR PARTNERS FOR THEIR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT OF THE SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROJECT AND THE SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY OVERALL.



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