

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



BACKGROUND

In partnership with The Social Consult, the YMCA of Metro Chicago completed a community assessment of four communities in Suburban Cook County, IL: Matteson, Richton Park, Steger, and Park Forest. The goal of the project is to understand how community members feel about COVID-19, and how their feelings impact their choices. Members of the Community Health Equity Network (CHEN) co-lead the project, coming up with the questions we asked and the ways we asked them. Funding for this project was made possible by the Office of Disease Control, through the Illinois Department of Public Health.

METHODS

Information for the community assessment was collected in November and December 2022. We used the following methods to understand how community members feel and act:

- Public data from sources like the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Census
- 13 interviews with community members
- 27 surveys about COVID-19 experience and beliefs
- 28 sets of responses to poll/access questions (yes/no questions about access to COVID-19 resources)

RESULTS

COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing Rates

- Matteson, Richton Park, Steger, and Park Forest have lower COVID-19 vaccination rates than the general region.

Access

- Approximately 15% of respondents in the South region reported not having access to COVID-19 vaccines, especially respondents from Matteson.
- There is a lack of trust about COVID-19 information in Region 10 South community members.

Thoughts, Feelings and Perceptions

- Death/critical illness from COVID-19 was reported as one of the most common impacts on community members' lives.
- COVID-19 created economic challenges for many community members. Some faced job loss, reduced wages, and general economic uncertainty.
- Community members also highlighted the social emotional impact of COVID-19 on children.
- Community members reported mixed feelings about COVID-19 vaccination requirements.

Other Key Health Conditions

- Community members listed mental health, heart disease, and obesity as the other major health issues in their community.



The full report can be accessed at ymcachicago.org/covid19support or by scanning the QR code. Questions about the YMCA Community Assessment? Contact Kelsey Barnick at kbarnick@ymcachicago.org.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a list of key recommendations based on the information we reviewed in the community assessment. The complete list of recommendations can be found in the full report.

TO INCREASE COVID-19 VACCINATION CONFIDENCE AND UPTAKE:

Testing

- Increase access to testing in all of the Region 10 South communities.

Communication

- Create an open space for conversation between vaccinated and unvaccinated community members.
- Communicate to non-English speaking populations in Region 10 South communities, with a particular focus in Steger.
- Host education events that focus on the long-term effects of COVID-19 versus the long-term effects of the vaccine. Include stories from people who were healthy but ending up having long COVID.

Vaccination

- Encourage people getting their boosters to bring not fully vaccinated friends and family with them.
- Do outreach at unemployment and cash benefit offices to reach unvaccinated community members.
- Increase vaccination for white, male, and 18-49 year old populations in all target communities. This will help close the biggest vaccination gaps.
- Focus vaccination efforts in Matteson to close the largest community vaccination gap.
- In Richton Park, focus on vaccination efforts for the Black population.
- Leverage relationships with trusted spiritual leaders to support vaccination uptake.

TO ADDRESS OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS:

- Find ways to understand how COVID-19 has affected mental health. Come up with strategies to help affected community members.
- Work with health care partners, funders, and CHEN to come up with ways to target heart disease and obesity.
- Find ways to understand the impact of COVID-19 on youth social and emotional health. Come up with strategies to support youth and families.



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