



# GROWING UP STRONGER: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CHILD OPPORTUNITY

in Neighborhoods in the District of Columbia and  
Prince George's County, Maryland



**Children's National.**



THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Community Health Improvement Plan, 2022-2025

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### GROWING UP STRONGER: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND OPPORTUNITIES

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#### Community Health Improvement Plan

Children's National Hospital  
and The HSC Health Care System  
Washington, D.C., November 2022

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# **GROWING UP STRONGER: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE CHILD OPPORTUNITY**

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## OVERVIEW

# IMPROVING A CHILD'S OPPORTUNITY TO GROW UP STRONGER AND HEALTHIER

A child's health is important—not just to their parents and families, but to the community as a whole. There are many social and environmental factors that contribute to a child's health, including having access to a high-quality education, an affordable place to live in a safe neighborhood, healthy food to eat, jobs that pay a living wage and comprehensive health care.

Unfortunately for many families in our community, particularly Black and Latino families, equitable access to these critical resources for their children remains out of reach. It will take a sustained effort to effect meaningful change—and change starts in partnership with our community.

Children's National Hospital and The HSC Health Care System (HSC) are committed to improving health equity for the children and families we serve. Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing barriers that impede good health, such as poverty and discrimination, and their far-reaching consequences. Our hospitals have started by assessing a child's opportunity to grow up stronger and have better health outcomes at the neighborhood level. To measure opportunity, we used the Child Opportunity Index (COI)<sup>1</sup>, a tool that relies

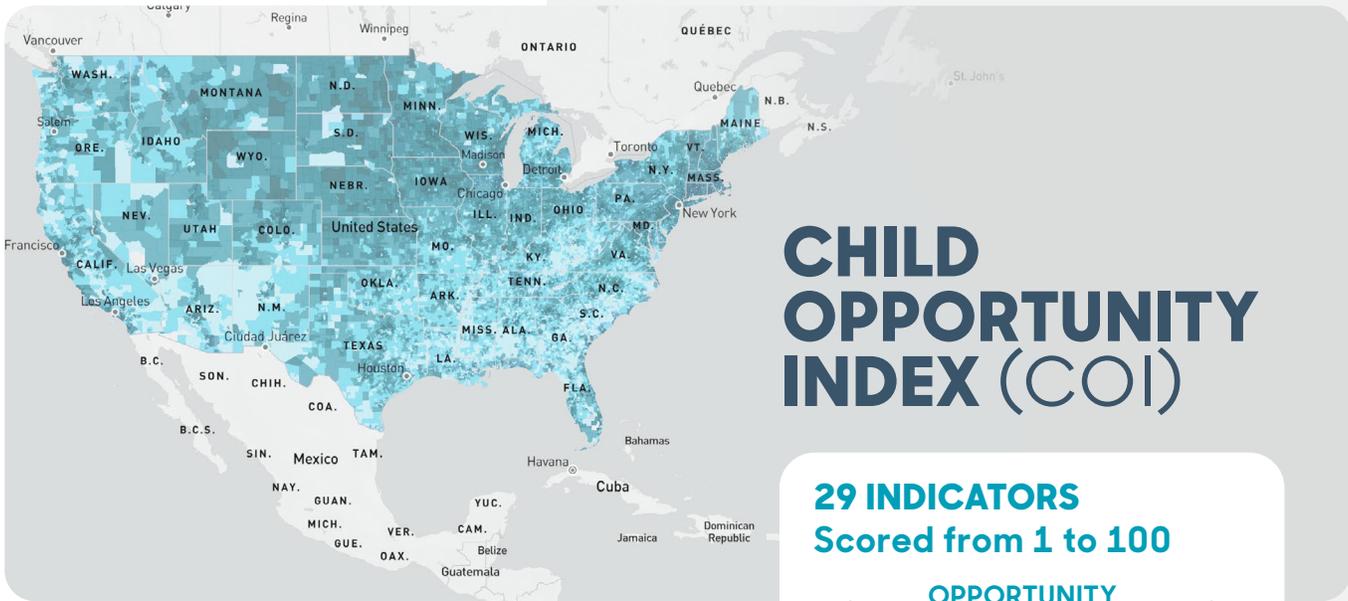
### HEALTH OUTCOME INFLUENCES

**15%**

Medical  
Care

**80+%**

External  
Factors



# CHILD OPPORTUNITY INDEX (COI)

**29 INDICATORS**  
Scored from 1 to 100



on 29 indicators across three domains—education, health and environment and social and economic factors—to measure opportunity levels across all neighborhoods in the United States.

**The COI defines opportunity as the neighborhood resources that matter for a child’s healthy development.**

**The 29 indicators focus on neighborhood features such as access to healthy food, high-quality education, parks and playgrounds.** The higher the score, the better the opportunity a child has to develop in a healthy manner. The COI underscores the interplay between place and race-based inequities, noting that low-opportunity neighborhoods are often disproportionately home to children of color.



## OUR FINDINGS<sup>2</sup>

Our findings revealed that child opportunity varies considerably within our primary service area. Child opportunity is lowest in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C., as well as certain Prince George’s County, Maryland, neighborhoods. We worked with community and hospital stakeholders to select **four of the 29 COI indicators as priority areas** within our community’s neighborhoods of lowest opportunity:

- 1 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**
- 2 HEALTHY FOOD**
- 3 HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE**
- 4 EMPLOYMENT RATE**

# COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

This Community Health Improvement Plan (**CHIP**) describes the goals and strategies that we—Children’s National and HSC—are using to address the four key indicators as identified through our 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (**CHNA**). The 2022 CHIP, informed by the community and approved by the hospital boards, actively addresses the four key indicators that were identified in the CHNA as “priority areas.”

These four priority areas are deeply intertwined and have lasting impacts throughout a child’s life. For example, education, nutrition and economic security are usually achieved through a parent’s ability to be employed and have health insurance. Access to health insurance is largely driven by employer-based coverage, but in order to work, parents and caregivers need access to affordable early childhood education and child care. Early childhood education is important for a child’s social, emotional and academic development and school readiness. Child development is also contingent upon having a healthy diet, which depends on families having the income to purchase healthy foods, as



## FOUR PRIORITY AREAS



1

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**



2

**HEALTHY FOOD**



3

**HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE**



4

**EMPLOYMENT RATE**

well as living in communities that provide access to healthy food options. Under-resourced neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, food deserts, lack of economic mobility and inadequate educational opportunity are more likely to experience high rates of violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an unprecedented strain on these four priority areas. Millions of families lost relatives and experienced job loss, which impacts their economic security, ability to pay for healthy food and access to employer-based health insurance. Early childhood education centers face challenges maintaining operations due to the pandemic, and many struggled to

remain open due to increased operating costs and staffing shortages. Families also face significant mental health challenges because of the stressors associated with the pandemic as they deal with circumstances such as death, social isolation, job loss and substance use.

With limited expertise and capacity to address the other COI indicators, we will partner with our local and regional organizations, like our health departments with their health system plans and the DC Health Matters Collaborative, to address aspects of the other COI indicators.

## CHNA AND CHIP OVERVIEW

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is developed by the Child Health Advocacy Institute (CHAI), the advocacy arm of Children’s National, on behalf of both hospitals. CHAI was launched in 2007 and advocates for policy and systems changes to achieve health equity for all children.

### CHAI CORE FOCUS AREAS:

- Community Engagement
- Data
- Education
- Policy



The CHNA and CHIP are federal requirements for nonprofit hospitals. The CHNA identifies key health needs through systematic, comprehensive data collection and analysis. We used a variety of processes to conduct the assessment, including data analysis, community engagement, and collaborative participation. The CHIP is a written document that describes our action plan for addressing the four priority areas identified in our CHNA.

This is the fourth improvement plan or CHIP supported by CHAI at Children’s National. This 2022 CHIP is different from our prior improvement plans, as it focuses on children living in specific neighborhoods within Children’s National and HSC’s primary service area (PSA) which includes Washington, D.C., and parts of Maryland, and applies a stronger pediatric health equity lens by utilizing the Child Opportunity Index. Prior improvement

plans were conducted in collaboration with the DC Health Matters Collaborative (DCHMC)<sup>3</sup> a coalition of local hospitals and community health centers and focused on the full Washington, D.C., population. Children’s National continues to be a member of the DCHMC and we are supporting efforts to address the needs identified in the DCHMC needs assessment mental well being, equitable access to care and community based workforce development for residents in the District of Columbia.

While this improvement plan is federally mandated, it means much more to us than simply “checking a box” or developing a plan that is not backed by action. **The strategies of this CHIP guide how our hospitals invest in our local communities and build community partnerships to improve opportunity for our children and families.**

## INTRODUCTION

# WHO WE ARE AND OUR COMMITMENT TO HEALTH EQUITY

Children's National Hospital, based in Washington, D.C., celebrates more than 150 years of pediatric care, research and commitment to the community. We are a pediatric academic health system that offers the highest quality community-based care in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, including Maryland and Northern Virginia. We are recognized for our expertise and innovation in pediatrics and as a strong voice for children through advocacy at the local, regional and national levels.



## CHILDREN'S NATIONAL MISSION

The mission of Children's National is to excel in care, advocacy, research and education.

### We accomplish this through:

- Providing a quality health care experience for our patients and families
- Improving health outcomes for children regionally, nationally, and internationally
- Leading the creation of innovative solutions to pediatric health challenges
- Making diversity and inclusion a priority to achieve our mission



Children's National.



THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**THE HSC HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS PART OF CHILDREN'S NATIONAL AND INCLUDES A CHILDREN'S SPECIALTY HOSPITAL AND A HOME HEALTH AGENCY.**

The specialty hospital, The HSC Pediatric Center, is located in Washington, D.C., and serves children with complex medical needs from infancy through the age of 21. The HSC Pediatric Center includes an inpatient subacute program, a skilled nursing facility and outpatient programs that provide individual rehabilitation therapies, as well as clinics for assistive technology and seating and positioning. Together, this affiliation agreement, Children's National and HSC will transform the delivery of pediatric healthcare across the care continuum.

**HSC MISSION**

The mission of The HSC Health Care System is to provide and coordinate innovative, high quality, community based care for individuals with complex needs and their families. HSC empowers all we serve to improve the quality of their lives.

**FIGURE 1**

Our Hospitals' Primary Service Area (PSA)



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Together, Children's National and HSC are committed to improving health equity, providing community benefit and building trust and goodwill with our hospital employees, community residents and community and government organizations.

We strive to be inclusive and equitable by collaborating with our community and remain accountable to improving health outcomes for children and families. Our hospitals' organizational values—compassion, commitment and connection—guide, inspire and challenge us each day to help us achieve our mission and vision.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and increased societal awareness of racism and social inequity, the CHAI at Children's National took action to establish a community engagement framework that would provide clarity, transparency and opportunity for community members and stakeholders to have a greater role in our community health improvement efforts.

**We recognize that community engagement is more than a one-time activity; rather, it should be a lens through which we do our work.**



## OUR DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*"Community engagement is not just a set of activities and methods confined to a particular project, policy or process. Rather, it is a way of communication, decision-making and governance that recognizes community members' power and includes them and other stakeholders in identifying problems and making decisions that promote equitable outcomes."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Bergstrom, D., Rose, K., Olinger, J., Holley, K. The community engagement guide for sustainable communities. PolicyLink and Kirwan Institute, 2013.



In recognition of the importance of community engagement and our responsibility to create meaningful partnerships with our stakeholders, the CHAI created a new resource called the **Community Engagement Guidebook**. This Guidebook provides Children’s National staff, leaders and partners with information and resources to inform community engagement efforts for their projects and programs. Community health improvement planning does not belong to one employee, division or department within a hospital. It uses a community engagement framework to help staff design, implement and evaluate community engagement efforts for new and existing work, and the Quick Start version provides user-friendly worksheets to easily put community engagement principles into practice. We are using the framework to help us collaborate with the community in planning, implementing and evaluating our CHIP strategies.

In 2022, we formed a **Community Health Advisory Council** to elevate the voices of residents living in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C., and Prince George’s County, Maryland. The Council is comprised of parents and caregivers of children who have received services at Children’s National or HSC. Meetings are held monthly and include hospital employees from the Community Affairs, Patient Experience and Social Work departments, along with local subject-matter experts. Council members provide feedback and input regarding their experience with the delivery of care including how community challenges, family barriers and cultural traditions affect care. They also provide input on community health priorities, initiatives and practices, including the Community Health Improvement Plan. The Council provides an opportunity for community members who are not often represented to be involved in decision-making, design and/or evaluation of our programs, community partnerships and health care services.



Children’s National and HSC are committed to advancing racial and health equity in our local communities. Beyond providing the highest quality clinical care, we know that health and well being begins in the neighborhoods that our children call home. This CHIP reflects our hospital’s commitment to improving the opportunity for our children to grow up stronger by addressing racial and health inequities in our community.

## OUR PROCESS

# COMMUNITY ENGAGED AND DATA-INFORMED ACTIONS

*"Mental health services are almost impossible to access even with good insurance."*

-WARD 8 RESIDENT

As part of our community health improvement planning, we invited residents living in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County, Maryland, to share their recommendations on how our hospitals can improve child opportunity in our communities.

*"We need English courses, computers and tech, too, to give people access to the opportunities... Empowering us will help us meet our nutritional and health needs. They all connect."*

-SPANISH-SPEAKING, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY RESIDENT



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we engaged with hospital employees, parents, caregivers, teens and adults in our communities through virtual community conversations, input forms, interviews and town halls to inform our CHIP strategies.

**The following sections provide a summary of the specific steps we took and the key input received.**

*" The true civil rights issues of the next generation, in my opinion, is going to be education. Those who have it are going to do well. Those who don't are really going to struggle."*

- COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION LEADER

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AND COMMUNITY INPUT FORM

**In July 2021**, we conducted 11 virtual community conversations with 67 parents and caregivers living in either Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County, Maryland, to give their perspectives on how the hospitals could improve neighborhood factors.

**In May 2022**, we hosted four additional community conversations with 26 parents and caregivers living in priority neighborhoods to identify specific strategies to improve access to early childhood education, healthy food, health insurance and health services and employment.

Furthermore, we issued Community Input Forms, once in 2021 and again in 2022, as a way for residents who may not have been able to participate in previous conversations to provide their input.

**We received feedback from more than 100 neighborhood residents on ways that Children's National and HSC can improve opportunities for children related to each of the priorities and suggestions for potential partnerships with organizations and individuals to address those priorities.**

# TOWN HALLS

In July 2022, Children's National and HSC held two town hall events, one virtual and one in person, titled, "Growing Up Stronger: Selecting Strategies to Improve Child Opportunity." Our main goal was to work in partnership with the community to help prioritize our CHIP strategies and develop a roadmap to address them. We convened more than 60 key stakeholders, including hospital staff and community organization leaders, to provide feedback on the potential strategies, community partners and funding sources. We also asked the town hall participants to vote on their top two strategies for each of the four priority areas that Children's National and HSC should focus on over the next three years.

## EXAMPLES OR SOME OF THE ORGANIZATIONS IN ATTENDANCE

Total Family Care Coalition, Safe Shores, Rodham Institute – The George Washington University, Prince George's County Public Schools, The Metamorphosis Community Project and others.

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

To include the voices of children in our community, we engaged two groups of high school students from the region. The first group was part of an eight-week Photovoice program tailored to adolescents. Photovoice works to build a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own story through photography. During the program, more than 20 high school students used their cell phones to capture images that showed the assets and challenges that affect health in their communities. The second group, which included eight adolescents who were part of the hospital's summer internship program, used artistic expression to show the impacts of important health issues, from community violence to access to healthy foods.





# HOSPITAL ENGAGEMENT

From September 2021 to August 2022, we engaged with more than 100 hospital employees to gain their perspective on the COI indicators and priority areas, existing work in these areas, potential partners and funding opportunities.

From attending hospital leadership meetings, like the Shared Nursing Leadership Advocacy Council and Social Determinants of Health Special Interest Group, to hosting community health improvement sessions, hospital employees were able to provide feedback and input on policy and programmatic actions we could lead as part of the CHIP.



We issued a Hospital Input Form twice, once in 2021 and another in 2022, to involve hospital employees who may not have been able to participate in previous conversations. We received feedback from more than 170 hospital employees on ways that we could address the priority areas, what current initiatives and resources can be leveraged and what potential partners are available.



## LOOKING AHEAD

# GOALS AND STRATEGIES

While all the strategies shared by our stakeholders were salient, we carefully reviewed and selected strategies that align closely with our organizational mission and expertise.

In this 2022 Community Health Improvement Plan, we outline nine strategies that use a variety of tactics to improve opportunity for children living in Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County, Maryland—from advocating for affordable early childhood education centers to implementing new programs that address food security to revising existing practices around employment. As we work with community partners and government agencies to implement the CHIP strategies, we will use the COI to measure how opportunity is changing for children in our neighborhoods. Changes in the overall opportunity score, as well as within each of the four priority areas, are measurable over time and across neighborhoods. We are confident that our investments in changing policy, improving programs and allocating resources more equitably will be a part of how opportunity for children in our community improves over time.

### OUR 2022-2025 GOAL

*In the next three years, we will implement, expand, fund or collaborate with others on the selected strategies as part of our community benefit efforts. We may amend the plan depending on the environmental circumstances, such as another outbreak or changes in community assets and resources.*



## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**GOAL:**  
Build a Stronger Early Childhood Education Community



### OUR STRATEGIES

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

#### ADVOCACY

Advocate for high quality, affordable ECE centers with well compensated staff

- Increase government and philanthropic funding for ECE
- Decrease cost of ECE for families

#### PROGRAMS & PRACTICE

Strengthen connections between ECE and hospitals about the referral process (e.g., what's available, how to enroll, requirements for vouchers, helping families who have children with disabilities, materials in multiple languages, etc.)

- Increase employee knowledge and understanding of ECE
- Increase connections between hospital/clinics and ECE

#### CURRENT PROGRAMS AND EFFORTS

The **Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN)** is embedding mental health supports in early childhood education centers to improve the ability of staff, families, programs and systems to prevent, identify, treat and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to age five and their families.



## HEALTHY FOOD

**GOAL:**  
Increase Access to Healthy Food Options



### OUR STRATEGIES

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

#### ADVOCACY

Advocate for funding for and improved access to healthy food options in the community

- Increase government and philanthropic funding for healthy food options

#### PROGRAMS & PRACTICE

Increase access to healthy food options within the hospital and community through the hospital cafeteria, food pharmacies, farmers markets and other initiatives

Expand food insecurity screenings to determine eligibility for enrollment in food access programs

- Improve food security screenings for families
- Increase access to healthy food options

#### CURRENT PROGRAMS AND EFFORTS

**Food Pharmacy Program**, in partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank. Children diagnosed with prediabetes or diabetes who also screen positive for food insecurity are provided with medically tailored groceries.

**FLIP and FLIPRx** offers community cooking classes and a produce prescription program.

**HSC's Healthy Habits** program is an eight-week class that focuses on healthy lifestyle, behavior health and nutrition education.

# GOALS AND STRATEGIES



## HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

**GOAL:**  
Improve Access to Health Care and Health Insurance Coverage



### OUR STRATEGIES

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

#### ADVOCACY

**Advocate for high quality and easily accessible mental health service continuum** inclusive of sustainable promotion, prevention, early intervention, treatment, crisis and recovery services covered by insurance

- Improve access to and delivery of mental health services
- Improve access to health insurance coverage in Prince George's County, Maryland

#### PROGRAMS & PRACTICE

**Improve care coordination** within the hospital and with insurance providers and community organizations

- Improve access to mental health services
- Improve care coordination between health care system and insurance providers

#### CURRENT PROGRAMS AND EFFORTS

**Executive Committee role** on the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Council on Immigrant Child and Family Health (COICFH), which advocates for health insurance coverage for undocumented families.



## EMPLOYMENT RATE

**GOAL:**  
Strengthen Employment Opportunities



### OUR STRATEGIES

### ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

#### PROGRAMS & PRACTICE

**Sustain and expand hospital research youth engagement programs and job opportunities** (internships, trainings, and, research opportunities)

Create job opportunities for people with disabilities, including partnering with organizations to provide skill based training

- Increase number of participants in youth engagement programs and job opportunities
- Increase number of job opportunities for people with disabilities
- Increase diversity of youth in health care career pathways

#### CURRENT PROGRAMS AND EFFORTS

**Children's National METEOR v. High School** program offers opportunities for high school students and teachers to integrate into biomedical research through short-term summer experiences that encourage careers in STEM/research.

**Host student internships** in collaboration with the DC Career and Technical Education (CTE) Network, Network, this locally funded program aims to strengthen the pathway to college and careers for high school students.



## COLLABORATION

# ENGAGE WITH US

Collaboration is at the core of what we do and is the key to making a significant and sustainable impact on the health of our community. We will continue to engage our community and government stakeholders, hospital employees, Community Health Advisory Board and Community Health Advisory Council to explore areas for collaboration.

We believe transparency is important in this process and will update our website as we address the nine strategies. Please follow along, provide feedback and ask questions as we track our progress in meeting the goals set out in this CHIP.

We invite all District of Columbia and Prince George's County stakeholders—residents, community organizations, hospital employees and business leaders—to join us on this journey. We offer this invitation because we know that each child's story of health depends on all of us being in conversation together and taking steps to help each child grow up stronger.

**For more details contact:**

[communityaffairs@childrensnational.org](mailto:communityaffairs@childrensnational.org)

### ENDNOTES

1 The Child Opportunity Index was developed with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation ([diversitydatakids.org](https://diversitydatakids.org))

2 The Community Health Needs Assessment was published June 30, 2022 on our hospital website. (<https://childrensnational.org/advocacy-and-outreach/child-health-advocacy-institute>)

3 Community Health Needs Assessment, District of Columbia, 2022. DC Health Matters Collaborative. June 2022, [dchealthmatters.org](https://dchealthmatters.org)

### COVER MURAL

Shani Shih  
Evergreen (2021)  
Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

*The neighborhoods in which children live impact their opportunity to reach their full potential. Neighborhood conditions that nurture children help them grow into healthy adults, and in the future, contribute to the development of **thriving communities**.*

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