

BRONZEVILLE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

March 2022

COALITION TO SAVE
Our Mental Health Centers

THE COALITION TO SAVE OUR MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS

The Chicago Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Centers works to ensure that all Chicago residents, especially the low-income and underinsured, have access to adequate and affordable community mental health services.

Founded in 1991, the Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Centers was formed as a response to the impending closures of Chicago's 19 city-run community mental health centers. These centers had been funded in part by the Community Mental Health Act of 1963 under President Kennedy. When the Act was rolled back in the '80s, however, Chicago began defunding and closing its public clinics. For over a decade, the Coalition organized mental health consumers, mental health professionals, faith leaders, and other Chicago residents to keep the centers open and funded.

In 2004, the Coalition began developing a new parallel model for mental healthcare delivery. Expanded Mental Health Services Programs (EMHSPs) would give communities the authority to approve, fund, and oversee their own mental health centers. In 2010-2011, the Coalition drafted and spearheaded the passage of the Community Expanded Mental Health Services Act (405 ILCS 22/), which provided the authorization for Chicago communities to create EMHSPs via binding referendums.

The first such program was approved by voters in the North River community in November of 2012 with 72% of the vote. A decade in the making, The Kedzie Center opened in October of 2014. Serving an area of approximately 130,000 residents, The Kedzie Center became the first provider of new public mental health services in Chicago in over 20 years. Located on the West Side, the second EMHSP was approved in 2016 with 87% of the vote and opened as The Encompassing Center in October 2019. The third EMHSP was passed with 86% voter approval in 2018 from residents in Logan Square, Avondale, and Hermosa. A center is expected to open in 2022.

During the spring and summer of 2020, residents of the greater Bronzeville area gathered 7,200 signatures to place their binding referendum on the ballot. Voters overwhelmingly supported the creation of the Bronzeville EMHSP by approving the referendum with 88% of the vote on Election Day. A "Yes" vote on the referendum meant agreeing to raise their own property taxes by a nominal amount (roughly \$16-24 per year) to fund a new mental health center for their community. The center is approved, funded, and overseen by community members and will serve all residents in the program area without regard to insurance, ability to pay, or legal status.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 3, 2020, 88% of residents in the greater Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago voted “Yes” on a referendum to raise their property taxes by a nominal amount to create the Bronzeville Expanded Mental Health Services Program (EMHSP). This approval set in motion the creation of a new center – to be funded and overseen by community members – which will serve all residents living in the program area, consisting of the Near South Side, Douglas, Oakland, Grand Boulevard, Fuller Park, and Washington Park.

To identify community priorities and inform the services to be provided by the Bronzeville EMHSP, staff from the Coalition to Save our Mental Health Centers conducted a mental health needs assessment with support from the Institute for Community Empowerment. The needs assessment involved reviewing existing data on socio-demographics and other key characteristics of the community, interviewing **28** “community leaders” representing a range of community interests (e.g. service providers, faith-based institutions, community-based organizations), and surveying **109** residents of Bronzeville (“community members”).

The examination of socio-demographic characteristics of the community in comparison with the characteristics of the City of Chicago revealed:

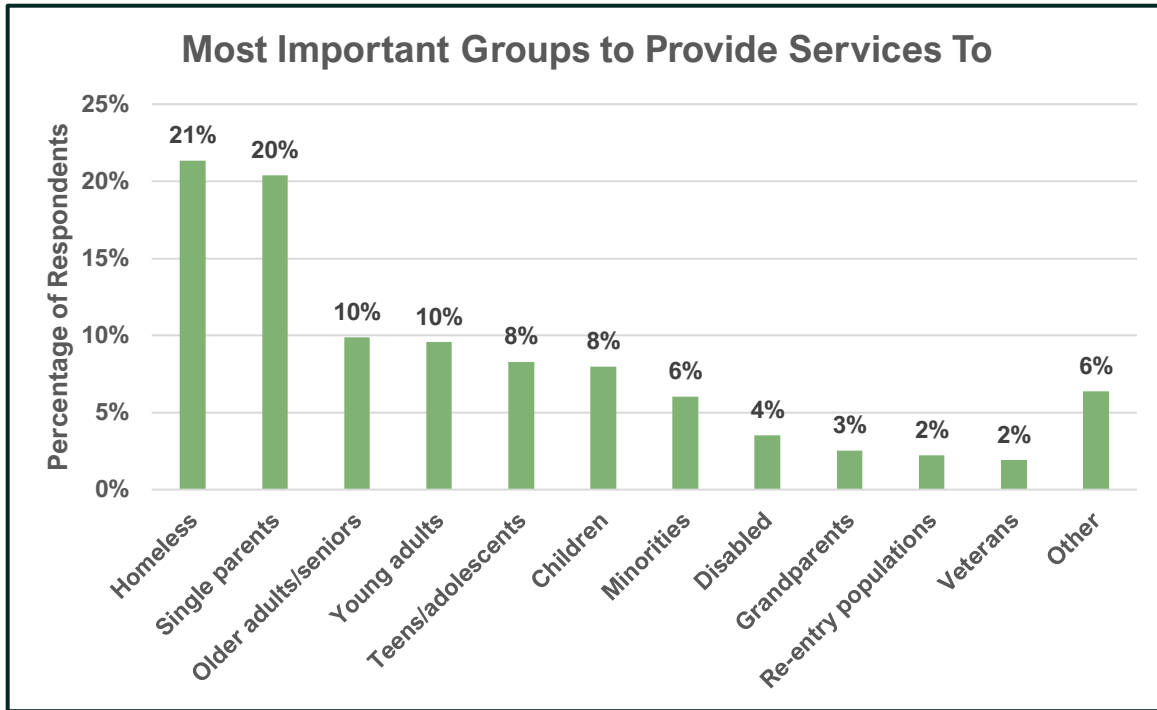
- *Race*: Two-thirds of residents in the Bronzeville EMHSP self-identify as Black (non-Hispanic) (66.5%), versus 29.2% in the City of Chicago.
- *Age*: The age breakdown of the Bronzeville EMHSP generally mimics that of the City of Chicago, with the highest proportion of residents being aged 20-34 years (25.9%);
- *Income*: Over one-third (35.2%) of Bronzeville EMHSP residents earn less than \$25,000 per year, compared to 24.3% in the City of Chicago. The median income is notably highest in the Near South Side (\$110,120), while ranging between \$23,148 and \$33,503 in Douglas, Oakland, Fuller Park, Grand Boulevard, and Washington Park.
- *Unemployment*: The unemployment rate is 9.7% in the Bronzeville EMHSP (compared to 8.1% in the City of Chicago), ranging from 0.4% in the Near South Side to 23.6% in Fuller Park.
- *Single-parent households*: 12.5% of Bronzeville EMHSP households are single-parent households, compared to 9.1% in the City of Chicago.
- *Violent crime*: Between 2019 and 2021, the Near South Side experienced a notable increase in violent crime (+58.8%). Fuller Park is the only area which experienced a decrease in violent crime (-10.5%).

Key findings from the **community leader interviews** are as follows:

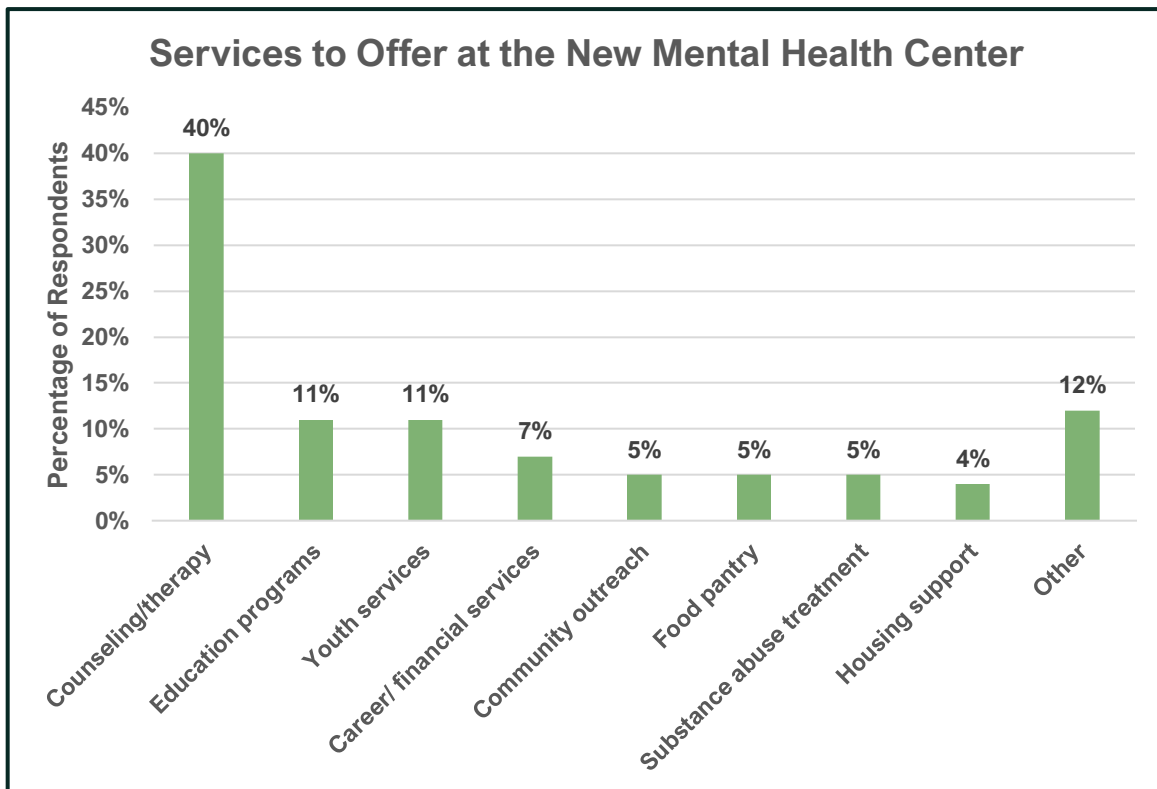
- The *most significant mental health issues* in the community are depression and suicide.
- The *most common stressors* experienced by community members are crime/abuse followed by financial difficulties and employment difficulties.
- The *groups of people* most affected by the stressors include “everyone,” single parents, and older adults/seniors.
- The *biggest effects that COVID-19 had on the community* were isolation, followed by mental health issues and closures/lack of access to resources.
- The *most desired services* to be offered at the new center were therapy/counseling, followed by mental health awareness workshops and outreach.
- Community leaders recommended *conducting outreach* through local institutions and organizations (e.g., schools, Park District), with particular focus on children and youth and seniors/older adults.

Key findings from the **community member surveys** are as follows:

- A majority of residents were *extremely likely* to bring a friend/family member to the center and *extremely interested* in learning more about the services offered.
- The most common stressors by age group were as follows:
 - *Children (ages 12 and under)*: education/schooling and quality of life
 - *Teenagers (ages 13-19 years)*: crime/abuse and quality of life
 - *Young adults (ages 20-39 years)*: financial difficulties and crime/abuse
 - *Middle-aged adults (ages 40-64 years)*: financial difficulties
 - *Older adults (ages 65+ years)*: health and financial difficulties
- The most common mental health issues by age group were as follows:
 - *Children (ages 12 and under)*: depression
 - *Teenagers (ages 13-19 years)*: depression
 - *Young adults (ages 20-39 years)*: depression
 - *Middle-aged adults (ages 40-64 years)*: depression
 - *Older adults (ages 65+ years)*: neurocognitive disorders
- The *most important groups* for the new center to provide services to were the homeless and single parents (see graph below).



- The *most desired* services to be offered at the new center were counseling/therapy, followed by educational programs and youth services (see graph below).



VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

CLEOPHUS LEE

Director of Violence Prevention and Intervention, Centers for New Horizons

ON COMMUNITY STRESSORS

We know that some of the deadliest times in the City of Chicago is the summertime! Numbers are ridiculously high in terms of victims who have lost their lives. It's one of the biggest stressors in all six communities. Another would be economics—individuals stressing on their ability to take care of their family, being able to provide food and other basic necessities for their children and loved ones in need. These stressors in our communities create other branches of stress that lead to various mental health issues.

ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY

We see a lot of anxiety, depression, bipolarism, and schizophrenia, with the top two being anxiety and depression. These two could lead to some of these other elements. With anxiety, it's just that stress of trying to make it everyday, fighting that fight everyday of not knowing if you're going to be able to pay your rent or be able to feed your family this month which then leads to a person being in a depressive state. "I just want to lay in the bed all day! I don't want to go outside! I don't want to talk to nobody!" Our anger is another response. Individuals having the inability to control their emotional response to their own personal situations and circumstances.

ON WHO EXPERIENCES MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

These things don't have a status...an academic level or anything. It's just across the board equally. I've seen individuals who were more stable economically deal with similar issues to a person that was not as stable. So, I say everyone because we all have similar issues regardless of the race, education, or income.

ON OUTREACH

I would like to see outreach done within the community from the service provider that works to help people to come to the conclusion that counseling is okay. [I would also like to see] a campaign that informs the community, that lets the community know and helps put the community at ease—that it's okay to go through therapy, it's okay to get counseling, it's okay to talk to somebody about your issues.



JOHN COOK

Owner, Bronzeville Community Clubhouse

ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Residents have been affected mentally, physically and emotionally due to the pandemic. This is a first for most of us and it has caused us all to be isolated and take on a lifestyle most of us haven't been accustomed to, one of which is in-home versus out-of-home. Not everyone is made to be independent in terms of working on their own or in a household because we're used to someone managing our time. A lot of people have a hard time adjusting to working from home. It's not part of their makeup.



ON THE LACK OF YOUTH ACTIVITIES

One of the biggest issues that the youth face is having nothing to do—[youth] who need more than anything to be social creatures—and by them not being allowed to do what comes natural and something that parents want out of their child: for them to be involved in extracurricular activities. But once that is stripped away from a person, it causes stress.

ON WHO EXPERIENCES MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

I don't think anybody's exempt. I can't put one group over the other. We only hear about the youth more than anybody else at this point but what about the seniors or the working mom and dad who lost a business or their job. We're not hearing from them how much they've been affected by losing their apartment or home. It's just devastating across the board.

ON SERVICES

Housing, which isn't a direct resource to help mental health issues—but people's shelter is their number one concern in most cases. Partnering with organizations that provide housing for residents would definitely be a service that I would like to see offered.

LADELL JOHNSON

Director, St. Elizabeth Food Pantry

ON GUN VIOLENCE

Being a crisis responder with “Chicago Survivors,” we work with families that have lost someone due to gun violence. That’s a club that people don’t ask to join and it happens so fast! Whether you realize it or not, even though the victim is a victim, the family becomes a victim as well. A lot of them are in shock and don’t even realize it because they’re too busy helping their loved ones cope with what just happened but not realizing that they need help as well. Some people suffer from depression due to this because in our community we’re taught to ‘mask our feelings.’ With a new center, family therapy or therapy in general could help address this issue.



ON WHO ARE MOST AFFECTED BY MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Everyone is affected. Some people don’t even realize it. I myself have been affected by it. You can look normal and still be affected by it and don’t even realize it. That’s where we have to educate people and let them know that you don’t have to feel this way. This isn’t normal and you can get help if you understand what’s going on.

ON COMMUNITY OUTREACH

[What I would like to see from the mental health center is] people going into the community and doing a follow-up with residents. Rather than partnering with CPD (Chicago Police Department) for instance, they occasionally run into people where locking them up is not the answer. You can’t put a mental health patient in jail and think that’s going to cure them. Or Chicago survivors– when a family is dealing with the death of a loved one due to gun violence. Connect with one of the crisis responders to follow up with the families. Also, connecting with the schools because you have students that are dealing with the loss of a friend or family member and are in need of help coping with how they’re feeling.

ETHAN GRIFFIN

Senior, Kenwood Academy High School

ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

I believe the biggest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would be how families were affected financially because of the onslaught of jobs firing them. They [the employers] couldn't keep them [the employees] on, or the company went under and everyone lost their jobs. Another issue would probably be a person's mental health overall. When someone has to be in the same place and associating with the same people everyday, they tend to get frustrated which could lead to negative results and outcomes. Bringing a center to the community to help address these issues would be just in time.

ON COMMUNITY STRESSORS

Lack of jobs and money (in my personal view) are the most common stressors in the community. There's not a lot of either available for everyone—particularly in communities where gentrification is going on, which then leads to rent being unaffordable for some people who then get pushed out of their neighborhoods. The lack of jobs within the community plays a pivotal part as well. Before you know it, families start going into debt for taking out loans to not go into debt. Having a center where there's outreach done in these areas could definitely benefit the communities.

ON THE LACK OF SUPPORT FOR TEENS DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

In my personal opinion, some people don't like to open up about what's going on with them when it comes to mental [illness]. Because it starts with family and if you can't go to your family for help, then most likely you're not going to want to go to anyone else. I've had friends opening up to me because the family shut them out or are saying things to them, like, "Stop acting like a girl and man up! You'll be alright!" You don't want a person to develop that mindset of holding everything in, because they eventually will explode. It also leads that person to isolating themselves from their family. I feel that with more positive family interactions, it can influence how a person opens up about their issues.



IMPLICATIONS & NEXT STEPS

By drawing on existing demographic data, in combination with interviews and surveys conducted with community leaders and members, this needs assessment provides rich insight into the mental health needs and priorities of the greater Bronzeville area. This needs assessment will serve as a catalyst for productive relationships between community organizations, community members, and the new Bronzeville EMHSP.

The needs assessment will not only inform discussions about mental health issues and priorities among community members and organizations but also serve as a valuable resource for the Bronzeville EMHSP Governing Commission. Comprised of nine representatives appointed by the Governor and the Mayor from nominees submitted by local non-profit organizations, the Governing Commission will use the needs assessment to help meet its responsibilities to provide the community with mental health services tailored specifically to the needs of local Bronzeville residents.

As the Bronzeville EMHSP is established and after it begins to offer services, continuous community involvement will be crucial to the program's success. To maintain community involvement, the Coalition will develop a Community Access Network of community organizations and residents, including those interviewed and surveyed for this assessment—many of whom indicated their strong interest in becoming involved with the Coalition's activities. These community organizations and individuals will be trained to effectively refer people to the Bronzeville EMHSP's center and to collaborate with one another for the purpose of increasing access to mental health service through effective, community-based partnerships.

This needs assessment will be publicly available on the Coalition to Save Our Mental Health Center's website (saveourmentalhealth.org).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deepest thanks to the community leaders and members for their time and openness in sharing their perspectives for this needs assessment, as well as to the Bronzeville Community Action Team for launching this study. Their feedback has been invaluable and will serve as the foundation for establishing the Bronzeville Expanded Mental Health Services Program's new mental health center as it works to meet the mental health needs of all members of the Bronzeville community.

Special thanks to the following organizations whose leaders and staff agreed to be interviewed for this assessment.

4300 Block of Champlain Block Club	Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT)
Amour Salon & Suites	Leverage Network
Angels R Us Kidz Academy	Lugenia Burns Hope Center
Bronzeville Community Clubhouse	Monumental Baptist Church
Brothers and Sisters of Love	Oakwood Shores Community Association
Center for Disability Services Association	Office of Diverse Learners at Chicago Public Schools
Center for New Horizons	Old St. Mary's Catholic Church
Chicago Police Department (2nd District)	Paul G. Stewart Apartments
Chosen Tabernacle Church	Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity
Comprehensive Quality Care, Inc.	St. Elizabeth Food Pantry
De La Salle Institute	St James Church
Evolve Counseling	St. James Food Pantry
Housing Bronzeville	