



Voices of Child Health in Chicago REPORT

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Violence was the issue most frequently identified by parents as the problem getting worse the fastest for Chicago youth.

Younger parents were more likely than older parents to consider substance use the problem getting worse the fastest for Chicago youth.

Moms and dads had similar levels of concern about youth mental health.

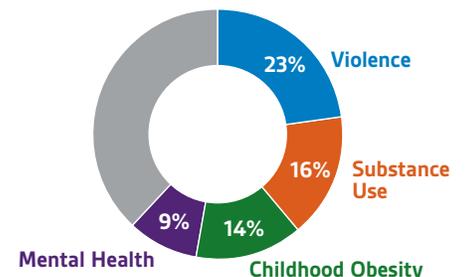
Youth Health and Social Problems Getting Worse the Fastest in Chicago

In this report, we explore which youth health and social issues parents in Chicago considered to be the problems that were getting worse the fastest. Researchers at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital teamed up with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) on the 2018–19 Healthy Chicago Survey, Jr. to ask parents from all 77 community areas in Chicago about health and social issues facing youth in Chicago. In previous reports, we have discussed the top 10 health problems¹ and the top 10 social issues² facing children and adolescents in Chicago. For both reports, respondents were presented with lists of health and social issues facing youth in Chicago and asked whether they considered each issue to be a big problem or not. In addition, we also asked parents, "Of all the health problems that children in Chicago face, is there one problem that you think is getting worse, faster than the others?" Parents generated their own responses, which we categorized based on overarching themes.

What problems do parents think are getting worse the fastest for youth in Chicago?

The top four youth health and social issues that parents identified as getting worse the fastest compared to others were violence (23%), substance use (16%), childhood obesity (14%) and mental health (9%) (Figure 1). Examples of responses for each category included "gun violence" (violence), "drugs" (substance use), "obesity" (childhood obesity) and "depression" (mental health).

Figure 1. Proportions of Chicago parents who identified youth health and social issues getting worse the fastest



Violence

Violence was the issue parents most frequently identified as the problem getting worse the fastest for Chicago youth. This was consistent across parents of all ages, household income levels, education levels and genders. In 2019, homicides in Chicago were down for the third year in a row³ and gun-related violence in the city was also lower than the previous year.⁴

Despite this progress, young people — and young non-Latinx Black males in particular — are most impacted by gun violence.^{5,6} Our data suggest that parents continue to be concerned about the impact of violence on Chicago youth. This may reflect parents' awareness of social influencers of health, such as the impact exposure to violence may have on a child's mental and physical health.

Substance use

Youth substance use was the second most commonly named issue that parents identified as getting worse the fastest. Substance use was more frequently cited as the problem getting worse the fastest among younger parents (18–29 years old, 29%) than among older parents (30+ years old, 14%). National trends suggest that youth alcohol and drug use (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines) have decreased in recent years.^{7,8}

Childhood obesity

The third most common response from parents regarding the youth health or social problem getting worse the fastest was childhood obesity. We examined funding for research on childhood obesity from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with the NIH RePORT tool,⁹ using the search term "childhood

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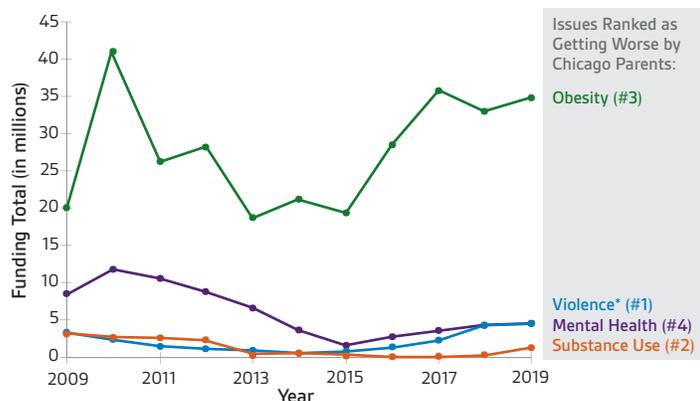
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obesity.” Since 2009, funding for research on childhood obesity has been consistently higher than funding for other childhood health problems (see Figure 2); however, research indicates that national rates of childhood obesity have continued to increase.¹⁰⁻¹² In Chicago, rates of childhood obesity remain higher than the national average. For example, 19% of Chicago kindergarten students were obese compared with 13% nationally, with the highest rates among Latinx children.^{13,14}

Figure 2. NIH funding from 2009-19 of top four issues getting worse the fastest by Chicago parents



*This trend line does not include funding for gun violence research prior to 2019
Source: NIH RePORT Query Form

Mental health

Mental health was the fourth most common issue that parents thought was getting worse the fastest for Chicago children and adolescents. Moms and dads showed similar levels of concern about this issue (9% and 10%, respectively). Data from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adolescents between 12–17 years of age indicated that the rate of depression increased by 52% from 2005–17.¹⁵ Among Chicago Public Schools high school students, 35% reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more within the past year and 5% reported a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury.^{16,17}

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HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

This report presents findings from the 2018–19 Healthy Chicago Survey, Jr., administered by the Chicago Department of Public Health in collaboration with Lurie Children’s. The survey was administered via phone interviews from December 2018 through May 2019. The sample consisted of 2,982 adults in Chicago, 740 of whom were the parent, step-parent or guardian (referred to as “parents” in this report) of at least one child under 18 years old living in the household. The survey cooperation rate was 12%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that they are representative of the adult population of the City of Chicago during the time period of data collection. For more information about health in your community, visit chicagohealthatlas.org.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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List of programs addressing highlighted health and social problems

	Program	Organization	For More Information
Violence	Strengthening Chicago’s Youth (SCY)	Lurie Children’s	scy-chicago.org/about/
	CDPH Office of Violence Prevention and Behavioral Health	Chicago Department of Public Health	chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/provdrs/violence_prev.html
Substance Use	Substance Use and Prevention Program (SUPP)	Lurie Children’s	luriechildrens.org/en/specialties-conditions/substance-use-prevention-program/
	Chicago Connects	Chicago Department of Public Health	chicagoconnects.org
Childhood Obesity	Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC)	Lurie Children’s	clocc.net/about-us/
	CPS LearnWELL Initiative	Chicago Public Schools	cps.edu/oshw/Pages/LearnWell.aspx
Mental Health	Pritzker Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health	Lurie Children’s	luriechildrens.org/en/specialties-conditions/pediatric-psychiatrist-psychologist/
	The Center for Childhood Resilience	Lurie Children’s	childhoodresilience.org/mission

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