



Voices of Child Health REPORT

Volume 7 Number 2
March 2025

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Gun-related violence in neighborhoods, poverty, and lack of adult supervision and involvement were the most common child health concerns reported by Chicago adults.

Youth social media use moved up to the number four top concern for youth health this year.

In general, women were more likely to consider each issue a big problem for youth health than men.

Top 10 Child Health Concerns

Children and adolescents in Chicago encounter a variety of challenges that impact their physical health, mental health and social well-being. Tracking Chicagoans' views on the most pressing problems for the health of our city's youth helps institutions and policymakers prioritize their work mindfully, allowing them to align their goals with what matters most to the community. Our team asked adults across Chicago which health and social issues they considered to be "big problems" for the health of our city's youth.

1. Gun-related violence in neighborhoods

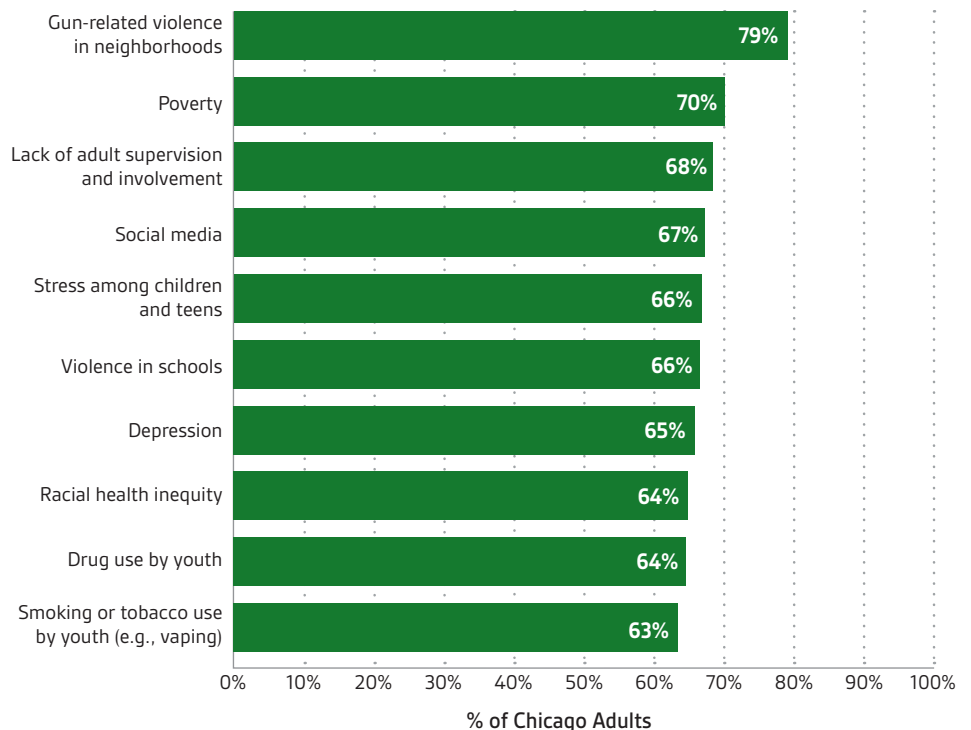
Gun violence is a pervasive problem for cities across America, having wide-reaching impacts throughout communities. In Chicago, 79% of adults reported neighborhood gun violence as a major concern for child and adolescent health. This concern emerged as the most largely shared concern on our list across racial and ethnic groups.

Data from the City of Chicago Violence Reduction Dashboard validates concerns over gun-related violence: in 2023, about 20% of Chicago's shooting victims were juveniles — a proportion that has been increasing since 2020.¹ Nationally, gun-related death rates have nearly doubled since 2011, reinforcing the urgency of addressing the impact of gun violence on youth safety.²



Learn more about the City of Chicago's Violence Reduction Strategy [here](#).¹

Figure 1. Proportion of Chicago adults who rated each issue a big problem for children and adolescents in the city



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2. Poverty

Poverty re-emerged as a top concern on our list, ranking #2 on this year's list with 70% of adults reporting it as a big concern. Younger adults aged 18 to 29 years old were less likely to consider poverty a major concern (63%) compared with adults 30–44 years old (72%) and those 45 years old and older (also 72%).

Recent data from the Illinois Early Childhood Asset Map reveals that 42,067 children under age 5 in Chicago live below the poverty line.³ Communities in Illinois with the highest rates of poverty and social vulnerability also experience worse health.⁴ Multiple factors are thought to contribute to the rising prevalence of child poverty in Chicago and across the United States, including the expiration of the federal Child Tax Credit.⁵



Calling [211](#) connects eligible callers with resources, including food, housing, and emergency financial assistance.⁶

3. Lack of adult supervision and involvement for children and teens

Chicago adults continue to report lack of adult supervision and involvement for youth as a big problem, ranking it #3 for the second year in a row. When it comes to concerns about children's well-being, men and women largely agree that lack of adult supervision and involvement is a major issue. Among the top 10 child health concerns, this issue stood out as one where both genders were most closely aligned, with 64% of men and 70% of women viewing lack of supervision and involvement as a big problem.

While adult supervision and involvement promotes safety and prevents injuries in younger children,⁷ teens also benefit from parental monitoring. Nationwide studies affirm that the benefits of adult supervision and involvement can help protect adolescents from several of the other child health problems on this list, especially stress, depression and drug use.⁸ In Illinois it is illegal to leave a child under the age of 14 home alone for an extended period, highlighting the need for consistent supervision.⁹



Parents and caregivers must consider their child's maturity and comfort level before deciding to leave their older child home alone. You can find tips from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services [here](#).

4. Social media

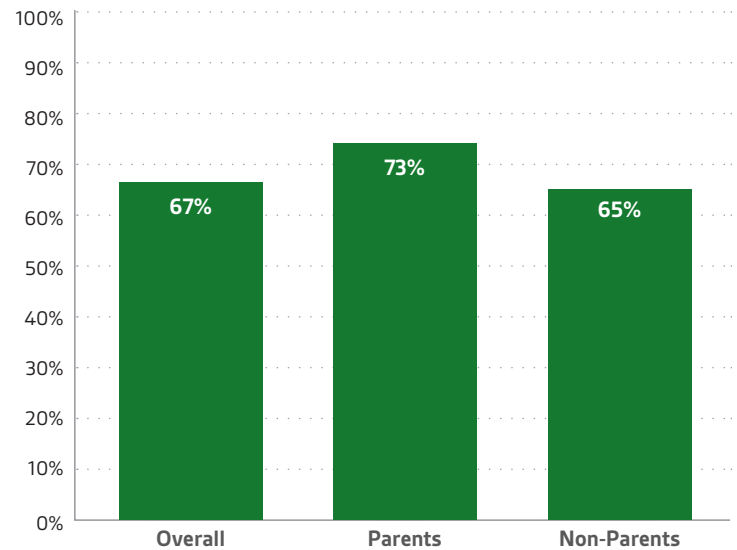
Social media climbed from #8 to #4 on this year's list of concerns among Chicago adults, with 67% considering this a big problem. Concern over the health impact of social media on youth differed by parental status. Parents showed more concern over social media's impact on child health (73%) than non-parents (65%) (Figure 2).

U.S. teens spend an average of 4.8 hours per day on social media platforms,¹⁰ and half say they are online "almost constantly".¹¹ In May of 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory calling for "immediate awareness and action" regarding social media use and its negative impact on youth mental health.¹² Parents and guardians play a crucial role in structuring their children's social media usage.



The American Academy of Pediatrics provides information for parents and caregivers about creating a [family media plan](#)¹³ and [screen time](#)¹⁴ for kids. The Illinois Attorney General also provides information to help keep youth safe online [here](#).

Figure 2. Proportion of respondents who indicated that social media was a major concern for youth health, overall and by parent status



5. Stress

In our survey, 69% of Chicagoans reported stress among youth was a big problem. Black adults were most likely to report stress as a major concern (73%), followed by Latinx/Hispanic adults (66%), white adults (63%) and other groups (53%).

Short-term stress can be healthy for youth; however, long-term stress, or toxic stress, can have lasting effects on physical and mental health.¹⁵ While resources for stress management exist for young children and adolescents, youth may struggle to take appropriate steps to seek out help and manage their stress in healthy ways. Parents, healthcare providers and schools share the responsibility of supporting youth appropriately, ensuring short-term stress doesn't progress to long-term stress.



There are many resources online to help deal with youth stress, including:

- For young children — [stress-busting activities](#)¹⁶
- For adolescents — mindfulness for adolescents through [Headspace for Teens](#)¹⁷
- For parents — [tips on helping adolescents deal with stress](#)¹⁸
- For healthcare providers — [AAP mental health practice tools](#)¹⁹
- For schools — [CDC mental health action guide](#)²⁰

6. Violence in schools

In 2023, 66% of Chicagoans identified school violence as a big concern for child health. While white adults were least likely to consider violence in schools a big problem (57%), Black (74%), Latinx/Hispanic (69%) and people of other races (59%) were more likely to consider violence in schools a big problem (Figure 3).

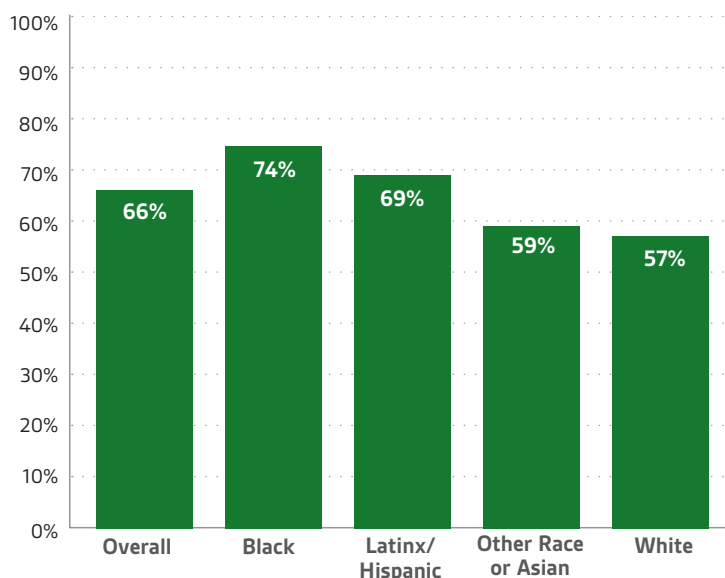
A different survey showed 17% of Chicago high school students were involved in one or more fights within the last year, while 51% of middle school students were involved in a fight at some point in their lives.²¹ Bullying on Chicago school property also increased in recent years, with 13% of high school and 37% of middle school

students reporting being bullied over the last year.²¹ A group at University of Illinois Chicago has been working alongside two Illinois school districts to improve student safety, focusing on training, behavioral interventions and violence reporting structures, hoping to learn lessons that can be applied in the city.²²



School violence prevention starts at home — parents can help by modeling healthy conflict resolution, teaching emotional regulation, and seeking professional help when needed.

Figure 3. Proportion of respondents who indicated school violence was a major concern, overall and by race and ethnicity



7. Depression

Youth depression was another mental health-related issue on the list, reported by 65% of Chicago adults. While women were generally most likely to identify each concern on our list as a major issue for children, this pattern did not hold for depression. Instead, a notable difference emerged between gender-diverse adults (e.g., non-binary, gender expansive or transgender) and cisgender adults: 75% of gender-diverse adults viewed youth depression as a major issue, compared to 66% of cisgender adults. Although gender-diverse adults were generally more neutral on most concerns, three in four highlighted depression as a big problem.

Data from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that over 40% of Chicago public high school students report symptoms of depression, such as feeling sad or hopeless over the past 12 months.²³ Research suggests that LGBTQ+ teens report depression more than twice as often as their non-LGBTQ+ peers.²⁴



For parents and caregivers who are concerned about their child's mental health, a great first step is talk with your child and their healthcare provider, such as a pediatrician. Other resources include your child's school counselor, [NAMI Chicago Helpline](#)²⁵ at 833.626.4244 and the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)²⁶ (text or call 988 — 24/7, 365 days a year).

8. Racial health inequality

Worse health for children of color than for white children, also known as racial health disparities, is a big problem for youth across Chicago, and 64% of adults in Chicago agreed. Chicagoans 30 years of age and older were more likely to be concerned about health disparities for youth (66%) compared with Chicagoans between 18–29 (58%).

The Illinois Department of Human Services' Health Outcomes Disparities Report 2024 uncovers several outcomes for which racial health disparities are clear, including access to dental care and infant mortality.⁴



You can learn about the Chicago Department of Public Health's 2025 Strategic plan to address health inequities in the most impacted communities and promote greater well-being [here](#).

9. Drug use

Drug use appeared on the Top 10 Report for the third year in a row, with 64% of Chicagoans reporting drug use as a big problem. Of all child health issues, this one had the biggest difference in concern between racial groups. Black adults were 25% more likely than white adults to see youth drug use as a serious problem (76% vs. 51%). Adults with lower household income (<133% of the federal poverty level (FPL); 71%) were more concerned with drug use compared with adults with higher income (400%+ FPL; 53%).

While drug use is more prevalent among older youth, middle school students are also susceptible to the health effects of drug use. Local data estimates that 12% of middle and high school students in Chicago have misused prescription pain medicine at least once.²¹ The percentage of Chicago high school students reporting marijuana use remained the same from 2021 to 2023 at around 29%. Marijuana or cannabis use can have permanent effects on the developing brain, increasing the risk of mental health issues.²⁷



Strong parent-child relationships and open communication are key to reducing risk of drug use in children and teens.⁸

10. Smoking, vaping and tobacco use

U.S. youth use e-cigarettes and vapes more than any other tobacco product.²⁸ Most Chicago adults (63%) are concerned about the threat these behaviors pose for the health of our youth. The percentage of Chicago teens who reported using an electronic vapor product in the last 30 days climbed from 10.3% in 2021 to 12.6% in 2023.²¹ Females were twice as likely to report current electronic vapor product use (16.6%) compared with males (8.8%).

While national survey responses from youth in 2024 imply that tobacco use and e-cigarette use among youth is decreasing,²⁹ sustained awareness and action is needed to prevent smoking, vaping and tobacco use among youth.³⁰



The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) offers resources to help [adults](#) and [adolescents](#) quit smoking. CDPH also has a campaign called [Me & Nic Broke Up](#) that promotes smoking cessation for Chicago youth.

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HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

This report presents findings from the 2023 Healthy Chicago Survey Jr., administered by the Chicago Department of Public Health in collaboration with Lurie Children's. The survey was administered via computer assisted web interviews, with an option to respond via paper and pencil instrument, from June 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023. The sample consisted of 5,490 adults in Chicago, 1,663 of whom were the parent, stepparent or guardian of at least one child under 18 years old living in the household. Respondents indicated which problems were "big problems" for children and adolescents in the city (not necessarily their own children). The survey cooperation rate was 21.2%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that they are representative of the adult population of the City of Chicago during the period of data collection.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Keese A, Menker CG, Matzke H, Brotslaw E, Alba A, Prachand NG, Macy ML, Heffernan ME. Top 10 Child Health Concerns, Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report. Vol 7, Number 2, March 2025. Available at luriechildrens.org/voices.

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*This project is supported in part by an anonymous foundation
and the Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities.*