Why the AMA is bolstering its commitment to health equity in Chicago

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The AMA’s commitment of an additional $3 million over three years to Chicago’s West Side United collaborative helps fulfill the AMA’s mission to improve health outcomes while advancing our organization’s strategic commitment to dismantling structural inequities, in our home city and across our nation.

Our work with West Side United—a partnership of residents, health care professionals, civic and business leaders, community groups and faith-based organizations—began with a $2 million investment in 2020. A dire need to address the underlying causes of poor health drove the collaborative’s founding three years before that. And now, a continued belief in West Side United’s bold, innovative work—happening right in our own backyard—has led to a doubling down on our social impact investing from the original $2 million investment over two years to a total of $5 million over five years.

This expanded commitment includes becoming a full Anchor Mission Partner, which means our contributions to the impact investing pool will support small business loans and reinvestment to spur economic growth. This not only reinforces our ongoing efforts to improve health outcomes, but also helps restore economic vitality and expand educational opportunities in neighborhoods ravaged by decades of disinvestment and neglect.

Local and national focus

We are eager to expand our work in Chicago, the city we’ve called home since 1888. But we know all too well that the problems found here—higher rates of preventable chronic diseases, lack of health care access, food and housing insecurities, and widespread poverty, among many others—are replicated nationwide in cities, suburbs, rural areas, everywhere.

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And the consequences are severe. For example, residents in Chicago’s wealthiest neighborhoods live, on average, 17 years longer than people living in its poorest communities just a few miles away on Chicago’s West Side. We know that people from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups consistently receive lower-quality health care than other patients, even when other considerations such as insurance coverage are controlled.

Health equity can only be realized when everyone can attain their full health and well-being potential. The AMA’s partnership with West Side United is just one facet of our full-force commitment to advance racial justice in medicine, led by AMA’s Center for Health Equity.

A cooperative effort

The AMA and our fellow Anchor Mission Partners—Rush University Medical Center, Ascension (formerly AMITA Health), Lurie Children’s Hospital, Cook County Health, Sinai Health System, University of Illinois Health and St. Anthony’s Hospital—work closely with WSU leadership to improve the physical and mental health as well as the overall quality of life of those who live, work and learn on Chicago’s West Side.

As organizations and entities rooted in our local community, anchor institutions share the ability and motivation to engage in planning and actions that benefit the long-term well-being of our neighborhoods, applying our economic power and leveraging institutional resources while encouraging other organizations to make similar commitments.

This work includes securing the cooperation of community development financing institutions to infuse the capital required to create the jobs, housing, economic opportunities and safe, livable neighborhoods found elsewhere in Chicago.

But this isn’t just about investing our financial resources. We are also lending our expertise by providing support and thought leadership to our West Side United partners in the areas of evaluation, development, and impact measurement while targeting neighborhoods that are suffering from decades of disinvestment as well as racist and exclusionary policies and programs.

This is precisely the type of opportunity that affords the AMA the ability to share power, build community, and operationalize our mission to promote the betterment of public health in alignment with the heart and soul of West Side United’s work to advance health equity.

Advancing health equity

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Our AMA is committed to creating a more just and equitable future in health care by dismantling structural racism and other barriers that impede access to care wherever they exist. Our ongoing commitment to improving the health and well-being of people in our hometown of Chicago is just one example of the work undertaken by the AMA and our Center for Health Equity in communities across the nation. We continue to develop and introduce comprehensive strategies to help physician practices and health systems embed racial and health equity across their operations.

This effort includes identifying and addressing inequities in care delivery, expanding access to care and research nationwide, increasing the diversity of our medical workforce while emphasizing culturally safe and structurally competent care, exerting positive influence on social and structural determinants of health, and offering concrete evidence of what equity looks like not only in health care but in every aspect of life. As we work to achieve this, we proudly redouble our support for West Side United in pursuit of optimal health for all.