

Addressing Inequities in Worker Health through the Healthy Work Initiative Semi-Annual Disparities Report item #26-1611

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Framing the Problem - Precarious Work



Work Is A Social Determinant of Health

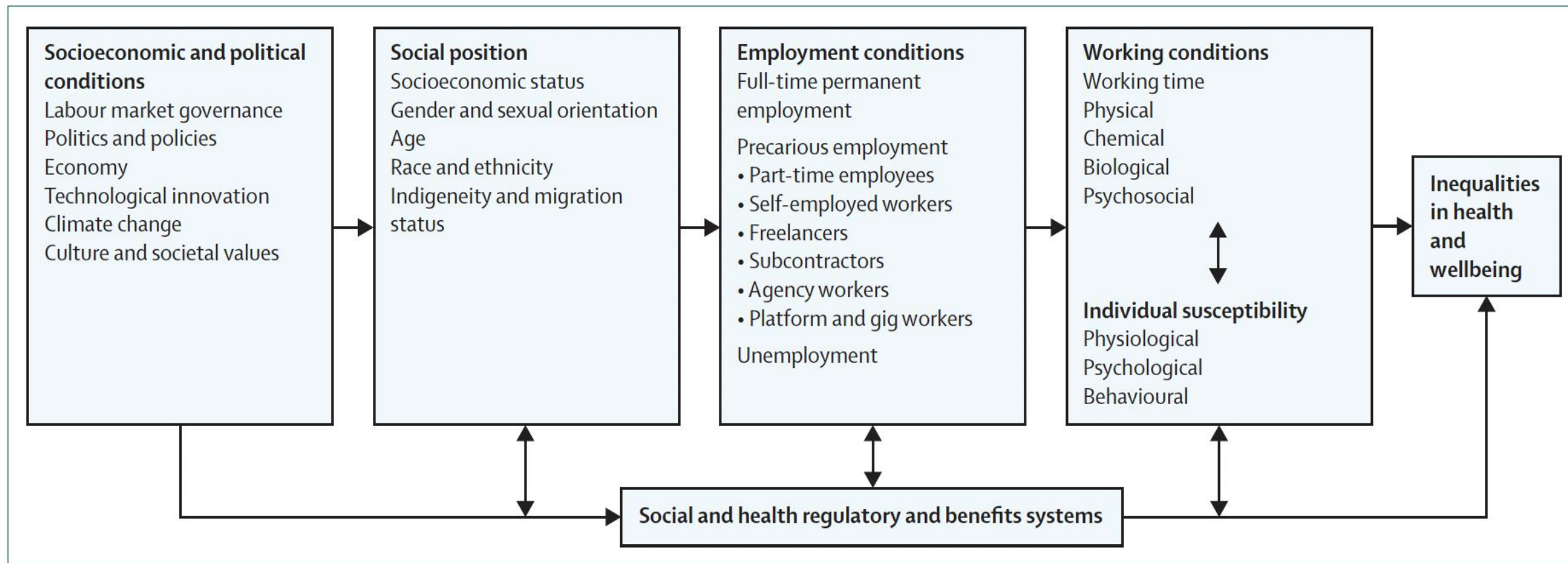


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of social determinants influencing work, health, and wellbeing

Work as SDOH. Vol 402, Issue 10410, P1357-1367, Oct 14, 2023. The Lancet.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00871-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00871-1)

What Is Precarious Work?

Precarious work is often characterized as:

- Insecure, unstable, and uncertain - example: "algorithmic management"
- Lacking flexibility: No control over hours; schedules- example: "Just-in-time"
- Limited/no social benefits (health insurance, retirement benefits)
- Little opportunity for advancement
- Low wages; economic uncertainty
- Exposure to dangerous and hazardous conditions
- Little protection against discrimination and exploitation
- Deeply intertwined with rising gig/contingent economy

30% to 50% of all jobs are estimated to be precarious*

*Lu, Q.S., Leicht, K. Low-Waged Hourly Employment as a Form of Precarious Work: Racial and Ethnic Disparity and Its Implications. *Soc Indic Res* **180**, 1765–1795 (2025).

Why Focus on Precarious Employment?

Precarious jobs have many negative impacts on the health of workers, their families and their communities.

- Compared to other employees, precarious workers disproportionately experience:
 - Increased discrimination on the job and limited control over workplace conditions
 - More often denied health insurance, retirement, vacation and paid sick leave
 - Difficulty paying for basic necessities and accessing childcare
 - Higher levels of work-related stress
 - Dangerous conditions in the workplace
 - Often work multiple jobs

- Benach J, Vives A, Tarafa G, Delclos C, Muntaner C: What should we know about precarious employment and health in 2025? Framing the agenda for the next decade of research. *International J of Epid*, 2016
- National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. (2013). *Let's talk: Health equity*. Antigonish, NS: National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, St. Francis Xavier University
- Bhattacharya A, Ray T. Precarious work, job stress, and health-related quality of life. *Am J Ind Med*. 2021 Apr;64(4):310-319. doi: 10.1002/ajim.23223. Epub 2021 Feb 4.

Precarious Work is Contingent Work

Standard Employment Arrangements (Non-contingent)

- Full time
- One employer
- Predictable work week
- At employer's place of business
- **Unambiguous employer-employee relationship**

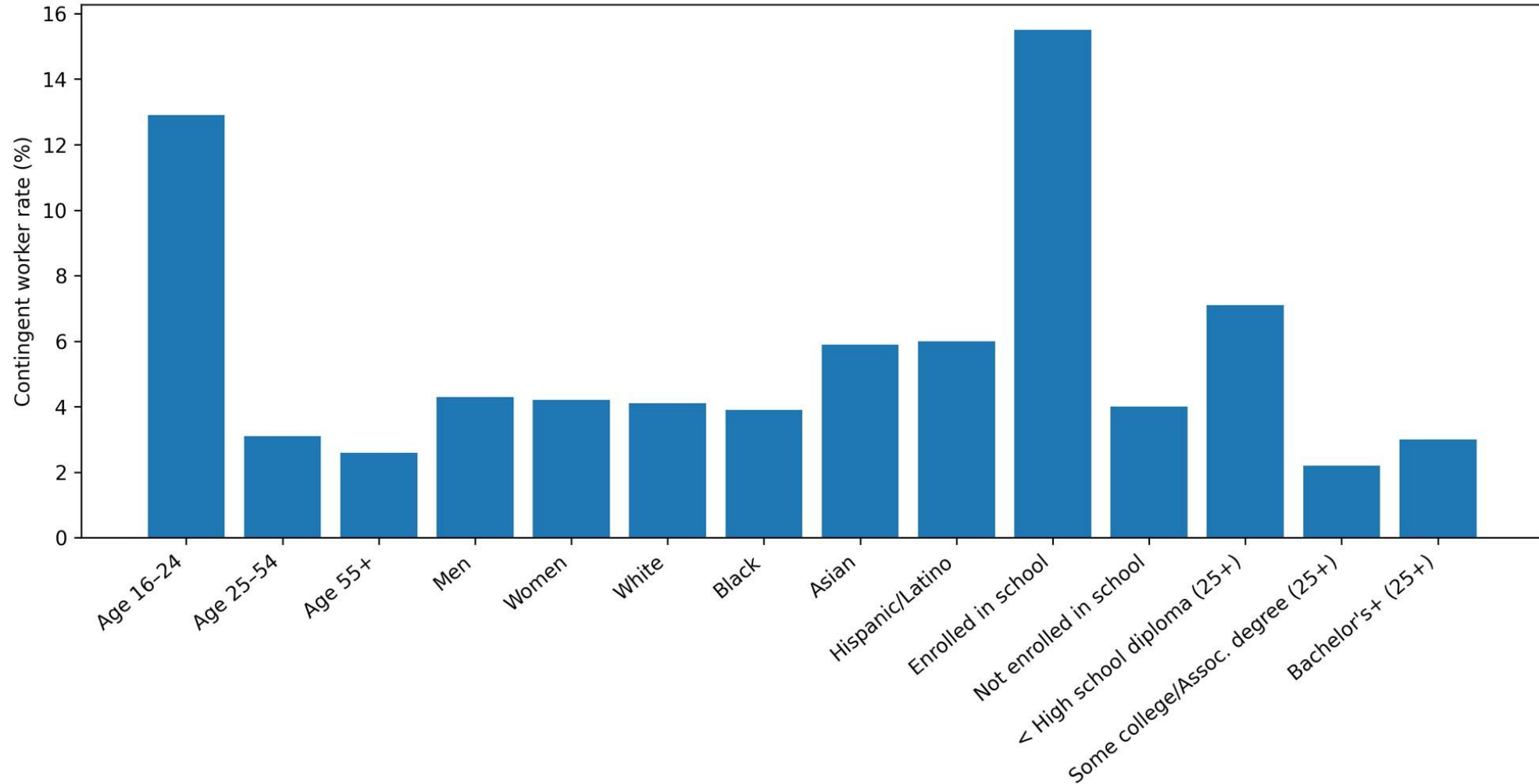
Non-standard Employment Arrangements (Contingent)

- Independent Contractor
- Gig or app-based
- Seasonal
- On call
- Involuntary part-time
- Temporary agency
- Low/mimimum wage hourly workers
- **Ambiguous employer-employee relationship**

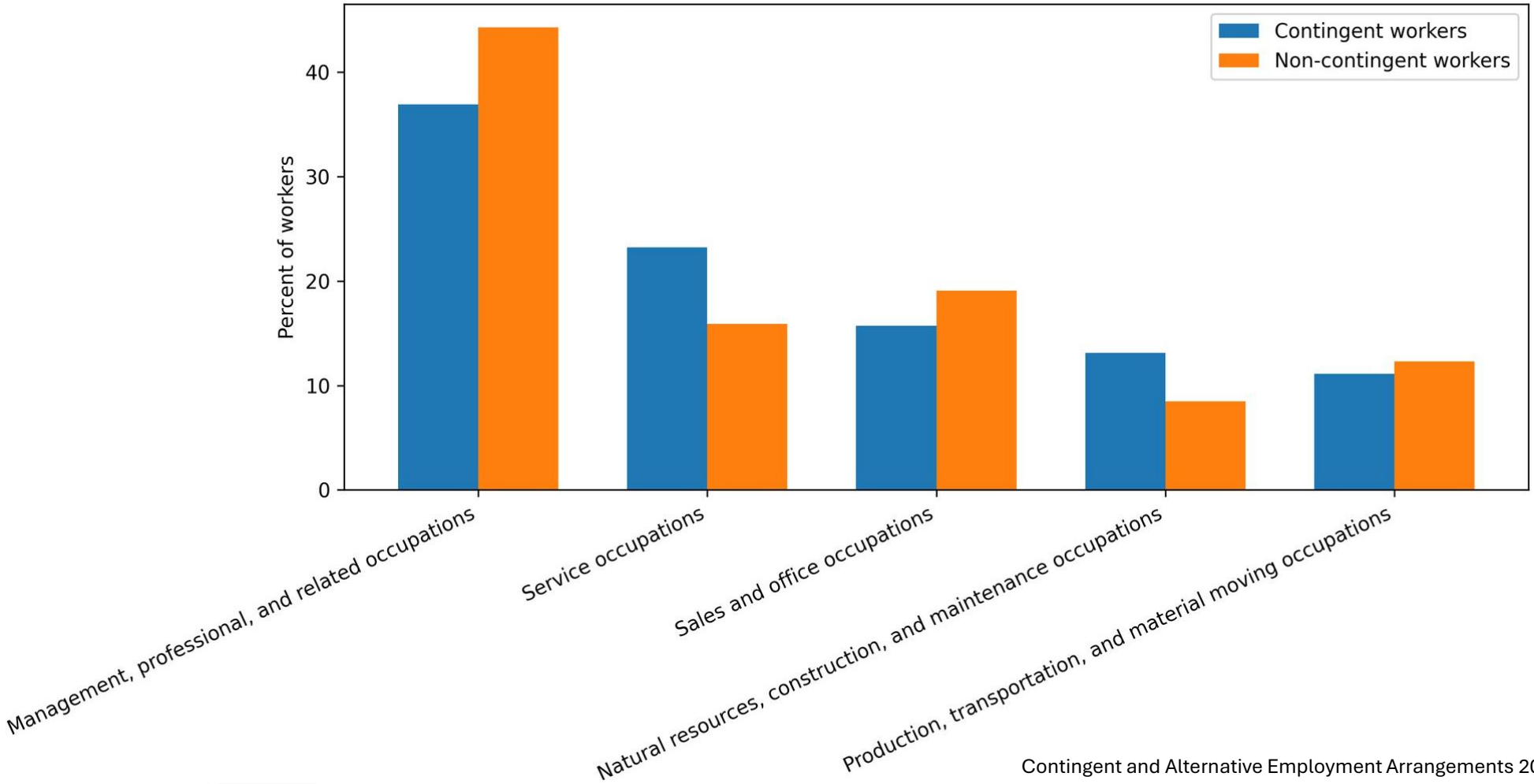
- Broschak JP, Davis-Blake A: Mixing standard work and nonstandard deals: the consequences of heterogeneity in employment arrangements. *Academy of Management Journal* 49(2), 2006.
- Howard J: Nonstandard work arrangements and worker health and safety. *Am J Ind Med* 60:1-10, 2017
- IRS: Independent Contractor Defined (<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/independent-contractor-defined>)

Disparities – Who Are Contingent (Precarious) Workers?

Contingent Worker Rates by Demographic Characteristics (U.S., July 2023)

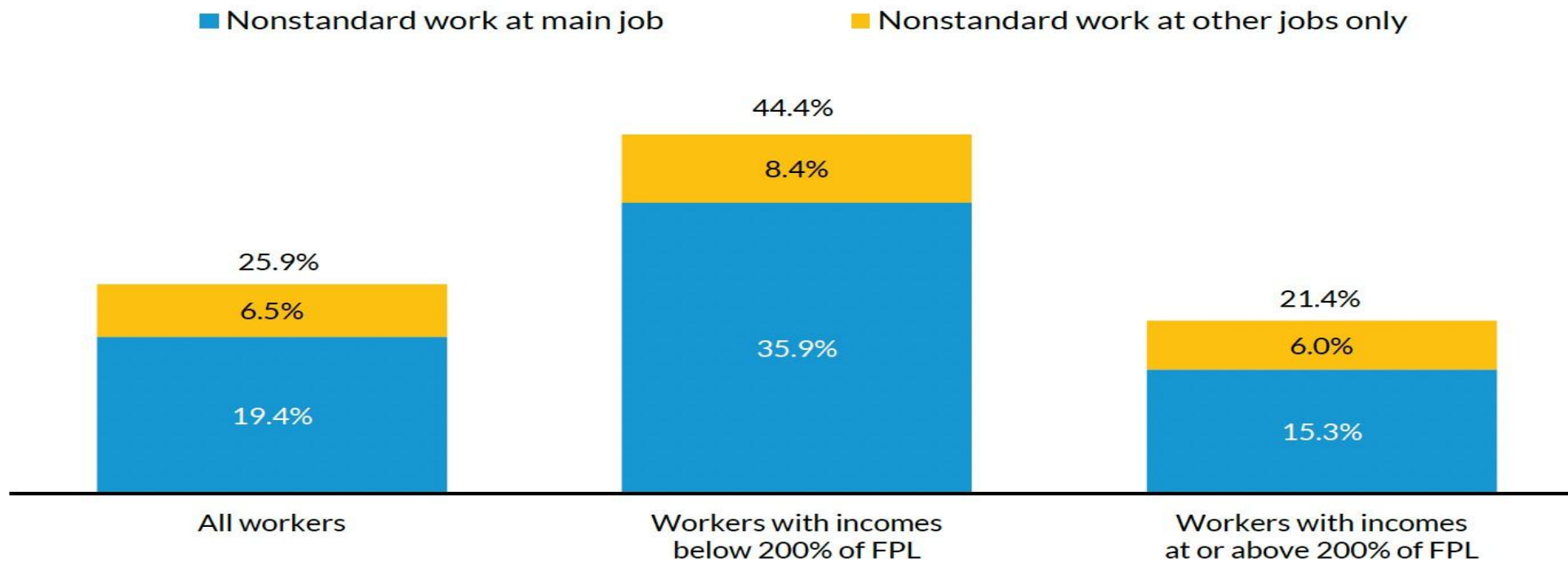


Occupation Distribution 2023: Contingent vs. Non-Contingent Workers



Disparities in Work Arrangements by Income for Contingent Workers

Share of Workers Ages 18 to 64 Reporting Nonstandard Work Arrangements at Any Job, Overall and by Family Income, December 2020



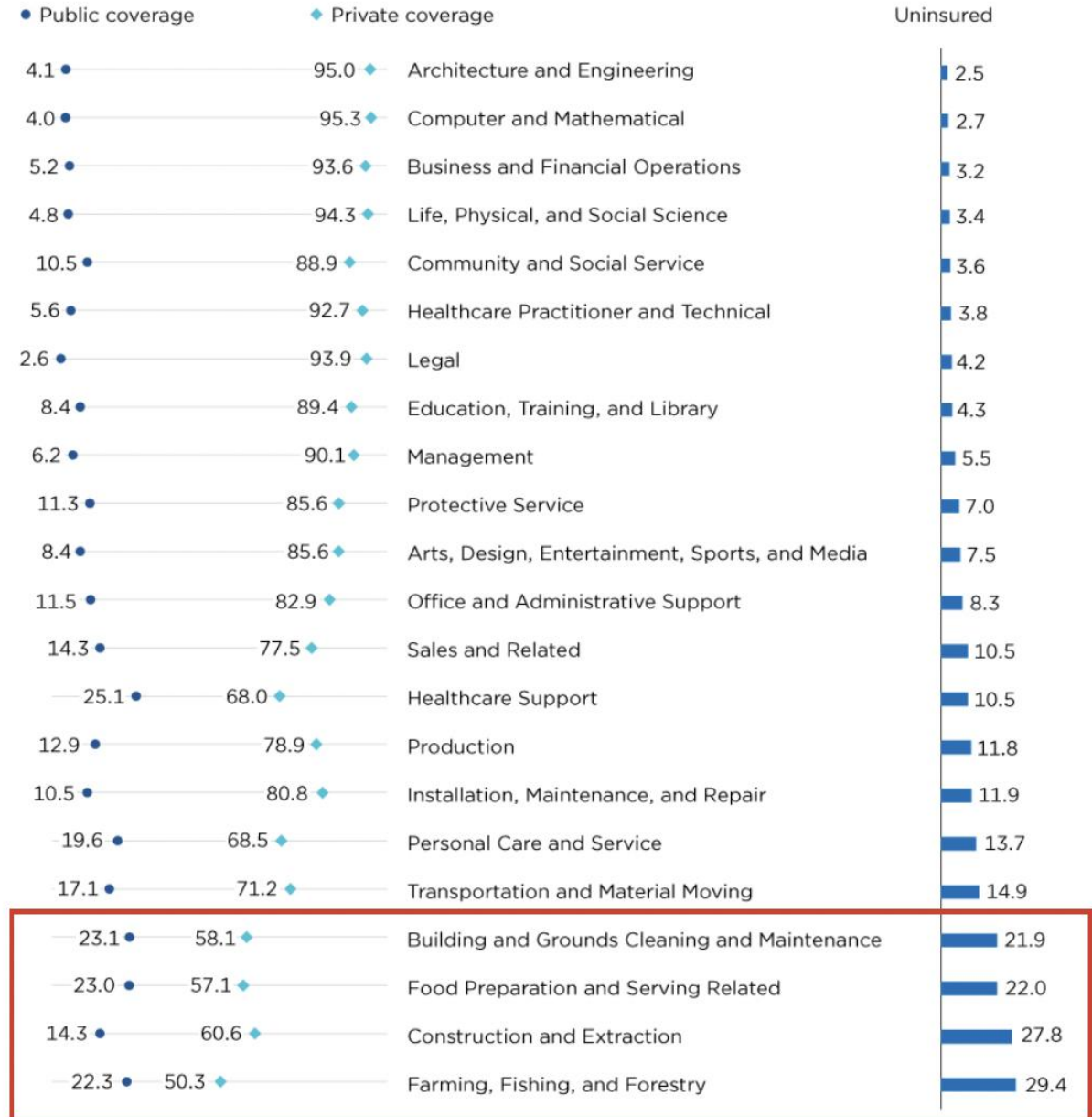
URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, December 2020.

Note: FPL is federal poverty level.

Disparities of Insurance Coverage by Occupation

Percentage of Workers With Health Insurance Coverage by Occupation and Type: 2024
(In percent)



Universe: Civilian employed population 19 to 64 years.

Notes: People are considered uninsured if they did not have any insurance for the entire calendar year. Numbers may sum to more than 100 because people can hold more than one type of insurance during the calendar year.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2025 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). The U.S. Census Bureau has reviewed this data product to ensure appropriate access, use, and disclosure avoidance protection of the confidential source data used to produce this product (Data Management System (DMS) number: P-7534374; Disclosure Review Board (DRB) approval number: CBDRB-FY25-SEHSD003-092).

Adverse Health Effects

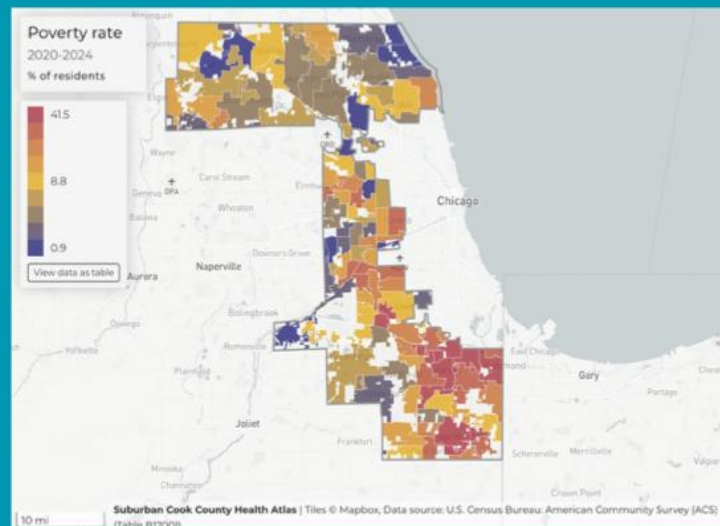
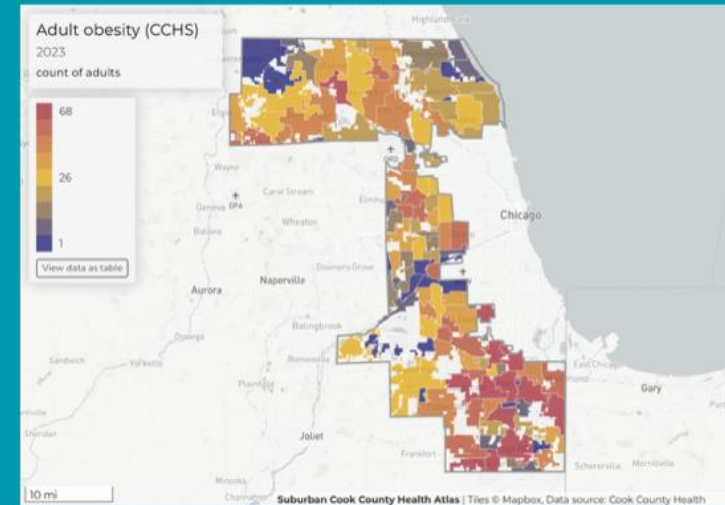
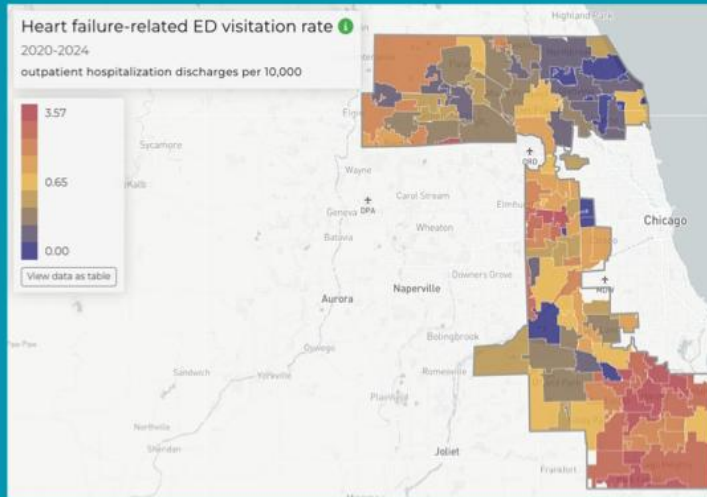
Individuals with jobs that do not pay a living wage have higher rates of:

- Stress and anxiety
- Obesity, Diabetes
- Asthma
- Low birth weight
- Fair/poor self-reported health
- Hypertension, Heart disease
- Preventable injuries
- Hospitalizations
- Premature death
- Social service/welfare dependency
- Heat related illnesses
- Frostbite

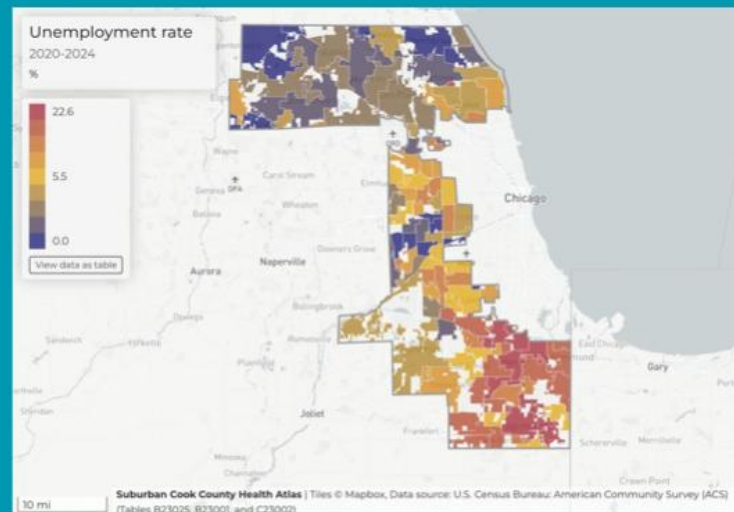
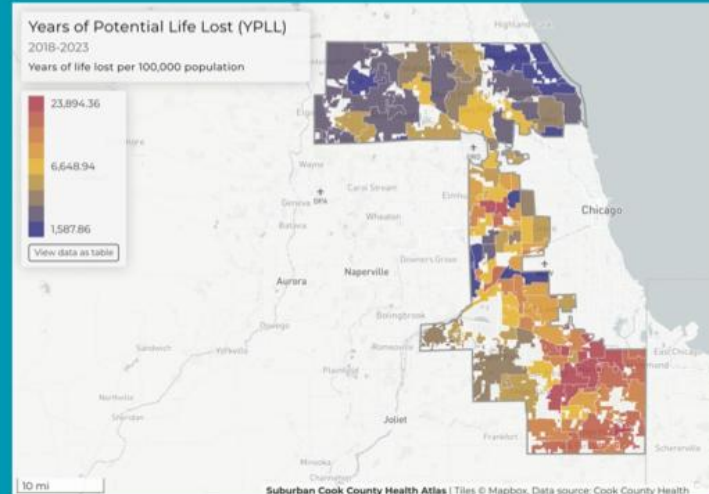
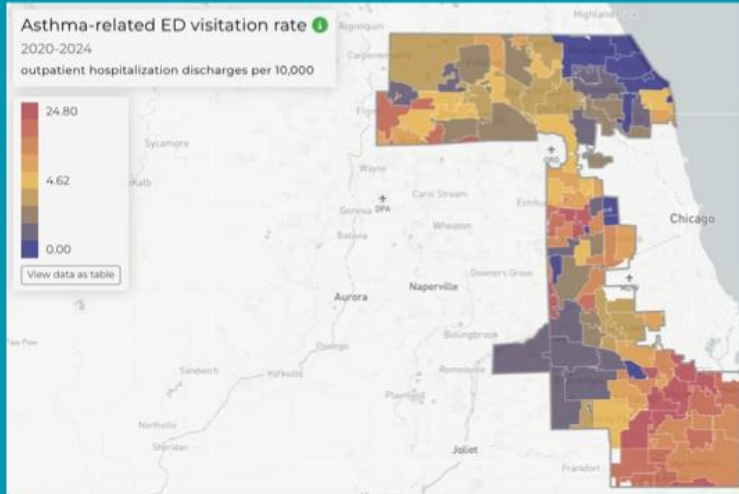


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Suburban Cook County Data Heart Failure/Obesity/Poverty



Suburban Cook County Data Asthma/Years of Life Lost/Unemployment



Cookcountyhealthatlas.org

Addressing inequities through the Healthy Work Initiative



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Cook County Healthy Work Initiative



The Healthy Work Initiative (HWI) is a co-led and co-created strategic and systems approach to address precarious work to ensure a Suburban Cook County where every worker has safe, healthy, just work leading to healthier lives.



HWI Mission

The Healthy Work Initiative exists to transform labor conditions into environments of health, equity, and resilience. We recognize that work is a social determinant of health, and we aim to ensure that every worker has the dignity, safety, and stability they deserve.

Our mission is not just about workplaces; it is about creating a foundation for healthier lives and stronger communities across suburban Cook County.

What This Means:

- Protect Health and Dignity
- Advance Equity and Justice
- Address systemic barriers that disproportionately impact marginalized workers.
- Build Resilient Communities
- Protect individuals, families, and communities from unsafe and unstable work
- Strengthen families, neighborhoods, and economies

HWI Vision

We envision a Cook County where communities most impacted by precarious labor and environmental injustice organize for health, dignity, and safety. These communities will be supported by systems that are justice-oriented, community-led, and structurally accountable.

What this looks like:

- Healthy work as a public good
- Workplaces that protect health and promote equity for all workers
- Community power at the center
- Workers and communities lead decision-making and governance
- Policies and practices that dismantle structural inequities and enforce accountability
- Resilient communities
- Families and neighborhoods thrive because work supports, not harms, health and well-being

Our vision is bold because the challenges are systemic. Together, we can create a future where healthy work is the standard, not the exception.

Healthy Work Initiative – Focus and Partners

Bridging across Government, Power Building-Worker Focused-Organizations, and Research & Development Institutions
Building a set of collective strategies, consciousness raising, fundraising, and allocation of system change investments

Worker Centers

- Arise
- Chicago Community & Worker Rights
- Centro de Trabajadores Unidos
- Chicago Workers Collaborative
- Latino Union
- Warehouse Workers for Justice

Worker & Immigrant focused organizations and alliances

- Raise the Floor
- Chicago Jobs for Justice
- PASO- West Suburban Action Project
- One Fair Wage
- ILCOSH

Academic Institutions

- UIC Center for Healthy Work
- Great Lakes Center for Occupational Health and Safety

Government

- Cook County Department of Public Health
- Cook County Department of Human Rights & Ethics

Collectively Identified Strategic Priorities

- Collaboration for Systems Changes
 - Establishing a shared analysis between government, partners, worker center, organizations and compliance partners
- Co-Enforcement
 - Co-enforcement is a model where government agencies work with community-based organizations to enforce labor standards and investigate workplace violations.
 - Moving away from complaint driven to prevention-focused approach
- Outreach and Education
 - Focused outreach and education process to grow workers into/as leaders
 - Merging of know your rights and occupational health

Alignment

Equity Fund

- 2.10 Strengthen and enforce Cook County's worker protection laws to ensure all workers receive fair compensation and protection from violations. Project Lead: Public Health.

Building Healthier Communities 2030

- Employers and policy makers should establish supportive workplaces and protective measures to mitigate workers' risk of chronic disease.

CCDPH Strategic Plan

- Pillar 1: Strategic Communications
- Pillar 2: Community Partnerships and Collaboration
- Pillar 3: Workforce and Workplace
- Pillar 5: Integration and Systems Alignment

Public Health Accreditation Board

- Domain 4, Standard 4.1 strengthen, support, and mobilize communities and partnerships to improve health;
- Domain 5, Standard 5.1 Serve as a primary and expert resource for establishing and maintain health policies and laws.

Cook County Department of Public Health Role

- Main funder (via grant) and organizer of HWI
- Administers program
 - Developed and monitors progress for all contracts with partners (5 total)
 - Prepares and submits all quarterly ARPA and other funding reports
 - Coordinates (with UIC assistance) stewardship and leadership meetings (monthly)
 - Participates in all relevant meetings (co-enforcement group, education group, WETSA)
 - Website development and other administrative tasks
- CCDPH Sanitarians
 - Training completed with Change Labs Solutions on labor laws and regulations and worker “Know Your Rights”.
 - Illinois and federal OSHA labor law posters were printed and given to inspector sanitarians for distribution to all establishments for posting as part of their inspection visits.
 - Questions about specific labor violations were identified to include as part of the routine food establishment inspections. To be piloted in 2026.

Activities and Outputs

Activities

- Co-Enforcement: identify egregious work conditions and labor violations and report to appropriate regulatory agencies; improve coordination so that precarious workplaces are held accountable
- Proactive outreach and education to employers to prevent violations
- CCDPH sanitarians trained on worker safety and labor laws to help educate employers and report violations- utilize non-labor specific inspections/inspection professionals to support prevention of labor, health, and safety harms.
- Environmental Scan: worker stories; municipal assessment; building regional data to support evidence-based actions
- IL-COSH- Temperature extremes awareness, policy, legislation (WETSA)- building public awareness of work precarity and environment
- Working to support the Cook County paid leave and minimum wage ordinances

Outputs

- Expanded trainings by worker centers with precarious workers on worker rights, safe work practices and basic principles of workplace health and safety
- Worker story products like fact sheets/infographics used for policy change (e.g., temperature bill)
- Municipal interviews used to identify/strengthen allies for co-enforcement
- Identify and act on state/county level cross agency partnerships and coordination for enforcement

Metrics

October 2022 – February 2026

Total # of workers reached, educated, or trained	389,843
Total # of community/ worker-led solutions	254
Total # of violations tracked	527
Total # of workplaces or communities that establish a worker safety committee	23
Total # of hours spent in education	292
"Total # of policies or system changes adopted"	6
Total # of COVID-19 Mitigation and Prevention Resources/Services Delivered	25,148

How is the program improving workers lives?

- Better enforcement of county paid leave and minimum wage ordinances.
- Increased documentation of labor & occupational health and safety law violations and referrals to appropriate enforcement agencies.
- Safer workplaces for essential workers through PPE distribution and cleaning supplies during COVID.
- Back pay won for temp workers whose wages were decreased during COVID and not reinstated after the pandemic.
- Workplace health and safety committees established in several unorganized (non-union) workplaces, creating safer working conditions.
- Strengthened relationships across communities and workplaces.
- Injury prevention.

Thank you



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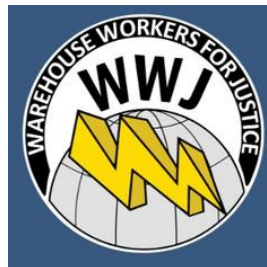
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Appendix

Partner Accomplishments – October 2022–February 2026

Partner- Warehouse Workers for Justice

- *Businesses, and the community at large seemed very responsive to the Boost Up campaign initiatives (CCDPH's COVID-19 vaccination campaign). Area businesses very receptive to engaging with organizers when information was shared. Organizers were able to effectively train and overcome hurdles during practice. When we engaged in the community and workplaces, the flow of conversation went very well.*
- *“Participants were informed of COVID-19 impacts and mitigation. Concerns over long COVID were addressed, information about vaccination events were announced. Health and Safety in the workplaces were discussed. A directory of partners were available for other health and safety needs. Food pantry locations were identified as 2 participants identified a food insecurity with immediate need. Worker protection organizers accompanied the contacts to the food pantry to ensure the immediate need was met.”*
- Social media postings
- Door knocking/canvassing
- Community meetings
- 1:1 conversations about worker safety during height of COVID pandemic.



Partners- Arise Chicago and CC Commission on Human Rights



- Held a workshop for working parents at Evanston Township High School with CCCHR (helping to build CCCHR community connection in Evanston)
- Set up workshops at Arise with CCCHR presentation (scheduled and completed in April, 2024)
- Building CCCHR relationships w/ immigrant workers
- Continued engagement with Northfield Township Supervisor for ongoing relationship and workshops
- Ongoing communication & collaboration with Catholic Charities in Oak Park to set up meetings and workshops at Oak Park congregations
- Solicited final draft of research on wage theft (contracted with Rutgers) for County feedback.



Partner- Chicago Workers Collaborative

CWC operated Occupational Health and Safety Committees in high-hazard manufacturing and warehousing facilities. Team now supports Occupational Health and Safety and Safety committees in seven companies, including:

- A food ingredient manufacturer were training for workers about hazard communication conducted. Workers now advocating for safer systems of handling chemicals
- A national packing house/food processor under investigation by the Illinois Attorney General for child labor violations
- A temp agency providing workers to a renowned nut and dried fruit producer which never provided training to workers in high hazard positions
- A candy manufacturer that produces famous brands engaged in gender and race discrimination as well as retaliation for workers requesting lock out/tag out in line with OSHA standards
- A warehouse where dozens of Mayan-language speaking workers from Guatemala have been suffering
- Ergonomic injuries due to long shifts without breaks of loading and unloading truck tires. Helped connect workers from these companies to government investigators through a USDOL/USDHS program called Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement (DALE) which protects undocumented workers through the provision of work permits (no longer functioning program).

Partner — Raise the Floor



- RTF functions as the major grantee from CCDPH to coordinate work with numerous worker centers operating in suburban Cook County.
- On January 23, 2025, RTF held an annual worker assembly with 300 workers. While the event was located in Chicago for a centralized commute, participants came from across Suburban Cook County including Cicero, Riverside, Berwyn, Proviso, Elgin, Elk Grove Village, South Holland, and Calumet City.
- Assembly topics included:
 - testimonials from various worker committees with successes from their worksite campaigns;
 - a know your rights session on labor, employment, health and safety, and immigration rights;
 - small group breakout session where workers from different worksites and worker centers could meet to share more about their organizing and glean best practices
- On January 30, 2025, RTF Legal presented before the Circuit Court of Cook County Chancery Division to represent two workers who were sexually harassed at a chemical fertilizer plant in Hillside.
- In Q2 of 2026, tracked over 2,000 labor violations and won \$250,000 in back pay for a large group of temp workers who had been advocating against these violations over the past 6 years.

Partner – University of IL Chicago School of Public Health



- CCDPH and UIC SPH aimed to conduct an Environmental Scan to identify challenges, strengths, and opportunities in suburban Cook County (SCC) for creating safe and healthy work environments—particularly for low-wage workers and those lacking benefits.
 - Worker Stories
 - This inquiry focuses on conducting in-depth interviews and/or focus groups in partnership with six worker centers to document worker experiences, understand workplace issues, and illuminate enforcement pathways in SCC.
- Develops products tied to Worker Extreme Temperature Safety Act campaign education and advocacy.
- Provides administrative support for HWI – including assistance to worker centers funded by CCDPH
- Collaborates with worker centers to develop materials and conduct specific trainings

Partner- IL Committee for Occupational Safety & Health



The Illinois Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (Illinois COSH) is raising workers' consciousness around health and safety with leadership from the Chicago Workers Collaborative (CWC), Chicago Jobs with Justice (JWJ) and PASO - West Suburban Action Project.

Extreme Temperature initiative

- Promote legislation to address extreme temperatures
- Worker and community education on risks from extreme temperature exposures

