



# Health Care Happenings

June 2023

Achieving zero health disparities through community and health system partnerships in the STL area



Saint Louis  
Regional Health Commission  
Newsletter

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

I recently read [an article](#) from the Missouri Independent titled, “Study reveals staggering toll of being Black in America: 1.6 million excess deaths over 22 years.” In summary, the article concluded that Black people live sicker lives and die younger than white people, and these deaths are fueled by [higher rates of preventable health conditions](#). The authors acknowledge the high death rates among Black people are not from genetics alone, but from the discrimination and racism that has plagued our country and has been weaved into the fabric of how [systems and policies have been designed](#) around housing, education, and employment.



Though it seems that these disparities only impact a portion of the population, a [study funded by the National Institute of Health](#) found that in 2018, racial and ethnic health disparities cost the U.S. economy \$451 billion. The massive financial toll is brought on by the health disparities across minoritized groups, including decreased access to care and increased exposure to environmental risks. The high-cost burden also varied among racial and ethnic groups, with the highest cost being borne by Black/African American population at about \$310 billion due to high rates of premature mortality.

In Missouri’s 2023 legislative session, we saw attempts to stop systems and institutions from addressing the conditions that lead to early death for many Black Missourians and others. It is important during these times to reaffirm our commitment and unflinching stance on achieving our vision of zero health disparities. When we are willing to do this hard work, we will see all Missourians having the same opportunity to live a long, fulfilling life, and our economic potential will be unlocked, growing prosperity across our state.

At the RHC, we are proud to have successfully closed out our Gateway program that has provided health coverage for more over 67,000 St. Louisans for more than 10 years, and all Gateway members were successfully enrolled in Medicaid or another coverage option. While this is a great milestone for our twenty-year efforts of ensuring access to care, we understand that our work is not finished until race is not a predictor of one’s health outcomes and life expectancy. To do this, we must move upstream and employ a preventative systems-level change guided by community members experiencing unjust health outcomes.

We also recognize the generational harm and ripple effects caused by the early deaths experienced at higher rates in the Black community and among those living in poverty. As a leader in health justice, the RHC is merging with [Alive and Well Communities](#) whose mission is to “activate communities to heal.” All communities experience harm from trauma. And those exposed to the trauma of racism are at higher risk of unjust health outcomes. This merger allows us to implement a statewide strategy of bringing together cross-sector stakeholders and community members around a common goal of building healthy, healed communities. We believe it is possible to facilitate co-creation between impacted community members and our state’s institutions to change the conditions in our state that lead to early death and to facilitate healing from the trauma of these unjust and untimely deaths. We invite you to join the movement, signing up to [be an Alive and Well ambassador](#).

*Angela Brown*

## AFFILIATION WITH AWC

# RHC ANNOUNCES AFFILIATION WITH ALIVE AND WELL COMMUNITIES TO ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY ACROSS THE STATE OF MISSOURI



On March 16, 2023 the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) and [Alive and Well Communities](#) (AWC) announced an affiliation to advance health equity across the State of Missouri and beyond. AWC became a subsidiary of RHC, effective February 24, 2023. By affiliating with Alive and Well, the RHC is able to move our work across the state and in sectors, such as K-12 education, that we historically have not engaged.

The RHC has adopted a new strategic plan that builds on its past successes and claims a bold vision of achieving zero health disparities. The plan calls for facilitating systems-level change guided by community members experiencing unjust health outcomes.

Today, AWC works in partnership with communities in St. Louis, Kansas City and Southeast Missouri ("the Bootheel") where poor health outcomes and health disparities continue to persist for Missourians. The partnership will expand RHC's outreach to these areas as well.



"The ability to share resources across both organizations and across the state will enable us to be more nimble and to expand the impact of both our organizations. We know when those who live with the poorest outcomes are able to improve their health, that we all will be healthier."

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- ANGELA BROWN,  
CEO OF RHC



## SAVE THE DATE

On September 26th, the RHC will be kicking off our merger with AWC with a multi-site event across the state of Missouri! The event will feature [Dana Bowen Mathew](#), author of the bestselling book "[Just Health](#)", with a panel and roundtable discussion. More details to come, including event info for St. Louis, Kansas City, and "the Bootheel"!

# GATEWAY TO BETTER HEALTH



## SUNSET ON GATEWAY TO BETTER HEALTH

The Gateway to Better Health program was designed to provide uninsured adults a bridge in care until they were able to enroll in health insurance coverage options available through the Affordable Care Act. It served as a temporary health care program for uninsured adults across St. Louis City and County.

The program covered primary, specialty, and urgent care services for individuals earning up to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

In August 2020, Missouri voters approved Medicaid expansion! This meant that residents across the region who were covered under the Gateway to Better Health program, would now likely qualify for Medicaid benefits under this new state-wide policy change. The review process to transition Gateway members to appropriate forms of Medicaid coverage began October 1, 2021 (see the [RHC blog](#) for more information).

The Gateway program concluded on December 31, 2022 with all members successfully converting to full insurance coverage!

## GATEWAY BY THE NUMBERS

67,847 Members enrolled

417,300

Primary care and dental visits

1.7 million

Medications to manage chronic conditions and other diseases

412,000

Diagnostic tests, procedures, and ancillary services

75,000

Specialty care visits

37,300

Urgent care visits

1,000,000

Medical Claims

# STORYTELLING INITIATIVE

## HUMANS OF ST LOUIS PARTNERSHIP

The RHC partnered with [Humans of St. Louis](#) to share our stakeholders' experiences across health care. These photostories, released from fall 2022 to spring 2023, highlight their experiences as patients and providers. We were able to share a total of 5 stories highlighting our health equity and access to care efforts.

The series concluded with stories from Dr. Jade James-Halbert, Keely Finney, and Brittany Jones. We hope their stories shed light on how we can continue our work developing an integrated health system that continues to support uninsured and vulnerable patients across the community. Check out all of the [Humans of St. Louis + RHC stories](#) on our blog.

"I've always been told and shown that 'no' just means there's a different path. I've been told no way more than I care to admit. And I've learned that it's less about being told no, but it's how you respond to it. Each part of my journey had stumbles and outright falls. But, in those moments, you develop resilience and opportunity. And when people keep encouraging you — 'Keep going, it's not over,' I've learned to look at no's as opportunities to shift."

-Dr. Jade James-Halbert, MD, MPH, RHC PSAB Member



"I was not always granted the opportunity to communicate what my needs were, so I created that opportunity for myself. Advocating is not a problem for me. My voice is what saved me growing up. I have always been boisterous. I have always spoken up for myself and those who couldn't speak up for themselves from an early age. Now I use that in a different way in my profession."

-Keely Finney, LCSW, Founder of Rejuvenating Comprehensive Services, and RHC PAB Member



"So, identify what your role is. And if it's not leading an organization, is it writing something? Is it merely talking about people's experiences? Is it checking in with yourself and how you may perpetuate inequity and white supremacy? Just like we have many roles and many jobs to make this world go round, we have many roles and many jobs in equity. It's okay to find your niche and do it."

-Brittany Jones, [St. Louis Integrated Health Network](#) Community Referral Coordinator and PrepareSTL Response Team Member



## PRIORITY POLICIES AND REGULATIONS FROM THE 2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



### Postpartum Medicaid Extension

- Legislation passed this session ([SB 106](#), [SB 45/90](#)) that would provide MO HealthNet coverage for women receiving benefits through MO HealthNet for Pregnant Women or Show Me Healthy Babies!
  - We support extending postpartum coverage because caring for pregnant persons' health after giving birth is critical to achieve health equity. Missouri has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality, and this policy will dramatically improve birthing outcomes.
  - We carefully watched anti-abortion language which was added and removed to other bills during session, and will monitor this possibility going forward in future legislative sessions.



### Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- On April 11th, the RHC joined [over 214 Missouri business and non-profit leaders](#) asking the Missouri Senate to remove harmful Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion language added into the house budget.
  - The language was very broad, potentially impacting a huge variety of services and programs that the state provides, including economic development, education, state contracts, licensing and accreditation, and more.
  - The RHC does not support anything that would dampen our efforts to understand and address disparities in Missouri, especially related to race.
  - The final budget that passed on May 5th did not include the anti-DEI language but this is something that will very likely come up again next session.



### APRN Scope of Practice

- The RHC tracked bills that would expand the scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs).
  - Although these provisions were present in many bills during session, [SB 157](#) and [SB 70](#) were both truly agreed to and finally passed.
  - Under these bills, an APRN may prescribe Schedule II controlled substances for hospice patients. Additionally, collaborative practice arrangements between the APRN and the collaborating physician may waive geographic proximity requirements, as well as several other provisions.



### Gender-Affirming Care

- On April 13, Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey issued an [emergency regulation](#) that would severely restrict access to age appropriate, medically necessary gender-affirming care for transgender and non-binary Missourians.
  - The RHC issued a [statement](#) in response, advocating for life-saving gender-affirming care for transgender and non-binary Missourians.
  - Unfortunately, anti-transgender bills ([SB 39](#) and [SB 49](#)) were both truly agreed to and finally passed, which limit gender-affirming care for minors and force transgender high school athletes to play on teams corresponding to their gender assigned at birth.

## STAY TUNED FOR FULL END OF SESSION WRAP-UP

Stay tuned for our end of session wrap-up which will summarize all of the bills that were passed- including our victories and concerns moving forward. Sign up for our [advocacy alerts](#) to make sure you don't miss these updates!

# JOINT ADVISORY MEETING

## RHC HOSTS A SECOND JOINT ADVISORY BOARD MEETING AT DOORWAYS



As a continuation of our access to care work and commitment to racial equity, the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) hosted a second joint meeting of our three advisory boards ([Community](#), [Patient](#), and [Provider Services](#)) in person at [DOORWAYS](#)' Jefferson Avenue Campus (1101 N. Jefferson Ave, 63106).

We know that racial and ethnic disparities in health care exist, but they do so within a broader context of historic and socioeconomic inequity and racism in America.

During the meeting, Rudy Nichols led our boards through a deeper dive into Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training. Board members were able to further examine and understand the concepts of intersectionality, privilege, and internalization of prejudice. Through rich dialogue and active listening, we hope to continue to inspire equitable, meaningful, sustainable systems change.



# MEDICAID ANNUAL RENEWALS

## THE UNWINDING AND MO HEALTHNET ANNUAL RENEWAL

Annual renewals for MO HealthNet (Missouri Medicaid) began April 1, 2023.

Beginning April 1, [Family Support Division](#) began the process of checking the eligibility of all MO HealthNet (Missouri Medicaid) participants. If you are a Missourian who gets healthcare coverage through MO HealthNet or any of the Managed Care health plans (Healthy Blue, Home State Health, or United Healthcare) you will need to renew your plan!

This process called a Medicaid eligibility renewal (or annual renewal). In order to complete your renewal, follow these steps:

### STEP 1: MAKE SURE CONTACT INFORMATION IS UP-TO-DATE.



Make sure DSS has your current mailing address, phone number, email, or other contact information. If your address has changed in the last 3 years, you will need to notify the Family Support Division by:

- Reporting a change and [updating your information online](#)
- Visiting your local resource center
- Calling 855-373-4636.

### STEP 2: CHECK THE MAIL.



DSS should send you a letter about your Medicaid or CHIP coverage sometime between April 2023 and April 2024. This letter will also let you know if you need to complete a renewal form to see if your family members still qualify for Medicaid or CHIP.

- You can check the annual renewal timeline to find out when you should expect to get your letter.

### STEP 3: COMPLETE YOUR RENEWAL FORM (IF YOU GET ONE).



If you need to complete a renewal form, be sure to fill it out and return it right away to help avoid any gaps in Medicaid or CHIP coverage.

Don't risk losing  
your Medicaid  
health coverage!

Get ready to renew  
your Medicaid.



## MEDICAID OUTREACH IN LOCAL FAITH BODIES



The RHC is partnering with the Ecumenical Leadership Council, a 501C4, whose mission is political and economic empowerment for Missouri's Black population. Together, we hope to advance Medicaid expansion efforts within the faith-based community, looking at both community engagement and policy. The ELC is comprised of labor unions, faith leaders and politicians and they represent St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbia, Jefferson City and Southeast Missouri. The RHC will have a representative sit on their board to ensure that updates are shared, and alignment continues.

The partnership will focus on creating a long-term strategy for healthcare access and education. We will also focus on pressing needs as they arise, such as the Medicaid Expansion redetermination process – ensuring residents are aware of the requirements and working with them to ensure that they do not lose coverage.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH ST. LOUIS COUNTY JAIL

Beginning in October the Regional Health Commission partnered with the [St. Louis County Department of Public Health](#) (DPH) to mass-enroll people incarcerated in the St. Louis County Jail in Medicaid health insurance coverage.

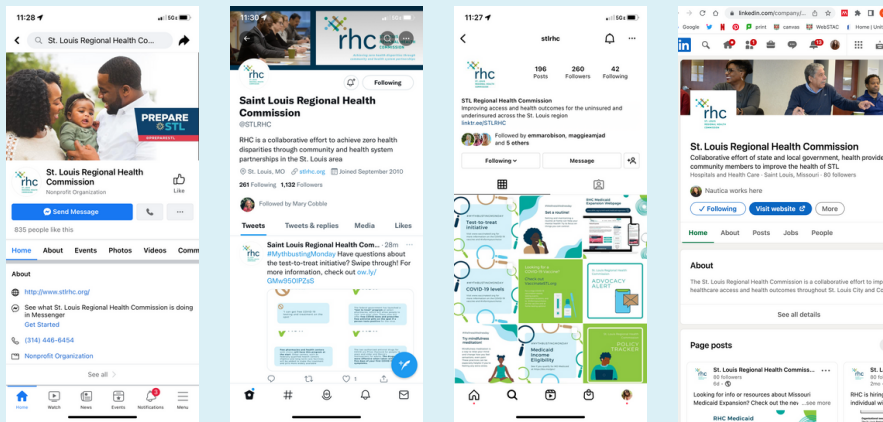
The goal of the project was to help those who are incarcerated apply and enroll in Medicaid so that when they are eventually released from the justice center, they have access to care and necessary health services. Through the joint effort, the RHC and DPH hoped that this initiative would target vulnerable individuals to help them live their best and most fulfilling life upon release.

Since the initiative launched October 10th, the RHC was present in the jail on a weekly basis, allowing over 244 people who are incarcerated to apply for Medicaid coverage. As of April 3rd, the project has been put on hold due to ongoing process complications. We are actively trying to understand the best process to ensure that complete applications are submitted and verified accurately, and we are working with LSEM to receive further guidance from the State. Despite that, we are very proud of this effort to date, knowing that ~244 inmates will have access to health insurance upon release.

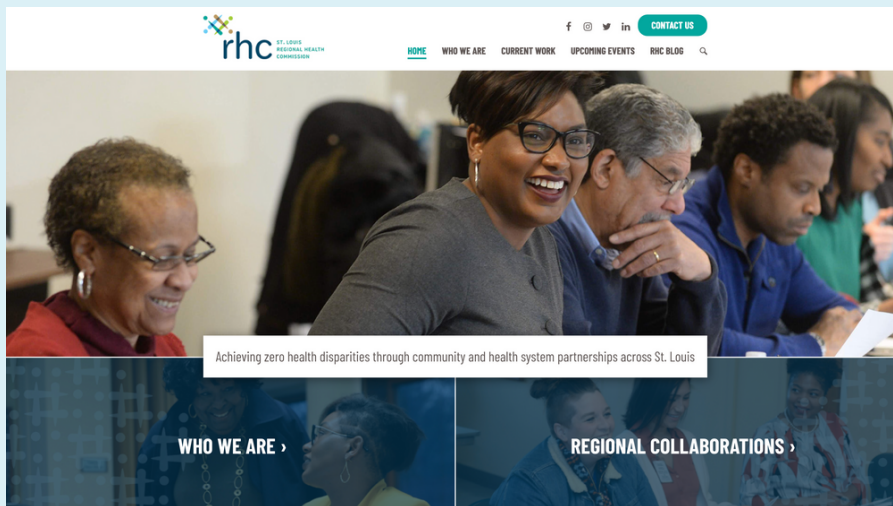


# FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIAS!

For #MotivationalMondays, #WellnessWednesdays, health advocacy updates and more, check us out on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn!](#)

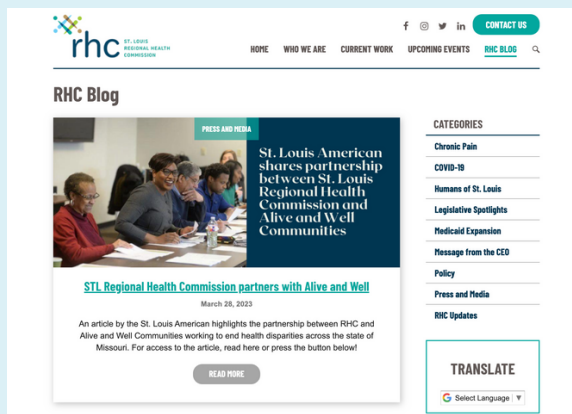


# CHECK OUT OUR [WEBSITE](#)



# RHC IN THE MEDIA

Visit our website for [recent media coverage](#) and read what we have been up to on our [blog!](#)



## ABOUT

The [St. Louis Regional Health Commission](#) is a nonprofit organization that envisions a St. Louis region committed to achieving zero health disparities, through a community driven approach, that yields health equity in all policy and outcomes.

# Upcoming Events

Join us for an [upcoming meeting!](#) All RHC meetings are open to the public, and we invite you to get involved. Have questions? Contact Joy Kuebee by emailing [executiveassistant@stlrhc.org](mailto:executiveassistant@stlrhc.org).



[Joint Advisory Board Meeting \(hybrid\)](#)



[Provider Services Advisory Board Meeting \(virtual\)](#)



[Community Advisory Board Meeting \(virtual\)](#)



[Commission Monthly Board Meeting \(virtual\)](#)

[VIEW MORE MEETINGS](#)

# GET IN TOUCH

Contact us [online](#) or by calling our team at 314.446.6454.

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