



# Health Care Happenings

April 2021

Improving access and health outcomes for the uninsured and underinsured across the St. Louis region



Saint Louis  
Regional Health Commission  
Newsletter

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO: MOVE FROM COMFORT TO COURAGE

At one of our most recent patient advisory board meetings, the agenda included an update on Medicaid expansion. One of the representatives said, and I quote, “Yes, we need to talk about that. I’m mad.” Those words resonated with the other members of the board, as well as those of us who are receiving daily updates on the advocacy efforts for Medicaid expansion. Our patient advisory board is comprised of individuals who have no insurance or have coverage through Gateway or Medicaid; many of whom have health care issues that require routine doctor visits. After the historic vote in August 2020, to approve Medicaid expansion in our state, our advisory board representatives were hopeful for a chance to have new or expanded access to health care coverage.

As I continue to watch this academic exercise taking place in the legislature over whether to fund Medicaid expansion, it raises a big question for me: “How are we centering and responding to the voices of people most impacted in our work?” A clear majority of voters (53%) approved expansion. However, there is a small group of people who insist they know what is best for the community, though it stands in direct opposition to how the people voted. This fight for expansion is following an all too familiar pattern, where organizations convene groups of community members for feedback, yet fail to act on the wisdom of experience shared in these conversations. It should come as no surprise then, as a result of this fractured trust, the community is “mad.”

The biggest silver lining I have observed over the past year is that our region is crying for more courageous leaders who are willing to move out of their comfort zone. The community needs leaders courageous enough to create space for those most impacted to join the conversation and be a part of the decision-making process. As we move through our transition and strategic planning process at the RHC, our patient advisory board members and other community partners are pushing us to shift from our comfort zone and courageously center the people with first-hand knowledge of the barriers we seek to address in our efforts to advance, catalyze, and bring about systems transformation. PrepareSTL has been a great example for us to follow. While it was created in response to the pandemic, it has shown us the value of leaders collaborating and strategically using their influence to create space for the communities who have borne the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 to lead the change.

At the RHC, we are committed to leaning more into this charge of centering those most impacted, and we invite other leaders to join us. Examine your policies and practices to see how you are engaging residents and patients in leadership roles in your work; work to create an environment that weights the data of experience as highly as the quantitative data we diligently examine. If we really want to see justice in our lifetime, we need more leaders who are willing to engage in radical listening and partnership that shares power with community.

*Angela Brown*

# POLICY + ADVOCACY

Advocacy – a tool for achieving policy and systemic change – is a key strategic priority of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC). Our advocacy efforts bolster our mission to improve access to health care, improve health outcomes, and eliminate health disparities. Read about our advocacy work over the past quarter and find opportunities to engage!



## ADVOCACY ALERTS

In February 2021, the RHC launched our Advocacy Alerts, which provide updates on key legislation and timely regional advocacy opportunities. You can sign up for these email alerts on our [policy\\_page!](#)

## LEGISLATIVE SPOTLIGHTS

This quarter, we also launched [Legislative Spotlights](#) on our blog! These posts give a comprehensive summary of the legislation, including reasons for support or opposition. We've given updates on preemption bills, Medicaid Expansion implementation, and physical therapy scope of practice. You can read [all of our blog posts here](#).



## COMMUNITY FORUMS

In January, we kicked off the legislative session with a town hall, featuring three Missouri legislators to talk about Coping with COVID-19. Moderated by Dr. Heidi B. Miller, the panel featured Rep. Mary Elizabeth Coleman, Rep. Sarah Unsicker, and Senator Brian Williams. We discussed ways to address COVID's impact on the behavioral health of our community. If you missed the town hall, [watch a recording here](#).

The RHC also sponsored two mayoral candidate forums on racial equity, hosted by the Social Policy & Electoral Accountability Collaborative (SPEAC). The 2021 St. Louis Mayoral Candidate Forums provided St. Louisans' a sense of how the mayoral candidates planned to make St. Louis a more racially equitable city. [Watch a recording here of the final forum](#).

We have been very active in promoting safety and active participation in the spring 2021 elections! We helped our community prepare for the elections and promoted safe behaviors (#VoteSafeSTL) on social media and [our website](#). [Read RHC's blog post preparing for the April 6 election](#).



## POLICY TRACKER

On the RHC's Policy Tracker, we follow state legislation that could significantly affect the St. Louis health care system. We provide plain language descriptions, updates, and our stance on the legislation. In the final couple of weeks of session, [follow our policy tracker](#) to see what's moving to the finish line!

## TESTIMONY

The RHC submitted testimony on 8 bills:



### Expanding health care coverage

- Read the [RHC's testimony in support of HB 20](#)
  - We support fully funding the expansion of Medicaid because it will improve the health of Missourians and bring billions of federal dollars to our state.
- Read the [RHC's testimony against SB 224](#)
  - We oppose implementing work reporting requirements for Medicaid participants because requirements have been shown to significantly limit access to coverage.



### Developing the health care workforce

- The RHC testified for informational purposes on [SB 293](#), [HB 84](#) and [SB 584](#)
  - The RHC supports authorizing health care providers, including advanced practice registered nurses, to safely practice at the top of their license in order to meet the demand for health care utilization in Missouri, especially in the health care safety net.

## RHC Policy Tracker

Several state actions may occur during this legislative cycle that could significantly affect the St. Louis health care system. The RHC has agreed to prioritize the tracking of such policy changes, report on the legislation's potential impact on access to care, and help lead advocacy efforts to improve the St. Louis health care safety net.

The Regional Health Commission is actively monitoring the below pieces of state legislation. Click on the subgroups below to see information on bills within each category and view the RHC's stance on the measures. Subscribe to the bill list(s) to receive daily or weekly email updates, including new bill actions and upcoming hearings.

### What we're tracking:

BEHAVIORAL  
HEALTH

HEALTH CARE  
WORKFORCE

HEALTH  
EQUITY

HEALTH  
INSURANCE

MEDICAID-  
RELATED

PREEMPTION  
BILLS

SEE ALL  
LEGISLATION



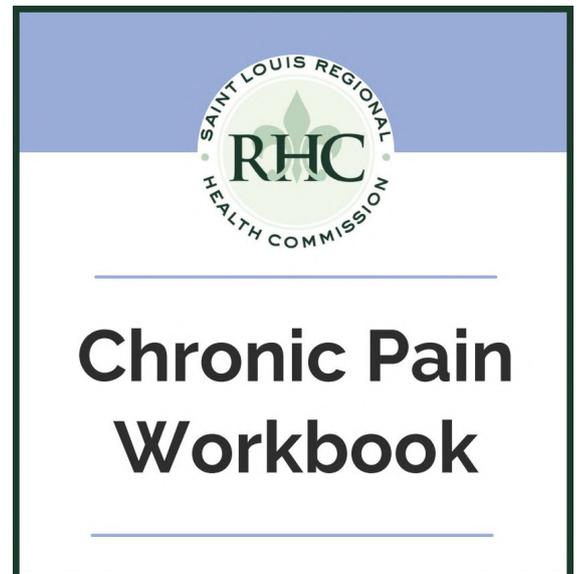
### Improving public health infrastructure

- Read the [RHC's testimony against HB 517](#)
  - We oppose taking away public health authority from local government to create laws around the sale of tobacco products, alternative nicotine products, and vapor products.
- Read the [RHC's testimony in support of SB 63](#)
  - We support the implementation of a statewide Prescription Drug Monitoring Program to help providers drive conversations about drug use and connect patients with appropriate substance use disorder treatment when needed.
- Read the [RHC's testimony in support of SB 64](#)
  - We support the legalization of syringe exchange programs because research shows these programs increase access to substance use disorder treatment and reduce the spread of infectious disease.

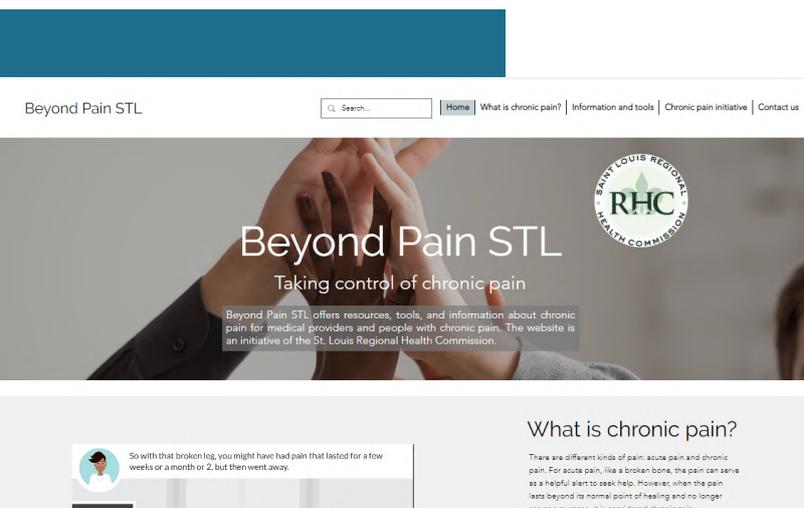
## THE RHC LAUNCHES A NEW CHRONIC PAIN WORKBOOK

The RHC created a [Chronic Pain Workbook](#) to give people with chronic pain a free, accessible tool to process more of their pain story and learn helpful pain management strategies. This workbook recognizes that people with chronic pain are experts on their own pain experience. Created under the guidance of Dr. Sarah Buday, a Washington University pain psychologist, this workbook combines information on the neuroscience of chronic pain, effective behavioral tips, and ways to process and live a fuller life with pain.

Dr. Buday excitedly spoke about the resource's potential benefits to people with chronic pain: "Living with chronic pain is often confusing and frustrating, given that it can impact so many areas of one's life. This workbook is a helpful start toward developing self-management of chronic pain that is not dependent on medications alone." Read more in our [blog post](#) about the initiative.



The Chronic Pain Workbook is part of the RHC's Chronic Pain Initiative, a regional effort to prevent and reduce the impact of chronic pain. For more information on chronic pain, visit the RHC's website called [www.BeyondPainSTL.com](http://www.BeyondPainSTL.com), which offers tools, information, and videos to our community, including people with chronic pain and medical providers.



### CONNECT ONLINE

Visit [BeyondPainSTL.com](http://BeyondPainSTL.com) to learn more about chronic pain and to connect to resources. Download and share Beyond Pain STL videos on the [RHC YouTube Channel](#).

## THE RHC HOSTS THE VACCINATE STL WEBPAGE

Through our partnership with the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force, the RHC launched [VaccinateSTL.org](https://VaccinateSTL.org) to connect the community to vaccine education, registration information to obtain vaccines, and other health care resources. Visit [VaccinateSTL.org](https://VaccinateSTL.org) for the latest information about vaccination efforts across Missouri!



## VACCINE EQUITY

Since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RHC has been committed to making sure access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines are easily accessible within our Black and Brown communities. To that end, the RHC advocates immediate action to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the St. Louis region.

Review the RHC's statewide and regional policy suggestions to combat these inequities on the [RHC's blog: Vaccine Equity Policy Recommendations.](#)

The RHC, PrepareSTL, and the COVID-19 Regional Response Team (RRT) are putting these suggested strategies into action through two key community engagement efforts:

### PROVIDING EDUCATION

Prepare STL and the RRT are partnering with medical providers from BJC Healthcare and SSM Health to offer community-based vaccine education. The volunteer speakers will conduct presentations that center the physical and material well-being of African Americans and communities of color, healing from trauma, and informed choice regarding COVID-19 vaccinations.

Speakers will share information about the vaccine to help individuals make an informed choice about getting or not getting vaccinated.

### BRINGING VACCINE PROVIDERS INTO THE COMMUNITY

As well as offering the vaccine education within the community, the RHC seeks to connect vaccine providers (local health departments and hospital systems) to organizations that wish to host a vaccination event onsite within their community.

If you would like to express interest in bringing a knowledgeable speaker to your organization or holding a vaccination event in your community, visit [VaccinateSTL.org](https://VaccinateSTL.org) to learn more.

# COMMUNITY MOBILIZING EFFORTS

**PREPARE STL** REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM

HELPING ST. LOUISANS OF COLOR PREPARE AND PREVAIL.

**WE NEED YOU!**

**BECOME A COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION!**

PREPARESTL AND THE COVID-19 REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM are conducting a vaccine education initiative to help community members make informed choices about whether COVID-19 vaccines are right for them.

Our **Community Health Champion Peer-to-Peer Outreach Program** will use word-of-mouth communication to educate the community about the pros and cons of vaccines. But **we need your help!**

**We're looking for 300 champions** to conduct two "Living Well in the Era of COVID" community conversations with 10 people each in **St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and East St. Louis, IL.** You'll be trained by trusted community members. April-May 2021.

**IF YOU FIT INTO ONE OR MORE OF THESE CATEGORIES, CONTACT US:**

- Are 18-30 years old
- Live and/or work in North St. Louis City or County or the Metro East
- Have health conditions that make you vulnerable to COVID
- Are active in a faith community
- Work in early childhood education
- Participate in grassroots/community groups
- Are foreign born and speak English

**EARN \$200**

WE ARE INTERESTED, BUT NOT LIMITED TO THESE ABOVE CATEGORIES.

**INTERESTED?**  
VISIT: [TINYURL.COM/PREPARESTL](https://tinyurl.com/preparestl)  
OR EMAIL: [PREPARESTL@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PREPARESTL@GMAIL.COM)

REGIONAL RESPONSE FUND ST. LOUIS

PrepareSTL and the COVID-19 Regional Response Team have launched a Community Health Champion Peer-to-Peer Outreach Program, designed to use word-of-mouth communication to engage Black residents and other communities of color about COVID-19 vaccines so they can make an informed choice. The program is working to recruit 300 Community Health Champions (CHCs), who will lead community conversations, as well as twenty medical professionals to serve as vaccine educators on behalf of the project.

To serve as CHCs, PrepareSTL is seeking community members who possess any of the following characteristics, though participants DO NOT have to possess these attributes to join the team:

- Are 18-30 years old
- Live and/or work in North St. Louis City or County or the Metro East
- Have health conditions that make you vulnerable to COVID-19
- Are active in a faith community
- Work in early childhood education
- Participate in grassroots/community groups
- Are foreign born and speak English

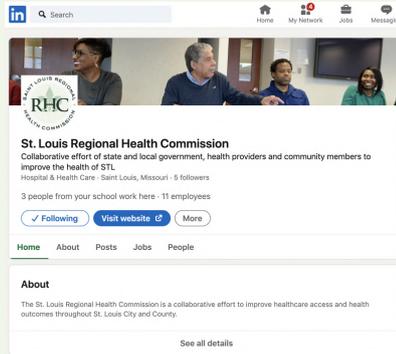
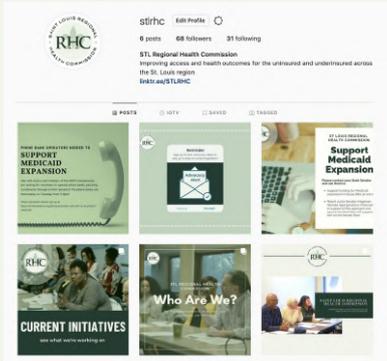
Vaccine educators are also needed to train the CHCs on basic COVID-19 vaccination information and be on call to answer questions during the community conversations. [Click here for full descriptions](#) of both the vaccine educator and CHC roles. Those interested in learning more can reach out to Rev. Regina Gray, Training & Recruitment Coordinator with PrepareSTL, at [preparestl@gmail.com](mailto:preparestl@gmail.com) before May 1, 2021.

**#INFORMYOURCHOICE SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN**

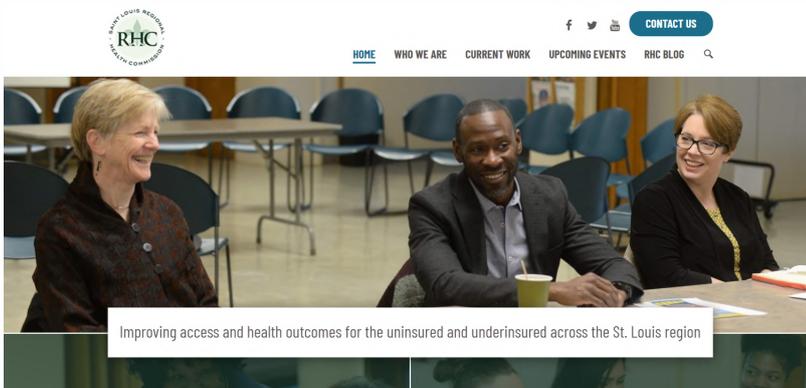
For the past several months, RHC has been promoting COVID-19 vaccine content on our social medias which encourages informed decision making: We know that people want access to factual information from a neutral source that can support their personal decision about whether or not taking the vaccine is the right choice for them and their families.

# FOLLOW US ON OUR NEW INSTAGRAM AND LINKEDIN!

RHC is excited to announce our NEW [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) accounts! Connect with us on both [@STLRHC](#) to stay up to date on all of our initiatives and efforts!



## CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE



## RHC IN THE MEDIA

Visit our new 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 collaborative effort of St. Louis City, St. Louis County, the state of Missouri, health providers, and community members to improve the health of uninsured and underinsured citizens in St. Louis City and County.

## 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 Emily Vandas by emailing [evandas@stlrhc.org](mailto:evandas@stlrhc.org).



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



[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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