



# Health Care Happenings

December 2022

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

Tis the Season!

As the year quickly comes to a close, I am proud of the work we have been able to accomplish this year. Some of the highlights include:

- Enrolling the remaining 16,000 individuals enrolled in Gateway on October 1, 2021, to Medicaid or another form of coverage. [The Gateway to Better Health program will end December 31, 2022.]
- Hosting the Securing Access to Care Town Hall and Educational Roundtable, centered around Medicaid and Reproductive Health in partnership with Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis, Legal Services of Eastern MO, Generate Health and the St. Louis Integrated Health Network with CEUs provided by the UMSL School of Social Work.
- Providing testimony that led to the St. Louis Board of Alderman's unanimous support of a Medicare for All bill.
- Partnering with the St. Louis County Department of Public Health Justice Center Outreach on an initiative to enroll more than 900 inmates into Medicaid.
- Supporting the "Feed the Babies" initiative that provided donor milk to families when infant formula was in limited supply.

In the midst of this celebration, my heart remains burdened by the trauma that still runs rampant in our communities and the many gaps and barriers to accessing much needed services. This year, we have seen continued increases in health disparities for chronic diseases, sexually transmitted infections, gun violence, and substance use. Unfortunately, this year also marks the first school shooting in our region. This is just a small reminder of the importance of our work to eliminate health disparities and create alive and well communities.

While December is a month mostly associated with love, happiness and miracles; for many people it is also a time of stress, loneliness and grief. I was reminded in a meeting recently that relationships are key to achieving great things. I remain hopeful and look forward to the work ahead knowing that we have great partners and people like you working to ensure our healthcare and social support systems work for all. Each of us has a unique role to contribute in the pursuit of health justice. Please take some time to restore, renew and reconnect during this season of celebration. In so doing, may we each be blessed to both give and receive the light and love needed – be it through a simple wave or gentle smile – to feel seen and loved this holiday season.

Angela Brown

# MEDICAID EXPANSION EFFORTS

## SECURING ACCESS TO CARE: MEDICAID AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

On October 6th, 2022, the RHC with partners [Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis](#) (BHN), [Generate Health, St. Louis Integrated Health Network](#) (IHN) and [Legal Services of Eastern Missouri](#) (LSEM) hosted a Town Hall and Educational Roundtable event, centered around Medicaid and Reproductive Health.

The Town Hall featured panelists: LaKisha Reddit (Maternal Health and Doula Services), State Senator Jill Schupp (District 24- Part of St. Louis County), Dr. Melissa Tepe (Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Affinia Healthcare), and Dr. Jennifer Wessels (Chief Medical Director of Home State Health Plan Inc.). the Town Hall was moderated by Lora Gulley, MSW (Director of Community Mobilization / Advocacy at Generate Health) and Dr. Jade James-Halbert (Obstetrics and Gynecology, SSM Health)

Following the Town Hall, our partners each hosted a “breakout” session in the form of an educational roundtable. The roundtables gave participants an opportunity to deeply connect and investigate specific issues and questions related to Medicaid and reproductive health care with a variety of voices and perspectives seated around the table.

**SECURING ACCESS TO CARE:**  
*Medicaid and Reproductive Health*

Town Hall and Educational Roundtable event

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6**  
9:00am-12pm at the UMSL Millennium Student Center

TO REGISTER:  
[bit.ly/rhtownhall1022](https://bit.ly/rhtownhall1022)

**featuring panelists:**

- LAKISHA REDDIT  
Maternal Health and Doula Services
- SEN. JILL SCHUPP  
State Senator District 24 - Part of St. Louis County
- MELISSA TEPE, MD, MPH  
Vice President and Chief Medical Officer  
Affinia Healthcare
- JENNIFER WESSELS, MD  
Chief Medical Director at  
Home State Health Plan Inc.

**moderated by:**

- LORA GULLEY, MSW  
Director of Community Mobilization / Advocacy  
Generate Health
- JADE JAMES-HALBERT, MD  
Obstetrics and Gynecology, SSM Health

Logos at the bottom: rhc, Behavioral Health Network, Generate Health, St. Louis Integrated Health Network, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, UMSL University of Missouri - St. Louis

Our topics of interest and framing for this event were informed by our policy and advocacy efforts in the last legislative session and our ongoing/current strategic priorities.

The World Health Organization defines [Reproductive Health](#) as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes.” By this definition, the importance of reproductive health is true for all persons, regardless of sex or gender identity.

The RHC advocacy priorities of expanding coverage for the uninsured and underinsured, achieving health equity, developing the health care workforce, and addressing the social determinants of health are all influenced by access to and quality of reproductive healthcare.

If you were unable to attend the event in-person, a [recording of the town hall](#) portion is available on our [Youtube](#) channel. A written summary of the Town Hall and each of the Roundtable breakouts is [available here](#).



## 2022 ACCESS TO CARE DATA BOOK

### OVERVIEW

As part of our mission to improve the health of uninsured citizens in St. Louis City and County, the RHC produces an annual “Access to Care” data book to review community-wide progress toward strengthening the health care safety net system in the region.

Access to Care provides a survey of annual operating statistics from primary, specialty and emergency care safety net health care provider institutions in St. Louis City and County. This year’s analysis focuses primarily on data reported over the past four years (2017 - 2020).

[Download the 2022 Access to Care Data Book](#) (PDF) and visit the RHC’s [Access to Care](#) web page to review key findings from the data. Contact [Riisa Rawlins](#) to schedule a presentation about the status of our health care safety net.

### COMMON THEMES

Here are some common themes found in the data across the different care settings discussed in each section within this report:

1

The overall rate of uninsured individuals has continued to steadily decline in both St. Louis City and County over the past four years. In Missouri, the number of uninsured individuals decreased by 6% over the past year, while remaining relatively stable since 2017.

2

There continues to be a shift in the payor mix of St. Louis safety net organizations.

3

Wait times across primary and specialty care safety net sites continue to lengthen over time.

# Progress Toward Building A Healthier St. Louis

Access to Care Data Book 2022



# STORYTELLING INITIATIVE

## HUMANS OF ST LOUIS PARTNERSHIP

As part of a series highlighting our health equity and access to care efforts, the RHC has partnered with [Humans of St. Louis](#) to tell the stories of some of our leaders from our patient, community, and provider networks. We are grateful for their partnership in the RHC's commitment to zero health disparities. We hope their voices will help amplify the inequities in our health systems and inspire the growing movement for health equity.

To kick off the series, Robin Cole, Co-Chair of the RHC Patient Advisory Board (PAB), and Demaris Ridgell, PAB member, shares their experiences navigating the health care safety net.



"I'm charged with letting people in the medical community know how to treat a patient, how to speak with them, and how to support them. Listen to our voices. We know our bodies. We know what we're feeling. Medical professionals need to know they have to meet patients where they are and build from there...Let me tell you what would work for me. Let's set up a plan. Give me access to the things I actually need — transportation, medical, pharmacy, medication."

-Robin Cole, RHC PAB CO-Chair

"There are just so many barriers and obstacles under-resourced communities are faced with. That's why access and equity speak volumes. Just letting people know there is access and we want that same equity to be across the board for everybody is crucial. You don't have to feel embarrassed or ashamed or jump through a lot of red tape and hoops. We want to make ourselves very visible to the community to let them know, 'Here we are and we're here to help.'"

-Demaris Ridgell, RHC PAB Member



Check out our [blog](#) to read Robin and Demaris' full stories, and follow along with the initiative [@HumansofSTL](#) on Facebook, and [#RHCSecuringAccess](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

# JOINT ADVISORY MEETING

## RHC HOSTS JOINT ADVISORY BOARD MEETING AT DOORWAYS



As part of our access to care work, we have increased our commitment to racial equity.

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.

On November 15th, The St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) hosted a joint meeting of our three advisory boards (Community, Patient, and Provider Services) in person at [DOORWAYS'](#) Jefferson Avenue Campus (1101 N. Jefferson Ave, 63106).

The meeting included a "Fundamentals of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" training, hosted by [Rudy Nickens](#). As Rudy shared in his presentation, diversity is the The presence of differences that may include race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language, (dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective. Inclusion the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within an organization or group. Equity promotes justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems.

Our conversation and training served as a great opportunity for open communication and collaboration among both our community members and regional partners. We know that this meeting was one of many spaces we hope to create for radical listening, reframing our community's lived experiences as valuable expertise.



## RHC PARTNERS WITH ST. LOUIS COUNTY JAIL TO IMPROVE MEDICAID COVERAGE OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE

The Regional Health Commission has 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 initiative is 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 hope that this initiative targets vulnerable individuals to help them live their best and most fulfilling life upon release.

Launched October 10th, the initiative has allowed the RHC and DPH to enroll over 100 people. The overall goal of the initiative is to enroll 800+ total individuals, but even this initial increase brings the total insured population in the St. Louis County Jail to over 80%.

Anyone is able to volunteer to help enroll persons impacted by the justice system. So far [Washington University in St. Louis Medical School students](#), [Eden Theological Seminary](#) students, and additional partners have volunteered to help with enrollment, but DPH and RHC are hoping to increase the number of volunteers and involve more members from our community going forward. At the moment, the primary goal of DPH is to track insurance status and assist with enrolling folks as quickly as possible.

"Health reimagines one's personhood and values for themselves, and that effect trickles down to help with all members of a household."

Ernest M. McDonnell, Public Health Coordinator for the St. Louis County Department of Public Health and co-leader of the project, believes that even a brief conversation with individuals from the incarcerated population is a space to underscore the importance of health care:

"Health reimagines one's personhood and values for themselves, and that effect trickles down to help with all members of a household. Enrolling individuals in Medicaid and helping them take care of their health indirectly benefits all members of the household: kids, peers, elders, and anyone else can be motivated to take care of themselves in the same way."

If you or anyone that you know is interested in being trained to help with Medication application assistance at the St. Louis County Jail, please contact:

- Blessing Kuebee  
[bkuebee@stlrhc.org](mailto:bkuebee@stlrhc.org) or
- Ernest McDonnell  
[emcdonnell@stlouiscountymo.gov](mailto:emcdonnell@stlouiscountymo.gov)

Not only is this initiative timely and responding to current community needs, but it looks into the future and improves access both today and tomorrow. By educating and empowering community members to understand their options and promote agency, they have the opportunity to amplify their needs and access necessary services. The RHC is perfectly aligned to be involved in this work and continue in the future.

[READ MORE ON THE RHC BLOG.](#)



## MONKEYPOX RESPONSE

In response to the [Monkeypox](#) virus, which continues to spread in the St Louis region, the RHC has added supplemental information about Monkeypox to our [VaccinateSTL](#) webpage.

If you have been recently exposed to monkeypox or if you meet the eligibility criteria for being most affected during the current outbreak, you may be able to receive a vaccine. Visit the [St. Louis County](#) or [St. Louis City](#) websites to find more information about vaccination eligibility and a vaccine interest survey.

**MONKEYPOX**

The [CDC](#) is tracking an outbreak of monkeypox that has spread across several countries that don't normally report monkeypox, including the United States. Click on the drop-downs below for answers to some frequently asked questions about the outbreak as well as information on testing, vaccination, and protecting yourself.

- What is Monkeypox? ▾
- How Does Monkeypox Spread? ▾
- Symptoms ▾
- How to Protect Yourself ▾
- Vaccination ▾
- Where to Find Testing ▾

For more information contact your local health department or visit the [CDC website](#).

**ST. LOUIS COUNTY**  
**DEPARTMENT OF**  
**PUBLIC HEALTH**

✉ [dphmonkeypox@stlouiscountymo.gov](mailto:dphmonkeypox@stlouiscountymo.gov)  
☎ 314-615-2660

[READ MORE →](#)

**CITY OF ST. LOUIS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF**  
**HEALTH**

✉ [health@stlouis.mo.gov](mailto:health@stlouis.mo.gov)  
☎ 314-612-5100

[READ MORE →](#)

## GUN VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Following the tragic [shooting](#) at [Central Visual Performing Arts High School](#) (CVPA) which occurred October 24, 2022, the RHC has deeply engaged in both partnering and supporting community. On October 24, we released a statement honoring our community's loss and collective trauma:

"We stand in love and support with the Central Visual and Performing Arts High School community. We are actively working with our partners across the region to ensure there are resources and support available now as well as in the days and months ahead to support our collective healing. We are committed to transforming systems and policies to allow our children and community the opportunity to enjoy the best health and well-being possible. "

If you need additional support or resources, call **988** or text **BHEARD** to **31658**.

Going forward, the RHC will help to coordinate and support our community for long-term strategies and response. Follow our [policy tracker](#) to stay updated on policy changes and other legislative updates related to gun violence and other advocacy efforts to improve the St. Louis health care safety net this upcoming legislative session.



# REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

## LEGAL UPDATE: ROE V WADE OVERTURNED

Following the Supreme Court's [decision to ban abortion](#), states now have the legal authority to regulate abortion access. Shortly after the decision was released, Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt certified [House Bill 126](#), which holds that abortion is illegal in all cases except where a medical emergency threatens the life of the pregnant person.

RHC's Legal Update on the overturning of Roe v. Wade, is [available here](#) which includes links to resources for those that need to access an abortion, medical or legal advice, or assistance with reproductive health issues.

SisterSong defines [reproductive justice](#) as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” The Regional Health Commission believes abortion care is healthcare. We will continue to fight to counter the disproportionate harm of past and present law on communities who rely on the safety net for care.

## RHC JOINED IHN AND OTHER PARTNERS IN AN EFFORT TO ADDRESS THE INFANT FORMULA SHORTAGE

The [St. Louis Integrated Health Network](#) and a host of partners, including the St. Louis Regional Health Commission, engaged in a community-wide collaboration from June to August (2022) to address the recent shortage of baby formula and provide solutions for families.

The initiative addresses three main priorities:

1. Breastfeeding Support for Birthing People and Families
2. Distribution of Pasteurized Donor Human Milk (PDHM)
3. Nutrition Support and Counseling for Families

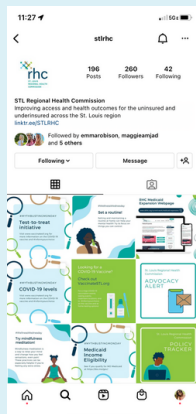
The project aims to support the St. Louis community in its potential for healthy outcomes through timely and equitable access to pasteurized human breastmilk and formula during the shortage crisis in the St. Louis area.

Check out this [article](#) from *the St. Louis American* highlighting the effort.

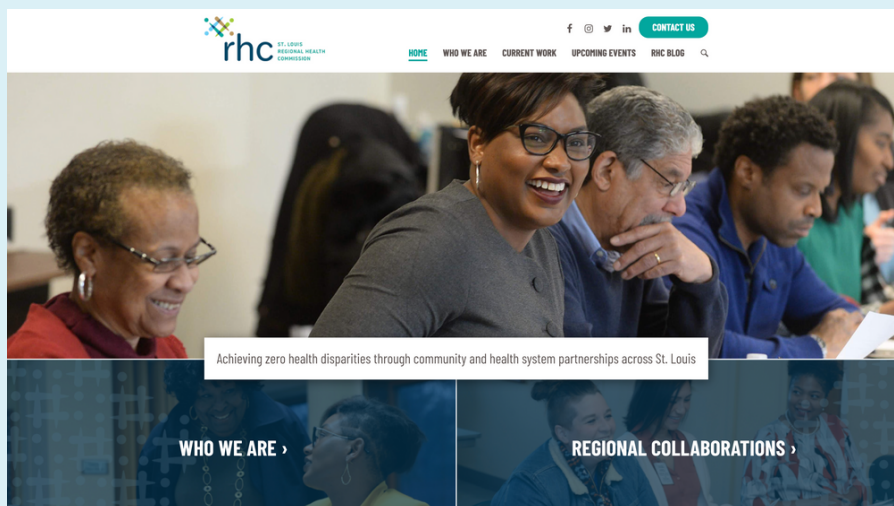


# FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIAS!

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

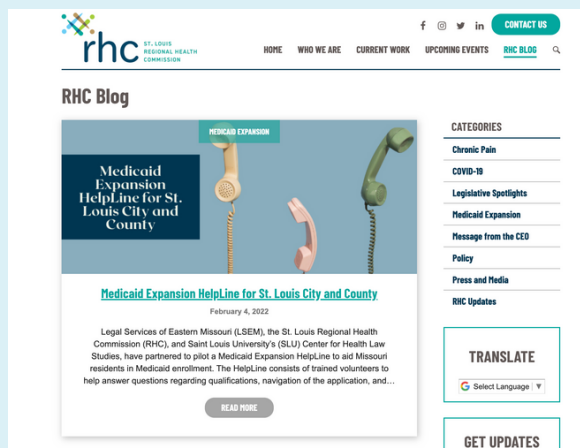


# CHECK OUT OUR [WEBSITE](#)



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



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



[Patient Advisory Board Meeting.\(virtual\)](#)



[Joint Advisory Board Meeting.\(location tbd\)](#)



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

[VIEW MORE MEETINGS](#)

## GET IN TOUCH

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

By Mail:

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St. Louis MO 63139



[www.stlrhc.org](http://www.stlrhc.org)