



# Health Care Happenings

August 2021

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



Saint Louis  
Regional Health Commission  
Newsletter

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CEO Message • P. 2

VaccinateSTL • P. 3-4

Behavioral Health • P. 5

Opioid Response • P. 6

BRIC • P. 7



## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

On July 22, 2021, victory was claimed for 275,000 Missourians when the Missouri Supreme Court unanimously voted that Medicaid expansion was constitutional. This is truly a historic moment to validate the action voters took to pass Medicaid expansion in August 2020, and moves our region closer to addressing health equity. Thank you to everyone who has worked tirelessly to make this a reality for our region.

After more than a year of fighting COVID, Medicaid expansion, racism, it is refreshing to pause and reflect on the moment to celebrate this win. There are many people, including myself, who can use a moment for respite after experiencing higher levels of burnout and fatigue over these last few years.

To address the trauma, stress, and burnout in our communities, this year, [PrepareSTL](#) conducted a new campaign, called “Living Well in The Era of COVID.” This campaign responds to a shift from an outbreak and containment approach to the pandemic to a community-wide pursuit of a “new normal,” marked by the emergence of vaccines, deepening concerns about collective trauma, and a growing emphasis on community resiliency. A wellness summit was held in July that provided an opportunity for the community to come together for healing.

I hope we can create more opportunities for communities to have space for healing and restoration. I am happy and proud to see young people, like Simone Biles, Naomi Osaka, and others, have the courage to step away and focus on their own mental well-being. Hopefully, we all begin to develop this courage and can normalize mental well-being. As more coverage options become available, more people will have access to resources to see the appropriate providers for treating the whole person.

Thanks to our partners at Alive and Well Communities, I now understand the importance and the need to prioritize self-care. I try to find more and more ways to incorporate this into my daily routine. For more ways to address self-care for you, your team, or organization, visit [www.awcommunities.org/self-care](http://www.awcommunities.org/self-care). We must do a better job at taking care of ourselves, so we can be prepared for the work ahead.

From the words of the Dalai Lama, “If you feel “burnout” setting in, if you feel demoralized and exhausted, it is best, for the sake of everyone to withdraw and restore yourself.”

Angela Brown

# VACCINATE STL

## COVID-19 COMMUNITY WELLNESS



### LIVING WELL SUMMIT

[PrepareSTL](#) hosted the Living Well Summit July 15-18 to support the Black community through COVID. This event served as an opportunity for the community to re-center after the pandemic and its taxing mental, emotional, physical, and financial impacts.

Covering topics such as caregiving, centering community voices, self love, spiritual care, wellness in the workplace, coping with grief, creative writing, meditation, and much more, the summit offered participants a variety of options for re-centering and healing from trauma.

If you could not make it to a session or want to relive your favorite workshop, please visit [PrepareSTL's YouTube page](#). All the virtual sessions from Thursday opening night and Saturday afternoon are available for you to view.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CONVERSATIONS

PrepareSTL's Community Health Champions (CHC) Program was created with the understanding that peer-based engagement is one of the most effective means of informing community behavior regarding vaccines. Word-of-mouth has always been an impactful communication platform, especially when connected to training, supported by expertise, and led by people who are trusted. From March through June, PrepareSTL recruited and trained 100 champions to conduct community conversations on vaccines with people in their families, neighborhoods, workspaces and places of worship living in St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and East St. Louis, IL.

All champions attended two-hour training sessions with PrepareSTL organizers, vaccine educators (all of whom were doctors, nurse practitioners, or nurses) and Community Health Workers. During these sessions, they learned about vaccine basics, building the body's immune system, vital community resources, and helpful facilitation skills. They also participated in vaccine conversations, where they discussed how they were staying safe during the pandemic, how they felt about vaccines, what mattered most to them in making decisions about whether or not to get vaccinated, and what information they wished they had to continue to stay safe from COVID.

30 champions conducted 60 community conversations with more than 300 people in their networks, using PrepareSTL's Zoom platform and community meeting spaces. These conversations were 75 minutes in length and supported by the team's vaccine educators, Community Health Workers, tech support staff, and process managers.



# VACCINATE STL

## THE RHC HOSTS THE VACCINATE STL WEBPAGE

Through our partnership with the [St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force](#), the RHC launched [VaccinateSTL.org](#) to connect the community to vaccine education, registration information to obtain vaccines, and other health care resources.

Going forward, VaccinateSTL will serve as the ongoing coordinating hub for COVID-19 regional planning and communication. Visit [VaccinateSTL.org](#) for the latest information about vaccination efforts across Missouri!

## HOLD A VACCINATION EVENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Health care providers across the region are available to help organizations host vaccination events onsite within their communities. Events can be held at local churches, community centers, nonprofit organizations, and other accessible sites. Organizations provide the location and assist with outreach efforts, while the medical partner oversees vaccine administration! Visit the RHC's [interest page](#) to learn more.

## REQUEST AN EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATION

Through a partnership with [PrepareSTL](#) and the [COVID-19 Regional Response Team \(RRT\)](#), volunteer medical providers from BJC HealthCare and SSM Health are offering community-based vaccine education. Presentations center the physical, mental, and material well-being of African Americans and communities of color healing from trauma. The presentations also prioritize informed choice regarding COVID-19 vaccinations. If you would like to request a presentation from the speakers bureau, [sign up here!](#)

**Vaccinate STL**  
Together, we can fight COVID-19



ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN  
PANDEMIC TASK FORCE



# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM REFORM IN ST. LOUIS

In the St. Louis region, many individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorder are not being adequately treated, resulting in an increased number of encounters in emergency departments (EDs) and the criminal justice system. In response to this problem, the Saint Louis Metropolitan Hospital Council met in November 2017, and formally requested that the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) “serve as the coordinating entity” to explore the feasibility of a behavioral health assessment and triage center (BHATC). With funding from the Missouri Foundation for Health and in collaboration with the Behavioral Health Network (BHN), the RHC conducted a [BHATC Feasibility Study](#) in response to this call to action.

Based on the findings, the feasibility study transformed into a broader agenda: to reform the region’s behavioral health care system. While the region clearly demonstrates a need for an assessment and triage center, the BHATC Feasibility Study showed that sustaining a center is not feasible until we make back-end improvements to the behavioral health system. Pulling from the BHATC Feasibility Study, the BHN launched a Visioning Initiative to create system-wide transformation within a Recovery-Oriented System of Care Framework.

Through this visioning work, our region has established two major resources – the SSM Behavioral Health Urgent Care and the Sobering Center – to bolster the behavioral health care system and assist in ED and jail diversion.

## SSM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH URGENT CARE

The [SSM Health Behavioral Health Urgent Care Center](#) is the region’s first and only urgent care/walk-in clinic dedicated to mental health. The clinic treats both adults and children in urgent need of care for mental health crises. It provides immediate access to behavioral health care without the often long and costly wait for ED care to address non-emergent issues.

Addressing a wide range of severity levels and service needs, such as bridging medications and determining inpatient hospitalization needs, the clinic is walk-in friendly, broadly open to the community, and available to both adults and youth (age 6+) for psychiatric and psychosocial care. Operating seven days a week, 9 am- 7 pm, the urgent care has served over 1,400 patients since its opening March 31, 2021.

## SOBERING CENTER

The St. Louis region is also planning to open a sobering center to increase behavioral health care access and meet community need. A sobering center is a facility where actively intoxicated individuals can safely recover from acute intoxication while receiving basic medical monitoring. The center operates on a harm reduction model, meaning they are not detoxification or residential treatment, nor are they necessarily a direct connection to treatment. The sobering center is designed to divert intoxicated adults out of jail and EDs by providing a safe alternative.

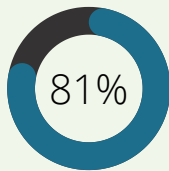
At this time, the anticipated opening date (pending funding) of the sobering center is September 2021. The BHN is working with partners to establish clinical protocols, sustain funding, and educate the public, including law enforcement and hospitals, on referral options.

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

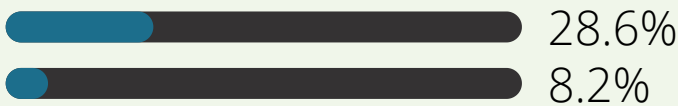
# OPIOID RESPONSE

## COVID WORSENS OPIOID BURDEN IN STL

COVID-19 has not only worsened existing problems in the United States such as unemployment, poverty, evictions, and societal stress, but has also led to intense social isolation, disrupted drug supplies, and reduced access to support services for many people across the state and country. As a result, the global pandemic has exacerbated the opioid crisis throughout Missouri and the United States as a whole.



*In 2020, the St. Louis region accounted for 81% of drug-involved deaths among Black individuals statewide.*



*In 2020, opioid-involved deaths increased 28.6% among Black people in both St. Louis City and County, compared to 8.2% among White people.*

The City and County of St. Louis have seen an especially high increase of drug-related fatalities and overdoses.

The St. Louis Metro region continues to account for over half of all overdose deaths in Missouri. Drug-related deaths increased by 18% in 2020, as compared to 2019, and the City of St. Louis had 36% more deaths.

Unfortunately, Black residents are disproportionately burdened by this crisis in St. Louis. In 2020, the St. Louis region accounted for 81% of drug-involved deaths among Black individuals statewide. Opioid-involved deaths increased 28.6% among the Black population in both St. Louis City and County, compared to only 8.2% among the White population, from 2019 to 2020.

Fortunately, St. Louis has seen tremendous support and engagement from our community-based organizations and partners who are tackling this complicated public health crisis.

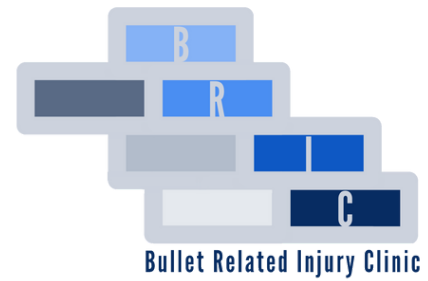
[The CENTER \(Community ENGagement, Trauma, Equity, and Renewal\) Initiative](#), funded by the Missouri Foundation for Health, focuses on improving the health of and investment in Black people who use drugs in St. Louis and are most affected by addiction and overdose. Through community-centered information gathering, community education and empowerment, community-centered intervention, and sustained community partnership, the project will lay the foundation to support the health and wellness of Black people who use drugs in North St. Louis through direct outreach and community-established recommendations for change.

[The EPICC \(Engaging Patients in Care Coordination\) project](#), led by the Behavioral Health Network, builds collaborative infrastructure to expedite access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and provide peer-based coordination of care from emergency departments to community-based settings for those who present with or are at high risk for an opioid-related overdose. Peer Recovery Coaches perform outreach 24/7 to accept referrals, enhance engagement, and maintain contact to support access to services, foster recovery, and reduce overdose rates. EPICC also works closely with MO Hope Project to provide opioid overdose education and distribute Narcan (a medication that blocks opioids and reverses overdose) to prevent overdose and reduce harm.

As we move to our “new normal,” we need to continue to be conscious of our efforts engaging the general public about mental health and substance use, centering communities in our efforts, and making addiction treatment more flexible, accessible, available, and equitable.

For more, check out the [RHC Blog](#), or this [infographic provided by noM0Deaths](#). To share your story or experience with drug use in St. Louis, fill out [this survey](#) provided by the CENTER Initiative. Finally, visit [NoM0Deaths](#) for more information, resources, treatment options, and more.

# BULLET RELATED INJURY CLINIC



## BRIC DATA UPDATE

In November 2020, Dr. LJ Punch launched the [Bullet Related Injury Clinic](#) (BRIC), a free program designed to support participants manage their own self-care after a gunshot wound. The BRIC, which operates out of [the T](#), offers guidance on both physical and mental healing, including topics of wound-care, nutrition, sleep, stress, trauma, and pain management.

"The Bullet Related Injury Clinic (BRIC) is absolutely essential to the St. Louis region," describes Kateri Chapman-Kramer, MSW, LCSW, Project Coordinator of [Life Outside of Violence \(LOV\)](#). "Particularly for underserved (uninsured, underinsured) victims of violence, the BRIC represents just and human care for many individuals that often do not receive needed physical and mental follow-up after violent injury. It is unique in that there is welcome space to answer questions in a community-setting that many individuals and their families are afraid to ask, or simply do not ask, in a typical medical setting. The holistic model of the BRIC treats the entire person – and further the entire community."

The clinic is off to a great start. In the first six months of operation, the BRIC surpassed its participant enrollment goal. 82% of eligible referrals who are successfully reached by phone enroll in the program. The total number of enrolled participants, 59, exceeded the BRIC's initial six-month goal of 50, determined by national and regional benchmark data.

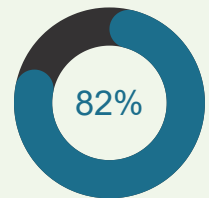
In addition to having a high enrollment rate, the BRIC also accomplished a high participant retention rate in the first half of its pilot year. In fact, 80% of first-visit participants went on to complete additional visits, with some participants completing as many as six. In the first three months of the program, the BRIC also referred over 40% of participants to a partner program, strengthening the region's violence prevention infrastructure by serving as another meaningful referral source.

Finally, the BRIC has demonstrated promise in decreasing hospital recidivism. Preliminary findings show that less than 20% of participants reported subsequent unplanned ED encounters, which is less than the regional average. The BRIC has plans to collaborate with hospital partners to develop a regional bullet wound discharge protocol to further optimize clinical outcomes and reduce hospital return rates. This protocol will prioritize evidence-based, person-centered, and trauma-informed care.

The BRIC is an extremely valuable resource to those suffering from bullet-related injuries, and St. Louis is fortunate to be able to direct survivors to such a support system, helping them to take care of themselves and heal.

To learn more about the BRIC, visit [www.thebric.org](http://www.thebric.org).  
[Click here to make a referral](#) for a client, friend, or for yourself.

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



*82% of eligible referrals who are successfully reached by phone enroll in the program*



*Less than 20% of participants reported subsequent unplanned ED encounters*



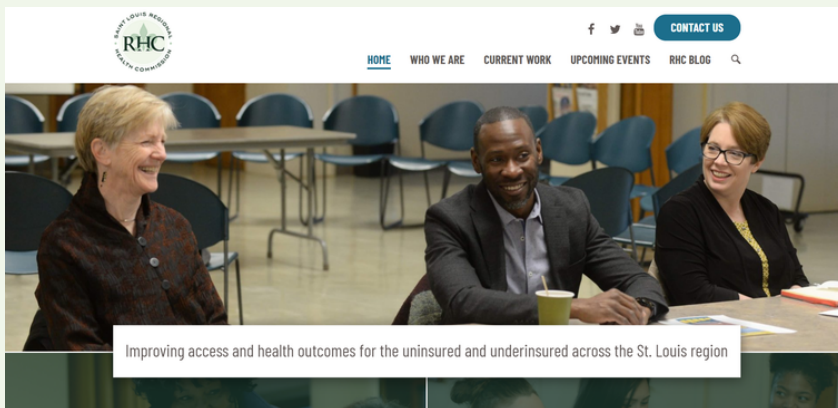


# FOLLOW US ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIAS!

For #MytBustingMondays, RHC Advisory Board and staff spotlights, health advocacy updates and more, check us out on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#)!

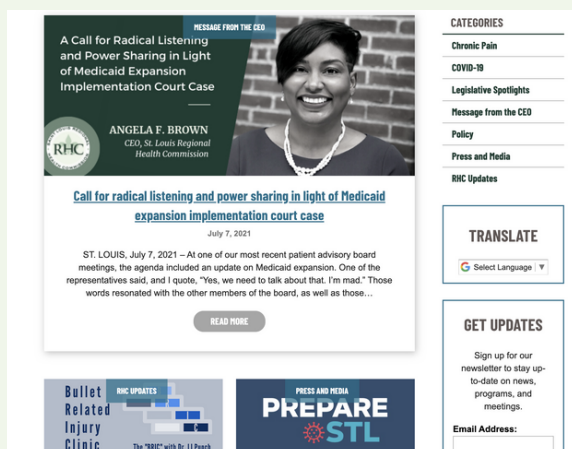


# CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE



# 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).



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



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



[Patient Advisory Board Meeting](#)



[Provider Services 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.

By Mail:

1113 Mississippi Avenue, Suite 113  
St. Louis, MO 63104



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