

The Future of Work and Health: Work Arrangements

On May 14, 2019, 60 Chicagoans of the public health community came together at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health for “On The Table” conversations around the Future of Work in Chicago. Participants composed memos on the Future of Work to Mayor Lightfoot to let her know what issues we want her to prioritize for action.

Describe the Topic: Non-standard work arrangements (NSWAs) are characterized by part-time or contingent employment often with multiple employers or across multiple jobs, unpredictable hours or job security, and a relationship based on arms-length business transactions. While some professional workers may pursue NSWAs for the autonomy and flexibility they provide, many other workers have little choice but to take these jobs, which tend to have lower wages, fewer benefits, and fewer worker protections than standard employment arrangements.

Neighborhoods/Communities of Focus: All neighborhoods

Who was at the table: Lorraine Conroy, UIC School of Public Health; Emily Stiehl, UIC School of Public Health; Naoko Muramatsu, UIC School of Public Health; Liz Fisher, UIC School of Public Health; Tamara Hamlish, UIC Cancer Center; David Moreno, Erie Family Health Centers; Dana Madigan, UIC School of Public Health.

Views and opinions represented in this document are those of individuals not the organizations.

What about the topic or issue should be a priority for the mayor?

Although it is not listed as an explicit social determinant of health, research suggests that work interfaces with many social determinants to impact on people’s health and well-being. As we note below, health insurance and even public benefits are increasingly tied to employment. Lack of job security or investments in safety at work are associated with stress and anxiety, fair/poor self-reported health, delayed access to medical care, and preventable injuries. Addressing NSWAs could help to reduce health disparities across different groups in Chicago.

How does the issue connect to the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation?

- **Equity.** In Chicago, NSWAs can increase inequities between groups of workers. Workers in NSWAs tend to be younger, Black or Hispanic or Latino, and to have low household income. Members of our table pointed out that these workers lack access to protections including workers compensation, paid sick leave or FMLA, or employer-based health insurance. They are often stuck in-between programs—making too much to qualify for assistance like Medicaid, but not enough to afford so-called Obamacare. In many cases, this can mean foregoing the care they need to stay healthy. It also implies few protections against their loss of earning power in case of workplace injury. They carry the additional burden of managing their own employment, such as filing taxes, obtaining licensing, and other paperwork.
- **Inclusion.** While some companies promise to bring jobs to Chicago, certain neighborhoods or communities may have less access to them and the jobs may not meet the definition of “healthy work.”

- **Transparency.** Data on NSWAs in Chicago are limited, which makes it difficult to target the relevant audiences to provide resources and services. The lack of transparency is detrimental to workers who might not understand their rights as workers. Work requirements for some social programs compel individuals to accept NSWAs just to qualify for social programs. Increasing the focus on healthy work, and data collection about jobs in Chicago will improve transparency.
- **Accountability.** Lack of healthy work can mean employees depend more on public programs, creating added stress on those programs and increasing costs to the city and taxpayers. There is limited data on which sectors have higher rates of NSWAs and which sectors, or employers, have developed strategies for developing sustainable Healthy Work. Without these data, it is hard to create systems of accountability. We propose working with multiple stakeholders, including employers who try to implement best practices to protect their employees. These coalitions of businesses could help to develop stronger policies to hold businesses accountable for employment relationships.
- **Transformation.** The shift to Healthy Work is an innovative and transformational approach to improving the lives of Chicago residents. Work is a powerful activity that can provide employees with a sense of belonging, meaning, and uniqueness. When the jobs reflect healthy work, employees are able to contribute to organizations and to receive incentives for doing so. When the work is unhealthy, employees may not have the opportunity to reach their full potential, which has implications not only for the workers, but for the quality of service produced by the organizations, and the use of social programs in Chicago.

What are the suggestions from the conversation for Chicago's new mayor to consider?

The mayor-elect has an opportunity to build coalitions to increase awareness and action around healthy work. She could define Healthy Work and shift the social conversation to engage both employees and employers in the effort to create sustainable jobs that benefit all stakeholders, including the city. Here are some proposed initiatives for doing so:

Develop A Strategic Plan: “Healthy Work Chicago 1.0” Following the success of Healthy Chicago 2.0, we propose developing a strategic plan to measure success around healthy work. Chicago could become a model for the state of Illinois and for other cities across the country. Below, we highlight a few areas that could receive attention as part of this plan.

- **Data Collection and Awareness.** We need better data on NSWAs. Which jobs fall into this category and who works in them? Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics collects data on NSWAs, it does so infrequently, it does not fully capture the circumstances, and it does not reflect Chicago directly. How could we differentiate NSWAs that are the primary source of income versus supplemental income? How do we capture individuals with multiple NSWAs, like Lyft or Uber drivers, versus those with jobs in addition to their primary employment? Governmental surveys could be used to further understand these data better.
- **Initiatives for Employees.** Employees need better resources for understanding and accessing the services available to them and the rights that they deserve through healthy work. Stronger collaborations among social services could alleviate some of the burden on employees, who often have to navigate the system alone. For example, the City of Chicago re-employment programs could collaborate with housing referral programs to address both employment and housing needs in concert, making it easier for individuals to connect to needed services. It could also educate employees on their rights and responsibilities with regard to NSWAs and/or to manage the additional employment requirements that come with them. For example, the City of Chicago re-employment programs could provide training to workers on accounting, insurance, and the tax-implications of being an independent contractor or starting their own business.
- **Business Accountability.** Addressing issues of healthy work requires the buy-in of employers, or mandates from the mayor-elect's office. One idea is to lead with positive examples by developing coalitions of business leaders that do support and protect their employees, as a platform to share best practices and articulate the business case for developing a healthy workforce—there might even be ways of creating incentives for businesses that invest in healthy work, beyond the benefits of employing a healthy workforce. This initiative involves raising awareness of the benefits employers receive from cultivating a

healthy workforce and allocating resources to provide training and advice to organizations that want to develop their workforce. This could create win-win situations for the employer and employees. As new businesses or developers move into Chicago, with the promise of new jobs, there is also an opportunity to ensure that the new jobs emphasize healthy work, and that there is a plan to make those jobs available to workers in underserved parts of Chicago.

- **Policy Changes around Public Benefits.** Given that workers in NSWAs often fall through gaps in social services, it is important to think about how these services and benefits are tied to employment and whether there are ways to offer benefits that are not dependent on an employer. Chicago could also follow the example of innovative U.S. cities that have created FMLA policies that expand the federal law and increase access for individuals who might not otherwise be covered.
- **A Culture of Healthy Work in Chicago.** Ultimately, we want to raise the bar for the city and all employers in the city to invest in healthy work. It will be important to put in place methods to collect accurate and reliable evidence for healthy work, the direct and indirect benefits achieved by businesses that invest in healthy work, and the costs to the City and society at-large when employers do not make these investments. Creating a culture of healthy work, supported by data, is the foundation for spreading the message of healthy work.

We hope that our suggestions for the Healthy Work Chicago 1.0 plan could serve as a start for emphasizing healthy work in Chicago. As part of the plan, it would be useful to develop collaborations between different social services and also a coalition of business leaders who consistently emphasize Healthy Work among their own workers. In addition, it would be useful to emphasize new data collection, to fully understand the scope of the problem, and to revisit policies that could disadvantage workers in NSWAs, including work requirements for public benefits.

How could the ideas and suggestions presented in this memo help make the Chicago region better for all Chicagoans?

These suggestions will help to address inequities in employment experienced across Chicago. It could also work to empower employees to seek Healthy Work.