

Annual Report 2020 - 2021



PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for Healthy Work



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work is to advance the health and well-being of people employed in precarious jobs. We aim to **turn unhealthy work into healthy work** by working with communities and organizations to build capacity for action through participatory and collaborative engagement across socio-ecological levels. The Center for Healthy Work actualizes our mission through applied, action-oriented, racial justice-centered research, constituency, and capacity building for systems change, accessible research translation, and consciousness-raising.

Through research and community engagement, the Center for Healthy Work supports pathways to jobs that pay a livable wage, are free from workplace hazards, encourage active participation in the workplace, offer opportunities for advancement, are free from discrimination, and include benefits such as healthcare, paid sick leave, paid vacation, and retirement savings.

The Center for Healthy Work integrates workplace safety and health with a strong focus on risk factors of work that affect health-related behaviors outside of work and impact family and community health. The Center for Healthy Work has undertaken two projects to address this challenge by working at the community level, Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project (GLHW), and the systems level, the Healthy Communities through Healthy Work project (HCHW). The Center for Healthy Work's approach to Total Worker Health® (TWH) builds community capacity to promote worker health among those in precarious employment as well as leveraging systemic initiatives to promote policy, systems, and environmental change.

The accomplishment of our aims will produce evidence gathered through transdisciplinary and participatory racial justice-centered research to explore work as a social and structural determinant of health and identify actions to promote health. More Information about our Center can be found at [**https://healthywork.uic.edu/**](https://healthywork.uic.edu/)

The Center for Healthy Work's strategy and intended Impact are documented in the Theory of Change In Figure 1 on Pages 5-6.

BACKGROUND

The U.S. is experiencing a profound change in employment due to the explosive growth of the contingent workforce, including temp workers, gig workers, part-time workers, and contract workers (Kalleberg, 2009; Oddo et.al., 2020). Employers increasingly prefer such arrangements to cut labor costs and to minimize their obligations under labor and employment laws. This business model is resulting in low-wage employment without benefits for millions of workers, often accompanied by unhealthy working conditions and abusive, discriminatory, and unlawful employment practices (Weil, 2014; Smith & McKenna, 2014). Public health institutions and health care providers can play an important role in addressing the root causes of precarious work as a social determinant of health.

Indeed, there are calls for the public health community to tackle such problems by thinking creatively about effective approaches to promote healthy work, not only inside the workplace, but outside of the workplace in communities and through the use of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change approaches.

There are several factors that may explain why work is often absent in health inequity research including the complexity of work, how work is connected to other socio-demographic determinants (race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status), and the development of occupational health disparity research in isolation from population health inequities research. Addressing work as part of a broader health equity agenda is necessary to gain a more complete understanding of inequitable patterns and advance health equity.

The CHW conducted a yearlong strategic planning process resulting in a **Center for Healthy Work Theory of Change** (Figure 1). The Theory of Change process guides the aims of the Center's research projects and outreach core and serves as a roadmap for the planning and evaluation core. Achieving our aims will result in community, workplace, and policy changes to address precarious employment and improve working conditions and health for workers currently engaged in precarious work.

Theory of Change



Current Conditions

- Changing nature of work due to expanding gig economy and worker misclassification
- Greater health and social inequities in low-income, Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities
- Decreasing safety net and worker protections
- Public and private disinvestment in the workforce
- Poor identification, implementation, and enforcement of worker protection standards
- Workplace-based health and safety interventions rarely address the social determinants of health
- COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on low-income communities

Strategies & Action

The reciprocal relationships between these strategies and actions inform strategic systems change to improve worker and community health:



Research

Produce evidence gathered through transdisciplinary and participatory, applied, and racial justice-centered research to explore work as a social and structural determinant of health and identify actions to promote healthy work



Capacity-Building

Develop and expand the reach of policy, systems, and environmental change initiatives to operationalize Total Worker Health across eco-social levels



Multidirectional Engagement

Build and strengthen multidirectional collaboration and engagement across eco-social levels to create networks that support healthy work



Communication and Consciousness-Raising

Translate and disseminate evidence to promote policies and practices that demonstrate the value and approaches to support healthy work and worker well-being for ALL workers, within and outside workplaces

Definitions

Community: Community is defined broadly as all partners in a work ecosystem, either direct or indirect (employers, workers, community members, worker advocacy organizations, local health departments, policymakers, etc.).

Healthy Work: Healthy work is defined as jobs that are free from workplace hazards, pay a thriving living wage, offer job security, provide benefits such as health insurance, vacation, sick leave, retirement, are free from discrimination and exploitation, offer opportunities for advancement, and provide freedom to express concerns, organize, and participate in workplace decisions. Healthy work is frequently promoted through worksite-based health promotion programming and the control of workplace hazards. Racial justice-centered policy, systems, and environmental change approaches should be implemented to support worker and community health outcomes.

Precarious Work and Who is Impacted: Precarious work is defined as jobs that by nature are unhealthy and/or unsafe/unstable, with irregular hours or hourly pay, low wages, without sufficient health insurance, or access to consistent healthcare, and/or the inability to speak freely to an employer or lack of clarity around who the employer of record is, increased vulnerability to exploitation and discrimination, and limited or no work/life balance. Women, people of color, and immigrants are disproportionately employed in precarious jobs.

Short- and Medium-Term Impact



Research

- Participatory methods are developed and tested to characterize precarious work across eco-social levels and to describe its social, structural, and economic impacts
- The science of Total Worker Health addresses the social and structural determinants of worker health and well-being in communities, local government, and businesses
- Standards for healthy work and well-being beyond the workplace exist



Capacity-Building

- Policy, systems, environmental, and norms-change initiatives support healthy work
- More employers and communities value and implement Total Worker Health
- Academic and citizen scientists are prepared to promote healthy work through participatory engagement with partners across eco-social levels
- Increase in training, skills-building, and wealth-generation strategies to build power in workers, institutions, and communities disproportionately impacted by precarious work



Multidirectional Engagement

- Multidirectional collaboratives work together to shift norms around healthy work
- Build worker power through increased multisectoral action and investment in workers and communities disproportionately impacted by precarious work



Communication and Consciousness-Raising

- Knowledge translation to adopt a standardized, evidence-based definition of healthy work
- Role of healthy work in addressing health and social inequities is illuminated
- The impact of precarious work on mental, physical, organizational, community, racial, and geographic health disparities is prioritized in the development of interventions that address the future of work and human rights
- Structural barriers to healthy work (e.g., racism, documentation status, criminal justice system) are illuminated

Long-Term Impact

- A nationally recognized definition of “healthy work” is established
- Model for local and national policies and programs that provide safety nets
- Shift in political/economic systems around labor market policies, business models, tax policy, social safety nets, employment classification, and job quality
- Substantial investment in policy, systems, environmental, and norms changes that ensure equitable access to healthy work
- Enhanced models of enforcement and accountability that protect the health of US workers
- Community residents, local government, health departments, healthcare systems, and employers that are more prepared for strategic implementation of healthy work policies
- Worker health and well-being initiatives adopted as a sustainable business strategy



Vision

The future of work promotes inclusive and equitable opportunities for healthy work that are valued in civil society, government, and the private sector. Healthy work is:

- A social and structural determinant of health, and a human right
- A pathway to advancing systemic change and racial justice
- A significant contributor to workforce well-being



Underlying Assumptions

Worker health disparities are evident across demographic and geographic divides. Historical and systemic racism and injustices have led to inequitable job opportunities and job quality for women, BIPOC, and immigrants who are disproportionately employed in precarious jobs. Healthy work is frequently promoted through worksite-based health promotion programming and the control of workplace hazards. The Center for Healthy Work aims to address these inequities by working across organizational, urban, suburban, and rural communities to systemically improve worker health. CHW is a research center focused on racial justice–centered strategic policy, systems, and environmental-change initiatives to support communities and institutions in building and sustaining healthy work.

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

5 Years of Research

Building off of nearly 10 years of academic-community collaboration, the **Greater Lawndale Healthy Work** (GLHW) project from the University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Healthy Work, a Center of Excellence for Total Worker Health, launched in 2016 a partnership with the Greater Lawndale community to better understand how work impacts community health and to identify community solutions to promote worker health.

Since the UIC Center for Healthy Work's inception 5 years ago, the partnership has deepened and the research continues to provide data, information and resources to the community.



Unfair barriers prevent residents from finding and keeping good jobs

Many of the jobs

- Cause stress
- Have unpredictable schedules
- Don't pay enough to live on
- Don't offer benefits
- Are physically dangerous or emotionally unsafe
- Require long travel time and distance
- Require background checks, documentation, and educational degrees

Many workers who live in North Lawndale and Little Village are taken advantage of

Employers aren't held accountable when

- Wages are stolen
- Workers aren't valued
- Workers can't speak up against unfair treatment
- Workers are pitted against each other for jobs

We have decent community resources, but they need to come together to help us get and keep good jobs

We need a fair share of community resources that include

- High-quality education
- High-quality job training
- Safe, reliable, affordable child care
- Fair housing and transportation

Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Project

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

5 Years of Research

Strategies



Encourage a shared vision of healthy work



Advocate for workers and enforce policy



Build health-focused community networks

Actions



Build power

- Change workers' and employers' expectations about work
- Create awareness about healthy work practices
- Bring people together to act



Build capacity

- Strengthen resources and networks to help the community act and grow
- Engage policymakers to understand roots of bad work and build healthy work

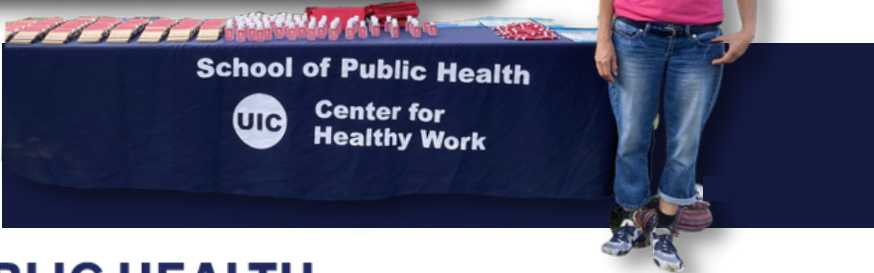


Build equity

- Invest in transportation, childcare and education
- Create more healthy work opportunities for all

Destination

- Sustain a safe and vibrant community
- Stable, local jobs for all residents
- Healthier families
- Financial security for workers



ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

5 Years of Research



The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Project has been busy developing community initiatives to promote healthy work at the neighborhood level. Our team has been working with Yollocalli Arts Reach and Free Spirit Media, two youth media literacy and production organizations in Greater Lawndale, to interview 50 Greater Lawndale residents about their work experiences during COVID-19. Using a trauma-informed distress protocol, our team trained the youth on subjects such as the interview and consent process and human research protections. The stories which will be collected by the youth will be used to characterize the ongoing needs in Greater Lawndale since the start of the pandemic, for use in community education efforts, and for youth podcast production.

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN



Strong Networks

UIC CHW Research Network

In late 2020, the **Center for Healthy Work Research Network** was created to identify University of Illinois researchers currently conducting research that is in line with the Center's mission and our Core Research Projects: the Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project and Healthy Communities through Healthy Work.

The Research Network works collaboratively with the Center to identify emerging trends related to the future of work and to promote best practices to improve worker health and safety.

Current Research Network projects include:

- Boone County Work, Mental Health, and Substance Use Study
- Development of Human-Robot Interaction and Collaboration Systems
- Employment Quality and Health Behaviors in the Aftermath of COVID-19
- Precarious Employment as a Determinant of Overweight and Cardiometabolic Risk
- Worker Center Remote Operations, Informal Learning Needs, and Practices during COVID-19
- Workplace Harassment, Macro-Level Stressors, Substance Use, and Health Outcomes: A Long-Term Follow-Up



Strong Networks

Illinois Total Worker Health Affiliates

The Center for Healthy Work facilitated the first Illinois **Total Worker Health** Affiliates meeting in July 2020 to develop a shared understanding of worker health and safety efforts across agencies. The impetus to call these partners together was around developing shared goals to collaboratively address worker health during COVID-19.

Illinois Total Worker Health (ILTWH) is committed to collaboratively addressing the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) for Healthy Work Design and Well-Being objectives.

As a collective, ILTWH aims to promote knowledge and activities that increase pathways to healthier work for all. The UIC Center for Healthy Work has and will continue to facilitate activities to leverage existing ILTWH efforts and resources to address NORA. In December 2020, ILTWH identified which NORA objectives were a priority for the state.

The network was reconvened in spring 2021 to identify activities around each objective. Partners were provided time to share their organizational efforts and resources tied to the 3 priority ILTWH research gaps identified at the previous meeting. By identifying ILTWH priorities and actions to address them, we aim to collaboratively implement Total Worker Health best practices in the region and expand the reach of Total Worker Health to our priority audiences.

In summer 2021, the CHW UIC began an environmental scan to determine each organization's resources that addressed the 3 priority ILTWH research gaps. The goal of the environmental scan is to focus on the development of a shared library of resources around Total Worker Health.

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN



Strong Networks

Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Council

This academic-community partnership is comprised of worker health and safety leaders and advocates. On the community side, the partnership is led by the **Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Council** comprised of 17 community stakeholders bringing expertise in community health work, faith-based leadership, worker centers and community development. On the academic side, the Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Council is made up of national leaders in occupational and community health sciences, psychosocial research on workplace harassment, discrimination, worker health, and transformative justice. The council also includes post-doctoral fellows, staff, and students who are community residents of Greater Lawndale and/or are bicultural and bilingual.

The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project uses a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach that strives to equitably involve community partners – community members and representatives of local community-based organizations and institutions, in such a way that all partners contribute their expertise and share the decision-making and ownership of the research. CBPR allows for research reciprocity, leveraging existing strength and building capacity of both the community and the academic partner.

All of our activities are conducted in English and Spanish so that monolingual Spanish-speaking residents can participate. This includes simultaneous translation of our meetings and events. Through the integration of scientific, legal, and community expertise, we are conducting groundbreaking research to root Total Worker Health in community development, positioning worker health as an integral component of community health via the development and testing of evidence-based interventions.

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

4

Strong Networks

External Advisory Committee

As we move into the next 5 years of funding, we have assembled an External Advisory Committee that will enhance community partnerships with research and outreach teams, while expanding opportunities for creating networks between and among communities and community-based organizations.

The EAC will play a key role in assuring that interventions developed by the Center represent activities that are respectful of workers, deliverable by communities and organizations, focused on relevant risk factors, and likely to positively impact the health of people in precarious employment. They will also serve to advise the center investigators about key issues and needs, assist in planning and evaluation activities to ensure the Center is achieving our aims, and to facilitate network building and communication and consciousness-raising about the role and value of healthy work and workforce wellbeing.



ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

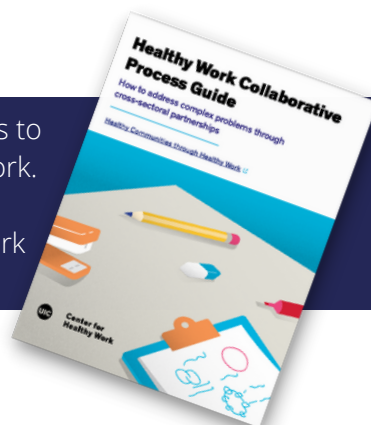
Healthy Work Collaborative Research Briefs

To develop a structure that best supported the learning of public health and healthcare participants, the Center for Healthy Work's **Healthy Work Collaborative** invited technical assistance providers from the labor sector including worker centers, union representatives, community organizers, and other worker's rights organizations to provide training to public health and healthcare practitioners.

The aim of the HWC was that, through Action Learning, participants would foster new networks and partnerships for their organizations, increase understanding and skills to address precarious work and its root causes, and leverage initiatives that address these root causes in collaborative networks.

Findings from the Healthy Work Collaborative were documented in 3 peer-reviewed publications which the Center's Communications and Outreach Group adapted as 3 **research briefs** to ensure access to evidence-based best practices.

Bonus: The Healthy Work Collaborative Process Guide outlines four steps to comprehensively address and solve complex problems like precarious work. Each step presented in this guide builds upon the next. These steps and their corresponding action steps can be used to implement a Healthy Work Collaborative in your community.



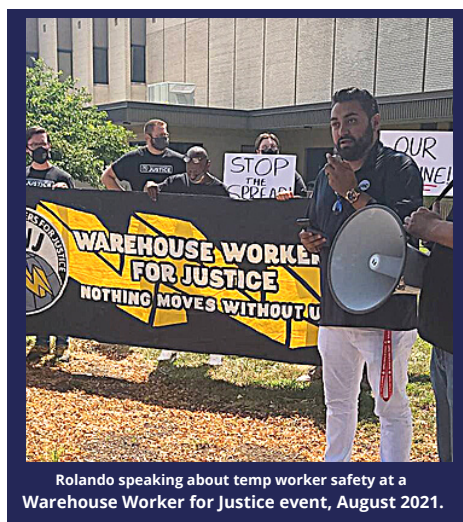
ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

2 Staff Changes

The University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work and Great Lakes Center for Occupational Health and Safety are excited to welcome Rolando Favela to our team as the new Outreach Coordinator!

Rolando started at UIC in June 2021. His dedication to environmental and occupational equity, as well as his vast experience in Chicago, will continue to advance our Center's mutual commitment to climate and worker justice.

"I am a recent graduate from DePaul University's Masters of Environmental Science program. I like using the skills from my program as a lens for my community work in green spaces. Over the last few years, I have worked with multiple community groups that tackle social and environmental injustices on the Southwest side of Chicago. Through my work with these organizations, I have worked to help communities reach health equity."



Rolando speaking about temp worker safety at a Warehouse Worker for Justice event, August 2021.

Longtime worker health and safety advocate Marsha Love retired in December 2020 after over 30 years as an educator and researcher in occupational safety and health. Marsha worked with labor unions, worker centers, faith-based organizations, non-profit workforce development organizations, and community groups to develop customized curricula and train-the-trainer workshops to build their organizational capacity to address workplace hazards. With a long-standing commitment to advancing health protections for low-wage and immigrant workers in hazardous occupations and precarious employment situations, Marsha will continue her involvement with the Center for Healthy Work's External Advisory Committee. **Congratulations, Marsha!**

ANNUAL COUNTDOWN

1 Center Grant Renewal

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has awarded funding to ten Centers of Excellence for Total Worker Health®. Four new Centers of Excellence for Total Worker Health have joined our six existing Centers. The Centers are hubs for TWH-related research and practice that build the scientific evidence base necessary to develop new solutions for complex occupational safety and health problems.

The comprehensive nature of Total Worker Health (TWH) approaches requires innovative thinking to design and inform current policies, programs, and practices that advance worker well-being. The Center for Healthy Work aims to accomplish this by:

- Further identifying and analyzing factors that impact the health of workers in precarious employment using surveillance data and community-based participatory research methods
- Developing and assessing the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve the health of workers in precarious employment
- Disseminating effective interventions by creating synergistic partnerships among community, employer, and healthcare organizations that will lead to long-term improvements in the health of workers in precarious employment

Congrats
to the Centers of Excellence
on their continued success!



HIGHLIGHTS

Congratulations to Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project Director, Dr. Jeni Hebert-Beirne, and outreach coordinator, Dolores Castaneda who were awarded the American Public Health Association's Innovative Curriculum award for their course, *Community Organizing & Community-based Participatory Research*.



The Center for Healthy Work participated In the American Industrial Hygiene Association's **Healthier Workplaces, A Healthier World** which draws awareness to the many aspects for creating a healthy and safe workplace and the innovation taking place. Our feature highlights the Importance of working with community partners on the safety and wellbeing of workers in minority and historically underserved populations.



As part of the annual **"Workers Memorial Week"** led by the National Council of Occupational Safety and Health (COSH), the Center for Healthy Work, Great Lakes Center for Occupational Health and Safety, the DePaul University Labor Education Center, and the Chicago Federation of Labor initiated efforts to relaunch a Chicago Area COSH. The Center has engaged partners in interviews and a visioning process to determine what reigniting the network could look like. A preliminary initiative of Chicago Jobs with Justice and the Chicago Area COSH, is *Community Action for Worker Safety*, which aims to raise public awareness of worker health and safety Issues to serve as a mechanism of labor law enforcement.



Together with the Center for Healthy Work, the Community Writing Project and Workers Teatro **documented the stories of temp workers in the Chicago area.** Workers shared their experiences of work, health, and well-being during COVID-19 in a digital and print magazine and through live and recorded performances. The Center for Healthy Work continues to collect worker stories with the Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project.

HIGHLIGHTS



In partnership with the Great Lakes Center for Occupational Safety and Health and the Policy, Practice, and Prevention Research Center, and the UIC Center for Healthy Work developed and disseminated the **COVID-19 Guide for Workers in Illinois** in both English and Spanish. The guide shares resources and information for workers, employers, worker advocacy organizations, and stakeholders across Illinois to ensure the safety and health of workers, their families, and communities. To date, the guide is the most comprehensive guidance for Illinois workers that details both state and federal resources.

In partnership with the UIC Collaboratory for Health Justice, the Center for Healthy Work supported the COVID-19 contract tracing efforts of the Chicago Department of Public Health by developing **Considerations for Hiring Community-Based Contact Tracers: A Handbook**. The guide has been shared with funded community-based organizations throughout Chicago and aims to create shared value around the employment and wellbeing of contact tracers.

The Center for Healthy Work also supported the University of Illinois Chicago, the Cook County, and Illinois Departments of Public Health, in their COVID-19 response through program evaluation, public health workforce development, and working to facilitate worker health and safety equity across communities.

KEY TERMS & ACRONYMS

Complex problems

Issues that require various and often competing perspectives and solutions, such as precarious work. Because of the complexity, these problems are best addressed using policy, system, and environmental strategies.

Environmental scan (ES)

The process of gathering information from organizations and partners through an interview style approach to understand stakeholder perceptions of complex problems, as well as ongoing initiatives addressing it.

Healthy Communities for Healthy Work (HCHW)

The HCHW project is a participatory action research (PAR) project designed to include multiple cycles of systematic inquiry, analysis and planning, and action across three phases: Plan, Implement, and Evaluate (Stringer 2014). The goal of the HCHW project is to bring public health and healthcare organizations together with labor partners (unions, worker centers, worker advocacy organizations) to understand and explore initiatives that may address health in the context of precarious employment.

Healthy Work Collaborative (HWC)

A project by the University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work that aims to change the perception of healthy work by addressing root causes of precarious work at a systemic level.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

A federal organization responsible for researching and making recommendations that promote workplace wellness and health. The Total Worker Health[®] approach, which focuses on promoting a hazard-free workplace, is a NIOSH program. The University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work is a Center of Excellence for Total Worker Health.

Precarious work

Workplace experiences that give rise to instability, lack of protection, insecurity, and social and economic vulnerability.

Policy, systems, and environmental change strategies (PSE)

Approaches to respond to complex problems by targeting legislative, organizational, and environmental change with the goal of creating long-term and viable improvements to a population's health.

Structural determinants of health

Systemic mechanisms that create and reinforce social class, highlighting positions of status, power, and disparities in access to resources.

Total Worker Health (TWH)

Total Worker Health[®] is defined as policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being. Total Worker Health is a holistic approach to worker well-being. It acknowledges risk factors related to work that contribute to health problems previously considered unrelated to work. The Total Worker Health approach seeks to improve well-being in the American workforce for the benefit of workers, employers, and the nation by protecting safety and enhancing health and productivity.

CHW	Center for Healthy Work
ES	Environmental scan
HCHW	Healthy Communities for Healthy Work project
HWC/HWC MASC	Healthy Work Collaborative to Map Action for Social Change
NIOSH	National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
NORA	National Occupational Research Agenda
PAR	Participatory action research
PSE	Policy, systems, and environmental change strategies
SDOH	Social Determinants of Health/Structural Determinants of Health
TA	Technical assistance
TWH	Total Worker Health [®]
UIC	University of Illinois Chicago



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**Everyone deserves
healthy work.**

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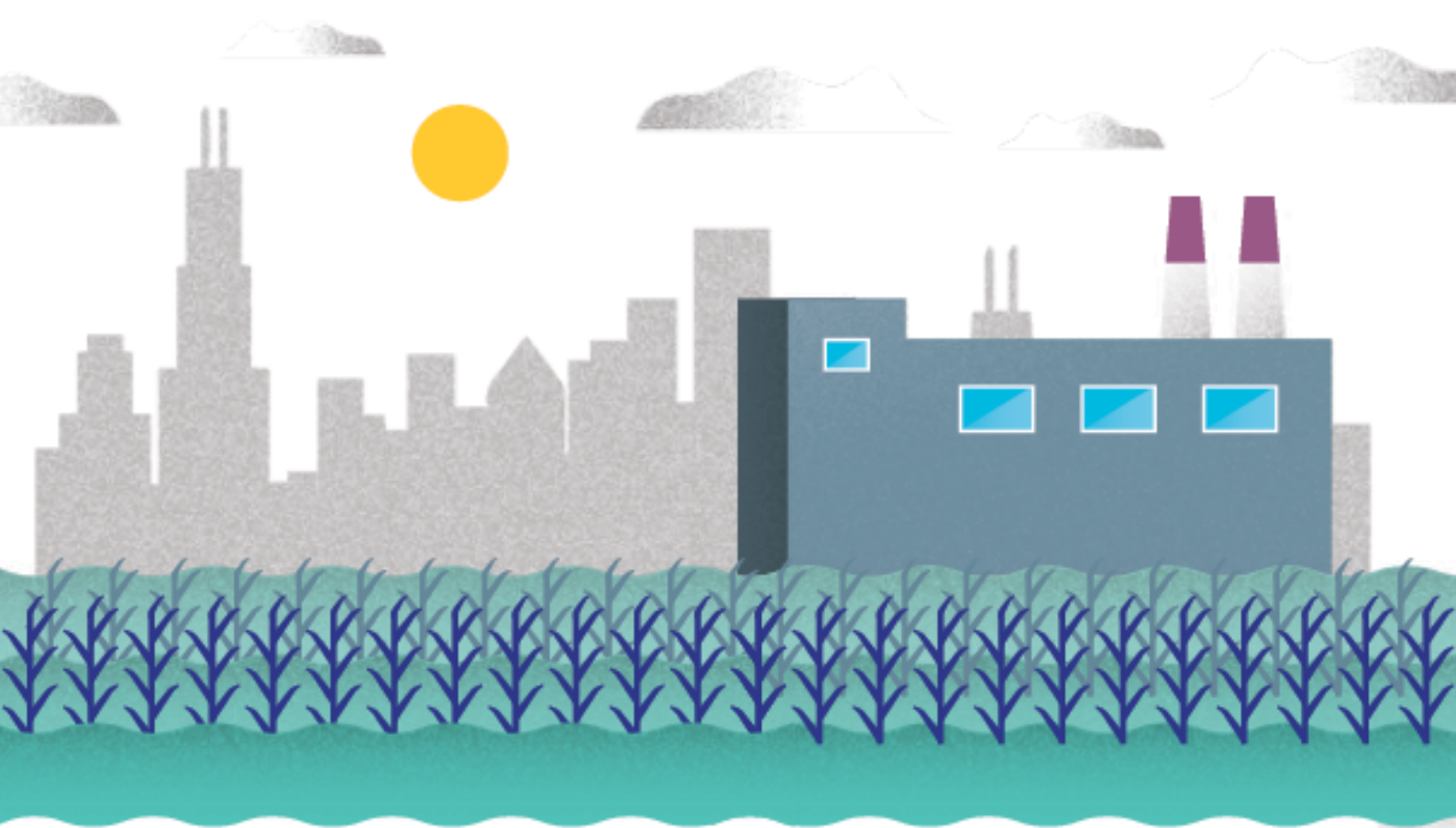
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