



**PUBLIC HEALTH**

Center for Healthy Work



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# ANNUAL REPORT



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# Message from the Director

Dr. Kirsten Almberg, PhD, MS, became the Director of the Center for Healthy Work in August 2022, following Dr. Lorraine Conroy's retirement. Dr. Almberg is a Research Assistant Professor in the School of Public Health's Division of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences.

I am deeply honored to serve as the new Director of the University of Illinois Chicago Center for Health Work as I have long admired the Center, its faculty, staff, and students, and most of all, its impact both locally and nationally. An occupational epidemiologist by trade, I have spent years researching classic occupational hazards like dust exposures and injuries, however, in recent years I have broadened my research to examine the psychosocial health effects of work. This expansion of my personal research mirrors the Total Worker Health movement more broadly, one which recognizes work as an important structural determinant of health

## Kirsten Almberg



and acknowledges that work arrangements – including pay, precarity, power dynamics, health benefits, shift work, to name a few – are just as important to study, address, and improve as classical occupational hazards like dust exposure.

The landscape of American work has been shifting for decades as a result of globalization, automation, a decline in unionization, and an increase in nonstandard work; the COVID-19 pandemic brought these issues, coupled with our legacies of racial and economic inequities, front and center and has forced the recognition that work impacts community health. This is why we at the Center for Healthy Work ground our efforts in racial justice. We recognize that the inequities and disparities seen in occupational health stem from our nation's legacy of slavery and discrimination.

Achieving healthy and safe work for all workers is complex and the Center for Healthy Work is at the forefront of this effort by identifying and promoting best practices for policy change at local, state, and national levels and collaborating with diverse stakeholders such as worker centers, labor unions, social justice groups, government agencies, social service providers, and employers to better equip communities to advocate for healthier working conditions.



# About the Center for Healthy Work

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's approach to *Total Worker Health*® 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.

Our vision is a future of work that promotes inclusive and equitable opportunities for healthy work, and healthy work is recognized as a social and structural determinant of health and a human right, a pathway to advancing systemic change and racial justice, and a significant contributor to workforce well-being.

In the last year alone, our Greater Lawndale Healthy Work Project has launched an exciting Lotería game – akin to bingo – that aims to inform and challenge assumptions or beliefs about work in the Greater Lawndale communities of Chicago. In addition to its effectiveness as a consciousness-raising tool, we are also incredibly proud to announce that Lotería will be featured in the David J. Sencer Centers for Disease Control Museum in late 2024.

Our Workforce Health and Well-being for All Project is doing exciting work to promote worker well-being for all employees in a large and complex healthcare system by identifying systemic, social, and other barriers that prevent specific groups of workers, often the most precarious workers, from participating in employer-provided health programs.

As you read about the great work we've done in the following pages, I hope you come away as inspired as I am by the innovative and impactful work of our Center.

Thank you,  
Kirsten Almberg, PhD, MS



# Greater Lawndale Lotería

**Goal:** The long-term goal of Greater Lawndale Lotería is to promote the recognition of healthy work as a social justice priority in Chicago's Greater Lawndale communities. The short-term goal of the game is to inform critical dialogue and challenge knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs related to work and health in Greater Lawndale among stakeholders, such as community members, youth, small business owners, and workers.

**Synopsis:** Greater Lawndale (GL) Lotería is an evidence-informed, historically grounded, and worker justice-themed educational game that was developed through a collaborative effort between community partners in Greater Lawndale and the Center for Healthy Work.

Greater Lawndale Lotería includes 54 cards of worker types, workplaces, and neighborhood landmarks found in GL designed by local artist, Ronica Hicks. Each card is accompanied by a narrative that describes the precarious nature of work that workers are exposed to such as workplace hazards and systemic exploitation; the valuable contributions that workers provide in their workplace and community; findings from our research and history about the labor movement in Chicago; and know-your-rights information about laws affecting workers.

To date, community stakeholders such as, faith leaders, small business owners, youth, and workers have played the game. A mixed-methods evaluation on participants' knowledge, attitudes and belief as well as a participatory, qualitative head, heart and feet component is administered to participants at the end of the game.

**Next Steps:** Following successful presentations of GL Lotería at the Total Worker Health Symposium and the Chicago Consortium for Community Engagement, the Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project (GLHW) will continue to pilot the game. The GLHW project team plans to facilitate gameplay with small business owners in the Greater Lawndale community.

GLHW is currently in the process of producing physical copies of the game and disseminating to our community partners. Future plans include continuing to play GL Lotería with local youth to inform dialogue about work in their community and sharing the game at community events. The GLHW team will produce a toolkit that will accompany the game so that it can be replicated by other community-based participatory research teams who hope to address precarious work in their communities. **GL Lotería will be featured in the David J. Sencer Centers for Disease Control Museum in late 2024.** Any individual or organization can download a copy of the game on our website: <https://healthywork.uic.edu/greater-lawndale-loteria/>



# Worker Cooperative Feasibility Study

**Goal:** The goal of the Greater Lawndale Co-Op 101 Workshops was to increase community ownership and wealth by increasing opportunities for Greater Lawndale worker cooperatives. The project is using a mixed methods neighborhood-wide feasibility and readiness study to expand worker cooperatives and to create a community-informed success metric for cooperatives that balances financial profitability with social outcomes such as community ownership, leadership, and civic engagement.

**Synopsis:** To measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and actions related to cooperatives



The number of worker cooperatives is growing. The Center for Healthy Work supports opportunities for community members to get involved by increasing pathways to healthier work through worker owned and operated business models.

among participants of the Co-Op 101 workshops, pre-and post-surveys were distributed to community members before and after workshops on cooperatives. Over 95% of those who participated in the workshops agreed that worker cooperatives would add great value to the neighborhood such as more jobs, goods, and services. Key findings are posted on our [website](#).

The Worker Cooperative Feasibility study was requested by community partners who provide resources to and build the capacity of worker cooperatives in Chicago. The Co-Op Feasibility study will address three domains of feasibility: acceptability, demand, and practicality. GLHW is using survey research, focus groups, and case study methodologies to measure these domains.

**Next Steps:** The Greater Lawndale Community Council, made up of three subcommittees, will meet with community partners and external partners to provide guidance as GLHW further develops the study. The project team will complete a literature review to inform our continued intervention development around worker cooperatives.

**"I am now more interested  
than before in what  
this kind of wealth-building  
model can do for our  
community."**

-Co-Op 101 Workshop Participant

# Research for Policy Change



**Goal:** The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project (GLHW) conducted two policy analyses to identify barriers and facilitators to healthy work for informal workers and workers hired through temporary staffing agencies.

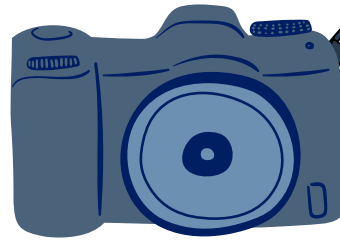
**Synopsis:** A policy analysis was conducted to identify policies that could support informal workers in the Greater Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago. With the guidance of our community partners, Equity and Transformation (EAT) and Street Vendors Association of Chicago (SVAC), GLHW concentrated on policies that could make it easier to establish and operate home-based businesses in Greater Lawndale. GLHW analyzed the home-based business (HBB) ordinance, its likely impact, and restrictions. Findings from the Policy Analysis to Support Informal Workers in Greater Lawndale are reported online. GLHW collaborated with two attorneys from the Raise the Floor Alliance, a

coalition of workers' centers in Chicago, to complete a second policy analysis examining changes to the Workers' Compensation system in Illinois. The objective was to support temporary workers' health by building capacity among community members, community-based organizations, and local government.

Pictured above and available online, GLHW created a process guide for conducting policy analyses in academic-community spaces.

**Next Steps:** In collaboration with the Center for Healthy Work's Communication & Outreach Group (COG), GLHW will create a graphically designed report for *Protecting Temporary Staffing Workers in Illinois: A Policy Analysis*. The COG and GLHW plan to facilitate a series of teach-ins on the *Policy Analysis to Support Informal Workers* with EAT and SVAC base members to provide policy education. GLHW also plans to collaborate with UIC Law School, and specifically the Health Equity, Law & Policy Program.

# Greater Lawndale Photovoice



**Goal:** The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project (GLHW) aims to use photovoice to identify healing-centered interventions that support informal workers (street vendors, in-home candy store owners, in-home hair stylists). GLHW will engage policymakers in identifying pathways to healthy work for community members by reducing barriers to home-based business ownership.

**Synopsis:** The GLHW Photovoice initiative emerged from a gap of knowledge identified following the completion of the Greater Lawndale Community Survey. While we developed robust knowledge about precarity levels among workers with employers, there is still very little knowledge about informal workers. Little is known about how informal workers contribute to community and neighborhood health. There is a need to better understand how informal workers serve as social connectors within neighborhoods and how they contribute to the social fabric of communities. The GLHW Photovoice Initiative uses photovoice, a participatory research method in which participants use photography and narratives to identify priority issues and to build off of the policy analysis to support informal workers.

GLHW piloted a photovoice protocol in a Master's level public health course titled Community Organizing/Community-based Participatory Research in the Spring 2022 semester co-taught by GLHW Principal Investigator Jeni Hebert-Beirne, and research associate, Dolores Castaneda. The pilot study was focused on graduate student workers.

**Next Steps:** GLHW plans to develop a manuscript that explains the use of photovoice as both an educational tool in graduate class settings and as a preparatory tool in community-based participatory research. GLHW will also brainstorm with community stakeholders on opportunities to educate policymakers on how work impacts community health.



## Workforce Health and Well-being for All As a Sustainable Business Strategy **Scoping Review**

**Goal:** A research project of the Center for Healthy Work, Workforce Health and Well-being for All as a Sustainable Business Strategy (4All) asserts that employers are key stakeholders in creating an equitable and healthy future of work and must recognize their role in contributing to workforce and

population health. The 4All project is conducting a scoping review, the goal of which is to assess what organizations have done to advance a culture of health and encourage workplace health promotion activities for all employees.

**Synopsis:** The 4All research team has refined their research question, created search criteria, developed inclusion/exclusion criteria for selecting articles that would fit in the scoping review, and built a list of existing articles around the topic. We are currently sifting through a final set of articles to ensure that they meet our inclusion/exclusion criteria and will start coding for themes. Preliminary findings demonstrate that research on organizations that have created a culture of health comes mostly from European countries, where social benefits are very different than in the United States. While these articles seem interesting and relevant to broader questions about designing a culture of health, we have excluded them from our scoping review to focus on the United States. Peer-reviewed literature reviewed to date has disregarded the organizational context. *What did the organization do to support the program? What other initiatives did the organization have to support employee health and well-being?* The 4All team aims to examine not only the features of workplace health promotion programs, but also the organizational conditions or culture that can make them successful.

**Next Steps:** To complete the scoping review, 4All is currently finalizing the list of articles and beginning the coding process. This literature review has informed questions for organizational leadership interviews and will also inform the development of health promotion workshops for the organization. A scoping review manuscript when will be published by the end of the year.

Leadership interviews will help 4All better understand the organizational context of employee health and well-being at a partner healthcare system. The Healthcare System is a champion of innovative methods for improving the health and well-being of their community. They are committed to advancing employee well-being and even have internal teams devoted to those topics. However, even in an organization that wants to advance employee health, there have been challenges with program design and uptake. Through the leadership interviews, we plan to hear from senior leadership first-hand about their expectations and plans for advancing employee health. 4All hopes to understand the goals of the program and how they are being perceived in practice. The project aims to localize any disconnect between employee needs and leadership perceptions. It is possible that leaders all perceive health promotion in the same way, but it is also possible that there could be conflicting priorities within the organization that change how leaders at certain levels or in certain departments balance employee health with organizational tasks.



## Workforce Health and Well-being for All As a Sustainable Business Strategy

# Data Warehouse

**Goal:** Workforce Health and Well-being for All as a Sustainable Business Strategy (4All) is collaborating with a comprehensive healthcare system to implement new culture of health initiatives by examining existing organizational datasets to track employees' individual well-being, individual performance, and organizational performance.

**Synopsis:** Existing organizational datasets will be combined into a data warehouse which will allow 4All to track the potential impact of culture of health initiatives on employees and to examine the business case for developing a culture of health. 4All expects that sustaining workplace health promotion

initiatives will be easier if the project team can leverage existing organizational systems, rather than developing new ones from scratch. The research question is focused on creating a culture of health for all employees, including those who are often overlooked (e.g., part-time workers, shift workers, front-line workers). 4All will use the data warehouse to evaluate the differential impacts of health and well-being initiatives across departments and employee roles. Some of the data that can inform our project include data about workplace practices/policies (e.g., performance measures, performance incentives, leave management, wages, and benefits design) and organizational structures (e.g., work relationships and interdependencies, work roles, and work-life interactions). In the data warehouse, 4All plans to link organizational data with measures of employee engagement and satisfaction, absenteeism and turnover, work output and quality, and ultimately organizational performance that are regularly collected by the organization.

**Next Steps:** Once the datasets are fully integrated into a data warehouse, 4All plans to use it to learn more about health and well-being in the organization, including differences in health benefits access or use across job categories and job types. 4All will also use these data to inform focus group recruitment.

# In a Year's Work

**Goal:** In a Year's Work™ is an educational game that demonstrates how different workers within the same organization experience the social determinants of health. The overall objectives of the game are to: 1) Describe how different work arrangements may impact worker well-being; 2) Identify workplace policies that promote Total Worker Health for all employees within an organization, including temporary and contract workers; and 3) Recognize opportunities and audiences for game play as an educational tool.

**Synopsis:** In the game, each player takes on a unique character: the CEO, the HR

**“As the CEO, it was easier to make the ‘wrong choice’ and you would still be okay.”**

**“[The game] really highlighted the compromise of health and having an impact.”**

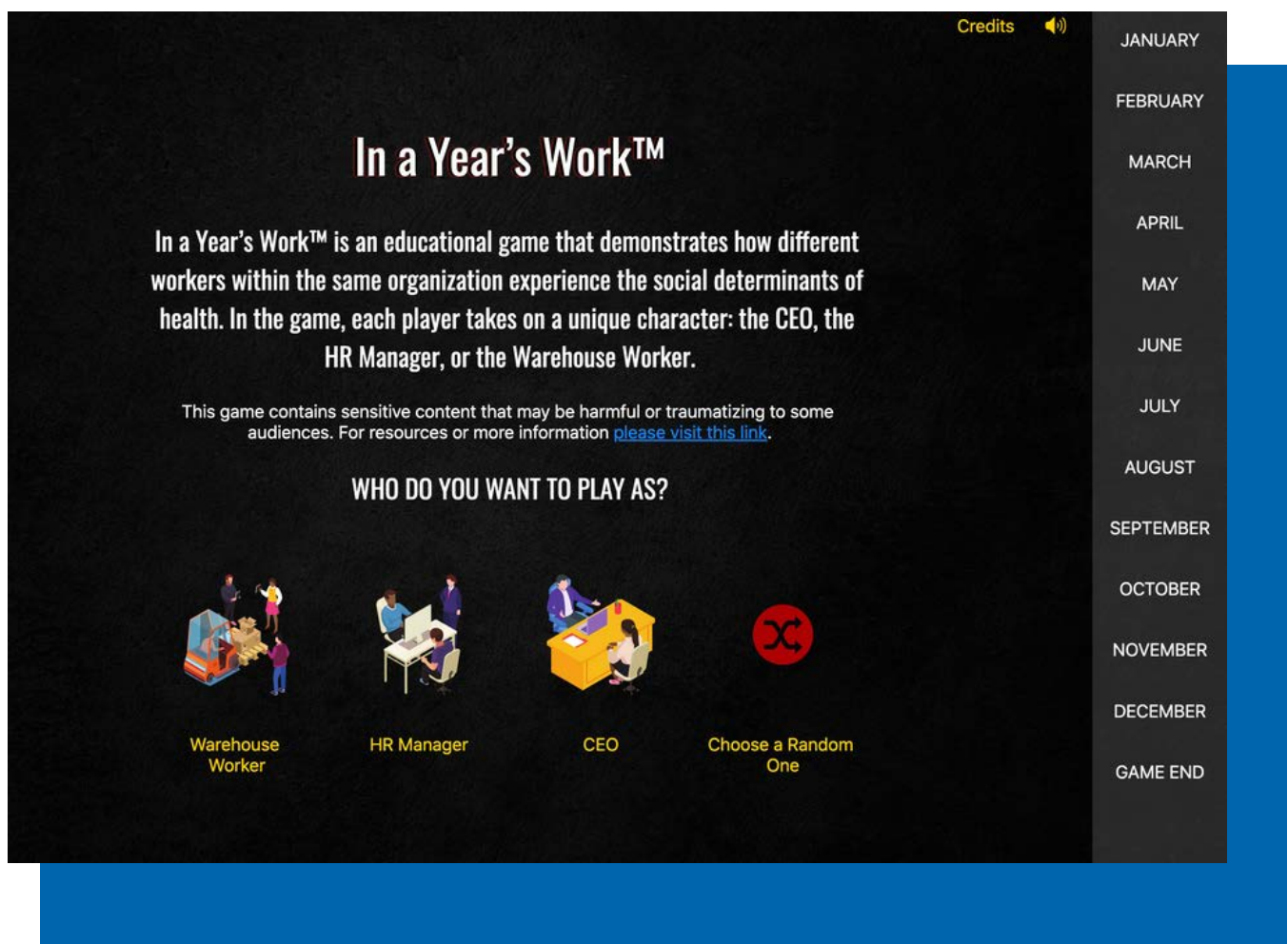
–Focus Group Participants

**“I felt terrible, especially for the Temporary Warehouse Worker. I got fired around August because I kept choosing unionizing and power to people. In my mind I thought I was doing the right thing.”**

–Focus Group Participant

manager, or the Temporary Warehouse Worker. Each character must navigate unique stressors and health challenges both at work and at home by making decisions, big and small to live a healthy life. Different scenarios require players to make choices that will impact the health and happiness of their character. Players are confronted with situations that force them to address precarious work, and create avenues for healthier work, in their workplace. Scenarios for the game were informed by Center for Healthy Work research project findings. Over the past year, the Communication and Outreach Group (COG) conducted multiple focus groups with diverse partners to garner feedback around game play as well as observe knowledge transfer. Partners that participated in focus groups included Total Worker Health Affiliates, Research Network investigators, Great Lakes Center for Occupational Health and Safety trainees and students. Those who participated shared that they enjoyed learning about work arrangements in a novel way; blending entertainment and learning helped players understand new concepts. Individual shared that they learned about the ways in which precarity is associated with all positions and statuses. Finally, the realistic scenarios made the content relatable and resonate with most players.

**Next Steps:** Focus group participants and subject matter experts within the Center for Healthy Work have provided recommendations for the next version of the game. In the next year, the COG will continue in partnership with the TESA Collective to finalize the game. The next version of the game will include a new character: the Call Center Representative! Focus group participants requested an additional character to bridge the gap in work arrangements from a Temporary Warehouse Worker to a mid-level HR Manager. In order to measure the outcomes of the game, the COG will implement an optional pre- and post-test for game players. The game evaluation will utilize a vignette-based survey to measure changes in attitudes and beliefs among game players. For increased access, the game was converted to a mobile friendly format in October 2022. The current version of the game was shared at the 3rd International Total Worker Health Symposium and the COG looks forward to sharing the next version in Spring 2023. Future versions of the game will be shared as part of the core curriculum for incoming School of Public Health graduate students.



# Healthy Work Collaborative

**Goal:** The Healthy Work Collaborative aims to build networks across public health, healthcare, and labor to develop a shared understanding of precarious work; identify pathways to healthier work; and explore how policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes can improve health in the context of precarious employment.

**Synopsis:** Hosted at the UIC School of Public Health, the Healthy Work Collaborative (HWC) invited public health and health care organizations to engage with labor, government, and non-profit organizations in a collaborative learning experience. Eight teams of multi-sectoral partners participated in the six-session exploratory process. Representatives from the labor sector provided technical assistance and facilitated training on Power Mapping, Theory of Change, and Action Planning to help public health and healthcare organizations define precarious work and build organizational capacity to create change. Through mini-grant funding administered by the Center for Healthy Work, project teams implemented projects to institutionalize PSE strategies explored during the Healthy Work Collaborative process. At the end of the implementation phase, each team produced case studies that were documented in [Healthy Work Collaborative: Examples from the Field](#). Following the production of the case studies, the Center for Healthy Work's Communication & Outreach Group (COG) developed the Healthy Work Collaborative Process Guide which outlines four steps that present critical activities to address complex problems within a defined target area (whether a community, city, county, or state). Each step presented in the guide builds upon the next. The four steps can be used to address precarious work, occupational safety and health disparities, as well as other complex problems.

**Next Steps:** In this past year, the COG has partnered with Candice Majors, a Chicago based Cinematographer with over 8 years of experience behind the camera. With her expertise, the Process Guide is being turned into the HWC Online Toolkit. Each of the Healthy Work Collaborative steps are being transformed into short videos that include interviews with subject matter experts as well as engaging and entertaining animation to help bring life to large theoretical concepts such as Power Mapping and Theory of Change. Our goal is to develop videos to capture interest and provide introductory materials for agencies to implement their own Healthy Work Collaborative. For agencies that may be interested in implementing their own Healthy Work Collaborative, the COG will provide supplementary resources and technical assistance.

The COG will also be supporting the Cook County Department of Public Health's Worker Protection Program in Spring 2023. The Worker Protection Program aims to increase the capacity of suburban Cook County organizations to address precarious work for their constituents. The Worker Protection Program will implement elements of the Healthy Work Collaborative with technical assistance from the COG.



From left to right, Amanda Mehl, Public Health Administrator at the Boone County Health Department, discusses her participation in the Healthy Work Collaborative; Felipe Tendick-Matesanz, Regional Health Officer at the Cook County Department of Public Health, demonstrates Power Mapping; Elizabeth Fisher, Deputy Director of the Center for Healthy Work provides a lesson on developing a Theory of Change.



# Healthy Work Collaborative BEHIND THE SCENES

# Research Network

**Goal:** The UIC Center for Healthy Work Research Network aims to connect academic, organizational, and industry researchers in Chicago who are conducting research on the future of work and the connection between work and health, particularly low-wage or precarious work.

**Synopsis:** The Research Network works collaboratively with the Center for Healthy Work to identify emerging trends related to the future of work and to promote best practices to improve worker health and safety. As a member of the Research Network, the Communication and Outreach Group (COG) provides outreach and dissemination support including but not limited to: study recruitment assistance, social media campaigns, website creation, and the development of

research briefs. In an effort to encourage cross-institution collaboration, the COG expanded the Research Network to serve investigators at DePaul and Roosevelt University.

This year, the Research Network developed a shared resource, the **Precarious Work Research Log**, that aims to catalog the existing studies that measure or define precarious work, including research from Research Network members. Through this activity, Research Network members are better able to identify measurement scales they may be able to use in future studies and potential areas of collaboration. Consistent definitions of and measurement scales for precarious work will help to build consensus around the health impacts of precarious work.

New Research Network projects include: the Food Chain Workers' Livelihood Project, the Cook County Worker Protection Program, and The Aging Workforce and Feelings of Empathy and Trauma at Work.

**Next Steps:** The COG will continue to expand the Research Network to other institutions. In particular, the COG hopes to include Total Worker Health affiliate organizations based in Illinois; Total Worker Health affiliates conduct research around occupational safety and health and the future of work.



# Annual Recap 2021–2022

97

## Knowledge Translation and Dissemination

The Center for Healthy Work logged 97 knowledge translation and dissemination activities. Activities include didactic presentations, manuscripts, community meetings, community outreach (i.e., tabling), media appearances, infographics and research briefs.

11

## Mentoring and Advising

The Center for Healthy Work supported 11 students, either through funded research assistantships or capstone projects.

19

## Investigator Development and Achievements

Nineteen development activities and achievements were logged by Center for Healthy Work investigators. An example activity includes serving as an advisory board member for the Total Worker Health Society.

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## Additional Grants and Funding

Center for Healthy Work investigators identified 4 grant opportunities and received funding through the Alpha Foundation and American Rescue Plan Act.

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