



FRONT LINES

COMMUNITY HEALTH AT THE FOREFRONT
OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Interviews and stories by
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FRONT LINES is a project of ESPERANZA HEALTH CENTERS documenting our response to the COVID-19 pandemic on Chicago's Southwest side.

On March 8, 2020, Illinois reported its first case of community transmission of COVID-19, prompting a flurry of public health efforts aimed at stemming the spread of disease. Within days, public schools were closed, bars and restaurants shut their doors, and a statewide shelter-in-place order was issued by Governor J.B. Pritzker. Terms like "social distancing," "N-95," and "flattening the curve" entered our collective vocabulary seemingly overnight, while across Chicago, life ground quickly to a halt.

But as some Chicagoans settled comfortably into lives of quarantine, working from home, and eventually boredom, another story was unfolding in poorer neighborhoods throughout the city. Here, crowded housing made social distancing impossible. Crippling unemployment threw entire families into turmoil. Those working in jobs deemed "essential" risked daily exposure as disease spread relentlessly through their workplaces and communities. And neighborhood health centers, like Esperanza, suddenly found themselves on the front lines of a pandemic with only a handful of tools against a deadly, inscrutable virus.

These narratives tell the story of what Esperanza witnessed during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what we did in response.

All patients' names throughout the report have been changed, and in some cases, potentially identifying information has also been changed.



COVID-19 street art in Pilsen doorway. Artist unknown. March 30, 2020