



## FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES

Manasi Jayaprakash, MD, MPH  
Center for Asian Health Equity  
773-834-6600

## Center for Asian Health Equity awarded \$4.25 million CDC Grant to Prevent Colorectal Cancer

The University of Chicago Medicine's Center for Asian Health Equity has received a five-year, \$4.25 million federal grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to increase colorectal cancer screenings, particularly among underserved and rural communities in Illinois.

Illinois Colorectal Cancer Alliance to Reduce Mortality and Enhance Screening (IL-CARES) builds on CDC's Colorectal Cancer Control Program, Cook County Colon Cancer Alliance to Reignite and Enhance Screening program (2015-2020), that worked with community health centers and select rural local health departments to address colorectal cancer disparities and increase screening rates up to 30% at partnering health systems.

"Colorectal cancer is treatable and beatable if caught in the early stages," said Dr. Karen Kim, Professor of Medicine, Director of the Center for Asian Health Equity, gastroenterologist and Principal Investigator for the program. "IL-CARES will mobilize health systems and county health departments around the State to collectively engage in cancer prevention and control," said Dr. Kim.

IL-CARES is partnering with the following health systems serving the vulnerable populations and communities extending from urban to rural setting:

- Friend Health - urban health center
- VNA Health Care - suburban health center
- Community Health & Emergency Services, Inc. - rural health center
- Southern 7 Health Department - rural local health department

Dr. Sunderbruch, Medical Director at VNA Health Care said "We are eager to participate in the IL-CARES program as this will help bring effective and convenient colorectal cancer screening to our patients, especially in these challenging times."

Evidence demonstrates that colorectal cancer screening saves lives. Colorectal cancer screening not only detects disease early but also prevents cancer by finding and removing precancerous polyps through colonoscopy. While the US has witnessed tremendous progress against colorectal cancer due to increased screening rates over the past several decades and IL has

witnessed pockets of improvement due to targeted efforts, IL's screening rate still lags behind at 66.7%, placing it in the last quartile across the Nation, according to Federal data. With the current coronavirus pandemic, colorectal cancer screening has declined 86% according to an analysis by Epic Health Research Network. It is even more essential for us to bolster our efforts around increasing CRC screening.

Colorectal cancer particularly affects the racial/ethnic minorities with African Americans having the highest mortality rates from CRC and Hispanic and Asian Americans having the lowest screening rates. Further, some rural counties in IL have among the highest incidence and mortality from colorectal cancer in the State contributing to the burden of unnecessary health disparities.

"We are pleased to partner with Center for Asian Health Equity to address the colorectal cancer disparities in our communities. Specifically, we look forward to increasing colorectal cancer screening rates as the Southern Seven region is one of three national hotspot areas with the highest mortality from colorectal cancer. Southern Seven Health Department is excited about the possibility of saving lives from this preventable disease," said Ms. Rhonda Andrews-Ray, the Public Health Administrator at Southern 7 Health Department.

The program will harness the strategic partnerships, utilize multi-level implementation approach to implement evidence-based interventions focusing on patient activation, provider level interventions and technology (including electronic health records) to improve screening rates. IL-CARES will also utilize our innovation, ILColonCARES.org, a web based technology platform, to ensure linkage to care between community clinics and hospitals for colonoscopy completions. In addition, a FIT registry module within the platform will empower local health departments to engage in our flagship Flu-FIT program to track distribution and completion of FIT kits to increase screening rates.

The Center for Asian Health Equity is a partnership between the University of Chicago and the Asian Health Coalition and is housed in the University of Chicago Medicine's Department of Medicine, Gastroenterology Department.

IL-CARES is wholly funded through grant 1 NU58DP006764-01-00 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information, contact us at:

Website: <https://www.asianhealth.uchicago.edu/>

Phone Number: (773) 834-6600

---