



Outreach and Health Ministry Program

Health Outreach Bus

The Night Ministry's Health Outreach Bus brings compassionate, accessible medical care, food, hygiene supplies, case management, and a sense of community into Chicago neighborhoods with high concentrations of homelessness or poverty. The Health Outreach Bus is unique to Chicago as the only program that addresses the medical needs of people experiencing homelessness with a mobile approach during evening hours, when many health care clinics are closed.



Background

Nearly one in ten Chicago residents has no health insurance.¹ Many of those living without insurance are individuals experiencing homelessness or poverty. For some, an acute health crisis or chronic health condition has led to the loss of work, which can trigger the loss of housing and health care coverage. For those with insurance, often through Medicaid or Medicare, factors such as limited clinic hours, a lack of transportation, and geographic isolation hinder access to medical care. Homelessness can also exacerbate existing health care challenges and make it difficult to treat ongoing conditions such as high blood pressure, asthma, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS which are highly prevalent among homeless populations.

The Program

In the late 1980s, The Night Ministry began bringing free medical care on a converted mobile home vehicle into Chicago neighborhoods where services were needed most. Today, our specially designed Health Outreach Bus features a fully equipped nurse's office, a confidential space for HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infections) testing, and a hospitality area to greet clients with coffee, hot chocolate, and lemonade. The Bus visits underserved Chicago communities six days a week on a regular schedule, including East Garfield Park, Douglas Park, Humboldt Park, South Shore, Pilsen, and New City.



Nurse Practitioners on board the Bus provide free medical care in the form of health assessments, treatment for infectious and chronic diseases, wound treatment, condition management, and prevention education as well as referrals to primary health care. Case managers link clients to housing, employment, and other services while Outreach Professionals and volunteers build nurturing relationships with clients and offer ongoing support. A meal is also served at each Bus stop.

The Night Ministry's mobile approach to health care has been nationally recognized. In 2018, the agency was awarded the Henry Schein Cares Gold Medal for excellence in expanding health care to underserved populations.

Partnerships

The Health Outreach Bus program has had success in linking individuals to primary care through collaborations with other organizations such as Heartland Alliance. Collaborative partnerships have also allowed The Night Ministry to expand its reach by providing health care services at other community-based organizations such as La Casa Norte and Sarah's Circle. Meanwhile, businesses, congregations, and other organizations from across the Chicago area volunteer to prepare and serve meals alongside the Health Outreach Bus throughout the week.



Program Achievements and Outcomes in Fiscal Year 2020

- The Night Ministry made 25,380 outreach contacts at the Health Outreach Bus and partner sites
- Nurse Practitioners provided 1,602 free health assessments and cared for 457 health conditions that would have gone untreated
- 212 visits to the emergency room were prevented by services on the Health Outreach Bus, saving the public health system nearly \$196,000
- 184 individuals who were at risk for HIV transmission learned their HIV status through a confidential, rapid HIV test
- 94% of clients reported they are satisfied with services at the Health Outreach Bus

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. *2018 American Community Survey*, 2019.

The Night Ministry is a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides housing, health care, and human connection to individuals experiencing homeless or poverty. For more information, please visit www.thenightministry.org or call (773) 784-9000.