

# AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

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Cook County's Community  
Engagement Report

## **STATE & LOCAL FISCAL RECOVERY FUNDS**

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December 2021



Community  
Engagement Report

State & Local Fiscal  
Recovery Funds

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# Background

More than \$1 billion in federal funds will flow directly to Cook County under provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) signed by President Biden last March. ARPA is designed to stimulate the U.S. economy, support individuals and families, and curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This one-time infusion of federal dollars will support both immediate recovery needs and long-term transformative initiatives.

In determining how to distribute the ARPA funds, Cook County is guided by an internal planning framework and by feedback received through a robust community engagement process to hear directly from County residents about how funding should be allocated.

This approach embodies the core values of equity, engagement, and excellence, and incorporates six policy priorities in President Toni Preckwinkle's 2018 [Policy Roadmap](#):

- Health and Wellness
- Economic Development
- Criminal Justice
- Environment and Sustainability
- Public Infrastructure
- Good Government

The County intends to allocate ARPA Funds through four categories:

- Near-Term Funding Opportunities;
- Transformative Initiatives;
- County Operations, Program Administration, and Contingencies; and
- Technical Assistance and Support for Local Governments to Administer Funds.

To learn more about the funding categories, visit [cookcountyil.gov/arpa](https://www.cookcountyil.gov/arpa).

On July 4, 2021, Cook County launched a website and interactive survey for the community to provide input on needs and priorities for ARPA funding. This Community Engagement Report analyzes feedback that Cook County received from online surveys and a series of town hall meetings and listening sessions. It is the first in what will be a series of such reports, as the County intends to secure ongoing public feedback throughout the three-year process of allocating funds.

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# Community Engagement Framework

To ensure broad engagement over the course of the planning and implementation of ARPA Funds, Cook County partnered with Forefront, a statewide organization representing both grantmakers and nonprofits. This partnership also included a diverse group of community-based organizations and coordinating councils representing marginalized communities, and communities that have disproportionately suffered the health and economic impacts of COVID-19.

These community-based organizations will play a critical role in expanding opportunities for marginalized and under-represented communities to participate in Cook County's planning and decision-making processes.

The community engagement approach includes three tiers:

1. Broad Outreach: Engagement across all of Cook County through townhalls in impacted communities as well as two interactive online surveys launched on July 4, 2021.
2. Impacted Communities: Hyper-local engagement and outreach in communities that have historically experienced disinvestment, and those hardest hit by COVID-19.
3. Place-Based Outreach: Longer term engagement for transformative initiatives being developed by the County's Equity Fund Taskforce, an advisory body established in May 2021.



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# Overview of Surveys

With close to 30,000 participants who generated more than 270 individual ideas, the surveys and town halls produced substantial quantitative and qualitative input on ARPA spending priorities. Engagement included the following:

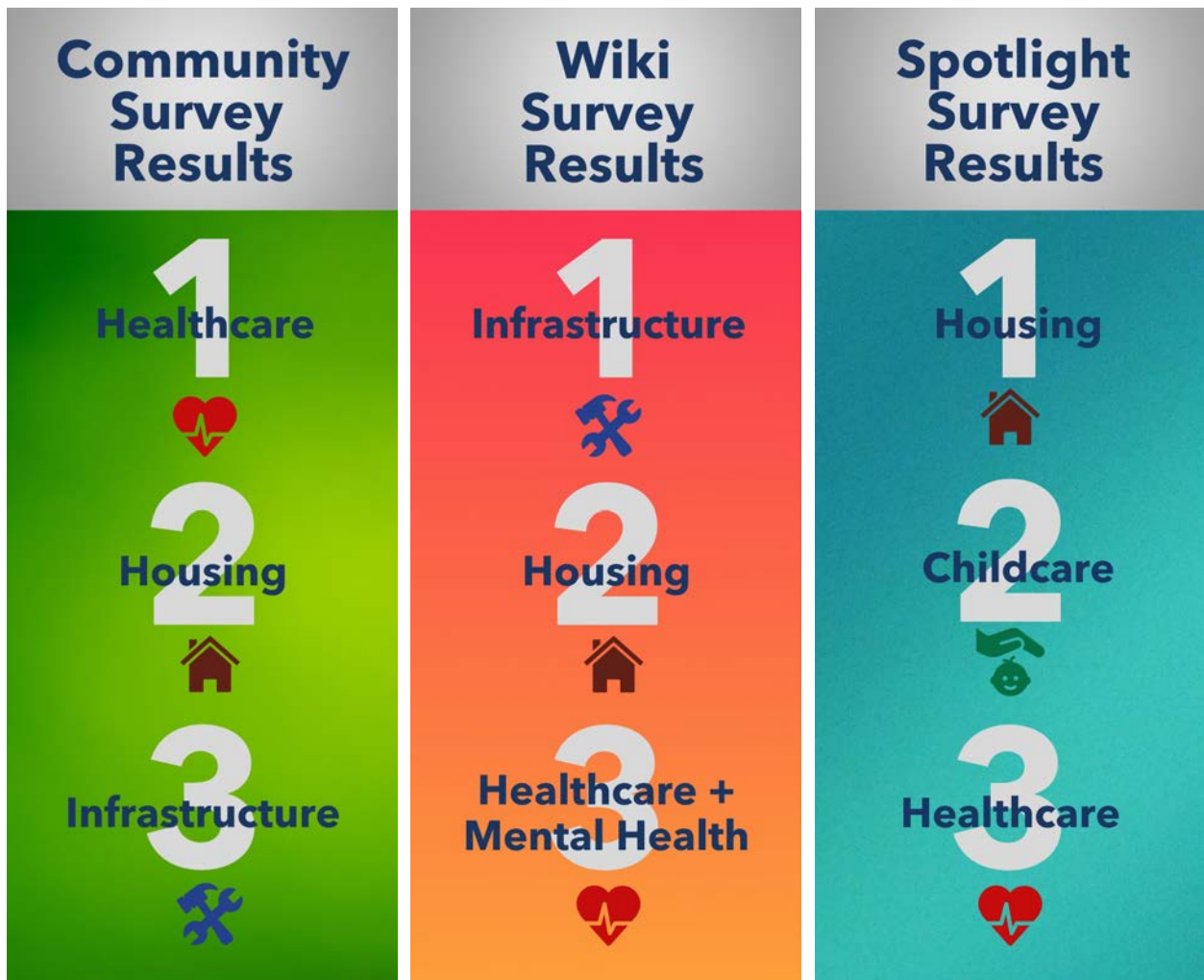
1. **Broad Outreach I: Community Survey** - Participants ranked their top priorities across 13 categories.
2. **Broad Outreach II: Wiki Survey** - This survey gathered another layer of insight by collecting written ideas from participants on top of the County's 13 categories. Participants then voted those priorities up or down as they related to one another.
3. **Spotlight Survey** - The People's Lobby conducted door-to-door canvassing, speaking with residents in the Village of Dolton and surrounding communities in the south and southwest suburbs of Cook County.
4. **Town Halls** - Cook County Commissioners and Forefront's association of nonprofits and grantmakers facilitated virtual, community face-to-face conversations. Forefront held 10 virtual town halls with residents, and four townhalls with nonprofits and foundations.



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# Survey Comparisons

Each survey provides specific insights, beginning with the quantitative analysis of the Community Survey. While the Community Survey cast the widest net, it did skew whiter and more middle-aged. The Wiki Survey did not include demographic data, but provided more qualitative data and insights into how people viewed Infrastructure and Health. Finally, the Spotlight Survey focused on Dolton and surrounding communities where the great majority of respondents were African-American and over 40.





# Community Survey Key Findings

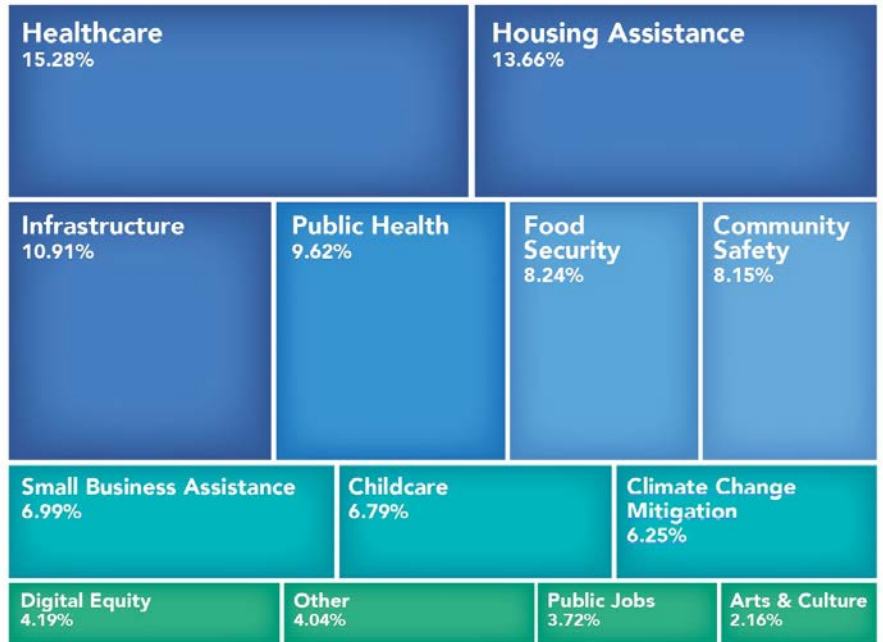
All surveys, as well as the local spotlight and town halls, confirm agreement across Cook County for prioritizing Healthcare, Mental Health, and Housing.

In the Community Survey, Infrastructure was identified as the third priority across all regions of Cook County.

While the top three priorities are agreed upon by each region in Cook County, variations are noted in priorities 4-6.

All three surveys (Community, Wiki, and Spotlight) show that the suburbs are more concerned about Food Security while Chicago is more concerned about Public Health and Community Safety.

The South Suburbs also highly prioritize Childcare, whereas Chicago and the North and West Suburbs do not.



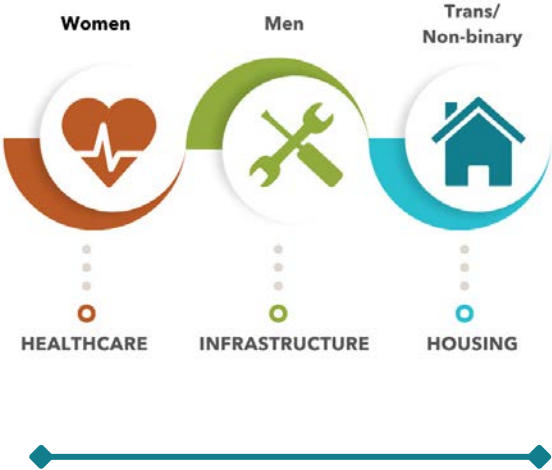
## Priorities by Region

PRIORITIES	Chicago	North Suburbs	South Suburbs	West Suburbs
Healthcare + Mental Health	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public Health	✓	✓		✓
Community Safety	✓			
Childcare			✓	
Food Security		✓	✓	✓
Small Business Assistance			✓	

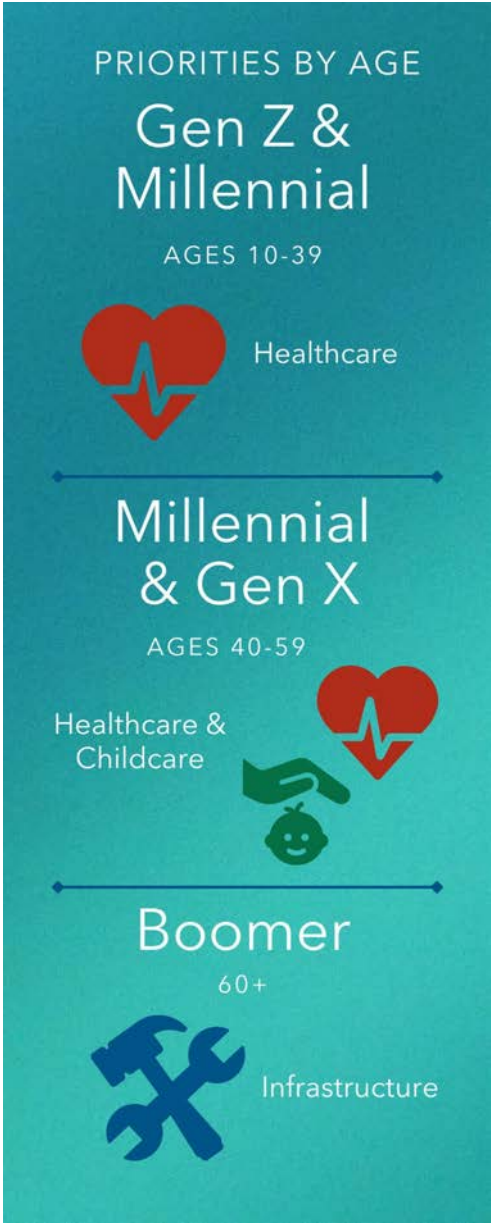
# Community Survey Priorities by Demographic

Across racial, ethnic, age, and gender demographics, Healthcare, Housing, and Infrastructure continue to be the top three priorities. Additional priorities include Community Safety and Childcare.

## Priorities by Gender



## Priorities by Race/Ethnicity



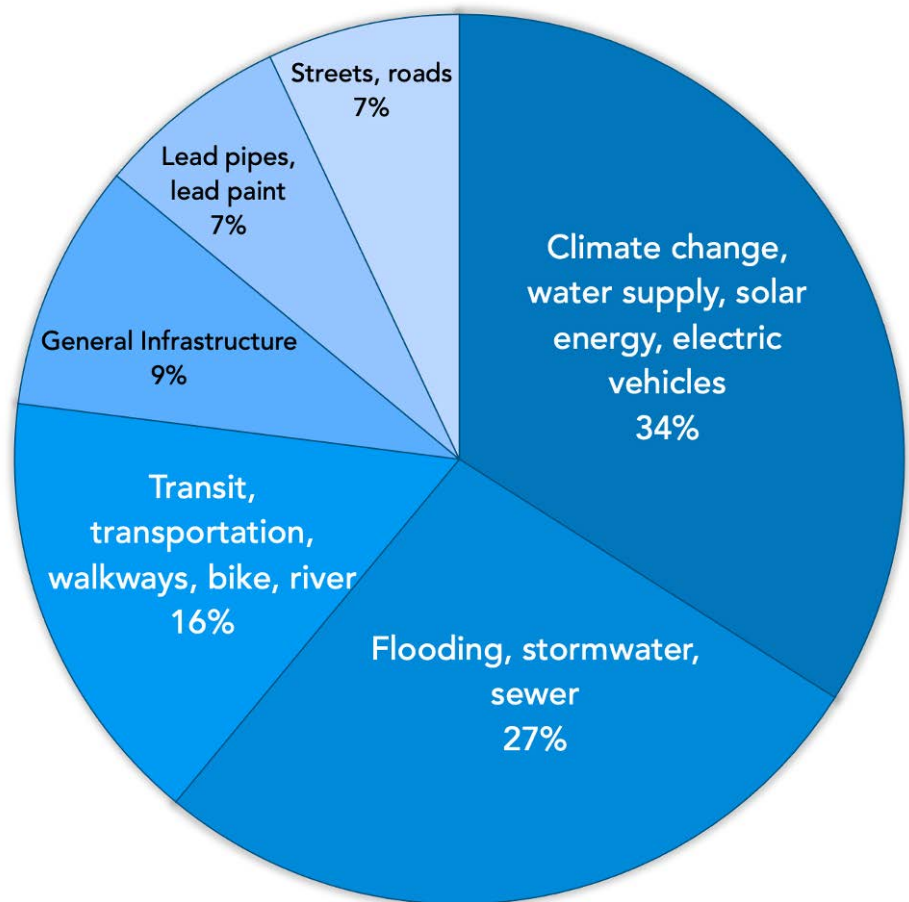


# Wiki Survey: A Closer Look at Infrastructure

The qualitative Wiki Survey reflects a more nuanced look at how people view Infrastructure.

Through their comments, participants specifically associated infrastructure with Climate Change issues as opposed to traditional notions of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges.

Thus, Climate Change priorities actually accounted for 77% of all Infrastructure ideas.

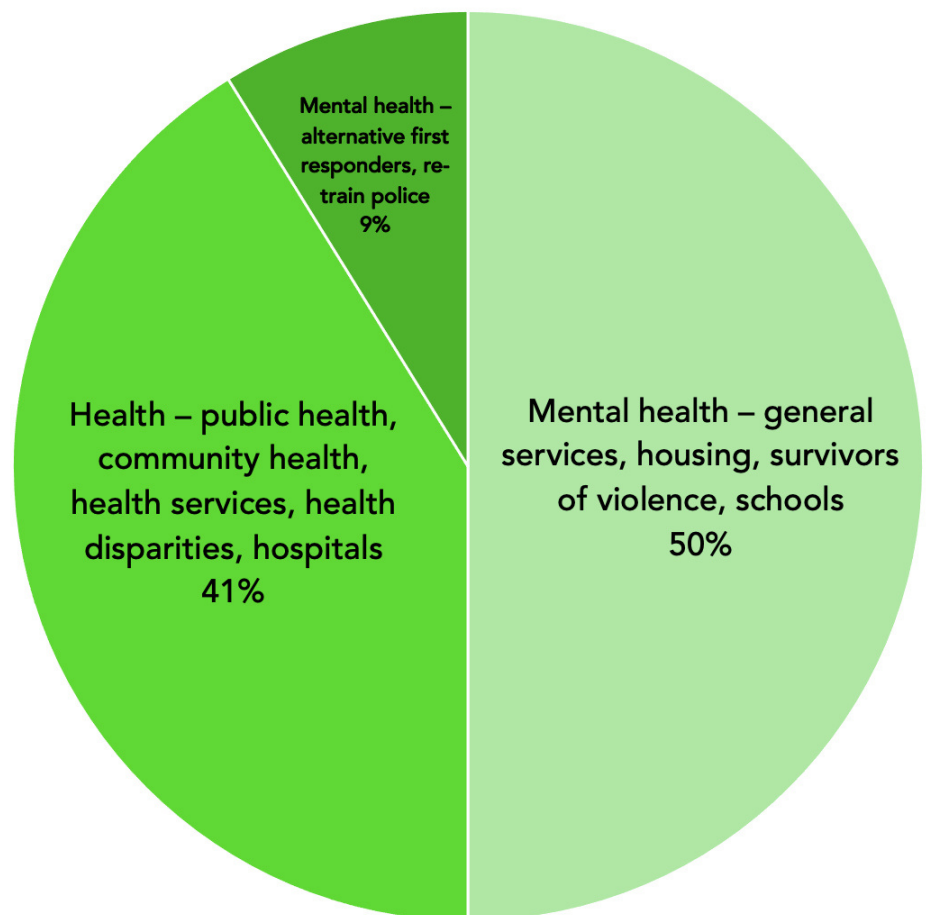


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# Wiki Survey: A Closer Look at Healthcare and Mental Health

Participants in the Wiki Survey largely identified Mental Health as their top priority, whether it stood as a single issue or as an adjacent issue within the Healthcare category.

Fifty-nine percent of participants prioritized mental health over general healthcare. In addition, participants associated first responders, housing, and survivors of violence as needs relating to mental health.





# Spotlight Survey: Dolton & Surrounding Communities

While consistent with South and Southwest suburban findings, the Dolton area survey -- conducted through door-to-door canvassing -- highlights additional details, including a major priority around Childcare.

## Infrastructure

While Infrastructure was identified as a priority across all suburbs, a hyper-local look shows that Infrastructure drops significantly in the Dolton area.

## Public Jobs

Public Jobs emerged as a close fourth priority, particularly among men and people over the age of 40.

## Community Safety

The disproportionate impact of racism, incarceration, and police violence prompted discussion around 9-1-1 and policing alternatives. The survey showed that residents nearly equally value these alternatives and traditional forms of community safety.

**SPOTLIGHT**

## Dolton & Surrounding Communities

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### Different Priorities

<b>Healthcare</b> Consistent with other surveys, residents prioritize healthcare 	<b>Housing</b> Consistent with other surveys, residents prioritize housing 
<b>Infrastructure</b> Infrastructure takes a major dip in priorities in the South Suburbs 	<b>Childcare</b> Childcare is the second top priority for residents in the Dolton area 

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### Additional concerns

 <b>Public Jobs</b> While men tend to prioritize public jobs more, this is a concern across most age groups	<b>Residents OVER 40</b> Years Old include Public Jobs as one of their top priorities 
 <b>Community Safety</b> All residents equally value alternative 911 programs and traditional safety programs	

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# Town Hall Meetings & Listening Sessions



Cook County Commissioners hosted a series of town hall meetings in their districts from August through October 2021. The town halls captured the priorities of residents, using the same Microsoft Forms survey as the online Community survey. Findings are incorporated in the Survey Findings section of this report.

In addition to Commissioner-led town halls, Cook County engaged Forefront to facilitate a series of virtual town halls and listening sessions. Forefront's engagement was designed to:

- Educate local nonprofits and the people they serve about the American Rescue Plan Act and its potential use and impact on services in Cook County.
- Seek direct input from residents living in south and west suburban Cook County communities about how they would like to see the County spend its \$1 billion allocation.
- Educate and build awareness of County initiatives among residents.
- Encourage dialogue between foundations and grantees to further leverage ARPA funds over time.

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# Town Hall Meetings & Listening Sessions

Forefront focused on communities with an overall score of 5 on the COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index\*:

Berkeley	Maywood
Blue Island	McCook
Calumet Park	Phoenix
Chicago Heights	Riverdale
Dixmoor	Robbins
Franklin Park	Stone Park
Ford Heights	Sauk Village
Hodgkins	University Park
Markham	

These communities are primarily located in the south and west suburbs of Cook County.

Forefront held 10 virtual town halls with a total of 107 residents. Forefront also held four town halls with nonprofits and foundations. Within the priority framework outlined by Cook County, the top three community needs identified were housing, mental health, and water:

## Housing

- Provide more units of affordable housing
- Provide more resources to avert evictions
- Offer subsidies to landlords who rent to low-income tenants

## Mental health

- Increase the number of providers
- Offer an array of mental health services
- Locate mental health services in suburban communities so that people can get to them easily

## Water

- Replace lead pipes
- Assist municipalities with revenue to defray costs of unpaid water bills
- Repair infrastructure to manage storm water runoff and flooding

For detailed meeting notes and a full list of organizational participants go to [cookcountyil.gov/arpa](https://www.cookcountyil.gov/arpa).

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\* CCDPH/CCH/Cook County Government, "[Vaccine Equity](#)" (2021)

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# Conclusion

Across surveys and town halls, community engagement participants primarily highlighted three priorities: [Healthcare \(particularly mental health\)](#), [housing](#), and [infrastructure](#).

In the Wiki survey and the Forefront town halls, participants further specified desired investments in infrastructure as investments in green infrastructure, including stormwater management, flooding mitigation, and lead pipe replacement.

These priorities align with proposed initiatives introduced to the Cook County Board of Commissioners in the FY2022 Executive Budget Recommendation. Many of the proposals reflect previous community feedback solicited by Offices Under the President throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Cook County has already committed to increasing mental health services through the Equity Fund, overseen by the Equity Fund Taskforce. The Taskforce consists of community partners and policy experts, and has guided Cook County's work to address the root causes of violence and other inequities through targeted investments in mental health, housing, violence prevention, and community development.

## HOUSING

During the height of the pandemic, the public health crisis quickly became an economic crisis, which caused great difficulty for many families—from paying utility bills to covering rent and mortgage payments. Cook County provided much-needed support in these areas. In addition to the rental, mortgage, and utility assistance, Cook County provided through CARES Act funding and other federal resources, Cook County created Cook County LegalAid for Housing and Debt, in partnership with the Chicago Bar Foundation, the City of Chicago's Department of Housing, and other partners.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Cook County has also already committed to addressing complex infrastructure needs, like flooding mitigation and broadband expansion, although these are longer-term, transformative initiatives that likely will not move into implementation in FY2022. Led by the Bureau of Technology, Cook County will expand the fiber optic network in the south suburbs to ensure that residents, municipalities, and institutions will have access to high-speed internet.

Find out more about the full array of initiatives proposed for FY2022, and stay engaged with Cook County to provide feedback on longer term, transformative initiatives through 2024. All future opportunities to participate will be posted on Cook County's dedicated website, [www.engagecookcounty.com](http://www.engagecookcounty.com).





*Toni Preckwinkle*  
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Cook County Board President

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