

Michael Reese Health Trust Announces New Initiatives to Prevent Domestic Violence, Reach People Who Cause Harm

Following year-long landscape scan in Cook County, Michael Reese to invest in new hotline, programming for people who cause harm

CHICAGO – With domestic violence deaths more than doubling since 2022, Michael Reese Health Trust is launching new initiatives aimed at reaching people who cause harm to interrupt cycles of violence. This includes exploring a new dedicated hotline for people who cause harm paired with innovative new programming geared at those voluntarily seeking help. This new phase of Michael Reese’s decades-long work to prevent domestic violence is informed by a year-long landscape scan of policies, funding, and strategies for people who cause harm in Cook County.

In 2024, 137 people in Illinois died from domestic violence, a 14% increase from 2023 and a 140% increase since 2022. This corresponds with a significant increase in calls to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline, with 59,704 contacts in 2024, a 26% increase from 2023 and a 140% increase from 2019. While research shows that effective programs for people who cause harm reduce violence, this area of prevention is severely under-resourced, limiting the availability and quality of services. Survivors often share needing help for their partners, but voluntary options are scarce, leaving many with nowhere to turn.

“Our mission at Michael Reese Health Trust is to bring people together to tackle complex challenges and drive innovative solutions that advance community health,” **said Ameya Pawar, President and CEO of Michael Reese Health Trust.** “This focus on programs for people who cause harm reflects that commitment, bringing new investment and attention to work that can break cycles of violence and create lasting safety for families.”

NEW INITIATIVES

Michael Reese will explore the development of a dedicated hotline for people who cause harm, ensuring those seeking help receive the support they need and are connected to the right services. The hotline would be paired with new voluntary programming and support intended to reach people who cause harm before violence escalates and criminal courts mandate involuntary programs. Michael Reese will pursue this work in partnership with The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence, which operates the state’s domestic violence hotline.

In response to additional recommendations in the report, Michael Reese will also pursue updates to the state’s administrative code. This work will support ongoing efforts to empower Partner Abuse Intervention Program (PAIP) providers to adopt new research-backed curriculum to ensure those who are primarily mandated to attend programming are receiving the most effective interventions. Changes to the code will also seek to institute better data collection and tracking across the system.

“When we talk about preventing domestic violence, we have to talk about the full system, including the people who are causing harm and the factors driving that behavior,” **said Jennifer Rosenkranz, Senior Program Director, Domestic Violence at Michael Reese Health Trust.** “This project helped us understand where the system is working and where families are being left without options. Investing in this type of support is one of the most impactful ways to keep survivors safe and interrupt cycles of violence, and Michael Reese looks forward to bringing partners together to advance this critical work.”

NEW FINDINGS

This announcement coincides with the release of a new report, “Preventing Partner Violence: Policies, Funding, and Strategies in Cook County.” The report is the product of a year-long landscape scan commissioned by Michael Reese in partnership with the VNA Foundation and conducted by a team of researchers led by Callie Kaplan, MPH, of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital.

Utilizing extensive qualitative and quantitative data, the report maps current services, identifies system gaps, and recommends coordinated, survivor-centered approaches to stop violence and keep families safe.

“We believe that lasting safety comes from investing in prevention and strengthening the systems that serve families,” **said Rob DiLeonardi, Executive Director of the VNA Foundation.** “This project highlights the importance of supporting people who cause harm, not as an alternative to survivor services, but as a necessary complement. We’re encouraged by the roadmap the report provides for advancing violence prevention in Cook County and look forward to continuing to partner on the work ahead.”

The report identifies a number of challenges in the work to reach people who cause harm in Cook County:

- **Lack of funding limits access and innovation:** Organizations and existing programs lack resources to update their curriculum or pilot potentially more effective, culturally responsive approaches.
- **Voluntary support options are limited:** People who cause harm and want assistance to modify their behavior have very few places to turn to get help as existing PAIP programs primarily serve those mandated to attend by the criminal courts.
- **System-wide coordination is missing:** Providers, courts, law enforcement, and community organizations often operate in silos and lack comprehensive coordination, leading to inconsistent referrals and gaps in survivor safety and support.
- **Children lack support:** Despite the well-documented harm of witnessing violence, there are few interventions focused on children, and limited school-based education around healthy relationships.
- **Society doesn't communicate about healthy relationships and domestic violence:** There is a lack of information on what healthy relationships look like, and the different forms partner violence can take which stops survivors and those who cause harm from seeking help.

WHAT'S AHEAD

In response to these challenges, the report outlines a forward-looking vision grounded in key recommendations.

First, there is a need for public education to promote the characteristics of healthy relationships to increase awareness and highlight pathways to support. Program options must expand beyond the criminal courts, including voluntary approaches. The system must also center children by increasing access to mental health care and strengthening school-based healthy relationship education.

Illinois should modernize PAIP curriculum and data collection to support innovation and better track outcomes. Finally, establishing a dedicated coordination council for Cook County would enable ongoing collaboration across providers, survivor services, courts, law enforcement, and government, closing gaps and advancing a more effective, prevention-focused system.

In response to these recommendations, Michael Reese Health Trust is immediately moving forward with plans to explore hotline and voluntary programming focused on those who cause harm, as well as supporting efforts to update the administrative code. Michael Reese also plans to pursue opportunities for system coordination by leveraging best practices from other municipalities. In the coming months, Michael Reese looks forward to pursuing additional partnerships and funding opportunities in this space to advance new strategies to prevent domestic violence and keep people safe.