



Health Equity Happenings

July 2026

Achieving zero health disparities by promoting equity-centered, trauma-informed health care across Missouri.

Community Health
Commission Newsletter

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dear partners, friends and allies across the state,

A lot can happen in two years.

When we became the Community Health Commission of Missouri, we carried forward decades of wisdom and relationships while embracing an ambitious statewide commitment: communities most affected by health inequities should not simply be consulted—they should have meaningful power to shape the decisions, investments, and systems that affect their lives.

We knew the destination we hoped to reach, even if the full route had not yet been drawn. We were clear, however, about how we intended to travel: alongside community, guided by lived experience, and committed to learning and adjusting as the landscape changed.

This summer, we paused to celebrate that journey through our Roadmap to Equity anniversary experience. We centered the gathering on art, storytelling, data, and community visioning because advancing health equity thrives at this intersection. Data can reveal where disparities persist. Stories help us understand how those conditions are experienced. Art invites us to see what has been overlooked and imagine what is possible. Community wisdom helps determine where we go next.

The pages that follow offer evidence that this approach is taking root. Across generations, Missourians are not only participating in conversations; they are influencing priorities, directing resources, carrying their experiences into places of power, and helping institutions develop more responsive ways of working. This is what it looks like to move from engagement toward shared decision-making.

The work remains urgent. The policy landscape is shifting, access to essential supports is increasingly uncertain, and many communities and providers are already navigating tremendous strain. We understand that our roadmap cannot be static. We must continue listening closely, strengthening our partnerships, and responding with both courage and care.

I am profoundly grateful to the CHCM team and to every community member, advisor, partner, provider, policymaker, funder, and supporter who continues to believe in this beautiful, complicated work. Together, we are building a fuller story—one that refuses to look away from difficult realities, resists despair, and draws joy, hope, and possibility from the communities that have always shown us the way forward.

I am humbled to be on this journey with you.

With gratitude and in solidarity,

Riisa Rawlings

Chief Executive Officer
Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM)



Roadmap to Equity: An Anniversary Experience

In June, CHCM hosted [Roadmap to Equity: An Anniversary Experience](#). This year's theme, *Through Our Eyes—Art, Data & Community Visioning for a Thriving Community*, explores how data, storytelling, and art work together to deepen our understanding of the conditions that shape health and to inspire action toward more equitable communities. By pairing quantitative data with lived experiences and creative expression, the event grounded community stories in evidence and brought together community members, partners, advocates, and leaders to envision a more equitable future for Missouri.

A centerpiece of this year's event was CHCM's [Artist in Residence](#) initiative, made possible in part by a 2025 Program Support Grant from the [Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis \(RAC\)](#). The featured installation, *St. Louis is Worth Saving* by [Janessa Williams](#) (ColorTripz), pairs original artwork with community narratives and health data to examine how place, opportunity, and historic disinvestment shape health outcomes.



Together, the installation invites participants to reflect on the realities communities face today while envisioning a healthier, more equitable future for Missouri.

Thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate another year of advancing health equity. We're grateful for your support and look forward to continuing this work together.



For those who attended or those engaging with this work beyond the event, we invite you to explore the art gallery and data on our [website](#).



CHCM Presents at 2026 NNPHI Annual Conference

In April, CHCM leaders [Riisa Rawlins](#), [Velva Hollimon](#), and [Aja Owens](#) were invited to join public health leaders from across the country in New Orleans for the [2026 National Network of Public Health Institutes Annual Conference](#). Together, they presented on participatory budgeting (PB) as a tool for transforming health systems.



Their session, "Power in Partnership: Participatory Budgeting as a Model for Health Systems Transformation," explored how PB shifts public health decision-making from decisions made about communities to decisions made with communities. CHCM leaders connected this framework to PB efforts already happening within the organization, including the [Seniors Community Fund](#) and the [Youth Advisory Council](#).

The session reflected CHCM's belief that meaningful community engagement requires sharing decision-making power. As CHCM shared, "Nothing about us without us becomes decided by us." Read more on our [blog](#).



EVENTS

CHCM Team Retreat

In May, the CHCM team came together in St. Louis for our annual staff retreat, centered around this year's theme: "Rooted in Purpose. Growing in Community. The Power of Us!" The three-day retreat was designed to strengthen relationships, foster collaboration, and reconnect our team to the mission and values that guide our work every day.

The retreat began with a succulent planting workshop led by Laura Dooley of LoKey Designs. As each team member created their own arrangement, we reflected on what it means to stay rooted in our shared purpose while continuing to grow together as a team.

The following day, our team participated in a Teaching Kitchen cooking class at Operation Food Search, where we prepared Pasta Alla No Vodka using affordable, shelf-stable ingredients. The class gave us the chance to connect while providing an opportunity to pay it forward by sponsoring a future class. The day concluded with an afternoon of fellowship at Topgolf.

The retreat concluded with a team breakfast and a scavenger hunt across St. Louis, exploring sites including Kinloch, The Griot Museum, Ferguson, Forest Park, the Delmar Divide, the Gateway Arch, and the Old Courthouse.

This retreat reflects CHCM's commitment to living our values by investing in one another, strengthening relationships, and building trust. We are grateful to the [REACH Healthcare Foundation](#) and its Wellness Grant for supporting this opportunity.



Dariya Walker Speaks Up for Medicaid in Washington, D.C.

On Thursday, April 16, CHCM Medicaid storyteller [Dariya Walker](#) spoke at “DWC x Future Forum Roundtable: Gen Z at the Table,” hosted by the Democratic Women’s Caucus and Future Forum in Washington, D.C. The roundtable brought together members of Congress and young people from across the country to discuss affordability, entering the workforce, and building a stable future.

Dariya, an 18-year-old high school senior from Florissant, Missouri, shared how Medicaid supports her health, her independence, and her dreams for the future. As a lifelong dancer preparing for college and adulthood, she spoke about the importance of stable health coverage as she begins managing her own care and planning for what comes next.

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“What I’m asking is simple. Keep the coverage that keeps communities like mine healthy, stable, and moving forward.”

**DARIYA
WALKER**



Dariya's mother, Shanelle Woods, joined her in Washington, D.C.

Following the roundtable, Shanelle, Dariya and CHCM staff visited with the office of U.S. Senator Josh Hawley. Drawing on her own experiences navigating health care while raising a family, Shanelle shared why Medicaid coverage is so important for Missouri families. Their voices helped highlight why protecting Medicaid matters for the health, stability, and future of families across Missouri. Read more on our [blog](#).

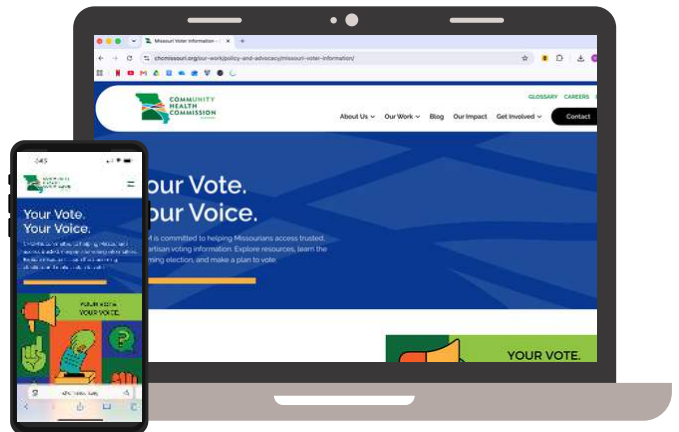


POLICY & ADVOCACY

August 4th Primary Election

Voting is critical way to make your voice heard. As Missouri's August 4 Primary Election approaches, now is the time to make a plan to vote and learn what's on your ballot.

In addition to primary races, Missouri voters will consider several statewide constitutional amendments:



Amendment 1: Renewal of the One-Tenth-of-a-Cent Sales Tax for State Parks and Conservation



Amendment 2: County Assessor Election for Jackson County



Amendment 4: Separate Majority Approval in Each Congressional District for Constitutional Amendments



Amendment 5: State Income Tax Elimination and Sales Tax Changes

Because ballots vary depending on where you live, it's important to review your specific ballot before Election Day.

Explore CHCM's Voter Information page to check your registration status, learn more about the amendments on the ballot, and make a plan to vote in the upcoming election.

[Missouri Voter Resources→](#)



August 4, 2026 Ballot at a Glance			
Issue	What is it about?	What a YES vote means	What a NO vote means
Amendment 1	State Parks & Sol Tax	You want to keep the current law that allows for a 10-cent sales tax on state parks, which would fund state parks, historic sites, and conservation.	You want to stop this sales tax, which would end this funding.
Amendment 2	Jackson County Assessor	You want to require Jackson County to select their property tax assessor from among voters who reside in the county, rather than from outside the county.	You want to keep the current system where Jackson County appoints its assessor instead of electing them.
Amendment 4	Rules for Changing the Constitution	You want to make it harder to pass citizen-led laws by requiring them to get a majority of votes in every single congressional district, not just a statewide majority.	You want to keep the current rule where a simple statewide majority of voters is enough to pass citizen-led amendments.
Amendment 5	Tax Shift Plan	You want to phase out the state income tax over time and allow the state to create new sales taxes to make up for the lost money. This creates a new tax on everything from prescriptions to home heating services.	You want to keep the state income tax and current sales tax rules as they are.

November 3, 2026 Ballot at a Glance			
Issue	What is it about?	What a YES vote means	What a NO vote means
Amendment 3	Reproductive Rights & Minor Healthcare	You want to require that all abortion rights enforcement cases be heard in federal court, rather than in state court.	You want to keep the current law that allows for abortion rights enforcement cases to be heard in state court.
Amendment 7	The "Shovel-It" Fund	You want to create a permanent public savings account for the state, with the goal of using the interest to fund public infrastructure.	You do not want to create this new public savings account.
Amendment 8	Elected Quarterly	You want to phase out the state income tax over time and allow the state to create new sales taxes to make up for the lost money. This creates a new tax on everything from prescriptions to home heating services.	You want to keep the state income tax and current sales tax rules as they are.

Looking for resources to share with your community?

Download our [one-pagers](#) with information about the 2026 Missouri elections, including key election dates, voting information, and plain-language summaries of the ballot measures for the August 4 and November 3 elections.

DRIVING IMPACT

Senior Wellness Workshops

In May, CHCM hosted two Senior Wellness Workshops at [Lessie Bates Neighborhood House Continuum of Life Care Center](#) in East St. Louis and the [Deaconess Foundation](#) in St. Louis. Over 60 participants enjoyed lunch, giveaways, and interactive programming in a welcoming, community-centered environment.



Centered around the theme of *Building Our Trauma Lens*, the workshops featured an interactive presentation focused on understanding trauma, its impact on health and well-being, and strategies for coping and resilience. Through discussion, activities, storytelling opportunities, and group engagement, participants explored how trauma impacts individuals, families, and communities throughout the lifespan.

These workshops were shaped by feedback from members of the Senior Advisory Board. After participating in a trauma awareness training in 2025, board members expressed interest in making similar learning opportunities open to the Senior community. The 2026 workshops illustrate CHCM's commitment to community-centered and participatory solutions.

CHCM is grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to the success of these events.

[Learn more about our work with the Senior Community →](#)



Youth Advisory Council Launch

Throughout the spring and summer, CHCM and the [St. Louis County Children's Service Fund \(CSF\)](#) continued their partnership through the [Youth Advisory Council \(YAC\)](#), taking important steps toward launching a youth-led grantmaking process focused on mental and behavioral health in St. Louis County.

In recent sessions, council members worked collaboratively to define the values that will guide their funding decisions, develop a Request for Proposals (RFP), and begin designing the grant application and review process. Together, they reflected on the power of youth advocacy.

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"I'll just say it's been uplifting. It gives me hope. It also is very fascinating because, you know, we all come from different backgrounds. We all have our own thing going on. But when we come together to be able to solve problems, for areas not just of one place that we grew up in, but in a place that we can all benefit from. It shows that we all have the same mindset of uplifting one another in within our community."

YAC Member

As the program progresses, participants are gaining hands-on experience in leadership, philanthropy, and collaborative decision-making while ensuring youth voices remain at the center of funding decisions. We're proud to support these young leaders as they build the knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills to create meaningful change in their communities.

[Learn more about the YAC →](#)



CHCM IN THE MEDIA

ST. LOUIS POST DISPATCH

Opinion: Missouri shouldn't have to choose between farms and families

As Missouri families face rising food costs and ongoing uncertainty around nutrition assistance programs, conversations about food security have never been more important. In an op-ed published in the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), our CEO, [Riisa Rawlins](#), highlights the connections between SNAP, local food systems, agricultural communities, and public health, while calling for policies that support both Missouri families and the farmers who help feed them.



[Read the Op-Ed →](#)

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

A functional safety net is economic infrastructure for Missourians in need



As policymakers consider changes to Medicaid and other safety-net programs, it is critical to recognize the role these systems play in supporting families, communities, and Missouri's economy. In an op-ed published in the [Columbia Missourian](#), [Riisa Rawlins](#) examines how administrative barriers to coverage can create challenges for eligible Missourians and why a functional safety net is critical to a healthy, stable workforce.

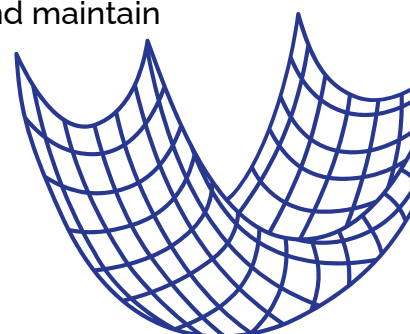
[Read the Op-Ed →](#)

CHCM BLOG

Safeguarding Missouri's Safety Net: What Federal Cuts Mean at the Local Level

Federal budget decisions may feel distant, but their impact is immediate and local. In Missouri, proposed cuts to public health, research, and social support programs have real implications for how communities access care, respond to crises, and maintain stability. [Riisa Rawlins](#), CHCM CEO explores what those changes could mean on the ground for Missourians and why it matters.

[Read Riisa's Reflection →](#)



STAFFING & DEVELOPMENT

Meet the Newest Members of the CHCM Team

We are excited to introduce two new members of the CHCM team. Their expertise, experience, and passion for advancing health equity will strengthen our work across the state and further our shared mission of achieving zero health disparities.

Bryan Davenport, Training and Capacity Building Manager

[Bryan Davenport](#) joins CHCM as Manager of Training and Capacity Building. A proud St. Louis native, Bryan brings a background in education, public service, community engagement, and public health. Before joining the organization, he served as a band director in the Kansas City area and later transitioned to the Kansas City Health Department, where he led community outreach, health education, and capacity-building initiatives while supporting community health programming.

At CHCM, Bryan leads training and capacity-building efforts by designing and facilitating equity-centered learning opportunities that strengthen organizations and communities across Missouri. For more information about our training and technical assistance, visit our [website](#). 



Lisa Boudreau, MPA, Senior Director of Policy, Advocacy and Public Affairs

[Lisa Boudreau](#) joins CHCM as Senior Director of Policy, Advocacy and Public Affairs, bringing more than 25 years of experience in government affairs, legislative strategy, and public policy. Prior to joining CHCM, she founded The Policy Stack, a government affairs firm serving Missouri, Kansas, and Washington, D.C., and held leadership roles with iCivics and Parents as Teachers National Center, where she advanced civic education and maternal and infant health policy.

At CHCM, Lisa leads the organization's policy, advocacy, and public affairs efforts, working to advance equitable policies and strengthen partnerships that improve health outcomes across Missouri. Visit our [website](#) for more information about our policy and advocacy efforts. 



We're thrilled to welcome these new team members! Meet the rest of our team on our [website](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us for an [upcoming meeting](#) or workshop! All CHCM advisory board meetings are open to the public, and we invite you to get involved.

Have questions? Contact [Joy Kuebee](#) by emailing executiveassistant@chcmmissouri.org.

Kansas City Joint Advisory Board Meeting



August 11th,
10:00am-12:00pm

[Learn more](#)



St. Louis Joint Advisory Board Meeting



August 18th,
10:00am-12:00pm

[Learn more](#)

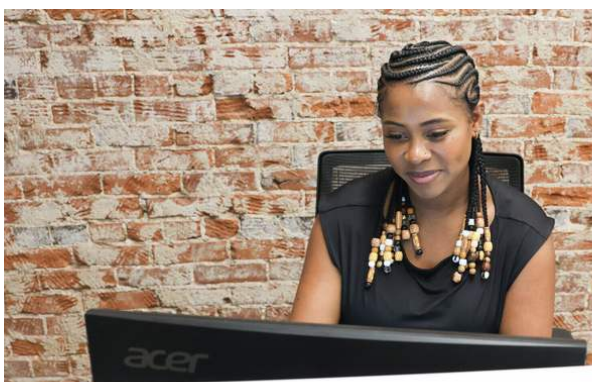


Southeast Missouri Joint Advisory Board Meeting



August 25th,
10:00am-12:00pm

[Learn more](#)



GET IN TOUCH

[Contact us online](#) or by calling our team at 314-898-4049.

By Mail:

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The CHCM July 2026 newsletter was authored and co-designed by Varsha Arun, CHCM Public Health Intern and Grace Cobble, MPH Senior Manager of Storytelling & Communications.