

**Illinois Governor Praises Pandemic Health Worker Program**  
***Program has helped reduce COVID-related impact on health resources***

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Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker held his daily COVID-19 press briefing in Peoria Monday, Oct. 26 at Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center on the OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center campus.

The Governor acknowledged OSF HealthCare for its Pandemic Health Worker (PHW) program. Launched in April 2020, the innovative program, developed by OSF, was deployed with the support of the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.

The Governor met with OSF Digital Health leadership that oversees the PHW program, getting an update on how the program has provided care for thousands during the COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time alleviating stress on health care resources. He was particularly interested in learning about how the program works from the patient's perspective.

"We wanted to impress upon him all that we've learned about our communities, how they receive digital health, how we are learning about their social determinants of health, and what resources they need beyond health care and how we are able to connect those resources to those that we're serving. Then utilizing that knowledge that we've learned to position ourselves for a future state digital health hub, so beyond COVID-19 how can we continue to utilize this sort of a model to serve all of our communities across the state of Illinois," explained Abby Lotz, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer for OSF Digital Health.

Through the PHW program, OSF HealthCare provides care to approximately 1/3 of the state of Illinois in 700+ zip codes in both urban and rural settings.

Utilizing a combination of technology and forward deployed personnel, COVID-19 patients are treated in their home with the same level of care and expertise they would get in a more traditional hospital setting, with licensed clinicians and providers overseeing their care.

Since the April launch of the Pandemic Health Worker program OSF HealthCare has:

- provided services to over 20,000 persons seeking virtual care through the PHW program with approximately 4,000 clients being enrolled.
- fielded over 89,000 calls concerning COVID-19 through the nurse hotline.
- provided access to mental health services via a digital app to over 1,800 clients.
- As a result of the hotline and the PHW program, only 393 of those who called sought care at an Emergency Room, and only 157 were actually admitted to a hospital.

What has been learned caring for COVID-19 patients is also helping the team develop and improve care models for illnesses beyond COVID-19.

"It's really given us a chance to leverage what we have learned about digital health and actually put it into action. We've been able to digitally upscale our communities, teach so many people about digital tools and help applications, and how to utilize those tools to improve their health. It's very exciting to see how we can take what we've learned and really translate that future forward to new use cases. We're already seeing influenza patients come through and we're able to care for them in the same way - remote monitoring, education, virtual visits - so I anticipate we will see more of that coming and then we'll just continue to learn and optimize that experience," said Lotz.

The Pandemic Health Worker program is offered free of charge to any Illinois resident and can be accessed by calling the COVID-19 Nurse Hotline (833-OSF-Know).