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MEDIA CONTACT: david_li@caslservice.org (312-791-0418)

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Impact of Mercy Hospital Closure on Southside Community

CHICAGO—Closing the doors of Mercy Hospital & Medical Center in Chicago would result in a devastating blow to residents who call the surrounding areas home. The Chinese American Service League (CASL) opposes the decision to close Mercy's doors—closing due to financial obligations instead of its obligation to “do no harm” by its patients. The 170-year old, not-for-profit institution represents an oasis in a region that would otherwise be known as a “health care desert.” Nearly [40%](#) of Chicago's population lives in Mercy's service area. Nestled on the Near South Side, Mercy offers medical care to vulnerable populations who would traditionally have had limited access. Neighborhoods served by Mercy have [higher rates of mortality from diabetes, cancer and stroke](#). Where private transportation by car is a luxury many residents in the surrounding areas cannot afford, the hospital's location offers much-needed convenience in a [7-mile radius](#).

Its 363 beds, busy emergency room, cancer navigation program, and labor and delivery center represent just part of the fundamental need for greater health equity. According to Mercy's 2019 community needs assessment, between [80% and 90%](#) of the population served by Mercy were economically challenged, underserved, underprivileged, and uninsured. On average, seventy-five percent of Mercy's revenue came from Medicare and Medicaid. Combined with [“\[the\] financial pressures exacerbated by the pandemic at a time when...hospitals' role has become more important: Their core patients — the poor and people of color—have been disproportionately stricken by COVID-19 in Chicago.”](#)

Access to health care is broadly defined as the [“the timely use of personal health services to achieve the best health outcomes”](#) (Institute of Medicine, 1993). Several factors influencing access to health care include, but are not limited to: [proximity, affordability, availability, convenience, accommodation, reliability, and quality](#). As hospitals move towards integrating community health and wellness into all affairs, three elements remain critical: the spectrum of services offered, location, and partnerships. Health care needs to become better coordinated, more comprehensive, and extend past hospital walls.

Traditional inpatient hospital care has already begun this transformation by intersecting with public and community health to reduce readmission rates. The U.S. health care system continues to grapple with increased chronic disease management, changing national demographics, increased responsibility around care coordination and medical homes, and the elimination of disparities in care. [Chronic diseases are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality](#). It is essential that health policy addresses patients and caregivers, and community leaders recognize how social determinants of health (SDoH)—[the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age](#)—can greatly impact a patient's ability to achieve good health.

To address most SDoH barriers, CASL collaborated with Mercy to launch [the CASL Community Resource Center](#) in 2019. Housed in the inpatient and outpatient settings of Mercy's campus, the Center acts as a pre- and post-discharge site where patients can explore additional options in their continuum of care. As one of the most comprehensive social service agencies in the Midwest and a national leader in data-informed practice, CASL is acutely aware that patients don't recover in a vacuum. To that end, let us not waste this opportunity to rise to the challenge, by preserving Mercy's legacy of care to some of Chicago's neediest communities. Perhaps best said by the World Health Organization Leader Margaret Chan, **“When it comes to health, equity is a matter of life and death.”**

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Chinese American Service League

For over 40 years, the Chinese American Service League's (CASL) comprehensive programs have connected families and individuals in the greater Chicago Chinese community with the vital support they need: providing an educational and cultural foundation for our children, ensuring our seniors live full and independent lives with dignity, enhancing education and training for tomorrow's workforce, putting immigrants on the pathway to citizenship, and securing our community's housing and financial well-being.