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La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative
8th District

February 15, 2021

Dear Colleagues, Advocates, and Interested Stakeholders,

I would like to call your attention to the issue of improving access to pharmacy services for all Medicaid recipients in Illinois. This letter provides greater detail as we have moved through this process.

Persons who are Illinois Medicaid recipients with Aetna Better Health Illinois (ABHIL) as their managed care organization have difficulties accessing to pharmacy services, especially Blacks living in Chicago.

As background, CVS Pharmacy bought the Aetna insurance company in 2018. Aetna bought IlliniCare in 2020, assuming its Illinois Medicaid patients, who now have Aetna Better Health Illinois (ABHIL) as their managed care organization. On December 1, 2020, ABHIL restricted its Illinois Medicaid patients to using only its own CVS pharmacies and a small number of independent pharmacies, generally excluding Walgreens pharmacies. Media has paid close attention to this evolving issue.¹

In much of the West and South Sides of Chicago and throughout the state of Illinois, pharmacy deserts are found in Black and other underserved communities. There are no CVS pharmacies in the majority Black West Side communities including Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, or Austin on Chicago's West Side, where 184,000 Blacks live², as seen in Map 1, attached.

ABHIL claims that "all of Cook County... met 100% of the [pharmacy] access requirements for Illinois Medicaid customers."³ ABHIL claims there are 44 pharmacies providing access to the 11,864 ABHIL Medicaid recipients living

¹ Fox-32 News, 12-23-2020: <https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/pharmacy-desert-concerns-arise-on-south-west-sides-of-chicago>; CNN, 12-24-2020: <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/pharmacy-deserts-covid-19-vaccine/ar-BB1ccYFw?ocid=ob-tw-enus-1541511688107>; Chicago Tribune, 12-30-2020: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-life-aetna-cuts-pharmacy-access-medicare-tt-12292020-20201230-ezco45aqwvdcrkys7u6tjjbu-story.html>; Modern Health Care, 1-3-2021: <https://www.modernhealthcare.com/insurance/aetnas-exclusion-walgreens-impacts-low-income-patients>; Axios, 1-7-2021: https://www.axios.com/pharmacy-deserts-cities-prescriptions-45c32271-37ac-4105-b1bb-e2d2436b88c1.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top; ABC-7 Chicago, 2-4-2021: <https://abc7chicago.com/health/limited-pharmacy-access-for-some-illinois-medicare-patients-in-chicago/10315664/>; <https://abc7chicago.com/covid-vaccine-chicago-pharmacy-near-me-walgreens/10315807/>

² <https://bestneighborhood.org/race-in-chicago-il/> and <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Illinois/Chicago/Overview>

³ Which may be strictly true per the current contract, but the HFS-MCO contract <https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/SiteCollectionDocuments/2018MODELCONTRACTadministrationcopy.pdf> has language on p. 82 which is not realistic for Illinois Medicaid recipients, with a requirement in 5.8.1.1.7 Pharmacy access. Contractor shall ensure an Enrollee has access to at least one (1) pharmacy within a fifteen (15)-mile radius of or fifteen (15)-minute drive from the Enrollee's residence. If an Enrollee lives in a Rural Area, the Enrollee shall have access to at least one (1) pharmacy within a sixty (60)-mile radius of or sixty (60)-minute drive from the Enrollee's residence. These distances and driving times are totally unrealistic for our urban Medicaid recipients, most of whom do not have cars.

in the five Chicago West Side Zip Codes of 60612, 60623, 60624, 60644, and 60651. However, research led by pharmacy desert expert Dima Mazen Qato, PharmD, MPH, PhD showed that only 26 mostly small independent pharmacies, not 44, were available for general pharmacy services. In addition, Map 2 from this research, attached, shows that 55% of the census tracts in these zip codes have low-accessibility to in-network pharmacies (>0.5 miles in low-income neighborhoods).

These 5 West Side Zip Codes have the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths and numbers of emergency medical services (EMS) responses to opioid overdoses in the city of Chicago⁴. 60623 has the highest number of deaths (236) due to COVID-19 in the city of Chicago⁵.

Access problems to CVS pharmacies are also seen in Chicago's majority Black South Side in Map 3, attached. In the last 4 years, at least 6 CVS pharmacies have closed in majority Black West and South Side communities of Chicago, three on the West Side and three on the South Side.⁶ 715,900 Blacks live in majority Black communities on Chicago's West and South Sides⁷, and according to the CVS store locator⁸, there are only three CVS pharmacies in those communities⁹.

Limiting pharmacy options for Medicaid recipients affects people not only in Chicago, but for people throughout Illinois. There are already severe pharmacy deserts in many parts of Illinois, and we need policies that improve access, not restrict access. During the COVID-19 pandemic when people need their medications and the coronavirus vaccine at pharmacies, and when people are dying daily due to opioid overdoses, it makes no sense for ABHIL or our state Medicaid program administered by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) to limit access to pharmacies.

Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has slammed CVS for not serving those most at risk for COVID-19, so for now, CVS pharmacies will not be getting coronavirus vaccine from the federal government. According to Chicago Tribune reporting by Lisa Schencker¹⁰, "The federal government is sending additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines to pharmacies across the country, but in Illinois, those doses will only be available at Walgreens — not CVS Health, Mariano's, Jewel-Osco or Walmart... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention worked with states to select which pharmacy chains would receive the additional doses during this first phase of the program. They were selected *based on the number of stores, ability to reach the people most at risk of getting severely ill with COVID-19* [emphasis added] and alignment with a state's existing vaccination plan, according to the CDC."

Many Medicaid recipients do not have their own cars and must use public transportation, expensive ride sharing, or even must walk miles to get their medications. Mail order and delivery options do not work for our Medicaid recipients with unstable housing situations. According to a presentation¹¹ by HFS at the November 6, 2020 Illinois Medicaid Advisory Committee Meeting, the top four most socially vulnerable Illinois Zip Codes with the most socially vulnerable persons

⁴<https://www.chicagohan.org/>, Chicago Opioid Update, December 31, 2020

⁵ <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/covid-dashboard.html>, accessed February 14, 2021

⁶ The CVS pharmacy at 3146 W. Madison in East Garfield Park closed in 2017 after receiving \$1 million in tax breaks to open 5 years previously, forcing the closure of a community pharmacy across the street. (<https://chicago.cbslocal.com/2017/02/26/alderman-closing-cvs-in-east-garfield-park-amounts-to-theft/>). The previous CVS pharmacy is now a boarded-up Dollar Store. The CVS pharmacy at 3552 W. Grand Ave. in Humboldt Park closed in 2017. (<https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/cvs-chicago-closings/32586/>) The CVS pharmacy at 1550 N. Kostner in Humboldt Park closed in 2019. Three South Side CVS stores have also been closed, including 745 W. 103rd and 1620 W. 49th St in 2019 and 7858 S. Halsted in 2020 (<https://abc7chicago.com/cvs-pharmacy-near-me-what-stores-are-closing/5822231/>)

⁷ <https://statisticalatlas.com/place/Illinois/Chicago/Overview>, 2018 data

⁸ <https://www.cvs.com/store-locator/landing?icid=cvsheader:storelocator>

⁹ 53rd and Kimbark; 79th and Western; and 87th and Stony Island

¹⁰ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/vaccine/ct-coronavirus-vaccine-walgreens-cvs-jewel-federal-retail-program-20210212-us2uqk67m5enpktbl26og26zyq-story.html>

¹¹ <https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/SiteCollectionDocuments/HFSHealthcareTransformationProposal.pdf>, slide 46

according to the CDC¹² are 60621, 60636, 60623, and 60624, as seen in Map 4, attached. We must live up to our claims that equity is the foundation of everything that we do as a state by righting this wrong as soon as possible.

HFS is aware of cases that have been reported to them where ABHIL Medicaid recipients have had difficulties obtaining their medications. I have talked to representatives from CVS, Aetna, and HFS to correct this injustice and this direct attack on our ABHIL Medicaid recipients and our Black communities. It is bad enough for Aetna to require their customers to use CVS pharmacies when there are only three CVS pharmacies in majority Black communities in all of Chicago - it is absolutely unacceptable for Aetna to forbid their patients from using Walgreens just because they are in competition.

I have worked with providers and advocates on a legislative fix to end this bad business practice, and I have introduced House Bill 0591¹³, which permits Illinois Medicaid recipients, including those enrolled in managed care, to obtain pharmacy services from the pharmacy of their choice if the pharmacy is licensed under the Pharmacy Practice Act and accepts the professional dispensing fee for pharmacy services as determined by the Department. I look forward to working with all stakeholders to create better access to pharmacy services for our Illinois Medicaid recipients throughout the state, thereby improving their health as we continue to address structural social and racial inequities.

We need to work for the best interests of our Illinois Medicaid recipients - they need us to stand up for them. We must work together to right this wrong.

Sincerely,



La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative – Eighth District

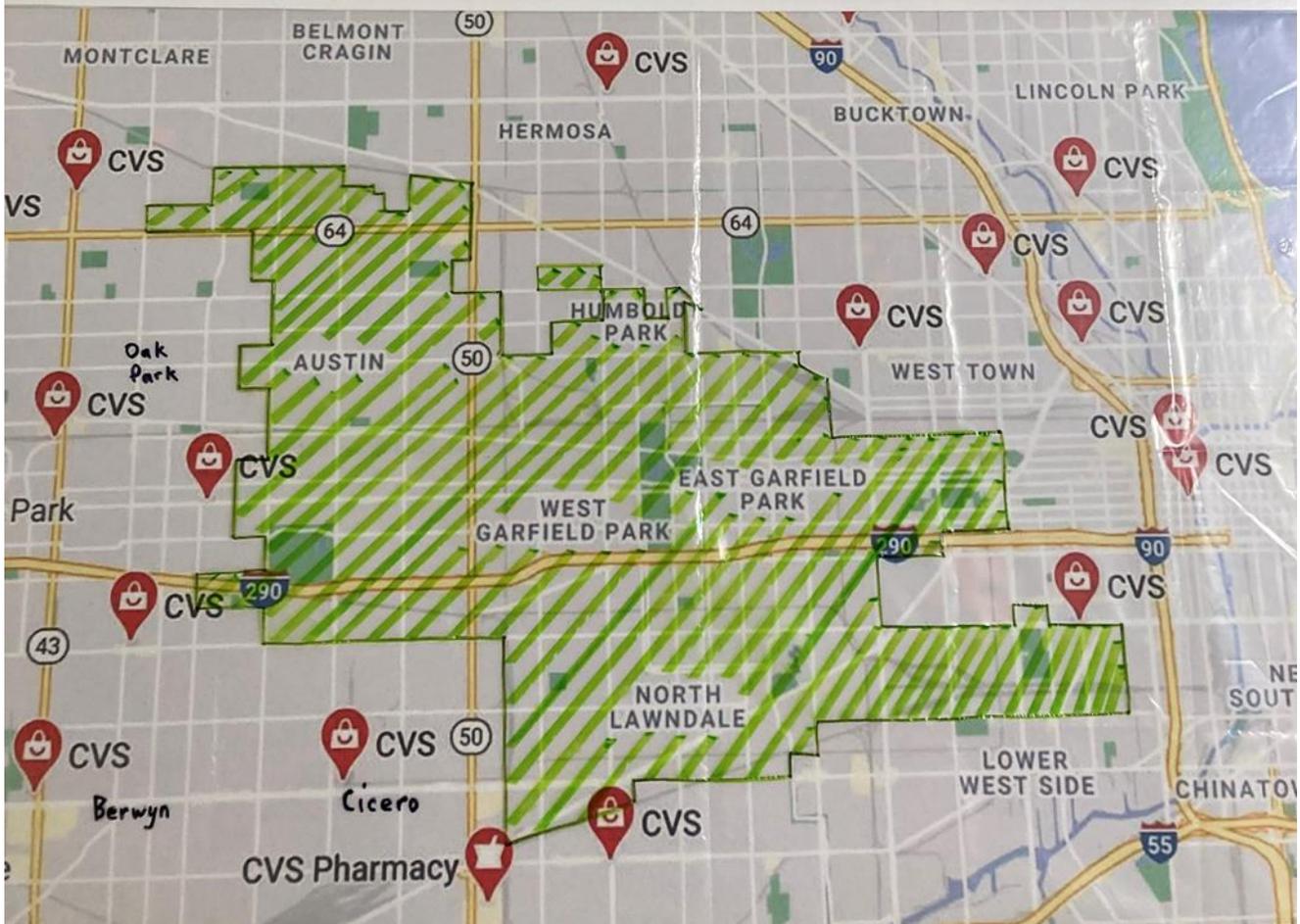
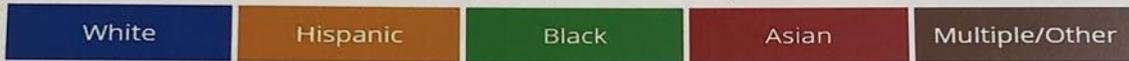
¹² <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/index.html>

¹³ <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=HB&DocNum=591&GAID=16&SessionID=110&LegID=128680>

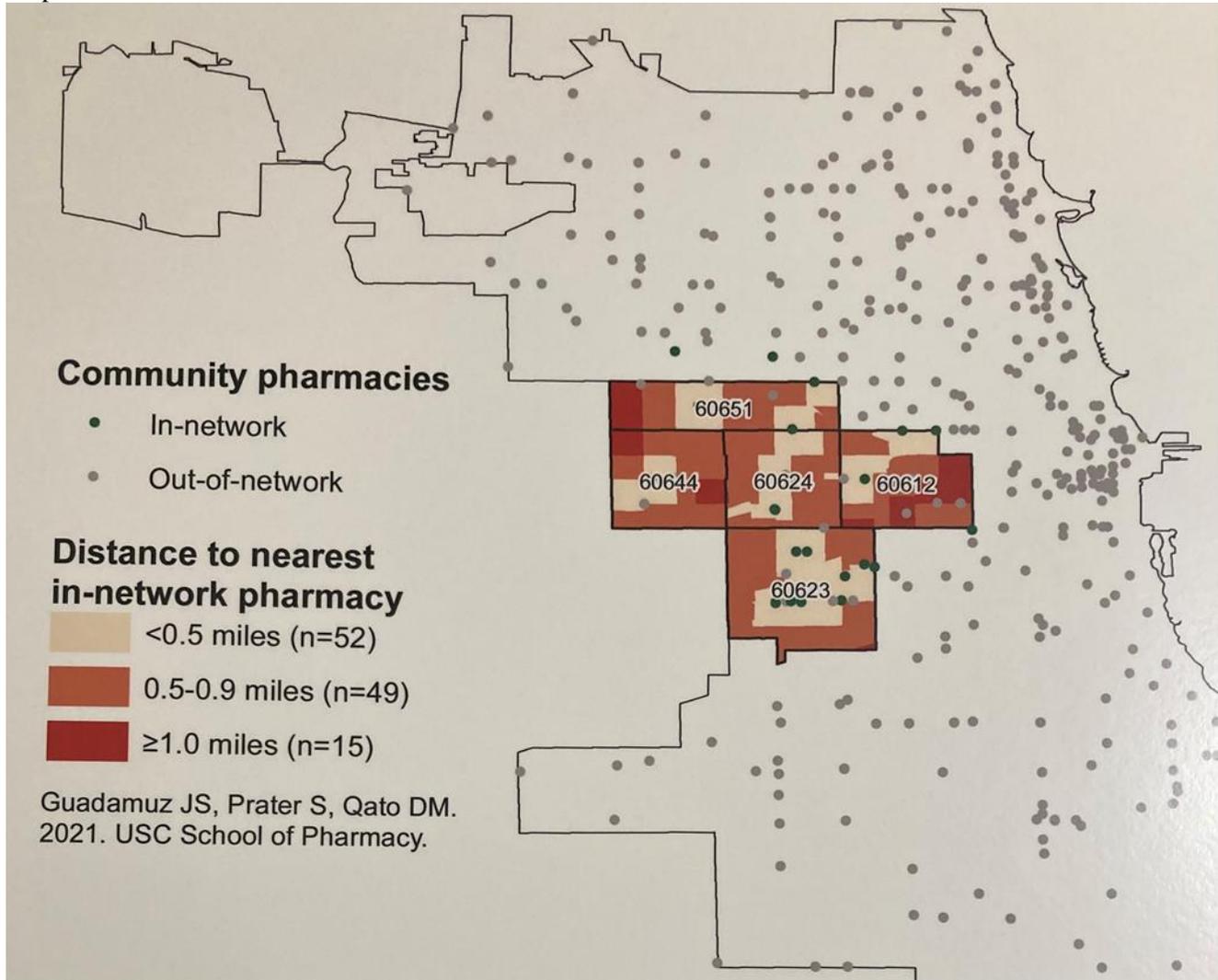
Map 1:



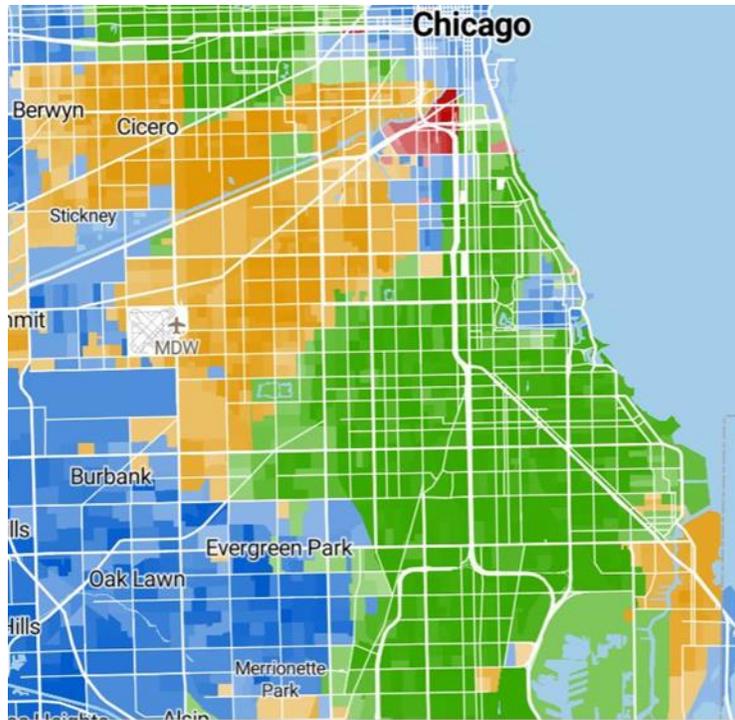
Majority Race Key



Map 2:



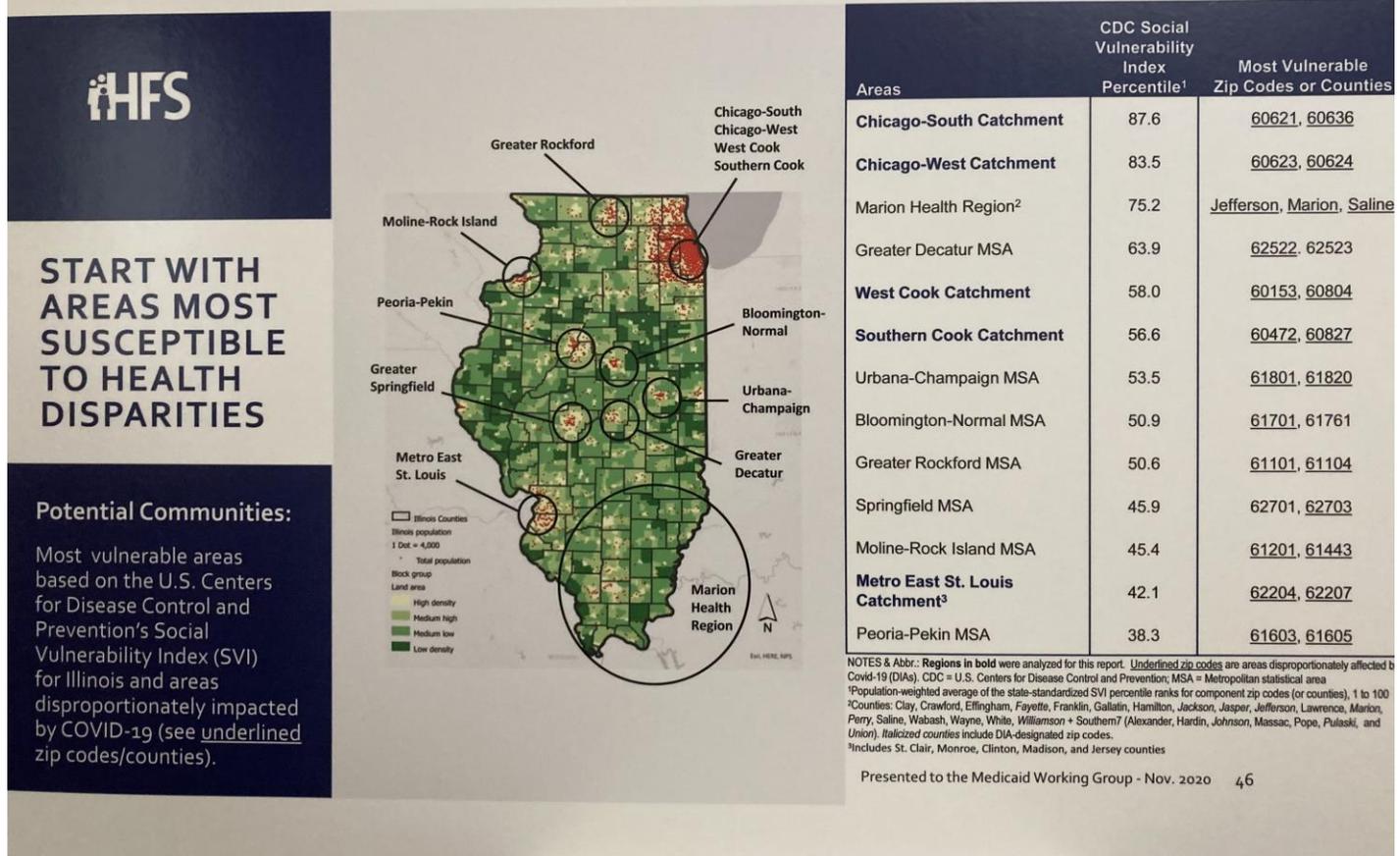
Map 3:



Majority Race Key



Map 4:



START WITH AREAS MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO HEALTH DISPARITIES

Potential Communities:

Most vulnerable areas based on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) for Illinois and areas disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 (see underlined zip codes/counties).

Areas	CDC Social Vulnerability Index Percentile ¹	Most Vulnerable Zip Codes or Counties
Chicago-South Catchment	87.6	<u>60621, 60636</u>
Chicago-West Catchment	83.5	<u>60623, 60624</u>
Marion Health Region ²	75.2	<i>Jefferson, Marion, Saline</i>
Greater Decatur MSA	63.9	<u>62522, 62523</u>
West Cook Catchment	58.0	<u>60153, 60804</u>
Southern Cook Catchment	56.6	<u>60472, 60827</u>
Urbana-Champaign MSA	53.5	<u>61801, 61820</u>
Bloomington-Normal MSA	50.9	<u>61701, 61761</u>
Greater Rockford MSA	50.6	<u>61101, 61104</u>
Springfield MSA	45.9	<u>62701, 62703</u>
Moline-Rock Island MSA	45.4	<u>61201, 61443</u>
Metro East St. Louis Catchment³	42.1	<u>62204, 62207</u>
Peoria-Pekin MSA	38.3	<u>61603, 61605</u>

NOTES & Abbr.: Regions in bold were analyzed for this report. Underlined zip codes are areas disproportionately affected by Covid-19 (DIAs). CDC = U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; MSA = Metropolitan statistical area
¹Population-weighted average of the state-standardized SVI percentile ranks for component zip codes (or counties), 1 to 100
²Counties: Clay, Crawford, Effingham, Fayette, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Lawrence, Marion, Perry, Saline, Wabash, Wayne, White, Williamson + Southern⁷ (Alexander, Hardin, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Pulaski, and Union). *Italicized counties* include DIA-designated zip codes.
³Includes St. Clair, Monroe, Clinton, Madison, and Jersey counties