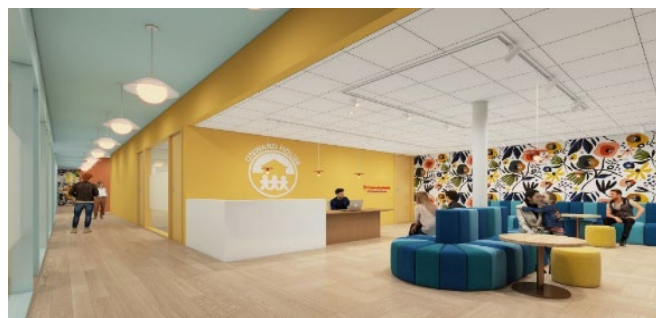


Opening Doors: Onward House’s Integrated Place-Based Health Care on Chicago’s Northwest Side

Onward Neighborhood House has served Chicago’s immigrant and low-income communities since 1893, building a wraparound model of care. Rooted in the organization’s commitment to meet families where they are, the CARES Community Center carries this model into the future as an integrated, place-based hub designed to respond to evolving community needs and advance health equity on Chicago’s Northwest Side. By bringing a comprehensive range of services under one roof and leveraging trusted partnerships, CARES reduces fragmentation, improves access to care, strengthens coordination across health and human services, and lays the groundwork for sustained improvements in health outcomes over time.

The CARES Center builds on the success of Onward House’s partnership with CommunityHealth, which established a co-located primary care clinic serving uninsured adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. CARES scales this proven model to incorporate pediatric and behavioral health services, alongside Onward House’s broader network of wraparound supports, which include a Food Pantry, Early Childhood and School Age Programs, Adult Education, and an Illinois Welcoming Center for immigrants and refugees. Together, these services allow families to access multiple supports in one trusted location, concurrently addressing health and its social determinants.



The reception area will warmly welcome community members and direct them to each program space.

Community Need

Belmont Cragin, where Onward House has operated since 2008, is the Community Area with the largest Latino population in the City of Chicago. In 2022, 77.8% of residents identified as Latino and 35.8% were foreign-born. It is likely that this percentage has since increased, as 51,000 new arrivals were sent to Chicago from the U.S. southern border between 2022 and 2024. Per capita income in Belmont Cragin is 45% lower than the average per capita income for Chicago.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored service gaps in an already underserved community, where 17.19% of residents are uninsured, nearly double the citywide rate, and there are 30.4 Primary Care Providers per 100,000 residents, compared to 107.7 citywide. Many residents are also “hard-to-count,” facing barriers such as lack of insurance, transportation, language access, and culturally competent care. As a result, they remain largely invisible in insurance-based data and the services built on it. Additionally, with HBIA ending and HBIS on pause, a large percentage of the community we serve is left without coverage, increasing reliance on free clinics such as CommunityHealth at Onward House.



The multipurpose room will provide workshop space, demo kitchen, and support one-off and periodic workshops and programs.

CARES Community Center

Onward House is preparing to launch the CARES Community Center, a one-stop hub for health and human services in Belmont Cragin. Acquired with support from the Reva & David Logan Foundation, the site at 2644 N. Central Avenue will undergo renovations in winter 2026 and open in late summer 2026. The growth of health services is a major focus of this project. The new building will expand space for CommunityHealth’s co-located clinic by over 150%,

add a FQHC look-alike Pediatric Clinic in partnership with IWS Family Health, and expand bilingual Mental Health Services through a partnership with Cicero Family Service.

These health services will be complemented by an expanded Food Pantry, Adult Education classrooms, the Illinois Welcoming Center, and open community space, creating a hub where families can access the resources they need to thrive.

Onward House has long operated as a hub organization, leveraging partnerships to create an interconnected web of services that extends beyond any single program or provider. CARES formalizes and scales this collaborative model, allowing co-located partners to coordinate care efficiently, support warm handoffs, and respond collectively as community needs evolve.

Impact

The CARES Community Center represents a critical expansion of Onward House’s wraparound model, increasing access to health and health-supporting services while addressing the social determinants that shape long-term outcomes. Through CARES, Onward House will:

- Expand access to healthcare by housing primary, pediatric, and behavioral health services under one roof simplifying how families navigate care.
- Promote seamless, coordinated support and enable warm handoffs between medical, behavioral, and social service providers to ensure families can access the full continuum of care and resources in one place.
- Strengthen food security through an expanded Food Pantry, a demonstration kitchen, and a rooftop garden, recognizing nutrition as foundational to long-term health and well-being.
- Leverage data to track impact over time, map community needs, and design long-term, community-based solutions.



The expanded Food Pantry will be set up like a grocery store for clients to choose from a variety of food and produce items.

As the social safety net continues to erode, CARES will provide the stability and flexibility needed to ensure that immigrant and low-income families on Chicago’s Northwest Side can access the care and support they need to thrive.