

# 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment: Implementation Strategy (Fiscal Years 2026-28)



## Introduction

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab completed its most recent three-year Community Health Needs Assessment (“Assessment”) during Fiscal Year 2025 (“FY25”). As a result of the input received from various sources, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab identified four areas of community health needs (“Priority Areas”).

This Implementation Strategy (“Implementation Strategy”) addresses each Priority Area, detailing how Shirley Ryan AbilityLab plans to meet the identified needs through targeted programs and resources for the community, and, where relevant, describing planned collaborations with related organizations to meet community health needs.

### THE PRIORITY AREAS INCLUDE:

1. Increased awareness of rehabilitation health
2. Increased quality-of-life programs at offsite locations
3. Inclusion of youth with physical disabilities in sports and fitness programs
4. Early identification of disability in infants and young children

During the FY26-28 timeframe of this Implementation Strategy, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab also is embarking on its broader strategic plan, Envision 2030. The organization is looking toward the future as it seeks to care for more patients in Chicago and, increasingly, around the country and the world.

As a result, the Priority Areas are particularly critical as Shirley Ryan AbilityLab builds on its culture, values and leadership to create the nation’s premier system of care devoted to maximizing human ability. Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will continue to set the standards for the field of physical medicine and rehabilitation (“PM&R”), while ensuring that more patients, regardless of where they live, can benefit from the organization’s best-in-class care, resources and education.



## Priority Area 1: Increased Awareness of Rehabilitation Health

As part of the Assessment, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab convened a focus group of local leaders who represent the broad interests of the community and solicited their feedback on the area's healthcare needs. The Assessment also included a literature review and comprehensive evaluation of the PM&R service needs of the community.

The analysis found that the primary needs of the community were related to rehabilitation for stroke, brain injury, spinal cord injury, neuromusculoskeletal conditions, pediatric conditions and cancer — consistent with Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's main clinical and research focus areas. The assessment and analysis also identified significant health needs in the areas of access to rehabilitation health, rehabilitation research, education about Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's resources and post-discharge support programs.

This analysis informed the first Priority Area for the Implementation Strategy — increasing awareness about rehabilitation health. The following demonstrates how Shirley Ryan AbilityLab plans to fulfill that priority over the next three years by providing patient and community resources; leading research activities that expand knowledge and advancements in rehabilitation; offering educational opportunities for current and future rehabilitation professionals; and expanding its reach to bring rehabilitation care and awareness to new patients in new geographies.

### PATIENT & FAMILY RESOURCES

As a mission-based organization, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab provides a vast amount of resources, education and support to the broader community — which includes prospective/current patients, patients' family members, caregivers, rehabilitation professionals, healthcare providers and community partners.

The hospital's marketing and communications team aims to continue robust, ongoing efforts that showcase Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's thought leadership related to rehabilitation care, research breakthroughs, patient recoveries and educational resources. Specifically, programs that support this activity include:

- **Media Relations:** Media outlets from around the world regularly seek input from Shirley Ryan AbilityLab experts. In the last year alone, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has been featured in more than 1,325 stories across local, national and international print, web and broadcast outlets, amounting to more than 6.4 billion media impressions. In the years ahead, the team will actively seek out opportunities to promote groundbreaking research and share relevant, actionable insights on rehabilitation health — advancing public knowledge and understanding in the process.



- **Social Media:** Social media is a fast-growing, dynamic channel for reaching Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's patient and family/caregiver audience, as well as the general public, with information about rehabilitation health. As of FY25, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has grown its social media audience to nearly 112,000 across platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube, etc.), and the thriving program continues to grow in size and engagement year over year — leading to increased opportunities for community connection and knowledge sharing.
- **Website:** Each year, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's website, [sralab.org](http://sralab.org), receives nearly 8 million pageviews as the community searches for general information about rehabilitation health and about the hospital's programs, services, sites of care and conditions treated. Part of the website is dedicated to Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's blog. It serves as the hospital's destination for human-centered stories and information about ability and includes strategic content areas such as stories of recovery; research spotlights; patient and family education articles; and organizational news. In FY25, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab published nearly 100 articles on its blog and amplified them across multiple platforms (such as via social media and in newsletters) to maximize reach and impact among different audiences. Moving forward, the team has a goal of publishing an average of 7-8 articles per month to maintain a consistent stream of fresh and relevant rehabilitation-related content.

- **Newsletters:** Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s growing portfolio of email newsletters delivers the hospital’s timely and relevant information and stories to different audiences. For example, The Pulse newsletter reaches prospective and current rehabilitation nurses, while the Adaptive Sports & Fitness Center Updates newsletter provides information about the benefits of fitness and movement, encouraging participation in the hospital’s recreational and fitness programming throughout Chicagoland.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s **Henry B. Betts, MD, LIFE Center** is also an important resource for supporting current/former patients and the community at large. The LIFE Center touts the most comprehensive collection of educational resources worldwide for people living with a wide range of cognitive and physical differences, chronic conditions and diseases affecting function.

The LIFE Center continues to grow its educational offerings to deepen its impact on the community, with ongoing programs that include:

- **Teaching:** The LIFE Center engages in a variety of teaching activities for patients and families. For example, in FY25, the LIFE Center engaged in 3,808 teaching activities that include programs, classes, and special events with patients and families.

- **Online Community Resources:** The LIFE Center’s web portal serves as a digital complement to the center’s in-person educational interactions, enabling the LIFE Center to extend its reach throughout Chicagoland — and even globally. In fact, in FY25, individuals in 188 countries accessed the LIFE Center’s online resources. This is expected to continue — and even grow — as the LIFE Center refines its online resource guides — lists of resources, vendors, and helpful websites researched and compiled by the center’s knowledgeable staff.

- **Peer Mentorship:** The LIFE Center developed and runs a highly regarded peer mentor program in collaboration with Access Living in Chicago, a non-residential independent living center. This program provides support to current Shirley Ryan AbilityLab inpatients and families to introduce the possibilities of post-rehabilitation success and continued engagement in lifelong learning. Currently, the peer mentor team includes 40 individuals with various conditions (including spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, stroke, heart failure and limb loss), as well as those who are family members of an individual with a disability. The LIFE Center conducted 1,109 peer mentor interactions in FY25, including one-on-one visits with patients/families and group education sessions.





## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's research enterprise is among the largest of its kind in the world, with a global reputation for developing treatments and technologies that translate into enhanced patient outcomes. As the first-ever translational research rehabilitation hospital, medicine and science come together to fuel better, faster patient recoveries — with an aim of shortening the time from research discovery to clinical implementation.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's 1.2-million-square-foot flagship hospital touts 800,000 square feet dedicated to clinical and research activities — including five ability labs where applied research and clinical care come together for patients, as well as traditional labs and centers where scientists are advancing rehabilitation research.

Additionally, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has 50 principal investigators and 250 research staff; maintains a \$188 million research portfolio; and leads 200 clinical trials and research studies at any given time.

As a result, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab research scientists are driving new insights and advancing rehabilitation research to increase awareness of rehabilitation health. Examples of research output and impact include:

- **Published Research:** Shirley Ryan AbilityLab research scientists publish hundreds of articles in peer-reviewed journals each year, continuing to advance discovery and innovation in the field of rehabilitation and beyond. Scientists and employees across the organization alike are empowered to lead research geared toward solving patients' most pressing challenges.
- **Rehabilitation Measures Database ("RMD"):** Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is home to the RMD, the largest online resource for measuring benchmarks and outcomes in PM&R, used by clinicians and researchers worldwide. In FY25, 20 new measures were added to the RMD, bringing the total up to 590 measures that are supported by the world's top therapists, researchers, educators and doctors. The RMD continues to be a trusted resource, generating nearly 5 million pageviews annually — thereby enhancing and sustaining the use of standardized rehabilitation measures in clinical practice.
- **Center for Rehabilitation Outcomes Research ("CROR"):** Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is a national leader in rehabilitation outcomes research, with CROR at the forefront of outcomes studies that measure the long-term impact of PM&R in patients with disabilities. Knowledge translation is a core component of CROR's research mission, supported by a range of outreach

efforts and products that bridge the gap between research and real-world application in the community. These efforts include a growing social media presence; infographics; presentations at national and international conferences; three newsletters (CROR Outcomes, HCBS Quality Matters and MRSCICS Matters); and the “INside the OUTcomes” monthly podcast that features in-depth conversations with CROR scientists; leading experts in rehabilitation research; and people with lived experiences of disability and chronic illness.



A recent addition to the program is a five-year combined residency in PM&R and pediatrics — the first of its kind in Chicago and one of only four in the United States. This program is offered in partnership with the top-ranked Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago and the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University, providing a streamlined path for residents to become triple-Board certified in pediatrics, PM&R and pediatric rehabilitation.

In addition to its prestigious rehabilitation residency program, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab also runs the Academy, the hospital’s educational arm providing a wide range of accredited continuing education for rehabilitation professionals. Through the Academy’s courses, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab shares the latest evidence-based interventions, assessments and discoveries. More than 11,000 clinicians annually — from all 50 states and 50 countries — participate via 160+ online courses and webinars, live learning at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab in Chicago, and customized programs for hospital systems and teams.

Taken together, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s educational offerings for medical residents and clinicians ensure the hospital continues to advance the field of PM&R while supporting professional development — ultimately benefiting rehabilitation health for patients.

### **EXPANDING GEOGRAPHIC FOOTPRINT**

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab believes patients should have access to the best care without leaving their communities, and, toward that end, is committed to extending its reach and impact in Chicago and the suburbs; in the Midwest and nationally; and through a global network of partner hospitals.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s network currently includes hospitals and partners in Chicago, California, Michigan, Minnesota and as far away as South Korea, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates — thus increasing awareness of rehabilitation health in those geographies while advancing ability in the growing number of patients served.

In FY25, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab celebrated the groundbreaking of the forthcoming Henry Ford Health patient tower in Detroit, the future home of a three-floor, 72-bed, state-of-the-art rehabilitation hospital that will be managed by Shirley Ryan AbilityLab. The new hospital, which is slated to open in 2029, is supported by a \$130 million investment from the Gilbert Family Foundation to bring transformative recovery opportunities to Detroit-area residents. In the meantime, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is currently providing oversight for rehabilitation services at Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital and Henry Ford Macomb Hospital.

### **MEDICAL EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In collaboration with Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine’s Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab operates the largest and most sought-after PM&R residency program in the nation. In fact, based on a survey of more than 30,000 U.S. physicians by Doximity, a professional online network for medical professionals, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s residency is rated No. 1.

## Priority Area 2: Increased Quality-of-life Programs at Offsite Locations

In addition to its 262-bed flagship hospital in Chicago, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab offers more than 30 additional sites of care — including inpatient, day rehabilitation (“DayRehab”) and outpatient locations — and treats more than 50,000 patients annually from across the United States and around the world.

While substantial resources and quality-of-life programs are available at the flagship hospital, the Assessment identified a need to increase these programs at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s offsite locations. This Priority Area focuses on ongoing and planned programming at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s other sites of care; in the community at large; and in outreach to patients in underserved communities to address health inequities, remove barriers to care, and, ultimately, improve quality of life.

### QUALITY-OF-LIFE PROGRAMS AT OUTPATIENT & DAYREHAB LOCATIONS

- **Diverse Offerings at Various Locations:** Several quality-of-life programs are offered at outpatient and DayRehab locations throughout Chicago and the suburbs. Specifically, these include adaptive sports; assistive technology; charity care and financial assistance; ethics program; patient and family housing (Streeterville); vocational rehabilitation; and access to the LIFE Center’s offerings. Additionally, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has pediatric care coordinators at its offsite locations, who focus on helping pediatric patients return to school after rehabilitation.
- **Community Groups:** Through educational programs and support groups, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab strives to create meaningful connections among patients and community members experiencing similar conditions. For those with chronic or degenerative conditions like Parkinson’s disease or other movement disorders, having access to these opportunities close to home enables convenient participation and fosters community connection. For example, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab hosts a Parkinson’s disease boot camp at its Burr Ridge, Glenview, Homewood and Streeterville locations. The boot camp offers comprehensive therapy and custom exercise plans to promote independence and slow disease progression, while also fostering community engagement among those living with Parkinson’s disease. Shirley Ryan AbilityLab also offers a monthly Parkinson’s conversation group in Homewood for patients and their care partners to share personal experiences and learn from each other in a supportive environment.

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH: ROBERT R. MCCORMICK FOUNDATION CENTER FOR HOPE & EQUITY

The Robert R. McCormick Foundation Center for Hope & Equity at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab was established in 2023 to serve Chicago’s communities, where social determinants of health often adversely impact patients after hospital discharge. The Center for Hope & Equity continues to make significant strides in helping patients navigate ongoing medical needs; secure accessible transportation to and from medical appointments; and receive resources and education about medical symptoms that could lead to rehospitalization.

Wraparound services provided by the Center for Hope & Equity enable Shirley Ryan AbilityLab to respond to the needs of patients in Chicago’s under-resourced communities. Continuing programs include:

- **Care Management:** Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has expanded the role of care managers so they can easily identify patients with complex health-related social needs who are likely to need follow-up care after discharge. Care managers partner with outside agencies, organizations, and programs to assist patients and families with various resources such as food, utilities, and housing. They also assist patients and families with applying for federal, state and local government programs.
- **Promoting Healthcare Equity:** The Center for Hope & Equity partners with clinical teams to ensure they have the support they need to implement screenings for social determinants of health. This includes reviewing economic stability; education access; healthcare access and quality; neighborhood environment; and social support — all of which are worsened by disability and carry a corresponding increase in morbidity and mortality.
- **Partnership with the LIFE Center:** The Center for Hope & Equity collaborates with Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s LIFE Center to identify and support patients who require additional support after discharge from rehabilitation, providing streamlined community resources targeted to patients who need them most.
- **Psychosocial Services:** The Center for Hope & Equity is expanding access to psychosocial services such as social work and psychology for underinsured patients, funding 1.7 full-time-equivalent employees across three care sites, including Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s Streeterville DayRehab® Center, the outpatient center at the hospital’s flagship location and the Homewood DayRehab® Center.

## ADAPTIVE SPORTS IN CHICAGO & THE SUBURBS

After an injury or illness, or for those living with a chronic condition or functional impairment, participation in recreational activities and sports can greatly enhance quality of life, allowing individuals to build upon physical skills, resume participation in previous recreational interests and discover new ones.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab operates Chicago's largest and most comprehensive adaptive sports program, providing sports and recreational activities to more than 450 adults and kids who have a primary physical impairment. Adaptive sports offerings include archery, bocchia, golf, hand cycling, rock climbing, rugby, sailing, scuba, sled hockey, swimming, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair softball.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab collaborates with many adaptive sports providers throughout Chicagoland and Illinois to host sports experience days in the community for everyone to display their ability. For example, in FY25, 686 patients participated in a variety of adaptive sports at offsite locations across Chicago and the suburbs, where they used adaptive sports equipment to enhance their skills.

As interest in adaptive sports continues to grow, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's goal is to increase visibility for these programs over the next few years. Specifically:

- Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's adaptive sports and marketing teams have created a guide listing all programs offered throughout the year, which is published online and distributed to all Shirley Ryan AbilityLab sites of care. The guide is also linked through the monthly Adaptive Sports & Fitness Updates newsletter that reaches approximately 600 current and prospective participants.
- Digital signage at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab displays information regarding adaptive sports programs.
- Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will continue to collaborate with local support groups and advocacy agencies, such as the United Spinal Association and Access Living, to raise awareness for these programs.



## Priority Area 3: Inclusion of Youth With Physical Disabilities in Sports & Fitness Programs

In addition to providing sports and fitness programs to adults, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will continue to grow and add programming tailored for children and adolescents — a fulfillment of the third Priority Area, inclusion of youth with physical disabilities in sports and fitness programs.

### TENGELSEN FAMILY FOUNDATION SPORTS FOR KIDS PROGRAM

One of the cornerstones of Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's youth offerings is the Tengelsen Family Foundation Sports for Kids Program, which offers adaptive sports and recreational opportunities year-round, including competitive team sports, camps and weekend programs.

For instance, the Sports for Kids Summer Camp — held in partnership with the Chicago Park District — is a one-week experience for young people between the ages of 6 and 21 who have a primary physical impairment and exhibit independence in their daily living skills. The camp offers a wide range of opportunities, such as archery, cycling, rock climbing, sailing and wheelchair softball (sponsored by the Chicago Cubs). In FY25, 53 young people participated in Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's sports camps.

During the school year, on non-attendance days, indoor and outdoor youth programs are offered through Sports for Kids for children who live in the city of Chicago. Programs include activities such as sled hockey, rock climbing and special field trips; free lunch; and transportation to and from home to make participation more convenient.



Sports for Kids programs are offered free of charge. Shirley Ryan AbilityLab partners with caseworkers and therapists in Chicago Public Schools to help them understand how to refer children to the hospital's youth programming, with hopes to grow the program going forward.

Beyond providing ways for youth to stay active and build community through adaptive sports and fitness, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is introducing new experiences that help young athletes build life skills through exposure to new environments, mentorship and diverse opportunities, such as:

- Trips to University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to introduce students to a fully accessible college campus with a thriving Center for Adaptive Sports, an acclaimed wheelchair basketball tournament and a diverse student body.
- Sports-specific trips to locations outside of Chicago, including a trip to Colorado for adaptive skiing and to Florida for scuba diving.

Of note, Sports for Kids boasts a 100% high school graduation rate among its participants, with some receiving full scholarships to college — a true testament to the continued value and impact of this program.

### ENRICHING PEDIATRIC CAMPS

Beyond the Sports for Kids program, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab's pediatrics team offers both summer and winter camps, which provide an enriching environment for kids to build new physical and functional skills through fun activities tailored to their specific needs.

Examples of these camps include "Power Play Kids" and "Tiny Tots" for building upper-extremity function through play; "Stride Through Summer" for improving gait and gaining higher-level mobility skills; and "Pool Pals Pediatric Swim Camp," which is led by speech and physical therapists and is designed to guide parents and caregivers to best support their child in the pool through fun strategies that maximize development and engagement.

## Priority Area 4: Early Identification of Disability in Infants & Young Children

The early detection of chronic conditions, as well as early intervention with developmentally appropriate therapies, is critical for improving outcomes in children and for equipping kids and their families with the right tools for community integration.

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will continue to make demonstrable progress in this fourth Priority Area — the early identification of disability in infants and young children. Over the next few years, it is operationalizing new programs that support the early diagnosis of cerebral palsy (“CP”); leading new pediatric-focused research initiatives; and championing a key partnership focused on supporting infant development.

### **CEREBRAL PALSY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE**

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has established a Cerebral Palsy Center of Excellence, designed to meet the comprehensive needs of pediatric patients with CP, as well as their families, by providing wraparound services — including a dedicated social worker and patient coordinator focused solely on supporting this population in collaboration with the clinical team of physicians, nurses and therapists.

Through the CP Center of Excellence, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s goals are to standardize clinical practice; promote and disseminate CP research discoveries; serve as a resource for patients and families; and gather and interpret data surrounding care and outcomes to better inform the medical management and community resources for children and adults with CP.

Within the center, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s Early Motor Development Clinic plays a critical role in facilitating the hospital’s early identification and diagnosis of CP. Dedicated to supporting infants and toddlers experiencing motor delays or developmental challenges, the clinic offers collaborative, interdisciplinary rehabilitation evaluations — for developmental screening, early identification of motor delays and appropriate referrals for infants and toddlers.

Overall, the center supports patients with CP by creating clinical pathways from time of diagnosis — ideally, within the first months of life — and continuous care to individuals with CP throughout childhood and as they transition to adulthood.

### **BUILDING ADVANCED CEREBRAL PALSY ASSISTIVE CARE SOLUTIONS**

The National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research announced that Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has been awarded a five-year, \$5 million grant to establish a new center, which will be called Building Advanced Cerebral Palsy Assistive Care Solutions (“BACPACS”).

When implemented, BACPACS will bring together clinicians with engineers and scientists focused on improving clinical care and quality of life in Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s youngest patients. In the process, it will become a national hub for innovation in pediatric device development, clinical trials that use multimodal therapy, and technology-enabled monitoring.

### **GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH**

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is leading a multi-million-dollar, multidisciplinary, years-long research effort that represents the largest longitudinal study of human infant motor development and movement ever performed and its findings are poised to revolutionize standard practice in pediatrics. This research project is a big-data, high-tech study that has never before been attempted. It is emblematic of Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s vision for the future — to tailor personalized care for the best outcomes.

### **PATHWAYS.ORG**

Shirley Ryan AbilityLab’s partner organization, Pathways.org, is committed to equipping parents and physicians with resources to strengthen infants’ motor, sensory and communication development while also building awareness about the importance of early intervention and detection.

In fact, Pathways.org continues to provide free, trusted resources to parents and clinicians around the world — a mission that already has resulted in a staggering 70 million+ video views. As Pathways.org’s reach continues to grow, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab is committed to investing in its evolution as it advances ability for even more children.



## Conclusion

Over the next three years, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will work diligently to implement these strategies in order to address the four Priority Areas, thereby providing community benefits to Shirley Ryan AbilityLab patients and their family members. In summary, Shirley Ryan AbilityLab will:

1. Increase awareness of rehabilitation health by providing patient and community resources; promoting research activities that expand knowledge of and advancements in rehabilitation; providing educational opportunities for current and future rehabilitation professionals; and expanding its reach to bring rehabilitation care and awareness to new patients in new geographies.
2. Increase quality-of-life programs at offsite locations by continuing or expanding programming at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab sites of care (outside the flagship hospital) and in community locations in Chicago and the suburbs. It also will provide medical, rehabilitation and social support to improve quality of life for patients in under-resourced communities.
3. Further promote and grow its programs for youth with functional impairments to encourage participation in sports and fitness programs — by raising awareness for adaptive sports and fitness youth offerings; partnering with community organizations and providers to drive program referrals; and building upon new programs such as experiential trips, mentorship and educational opportunities.
4. Promote the early identification of disability in infants and young children by operationalizing new programs that support the early diagnosis and treatment of cerebral palsy (CP); leading new pediatric-focused research initiatives; and building upon a key partnership focused on infant development.