



HealthChoice
Illinois
Illinois Department of
Healthcare and Family Services

Caring for what matters.™

2025 Community Impact Report



Table of Contents



A Message from Cristal Gary 3

Meridian at a Glance. 4

Investing in Local Solutions. 5

Investing in Our Communities. 6

Whole Health Care. 7

Uniquely Local Approach 8

Trusted Partner to All 9

Extras that Make a Difference 10

Supporting Providers
Every Step of the Way 10

Member Voices 11

Welcome

A Message from Cristal Gary



Cristal Gary
Plan President & CEO

At Meridian, we recognize that advancing health equity requires more than clinical care—it demands strategic collaboration with policymakers, community leaders, and organizations committed to improving lives across Illinois. As we reflect on our work, I’m proud to share how our mission has a measurable impact on the communities we serve.

Our approach centers on whole-person care, meeting individuals where they are and responding with compassion and innovation. Programs like MomCare and MindCare are designed to address maternal health and behavioral wellness, offering tailored support that reflects the diverse needs of our members. These initiatives are not just services—they are critical interventions that align with public health priorities and community goals.

We deepened our investment in community-based solutions. Through our *Health Happens Here Grants™*, we allocated nearly \$2.8 million to more than 80 local organizations, expanding access to essential services such as housing, nutrition, and preventive care. We also led all managed care plans in Business Enterprise Program (BEP) investment in 2024, directing over \$98 million to certified vendors and strengthening economic opportunity in underserved areas. We were also a leader in quality – particularly Living with Illness and Access to Care—according to HFS’ HCI Health Plan Report Card.

Our provider network remains a vital partner in delivering quality care. In 2024, we awarded \$15 million to providers for achieving improved health outcomes. These strong relationships help ensure our services are responsive, culturally competent, and effective.

We’re also proud of our investments that drive community-level outcomes. In collaboration with the Chicago Fire FC, we expanded the P.L.A.Y.S. program, promoting social-emotional learning and achieving a 24% improvement in mental well-being among youth participants. With support from the Centene Foundation, we delivered over \$2.5 million in mobile prenatal care, housing assistance, and fresh food access—reaching families in neighborhoods that need it most.

As we look ahead, Meridian remains committed to working alongside legislators and community allies to build healthier, more resilient communities. We thank you for your continued leadership and partnership in this shared mission.

Warm regards,

Cristal Gary
Meridian Plan President and CEO




Meridian at a Glance

 ~\$2.8M
invested

in more than 80 community-based organizations and programs with our *Health Happens Here Grants™* since 2022.

 \$500K
in seed funding

launched the Lightning Loan Program, unlocking \$2.5M in lending power for minority-owned and led small businesses.

 24%
increase in Mental Well-Being

by partnering with the Chicago Fire FC to implement impactful social and emotional learning through the P.L.A.Y.S. program.¹

¹ PLAYS (Participate, Learn, Achieve, Youth, Soccer) engages 1,500 kids annually from 60+ Chicago Public Schools from 25 underserved neighborhoods.

² 2024 HealthChoice Illinois Statewide Plan Report Card by HFS

 5 Stars
rating

Meridian earned 5-star ratings for highest performance on Access to Care and Living With Illness.²



\$2.5M+
invested

in mobile, prenatal healthcare in rural areas, critical housing, and fresh food for neighborhoods in need thanks to the Centene Foundation.

 \$15M
awarded

to providers for improved health outcomes in 2024.

Investing in Local Solutions

Health Happens Here Grants™

At Meridian, we're committed to supporting the communities where we live and work. Through our *Health Happens Here Grants™*, we fund behavioral health and wellness programs that serve young mothers, children, teens, and seniors. These grants are designed to improve access to care and promote more equitable healthcare delivery across Illinois.

Our goal is to close healthcare gaps for our members—particularly in under-resourced communities—by investing in local organizations that offer high-quality, culturally sensitive services. Since launching the program in 2022, we've invested nearly \$2.8 million in more than 80 community-based organizations and programs throughout the state.

Here are a few recent examples of how our grants are making an impact:

Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) & Esperanza Health Centers

(Chicago): Received a \$50,000 grant to establish school-based therapy services for children and teens.



Dream Center Peoria (DCP) (Peoria): Received a \$100,000 grant to support mobile units and a 24/7 emergency shelter. The mobile units offer free showers, bathrooms, laundry, haircuts, and meals to local families. The grant also funded renovations to DCP's indoor playground and fitness center.



\$1.6M+

grants awarded to fund care services for pregnant women



\$50K

grant to establish the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council and Esperanza Health Centers' therapy services for school-age students



\$100K

grant to Dream Center Peoria for its mobile units and 24/7 emergency shelter

“ Meridian’s grant allows us to provide a full-time therapist for students who wouldn’t normally be able to receive this type of care. ”

— Craig Chico, BYNC Council President & CEO

“ The generous contribution from Meridian has exponentially increased DCP’s impact to serve the community with dignity. ”

— Andy King, CEO, DCP

Investing in Our Communities

Each year, Meridian evaluates how well our members can access the care they need—where and when they need it most. These insights help guide our community investments across Illinois to improve health and well-being.

Here are examples of the programs we supported:

Roseland Community Hospital (Chicago): Funded the purchase of a mobile mammography unit to increase access to breast cancer screenings.

Franklin-Williamson Positive Youth Development (Southern Illinois): Purchased 2,000 back-to-school kits to support local students.

The Outlet (Central Illinois): Contributed to the renovation of an in-school mentoring and youth development center for students ages 8–18.

Compass for Kids (Springfield): Purchased an 11-passenger van and a minivan to help transport children and families to after-school and summer programs. ▼

Mini O’Beirne Crisis Nursery (Springfield): Funded the purchase of diapers and wipes for families in crisis.

Children First Fund, The Chicago Public Schools Foundation (Chicago): Supported immunization and physical exam events to keep students healthy and ready to learn.

Connections for the Homeless (Northern Chicago suburbs): Provided support to deliver critical services to individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

Greater All Nations Tabernacle (Springfield): Expanded the senior luncheon program to include continental breakfasts, games, art supplies, and prizes.

Hispanic Women of Springfield: Supported efforts to raise awareness and educate Central Illinois communities about Hispanic culture, traditions, and folklore.

Southern Illinois University College of Medicine (Springfield): Helped develop curriculum to train the next generation of healthcare providers.



Whole Health Care

At Meridian, we take a whole-person approach to care—offering tailored support to help our members thrive physically and mentally. Through innovative programs like Meridian Medicaid Plan and YouthCare, we address health disparities and bring vital services to those who need them most—at every stage of life.

Improving Maternal Health through MomCare

Signature programs for new and expecting moms

Meridian actively collaborates with healthcare providers and community organizations to address alarming health inequities that contribute to preterm births, pregnancy-related deaths, and other risks.

Through initiatives like our Start Smart for Your Baby® program and investments in mobile obstetric care, we work to improve outcomes for mothers and babies across Illinois.

Our focus is on early engagement—helping moms-to-be:

- Manage chronic health conditions
- Access behavioral health care
- Overcome barriers to care
- Benefit from educational resources for a healthier pregnancy and postpartum experience



~ 1 in 3

Illinois adults report symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. We offer innovative programs to support our members’ mental health.



Supporting Mental Well-Being through MindCare

Innovative behavioral health support for members

Whole-person health begins with mental health. In Illinois:

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young adults ages 15–34
- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death overall

Meridian is committed to improving mental health care by providing innovative programs and ongoing education for our care teams and provider network. Our goal is to ensure every member has access to high-quality, compassionate mental health support.

Uniquely Local Approach

We Are Where Our Members Are

Healthcare quality and access begins locally. We are deeply committed to the communities where our members live and work—partnering with providers, organizations, and local programs to bring care and support directly to them.

Community Partnerships and Events

Back-to-School Events

Each summer, we help Illinois children start the school year ready—providing backpacks, supplies, and activities. Many events also offer haircuts, health screenings, dental exams, and immunizations.

Chicago Fire Foundation P.L.A.Y.S. Program

The Chicago Fire Foundation P.L.A.Y.S. (Participate, Learn, Achieve, Youth, Soccer) Program, presented by Meridian, serves under-resourced students across 60 Chicago Public Schools. With 95% living at or below poverty level, it uses soccer to teach teamwork, resilience, and physical and mental health.

Supporting City of Refuge – Chicago

Together with the Centene Foundation, we provided a \$135,000 grant to City of Refuge – Chicago for nutritious meals for Youth Sports Conference players and Chicago Westside Police, plus 1,500 grocery bags of farm-fresh produce for families in need.

Hip Hop Tuesdays

In partnership with Chicago Police Department District 15, we host Hip Hop Tuesdays—a weekly program offering youth a safe space to relax, play games, connect with local officials, and get schoolwork help, fostering community and positive engagement.

Building Healthcare Access Through Provider Partnerships

Strong provider partnerships are the cornerstone of delivering the high-quality services our members need. Our robust and accessible network spans providers and facilities across Illinois:



16K+

primary care providers



53K+

specialists



4K+

behavioral health and substance use providers



230+

hospitals



660+

rural health center locations



1.3K+

federally qualified health center (FQHC) locations and community mental health centers

Data as of April 23, 2025

508K+ lives impacted in 2024.

Trusted Partner to All

Meridian is aligned with the Illinois Department of Public Health’s priorities and goals as outlined in Healthy Illinois 2028. Our programs reflect this commitment across key areas:

Chronic Disease

Living with a chronic condition can be challenging. That’s why we offer a Chronic Disease Management Program, providing nurse support and resources to help members with asthma, COPD, diabetes, heart disease, or those looking to quit smoking.

Health Equity

Meridian champions health equity across Illinois through both leadership and action. In 2024, we sponsored the *5th Annual Chicago Clergy Convening for Health Equity* to foster dialogue and collaborative solutions on key issues such as Black maternal health in the post-pandemic environment. In addition, Meridian was the first Medicaid plan in the U.S. to offer incentives helping hospitals achieve *Health Care Equity Certification from The Joint Commission*—underscoring our commitment to advancing equitable healthcare for all.



From left: Dr. John Rich, Director (RUSH of Health Equity), Dr. Rutu Ezhuthachan, CMO (Meridian), and Dr. Olusimbo Ige, Health Commissioner (Chicago Department of Public Health) discussing key health concerns impacting communities throughout the city of Chicago

Maternal and Infant Health

We implement innovative programs to reduce preterm births and pregnancy-related deaths:

Smart Start for Your Baby®

From pregnancy through baby’s first steps, this program connects new and expecting mothers with culturally sensitive whole-health care, mental health services, breastfeeding support, community resources, and more.

Remote Patient Monitoring Program

In partnership with Vheda Health, high-risk pregnant members receive specialized monitoring and support through remote patient monitoring technologies. Since launch, the program has supported the delivery of over 2,000 babies, 86% of which were full-term (average gestational age: 38 weeks).

Meridian Healthy Rewards for Moms

A robust rewards program encourages positive health outcomes—members can earn up to \$250 and baby gear (\$140 value) for completing key prenatal and well-child milestones.

Community Baby Shower Events

We host baby showers that provide new and expecting mothers with essential baby items and education. Events also feature demonstrations on safe sleep, oral hygiene, car seat safety, breastfeeding, and postpartum care.

The Link & Option Center, Inc.

Awarded \$175,000 to fund two doulas who provide prenatal and postpartum care to pregnant women on Chicago’s South Side—supporting Meridian members and the broader community.

Extras That Make a Difference

At Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

Our at-home blood pressure monitoring program helps eligible members manage hypertension. Using a smartphone app, members can track and share readings with their providers for better care coordination.

Diabetes Prevention Program

This free program helps members lower their risk of developing type 2 diabetes through healthy lifestyle changes. It includes:

- > Personalized coaching
- > Lessons on nutrition and activity
- > Options to participate online or in person



Supporting Providers Every Step of the Way

At Meridian, we take a comprehensive approach to provider support. Our dedicated Provider Relations team offers expertise across all aspects of operations—from enrollment and credentialing to claims inquiries, provider performance, and engagement. We also assist with quality improvement efforts, care coordination, and navigation of the provider portal.



“ Our Meridian Provider Relations partner, Alona, is very attentive to our issues and concerns. We’ve established monthly meetings to discuss ongoing matters and raise any new ones—holding each other accountable for solutions. We’re grateful for the positive experience and Meridian’s efforts to meet our needs. ”

— Dan H., Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System, Mattoon, Illinois

Member Voices

Our members are at the heart of everything we do. We recognize that each person’s health journey is unique—and so is the support they need. Through compassionate, personalized care coordination, our teams work closely with individuals and families to address medical, behavioral, and social challenges. These stories highlight how meaningful connection and dedicated support can lead to life-changing outcomes.

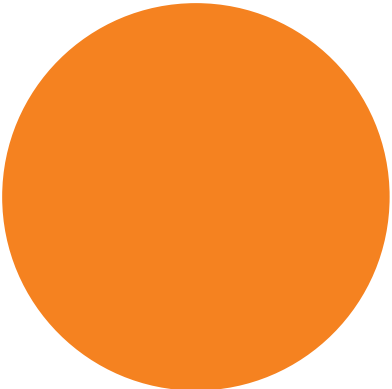
Laura* — Laura, a Spanish-only speaking Meridian member was diagnosed with gestational diabetes and epilepsy. Through her care manager and an interpreter, she was able to navigate her health journey during and after pregnancy. She connected to care for her complex postpartum needs after giving birth to twin girls, resulting in a 7-day hospital stay. She also continues to see a neurologist to manage her epilepsy.

Chloe* — Chloe, an 18-year-old who received support from Meridian to help her manage attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and depression. With the R.E.A.C.H. program, a care manager, therapist, and psychiatrist developed a care plan to help Chloe cope and feel focused and empowered to improve her overall health. She also stopped smoking.

*Name changed to protect member’s identity





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