

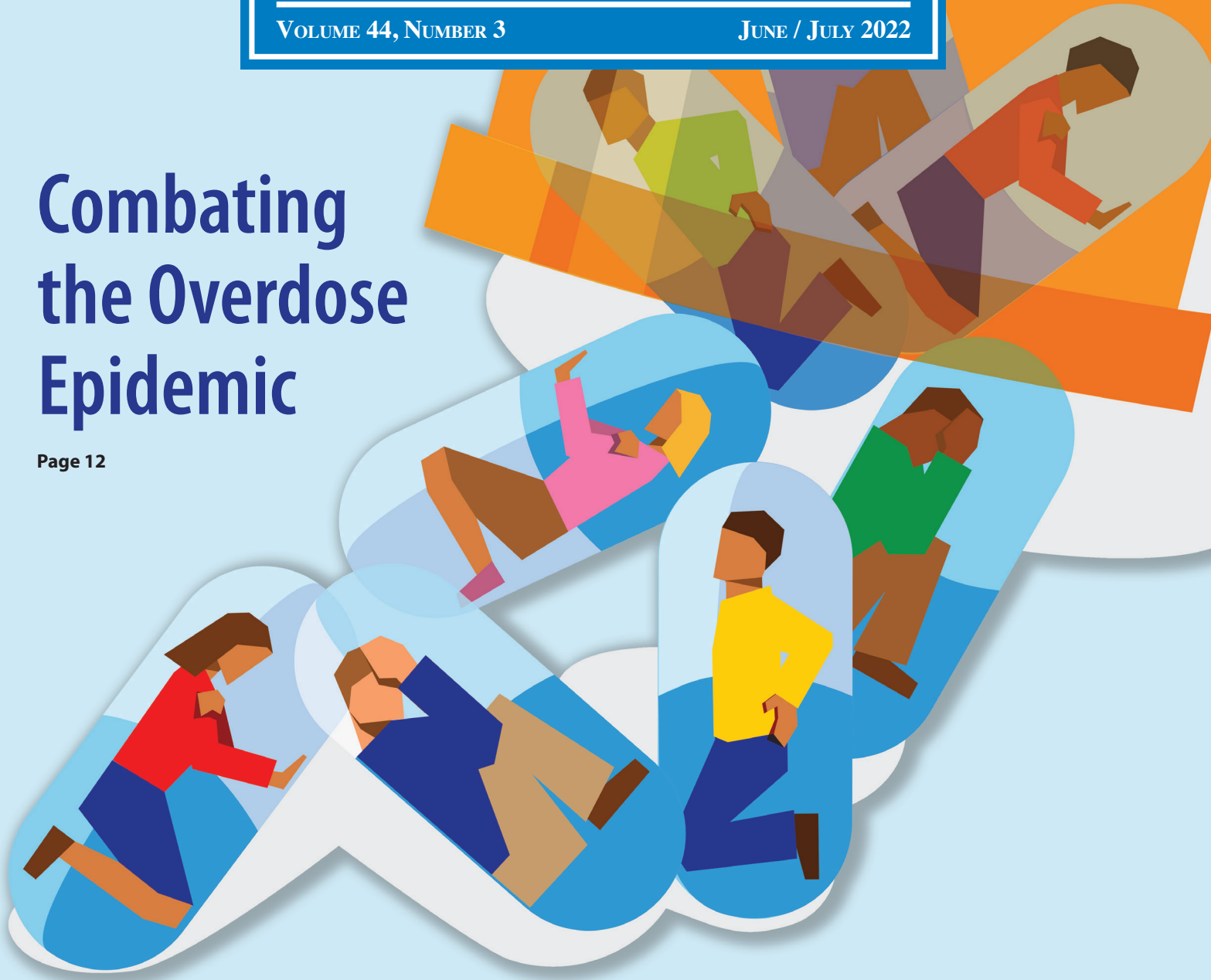
# ST. LOUIS METROPOLITAN MEDICINE

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## Combating the Overdose Epidemic

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# SSM Health Efforts for the Underserved in COVID-19

*Editor's Note: The following is a supplement to the April-May St. Louis Metropolitan Medicine article on the efforts of local health departments and hospital systems to advance health equity around COVID-19. The original article included information on BJC HealthCare and Mercy; the information below covers SSM Health.*

**S**SM Health has worked to advance health equity during COVID-19 through its support of the St. Louis Metropolitan Pandemic Task Force and outreach efforts for testing and vaccination in the community.

Chairing the task force has been Alex Garza, MD, chief community health officer of SSM Health. From the start of the pandemic in March 2020, he has given briefings to media and the community as many as six times a week over Facebook, providing current data and highlighting issues of concern. Formation of the task force forged an increased level of cooperation and collaboration between health systems, public health, the business community, community-based clinics and more, and the task force advocated for equity issues such as vaccine distribution.

On the health delivery side, SSM Health emphasized and advocated for the most vulnerable populations with regards to protective measures and vaccinations. In addition to prioritizing the elderly population, SSM Health focused outreach and vaccination efforts on 10 ZIP codes having the greatest socioeconomic disparities. Nearly 7,000 patients were reached in these areas.

In partnership with Home State Health, Affinia, and the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, SSM Health administered 1,000 first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccine to patients with high socioeconomic needs in March and April 2021 at the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis. SSM Health provided vaccine supply, administration, and physician oversight for



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events. This included a vaccination clinic held March 27-28, 2021, at the Victor Roberts Building on North Kingshighway, focusing on providing COVID-19 vaccines to people over the age of 65 in underserved ZIP codes.

In the Ritenour School District, which has a high percentage of Hispanic families, SSM Health hosted multiple vaccine events. Jayceen Ensruide, vice president of operations of SSM Health Medical Group, described the effort: “Through our mobile vaccination team, we offered vaccinations to students and families in a familiar and non-intimidating location and provided Spanish-speaking interpreters.”

Drive-through COVID-19 testing was offered in underserved communities at the Ronald McDonald House location on South Grand and SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Pediatrics in North County. Testing was also offered at SSM Health urgent care locations across the metropolitan region.

“The relationships and partnerships that we have developed throughout the pandemic in serving the highest-risk communities can be leveraged to address a multitude of other ongoing health inequities beyond COVID-19,” said Deidre Griffith, SSM Health St. Louis regional director of community health. —

## — ALLIANCE —

**Members Recognized:** Two SLMMS Alliance members were honored at the MSMA Alliance annual meeting during the MSMA convention April 2. **Angela Zylka** received the Jean Wankum Spirit of the Alliance Award for her work with the Hungry Heroes program distributing gift bags to frontline staff at area hospitals; she also was presented a special award along with former St. Louisan **Millie Bever** for their 28 years of service to medical students by organizing Match Day events. **Sue Ann Greco** received the Sandra Mitchell Member of the Year Award along with a special resolution from the MSMA House of Delegates

honoring her service to the state and national Alliance including service as AMA Alliance president for 2020-2021. —

**2022-2023 Officers Elected:** Leading the SLMMS Alliance for the 2022-2023 year are **Jo-Ellyn Ryall, MD**, and **Gill Waltman**, co-presidents; **Angela Zylka**, vice president-health; **Sue Ann Greco**, vice president-membership; **Sandra Murdock**, treasurer; and **Jean Raybuck**, corresponding secretary. Dr. Ryall also is serving as vice president-legislation; Gill also is serving as vice president-foundation and recording secretary. —