

Chicago Clean Air Resilience Network Launches to Expand Nonprofit Access to Clean Air Equipment and Free N95 Masks

New network expands Windy City ToolBank's community lending model to help groups prepare for poor air quality, wildfire smoke, and airborne health threats.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, July 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Chicago-based nonprofits [Air Support Project](#) and [Windy City ToolBank](#), in partnership with [Public Health Action Network](#) (PHAN) and SOS, have launched Chicago Clean Air Resilience Network (Chi-CARN), an initiative creating equitable access to clean air equipment and free high-quality masks for nonprofits and community organizations across Chicago.



Chicago neighborhood covered in smoky haze |
Photo credit: Steve Geer via Getty Images

Chi-CARN is building a shared stockpile of clean air-related tools, supplies, and personal protective equipment through Windy City ToolBank's lending program in Pilsen. Through this community-driven model, organizations can borrow equipment such as air purifiers, particle sensors, and dehumidifiers without the burden of purchasing, storing, and maintaining these resources themselves.

Record-breaking wildfire smoke, tornadoes, and flooding have created hazardous air quality in Chicago throughout the summer, and severe climate-related weather events are happening more frequently across the Midwest. As the smoke clears over Chicago for the fourth year in a row, the launch of Chi-CARN comes at a critical time. The city routinely experiences moderate-or-worse air quality conditions and faces some of the highest asthma rates in the nation, with disproportionate impacts on Black and Latino communities.

"This project exists because Chicago lacks a coordinated and equitable system for delivering clean air resources during both emergencies and everyday air quality challenges," said Sarah Masih, Executive Director of Air Support Project. "The air we breathe is a fundamental social determinant of health. We breathe approximately 11,000 liters of air every day, and most of those breaths occur indoors, where we encounter the majority of our exposure to air pollution



Our program builds upon and supports the work already being done by community organizations by giving them access to clean air tools without the overhead costs that put these resources out of reach."

Melissa Smallwood, Air Support Project, Program Director

and airborne illness. By improving indoor air quality, we create healthier, more accessible spaces where everyone can safely participate in community life."

Chi-CARN's inventory will include free consumable supplies, such as N95 respirator masks and rapid respiratory tests, as well as durable equipment including, high-CADR air purifiers, far UVC lights, and PortaCount fit testing machines.

"Clean air is a basic right, but it is still invisible and neglected in public conversation," said PHAN CEO Tarz Ludwigsen. "Chi-CARN helps make it visible by giving communities a practical way to obtain masks, clean air equipment, and support before smoke, pathogens, or

severe weather becomes a crisis. For PHAN, this is how public health becomes actionable and clean air becomes an expectation."

For Windy City ToolBank, Chi-CARN represents a natural evolution of its mission of helping community organizations accomplish ambitious goals by removing barriers to accessing equipment.

"We're taught that you can survive three weeks without food and three days without water, but only about three minutes without air," said Jessica Pohto, Executive Director of Windy City ToolBank and Midwest Territory Manager for ToolBank Disaster Services. "Clean air isn't a luxury. It's essential infrastructure. As Chicago continues to face everyday air quality challenges and increasingly severe climate events, we're proud to add clean air equipment to our lending inventory so that every neighborhood organization has equitable access to the resources that keep people safe."

The coalition is already partnering with community-based facilities and local ward offices to establish neighborhood-level distribution throughout the city, as well as hosting build events for DIY air cleaners. The pilot is currently supported through grassroots contributions, in-kind donations, and community volunteers, with early donations including a shipment of children's KN95 masks from WellBefore.

Any nonprofit, school, faith community, civic organization, mutual aid group, or mission-driven organization in the Chicago area is welcome to participate, regardless of 501(c)(3) status.

Organizations interested in becoming members, borrowing equipment, donating inventory, volunteering, or supporting Chi-CARN's expansion are encouraged to reach out. Because no organization's mission should be limited by unbreathable air.

For more information, visit www.cleanairresiliencenetwork.org or contact:

Chicago Clean Air Resilience Network (Chi-CARN)

hello@chicagocarn.org

About Chi-CARN

The Chicago Clean Air Resilience Network (Chi-CARN) is a coalition led by Air Support Project and co-founded with Public Health Action Network (PHAN), SOS, and Windy City ToolBank. Together, the organizations are building equitable access to clean indoor air resources and strengthening community resilience to air quality challenges across the Chicagoland region.

About Air Support Project

Air Support Project works to make affordable, science-backed indoor air quality solutions accessible to communities, with a focus on protecting public health and improving indoor environments for everyone.

About Windy City ToolBank

Windy City ToolBank serves community-based organizations by providing tools, equipment, and expertise to empower their most ambitious goals. Through its community lending model, the organization removes barriers to access and strengthens the capacity of nonprofits, schools, faith communities, and neighborhood organizations throughout the Chicago region.

About Public Health Action Network

Public Health Action Network is a forward-thinking public health advocacy and technology organization dedicated to helping people stay healthy by reducing exposure to airborne illnesses like COVID-19. PHAN believes clean air is a basic right and a public health essential. By uniting siloed resources, translating verified research into actionable insights, and developing user-centered tools, they empower individuals and communities with the information they need to avoid airborne illnesses.

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