

The fight for reproductive rights drives Uptown, Edgewater women to the polls

Waiting at the back of a silent line of voters that stretched halfway up Buena Avenue and into the Uptown Branch Chicago Public Library, Hannah Dowell, 27, wiped tears from her face with her thin black sweater.

"I vote on behalf of women that can't make choices for themselves about their freedom," Dowell said through glossy eyes.

She said she was thinking of her late mother, Patricia Carter Dowell, who advocated for reproductive rights before she passed 12 years ago.

Dowell and thousands of other women were lined up at the polls across Chicago to vote in this year's historic presidential election Tuesday. As of 3 p.m., 526,232 ballots cast by women had been accounted for, about 100,000 more than the number cast by men, according to the Chicago Board of Elections.

Voters will decide between Democratic nominee Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman of color to lead a major political party ticket, and Republican nominee Donald Trump, the first former president to be impeached twice during his time in office from 2016 to 2020.

This election cycle, all Illinois voters will also decide whether to expand insurance coverage to include fertility treatments, such as in vitro fertilization.

Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth introduced the referendum as part of her Right to IVF initiative, which aims to provide funding for pregnancy and reproductive health resources throughout the state.



A woman holds out a “Thank You for Voting!” card given to voters after handing in their ballots outside of the Broadway Armory on North Broadway Street in Edgewater on Nov. 5, 2024.
(Medill Reports/Anneliese Cornejo Garcia)

According to the American Civil Liberties Union, Illinois passed the Reproductive Health Act in 2019, which safeguarded abortion rights, family planning resources and public funding for reproductive health clinics.

Some young women in Uptown, like Casey O’Connor, 23, said they are still uneasy about the future of reproductive health protections after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states should decide reproductive protections in a landmark decision that overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022.

“We can’t fall victim to fatigue or hopelessness. We’re the ones next up in line, and we have to get up and do something,” O’Connor said.



A line of Chicago voters reached halfway down the Uptown Branch Chicago Public Library on West Buena Avenue around 10:30 a.m. on Nov. 5, 2024.
(Medill Reports/Anneliese Cornejo Garcia)

Catera Carter, 20, added her ballot to the count today as she voted in a presidential election for the first time at the Uptown Branch Library. She said she felt emotional about the ability to vote on legislation that impacts her health.

“I’m just holding my heart today,” Carter said, pressing her hands to her chest.

A short bus ride away from the Uptown Branch Library, people headed to vote at the Broadway Armory in Edgewater. It’s where Kristin Lansdown, 34, cast her ballot today, wearing a bright yellow blazer over a blue jumpsuit.

“My interest, as a voter and as a human, is looking to make sure that everyone is treated with respect and has the rights that they deserve,” Lansdown said.

She said she felt more informed than ever about Duckworth’s reproductive health proposal and its potential impact on her health as a Black woman.

According to the Chicago Department of Public Health, Black women are three times more likely to die from complications during pregnancy.

Lansdown said she hopes Black women vote with their reproductive health in mind this election.

“Get out there, and try to get our country to where we want it to be one day,” she said.

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