



POP HEALTH CENTRAL

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POPULATION HEALTH IN ACTION

RWJ University Hospital and Mexican Consulate Partner to Improve Community Health

Contributing Author: Mariam Merced, Director of RWHUH Community Health, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) has partnered with the Ventanilla de Salud (Window of Health) initiative at the Mexican Consulate in New Brunswick to expand access to healthcare for Mexican nationals and disproportionately impacted communities. This collaboration promotes health equity by providing health education, screenings, and connections to medical services for Mexican immigrants.

Edited by: Horacio Hernandez, Donna Meeker-O'Rourke, Kithmy Wickramasinghe & Mary O'Dowd (Rutgers Health)

For recommendations on future newsletter topics or to be a contributing author, reach out to us.



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Mexican immigrants face barriers to healthcare, including lack of insurance, language barriers, and fear of seeking services. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Pew Research Center, nearly 35% of Hispanic adults in the U.S. lack a regular healthcare provider and about 20% are uninsured. By working together, RWJUH and Ventanilla de Salud ensure more people receive the care they need in a setting they trust.

A key part of the initiative is the use of Team Salud, a group of Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs) or “Promotoras,” who serve as a bridge between residents and the healthcare system. Team Salud members are from the same communities they serve, provide culturally appropriate health education, connect individuals to services, and help them navigate complex medical systems. Their presence at the consulate makes health resources more accessible to visitors who may not seek medical care. Since the program’s inception eight months ago, the Promotoras at the Ventanilla de Salud have assisted over 4,421 residents in accessing healthcare services.

“We make people feel safe and informed about their health,” says Rosabel Pastrana, a community health ambassador coordinator at the Ventanilla de Salud. “Many of our clients don’t know where to go for medical care, and we help them take that first step toward a healthier life.”

Additionally, the partnership includes hospital-affiliated physicians from the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School who offer health screenings and educational sessions at the consulate. These screenings detect conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol early, allowing for timely intervention. The program has provided more than 731 health screenings. Physicians also provide guidance on preventive care, helping individuals adopt healthier lifestyles and manage chronic conditions.

“Partnerships like this allow us to reach individuals who might otherwise fall through the cracks,” said Mariam Merced, MA, Director of Community Health Promotions for RWJUH. “By working with Ventanilla de Salud, we can provide care where it’s most needed and ensure that more people have access to life-saving health services.”



Update on the Rutgers Health Service Corps: Student-Led Program to Improve Colorectal Cancer Screening in the Eric. B Chandler Health Center Populations

Contributing Author: Jack Hemphill, Associate Program Manager, Rutgers Office of Population Health

The Rutgers Health Service Corps (RHSC) has been leading a potentially life-saving initiative to promote early detection of colorectal cancer—the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. Since last September, RHSC students have assembled over 1,700 colon cancer screening home stool blood test kits, which are called fecal immunochemical tests (FIT Kits), to help make screening more accessible to low-income community members.



Every Tuesday morning, volunteers transform the Rutgers Office of Population Health space, located at the Institute for Health, into a production hub, assembling FIT kits for patients ages 45 to 75 years cared for by the Eric B. Chandler Health Center who are overdue for colon cancer screening. Chandler is a federally qualified community clinic in New Brunswick that serves low-income residents. Each FIT kit includes a labeled collection tube and bilingual instructions, making it easy for patients to complete the test in the privacy of their homes. Patients mail the kit to LabCorp who processes the test and reports the results to the ordering primary care provider using the electronic health record. If the test detects microscopic blood, the patient's primary care provider will refer them for a follow-up colonoscopy to visually check for precancerous polyps or potential tumors.

For many student volunteers, this project has been a powerful learning experience. Shanik Quirola, a junior from Ecuador, was so inspired by the initiative that she switched her major from cell biology and neuroscience to public health. "This project showed me how I can directly help the community by raising awareness about cancer screening and the recommended age to start," she says.

Lauren Seo, a student in the Master of Health Communication and Information program, was personally motivated to join after her husband's prostate cancer diagnosis. "This reminds me how critical early detection is, especially for colon cancer," she explains. She dedicates three to four hours a week to volunteering, calling it "small and simple work" that can have important impact.

The RHSC will continue this partnership with Chandler, as well as explore opportunities to expand the mailed FIT program to additional clinics, aiming to increase the number of test kits distributed, and save even more lives through early detection. To learn more about this project, read the full Rutgers Today article here: [Rutgers Students Are Saving Lives With Colorectal Cancer Screening Project](#).

POPULATION HEALTH NEWS

Together We Rise: Mental Health Education and Empowerment Across New Jersey Communities

Contributing Author: Dr. Alexandria Bauer, Assistant Research Professor at the Center of Alcohol & Substance Use Studies and Applied Psychology, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

Rates of mental health inequities in New Jersey mirror those across the United States, including rates of unmet need. In Spring 2024, the Racial Equity, Advocacy, and Community Health (REACH) Alliance lab conducted a mental health needs assessment to explore other needs among community members, as well as community priorities, preferences, and available resources. Among the sample of 368 participants, there were high rates of depression, anxiety, and stress reported. Participants also described interest in receiving information on mental health, with opportunities to create connections and build community.

To help fill these gaps, the REACH Alliance is working with academic and community partners to develop the Together We Rise handbook, which provides information about depression, anxiety, stress and trauma, substance use, social media use, suicide prevention, and other areas related to mental health and wellbeing. Most importantly, the handbook is designed to be an empowerment resource with information relevant for teens and adults across the lifespan to support themselves, their families, and their communities. People can use the information to prevent and manage their own mental health challenges, reduce stigma, and encourage people to reach out to one another.

Development of the workbook has been led by Dr. Alexandria Bauer (Applied Psychology and Center of Alcohol & Substance Use Studies, Rutgers GSAPP), in partnership with Dr. Linda Oshin (Clinical Psychology, Rutgers GSAPP), Dr. Adrian Gale (Rutgers School of Social Work), Zaire Ali (The Urban Health Collaborative), and Rev. Kamaria Byrd-McAllister (First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens). The research team also sought out input from multiple community advisory groups to help ensure that the content and design were relevant, appropriate, and comprehensive.

The Together We Rise handbook will be available free of cost for community members in late spring 2025. The REACH Alliance also hopes to pair the workbook with monthly opportunities for in-person community engagement. We hope that these efforts will be a beginning to re-imagine mental health care, reduce mental health inequity, and promote community well-being across New Jersey and beyond.

Population Health Research Highlights from the School of Social Work

Contributing Author: Laurie Zazenski, Director of Communications, Rutgers University School of Social Work

Rutgers School of Social Work's mission is to develop and disseminate knowledge through social work research, education, and training that promotes social and economic justice and strengthens individual, family, and community well-being in the diverse and increasingly global environment of New Jersey and beyond. To further this mission, the School's faculty and centers conduct, publish, and share original research, and many are actively engaged in research linking to the field of population health.

The Center for Gambling Studies (CGS) in the Rutgers School of Social Work has completed two projects designed to inform gambling-related public policy decisions, workforce development, and service deployment in the State of New Jersey. Led by Distinguished Professor Lia Nower, Associate Dean for Research and CGS Director, the first project conducts big data analyses using information on 128,000 players to develop a predictive, machine learning algorithm to identify the highest risk indicators for bettors in online casinos. The largest and most comprehensive model available to date, the CGS model uses changes in betting and spending patterns, which are not tied to income, to identify escalating at-risk patterns of play. The CGS is now developing a similar algorithm for online sports bettors. Ideally, operators will use, and regulators will require these models to identify players in need of intervention to prevent or arrest gambling-related harm at stages before serious problems develop.

The second project uses a StoryMap framework to present a series of five GIS maps that identify, by zip code and county, locations in New Jersey that are overrepresented by socio-economic and demographic factors associated with higher risk for developing problem gambling behaviors. This map provides critical information to guide the development of community and state-based resources, particularly for specific population groups. Other maps contextualize that information by analyzing the location of land-based gambling venues, support and treatment services, and high-intensity bettors for both iGaming and sports wagering. A final map creates statistically based risk scores from the prior maps, tied to the 2023 New Jersey Prevalence Survey results, to identify areas most in need of targeted problem gambling prevention, education, and treatment services.



Danielle L. Beatty Moody, Associate Professor & Chancellor's Scholar for Inclusive Excellence in Multilevel Racism and Life Span Health and Aging, was nominated by her peers for election into the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research (ABMR), and the motion received enthusiastic and unanimous support. ABMR is the premier honorary scientific organization for scientists working at the interface of behavior and medicine. It comprises several hundred eminent senior investigators, all of whom have been elected as Fellows of the Academy through a highly selective process. Being a Fellow of the Academy is a privilege and brings with it certain responsibilities. Among these is upholding the mission and values of the Academy, as well as active participation through involvement in committees and attendance at the annual scientific meeting.

Associate Professor Jamey Lister (Co-Director & New Jersey Director), Michael Chaple (Director, New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University), and Ibis Carrion-Gonzalez (Caribbean Director, Universidad Central del Caribe) received a \$1.95 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for their regional center, "Northeast & Caribbean Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Center (NeC-ROTAC)." The center serves all rural communities in HHS Region 2 (NJ, NY, PR, USVI). Dr. Lister directs efforts in New Jersey, through a \$487,500 subaward, to improve knowledge about substance use and behavioral health, and to identify tailored strategies that state health departments, health care facilities, and community-based organizations serving rural New Jerseyans can use to facilitate access to best practices.



Learn more about the School of Social Work's research and faculty.

Office of Basic Student Needs: New Basic Need Center Grand Opening

Contributing Author: Amber Schreck, Assistant Director for Student Basic Needs, Rutgers University- New Brunswick

In February, the Basic Needs Center hosted their grand opening in the lower level of the College Avenue Student Center. The space, which was converted from what used to be the Red Lion Cafe, hosts a larger food pantry area which students can visit once per week to grab pantry staples, refrigerated and frozen items, fresh produce, and hygiene products. The space also hosts the Textbook Assistance Program library, where students can borrow books, Sir Henry's Closet, a clothing donation space that holds professional and casual clothing and household goods, and multiple lounge spaces for students to do work in. A few of the fun highlights of the space include games like chess and checkers on the walls, and a hydroponic garden run through the club Enactus, which harvests their plants to give directly to the food pantry.

The Basic Needs Center also includes professional staff offices, including Dr. Phillip Smith, Assistant Dean for Student Basic Needs, Amber Schreck, Assistant Director, Ross Perez, Program Coordinator, and Kiara Padilla, Graduate Assistant. Students are able to meet directly with staff about their needs within the space and get the help or referrals they may need.

Class presentations or student employment training appearances for educational purposes are available upon request and the team plans on hosting weekly workshops in the presentation lounge space as well. To request a presentation, email basicneeds@echo.rutgers.edu and for students looking for resources, head to basicneeds.rutgers.edu to see food pantry hours and how to sign up. For anyone interested in volunteering, head to rutgers.givepulse.com to see any available shifts.



CONSORTIUM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Featured speaker at Rutgers Population Health Consortium June 2025 meeting

For this newsletter edition, we would like to introduce a member of our Rutgers Population Health Consortium who will be presenting at our upcoming June meeting.

Meet Christine Delnevo, PhD, MPH

Cristine Delnevo Ph.D., M.P.H. is the founding Director of the Institute for Nicotine and Tobacco Studies at Rutgers University and Distinguished Professor of Health Behavior, Society, and Policy. Her research focuses on the population epidemiology of tobacco use, in particular noncigarette products, tobacco marketing and tobacco control policy and regulation. She has held numerous NIH grants and currently serves as PI of the Rutgers Center of Excellence in Rapid Surveillance of Tobacco, funded by NCI and FDA. Dr. Delnevo currently serves as the chair of FDA's Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee. She received her M.P.H. from the Rutgers School of Public Health and her Ph.D. in health studies from Temple University.



Mindfulness Moment

Draw Away!

Drawing can be an opportunity for you to not only practice your creative skills but also slowdown from your day and relax. Even 5 minutes out of your day, drawing can allow you practice aspects of mindfulness, such as reflection and being present with yourself without judgement. Some drawing prompts from the National Gallery of Art suggest drawing what comes to mind while listening to your favorite song or drawing what you see outside your window. Alongside this, the National Portrait Gallery, has 5 artist-led activities to draw alongside highlighted artist and practice mindfulness drawing.



Upcoming Events

Registration Open: APHA's 2025 Policy Action Institute

June 16–June 17, 2025

This event by APHA (American Public Health Association) is focused on bringing public health leaders, policymakers, and advocates together ranging from government, nonprofits, and Academia backgrounds. Attendees will have the opportunity to network, practice and strengthen your advocacy skills, and overall have a toolkit of strategies to implement to help shape the future of public health. For more information and to register, please visit the website [here](#).

Registration Open: 25th Anniversary New Jersey Prevention Network Annual Conference

June 12–June 13, 2025

This conference is aimed at gathering professionals who work in the field of substance misuse prevention, peer recovery support, and adjacent fields across the continuum of care throughout the state of New Jersey. In addition to celebrating 25 years since being established, attendees will be able to meet with more than 1,000 professionals, support and share new skills to improve the quality of care in New Jersey and learn from experts within the field of substance use disorders. For more information and to register, please visit the website [here](#).

Registration Open: NJ American Academy of Pediatrics Annual Conference & Exhibition

June 11, 2025

This conference has been designed for healthcare professionals who focus on, and are interested in, pediatric healthcare and want to be aware of the latest advancements in pediatrics. Alongside the opportunity to obtain continuing education credits, this conference provides a wide range of educational opportunities to continue expanding one's learning. To register, please visit the website [here](#).

Upcoming Health Observances

June:

- Liver Health Matter Month
- Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month
- Cataract Awareness Month
- Men's Health Week (June 2nd –June 8th)
- Community Health Improvement (CHI) week (June 9th –June 13th)

July:

- National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month
- UV Safety Month
- Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Month
- World Hepatitis Day (July 28th)

August:

- National Immunization Awareness Month
- Children's Eye Health and Safety Month
- National Health Center Week (August 10th –August 16th)
- International Overdose Awareness Day (August 31st)