



# 2022 - 2023 Annual Report

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# | Message from the Director

## Dear Friends and Fellow Health Equity Partners,

As we celebrate CHET's achievements this past year, we reflect on a fundamental principle in our work: the centering of our collective humanity. The past year was marked by manifold attacks on already marginalized populations fueling increased health disparities.

On reproductive rights, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 opened the floodgates for legislation and legal decisions that restrict individual bodily autonomy, such as the ruling from a federal judge in Texas, which bans the use of the FDA-approved drug, Mifepristone. Numerous states have also instated harshly limited abortion restrictions, which amount to bans, and disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color.

On equitable healthcare, 19 U.S. states have passed legislation banning or limiting access to gender-affirming care and age-appropriate medical services necessary for many transgender and non-binary individuals. This medical care can be life changing and life saving for a population that already faces high rates of discrimination and violence.

On academic equity, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the constitutionality of affirmative action at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina in July 2023. This decision rolls back decades of progress made in higher education to expand educational access to underserved populations.

On the climate crisis, 2023 is on track to be the hottest year in human-recorded history, with the effects of global warming and extreme weather generally impacting marginalized populations the most. Unhoused populations, people with chronic medical conditions and disabilities, and low-income populations contribute the least to climate collapse, yet face the harshest consequences of these compounding forces of oppression unleashed by systemic failures to protect life on a



— Dr. Melissa Simon



finite planet. These failures include the poisoning of low-income neighborhoods and ecosystems vital to healthy life, such as waterways, by industrial pollution.

All these different issues are connected by a throughline of cruelty, disunity, and systemic injustice over empathy and solidarity. Our commitment to care for the collective humanity reaches across these various crises and guides the work being done here at CHET. Each of our projects confronts inequitable and unjust systems and uses the power of research and implementation science to reshape or, where necessary, replace them for the betterment of all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MS", written in a cursive style.

Melissa A. Simon, MD, MPH

Director, Center for Health Equity Transformation



# Our Mission, Vision, and Values

**Our Mission** — To lift health for all by exposing root causes of health inequities and serving as a hub that pushes boundaries in research, education, workforce development, and community engagement.

**Our Vision** — To bridge the gaps between research, community needs, and policy by transforming systems and structures so that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their best possible health.

**Our Values** — **Lift Community Voices:** Our community-based participatory research projects seek guidance and collaboration from community leaders and organizations from the research design to the impact that persists beyond the completion of the projects.

**Apply Health Equity Lens to Public Policies:** We must acknowledge that the intention behind oppressive policies and practices matters less than their actual impact, and then take action with an anti-racist approach.

**Transform Health Outcomes:** To create transformational change, we must connect these areas that often operate in silos. We must ensure that the health care and research workforce is a diverse and inclusive one and that we train the next generation to serve with empathy and compassion to mitigate the health outcome disparities that are influenced by racism and implicit biases.

# Our Team



Our CHET team continues to grow, with over 27 staff members across a range of career levels with a shared commitment toward health equity. Between September 2022 and August 2023, we have mentored 10 trainees through our T37 Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program (NU-MHRT), 8 Health Equity Scholars, and 19 CHEC Fellows.

We pride ourselves in being a diverse and inclusive team that champions a wide range of social justice and health equity causes, reflecting the passions of our team members. Our interdisciplinary team have collective experience across the nonprofit, public, and private sectors with subject matter expertise on topics such as racial disparities in maternal health, workforce development, community engagement, health policy, comprehensive sexual health education, cancer disparities, food access, environmental justice, and more.

# Research and Scholarship

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A majority of CHET's research projects are community-based research projects in which we center community partners throughout the research process and support them in building research infrastructure for their own sustainability needs.

# Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC)



ChicagoCHEC is a National Cancer Institute (NCI) U54 comprehensive cancer partnership between the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University, Northeastern Illinois University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago that advances cancer health equity through meaningful scientific discovery, education, training, and community engagement.

In its 8th year, the Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC) continues to successfully conduct transdisciplinary cancer health disparities research projects, engage Chicago communities that are disproportionately impacted by cancer health inequities, and coordinate research education and mentoring opportunities to advance a pipeline of diverse students and early career faculty in cancer research careers. In addition, ChicagoCHEC is fueled by community voices, including strong, expert voices from partner organizations who have been doing incredible work in communities for decades. Our ChicagoCHEC Community Steering Committee (CSC) is made up of passionate and honest voices who speak up and challenge us every day to bring forth solutions to cancer inequities that truly benefit communities.

These next pages provide a glimpse of the high-impact projects and initiatives of the ChicagoCHEC partnership over the past year. For more information about ChicagoCHEC, please visit <https://chicagocheec.org/>.

# ChicagoCHEC Research

## Supporting High Risk African American Men in Research & Engagement in Decision Making for Lung Cancer Screening: The SHARED Project

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The SHARED Project engages African American men (AAM) as Citizen Scientists to improve uptake of lung cancer screening. In this project, ChicagoCHEC researchers focus Citizen Scientists efforts on leveraging social networks to engage AAM and supporting and enhancing an Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) evidence-based Decision Aid that promotes shared decision making and subsequent lung cancer screening. Engaging AAM as Citizen Scientists is expected to improve outreach and respond to the needs communities that may traditionally be “unengaged” in the research process and provides an opportunity for the group at the most increased risk for lung cancer, AAM, to directly drive uptake of evidence-based screening. The research team [published an article](#) (Matthews et al., 2022) detailing their progress; analysis of the study results of the lung health promotion intervention is underway.

## WeCanManage: An mHealth Self-management Tool to Empower Survivors with Disabilities Due to the Long-term Effects of Cancer and its Treatment

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ChicagoCHEC researchers are developing an innovative mHealth app called WeCanManage (WCM) to empower cancer survivors with disabilities to proactively manage cancer and its consequences as a chronic condition. People with disabilities are an unrecognized health disparities population and are often excluded from the cancer health equity agenda. Indeed, cancer survivors indicate that their long-term disability needs are inadequately addressed across the cancer care and survivorship continuum. The WCM research project is an opportunity to enhance the cancer community’s understanding of this population and to develop evidence-informed interventions to better meet the needs of people with the ‘double whammy’ of cancer and disability. The research team [published a paper](#) in *JMIR Formative Research* outlining their progress and approach; evaluation of the web-based application platform is in progress.

## Social Correlates of Variation in Intestinal and Oral Microbiome Among Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant Patients: A Geographic Exploration in the City of Chicago

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This pilot study was designed to lay the groundwork for an ecological analysis of variation in microbiome diversity. A large, diverse, and segregated city like Chicago has known disparate outcomes in various malignancies and is an ideal urban center to explore the role of geographic variation in gut microbiome diversity. We propose an innovative, multi-institutional study evaluating serial changes in intestinal and oral gut microbiota amongst 50 hematopoietic stem cell transplant patients selected from widely diverse areas characteristic of large populations in the Chicago metropolitan area. The study will demonstrate the feasibility of analyzing the association of microbiome diversity with early clinical outcomes among stem cell transplant patients residing in the Chicago area. These findings are expected to better elucidate the role that area characteristics, as reflected by diet and the socioeconomic characteristics of geographic location, may play in intestinal gut microbiome diversity. A [recent publication](#) in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* describes the results of their preliminary evaluation.

## Addressing Ovarian Cancer Platinum Resistance Disparities: Population Studies and New Therapeutic Approaches for Black Women

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ChicagoCHEC researchers will work closely with community partner, Black Cancer Collaborative, to evaluate differences in survival outcomes between non-Hispanic White and Black ovarian cancer patients, by treatment received. Researchers will also investigate arsenoplatin potency and mechanism of action using cell lines, cell-derived xenograft (CDX) models, and racially diverse patient-derived xenograft (PDX) models. If successful, this study will address knowledge gaps in the factors driving race-based ovarian cancer recurrence and survival disparities, uncover new drug discovery strategies, and help support healthier communities.

## The Role of Structural Racism in Adult Acute Myeloid Leukemia Outcomes and Disparities

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Racial and ethnic disparities in survival from Acute Myeloid Leukemia are not well understood. Aspects of where patients live and have lived historically could influence AML survival disparities. ChicagoCHEC researchers, in this newly funded study, will investigate how structural racism may play a role in Acute Myeloid Leukemia survival.

## Targeting chronic stress for colorectal cancer risk reduction: a pilot feasibility study among vulnerable at-risk Black females

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Chronic stress can directly and indirectly promote carcinogenesis through immune, metabolic, and microbial pathways. ChicagoCHEC researchers hypothesize that reducing chronic stress will have important implications for Colorectal cancer risk reduction among vulnerable and high-risk populations. An 8-week mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention delivered in a hybrid format (synchronous and asynchronous sessions) among 40 Black females at elevated risk of Colorectal cancer, who reside in vulnerable communities and who report moderate to high perceived stress will test the relationship between chronic stress and Colorectal cancer risk.

Since its inception, ChicagoCHEC has funded eleven research teams through the ChicagoCHEC Incubator, Catalyst Grant Program, and NCI supplement funding. To learn more about ChicagoCHEC research projects, visit [www.chicagochec.org](http://www.chicagochec.org)



# ChicagoCHEC

## Outreach and Community Engagement

The ChicagoCHEC Outreach Core (OC) leads community engagement, cancer education, and outreach activities to foster meaningful interactions between cancer centers, academic institutions, and the communities they serve. In concert with NCI's National Outreach Network, our Outreach Core activities will yield valuable data on factors associated with poorer cancer outcomes experienced by some communities, as well as factors associated with improved cancer outcomes experienced by other communities. Identifying the driving forces behind cancer inequities provides a unique and powerful opportunity for ChicagoCHEC to translate research findings into direct action.

ChicagoCHEC has organized, sponsored, and collaborated with many community outreach, education, and support group events in the past year. We have reached over 1,000 participants through these outreach activities and resources for cancer screening, support groups, early diagnosis, and treatment.



## ChicagoCHEC 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL COMMUNITY FORUM Community Health Connections: Bridging Gaps in Cancer through Conversations

Every year, ChicagoCHEC hosts a community forum that brings together local residents, survivors, caregivers, students, researchers, and community leaders to share stories, resources, and research results.

The 2023 Annual Community Forum featured diverse community conversations on the gaps in cancer care, self-care for cancer caregivers, and spotlighted community resources. Find more information and the recordings at: <https://forum2023.chicagochech.org/>.

The ChicagoCHEC 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Forum was held on September 29, 2023.



Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative

### 8th Annual Community Forum

Community Health Connections:  
Bridging Gaps in Cancer through Conversations

**WHEN:** Sept. 29th | 9am - 2:30pm CST  
**WHERE:** Arturo Velasquez Institute  
2800 S Western Ave, Chicago, IL 60608

Topics will include diverse community conversations on:

- Gaps in cancer care
- Self-care for cancer caregivers
- and more!

All are welcome to this free, public event!

Information will be provided in English, Spanish, Cantonese & American Sign Language

Register at [bit.ly/23ForumENSP](https://bit.ly/23ForumENSP) or use QR code  
Questions? Email us at [info@chicagochech.org](mailto:info@chicagochech.org)

This event is brought to you by:



## 8° Anual Foro Comunitario

**Conexiones de salud comunitaria:  
Cerrando brechas en el cáncer a través de conversaciones**

**CUÁNDO:** 29 de septiembre | 9am - 2:30pm CST  
**DÓNDE:** Arturo Velasquez Institute  
2800 S Western Ave, Chicago, IL 60608

Los temas incluirán diversas conversaciones comunitarias sobre:

- Las brechas en la atención oncológica
- Autocuidado para cuidadores de pacientes con cáncer
- ¡y más!

¡Todos son bienvenidos a este evento público y gratuito!

*La información se proporcionará en inglés, español, cantonés y lenguaje de signos americano (ASL)*

Regístrese aquí [bit.ly/23ForumENSP](https://bit.ly/23ForumENSP) o utilice el código QR

Envíenos sus preguntas a [info@chicagohec.org](mailto:info@chicagohec.org)

*Este evento es presentado por:*

## 第 8 屆年度社區論壇

**社區健康聯繫：  
通過對話彌合癌症方面的差距**

**日期及時間:** 9月29日 | 美國中部時間早上9時 - 下午2時半  
**地點:** Arturo Velasquez Institute  
2800 S Western Ave, Chicago, IL 60608

主題將包括以下方面的各種社區對話:

- 癌症護理方面的差距
- 癌症護理人員的自我護理
- 及更多!

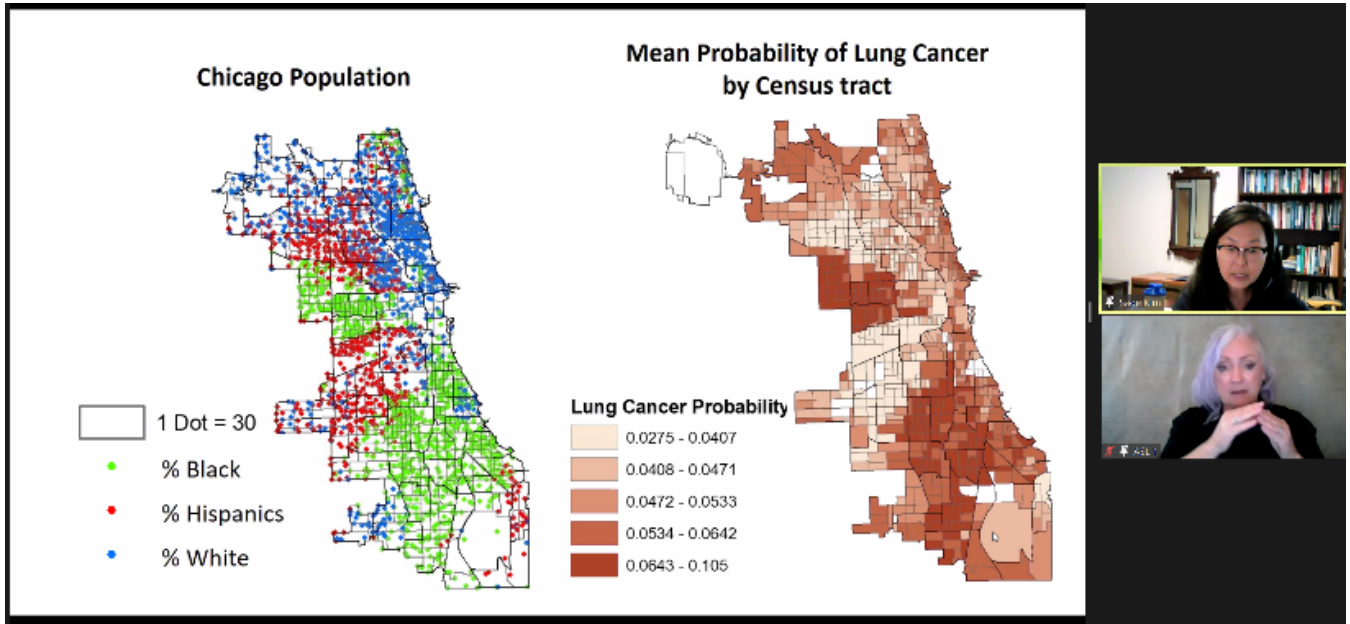
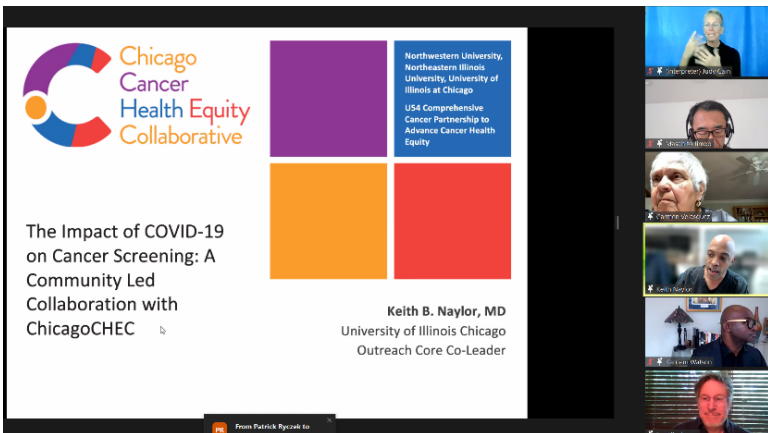
歡迎所有人參加這個免費的公共活動!

*信息將以英語、西班牙語、粵語和美國手語提供*

在 [bit.ly/23ForumCH](https://bit.ly/23ForumCH) 註冊...或使用二維碼

有疑問? 給我們發電子郵件: [info@chicagohec.org](mailto:info@chicagohec.org)

**本次活動由以下機構聯合舉辦:**

**Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative**

Northwestern University, Northwestern Illinois University, University of Illinois at Chicago  
USA Comprehensive Cancer Partnership to Advance Cancer Health Equity

**The Impact of COVID-19 on Cancer Screening: A Community Led Collaboration with ChicagoCHEC**

Keith B. Naylor, MD  
University of Illinois Chicago  
Outreach Core Co-Leader



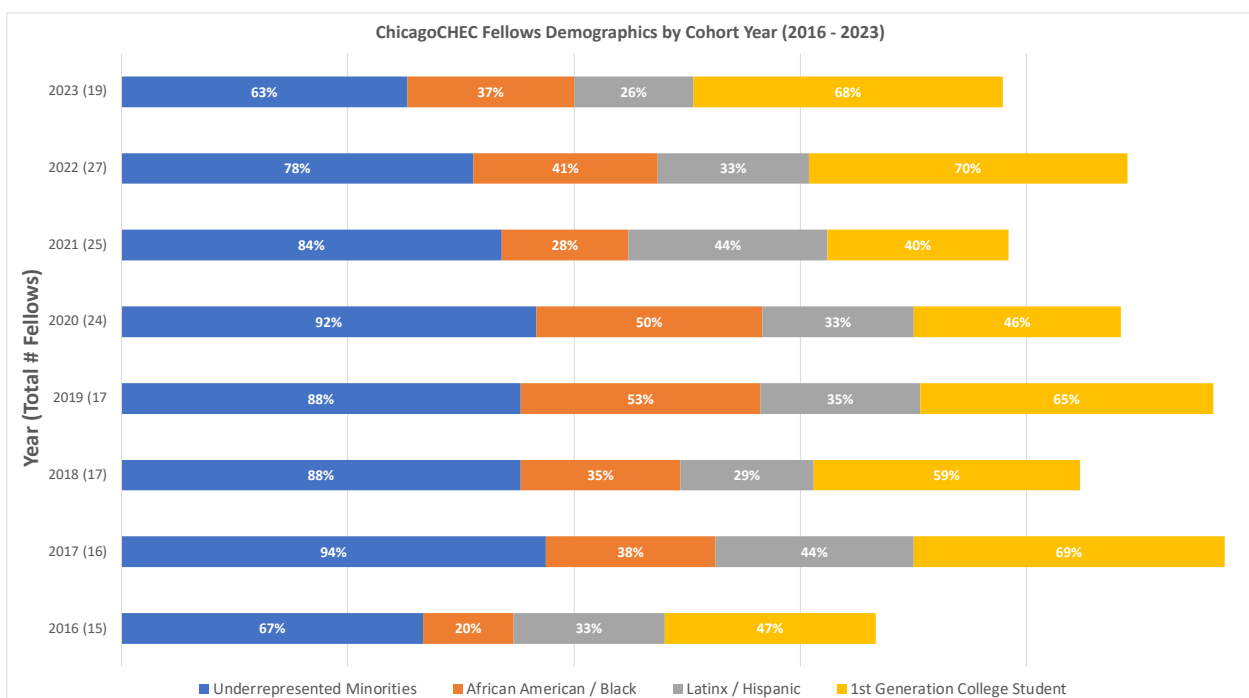
# ChicagoCHEC

## Research Education

### ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program

ChicagoCHEC offers the Summer Fellows Program as one of CHET’s signature workforce development programs. CHEC Fellows are recruited from the undergraduate body from Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Chicago, Northeastern University, and the City Colleges of Chicago. This past summer, ChicagoCHEC accepted 20 Fellows to its Summer Fellows Program. After three years of virtual implementation, the 2023 cohort experienced the 8-week program fully in person. Some highlights from this year are:

- A unique opportunity to visit the Urban Grower’s Collective (a Black- and women-led non-profit farm in Chicago’s south side) to learn more about how to build a just and equitable food system, food insecurity and benefits of urban agriculture.
- Community site visits returned to in-person experiences. Community site visits included Gilda’s Club, Instituto del Progreso Latino, and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Humboldt Park.
- Fellows engaged in a private forum with Senator Dick Durbin on various topics such as health insurance, abortion access, refugee and agricultural health.







Fellows at Puerto Rican Cultural Center listening and learning from Jose Lopez



Fellows touring the Malcolm X Virtual Hospital



ChicagoCHEC Team tabling at the LCC event



Fellows at Gilda's Club



ChicagoCHEC, DICR, and UIC Chess at Community Day



Fellows enjoying the outdoors and volunteering at Urban Growers Collective



**Alyssa Purvis**



**Amna Dafalla**



**Andrea Penrose**



**Brittani Rouse**



**Charlie Sutcuoglu**



**Clovis Njei**



**Fabiola Solano**



**Hellen Sales**



**Jaweriya Azeem**



**Jesus Correa**



**Julie Paska**



**Justin Vaughn**



**Laila Zatar**



**Marissa Aseves**



**Megan Gonzalez**



**Olalekan Babalola**



**Petros Basourakos**



**Sorayya Nazari**



**Taneil Johnson**

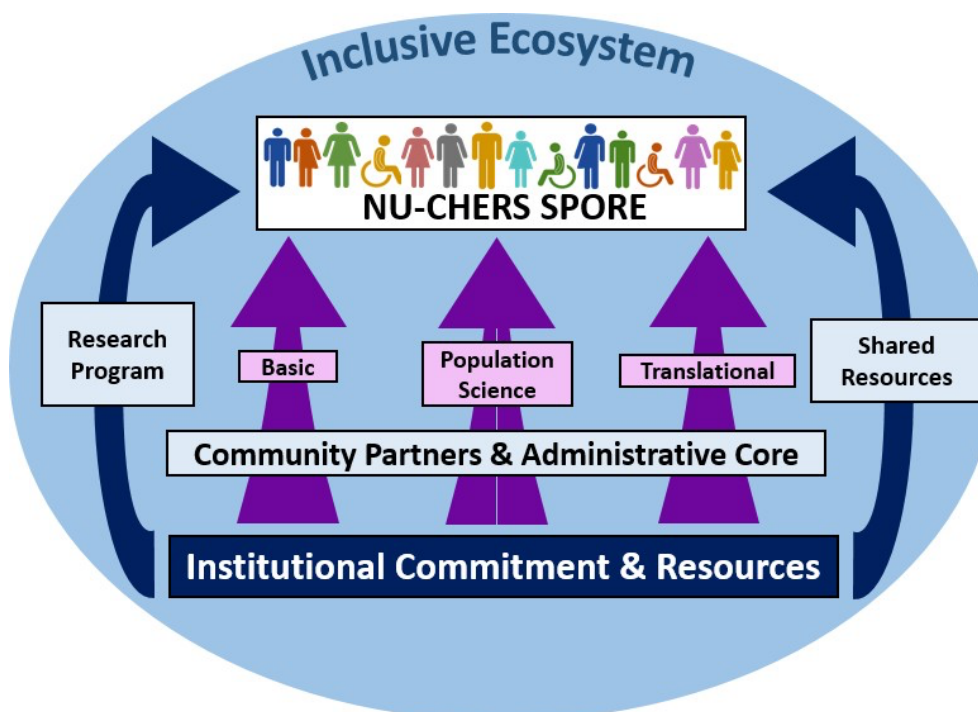
**ChicagoCHEC  
2023 Cohort**



# NU-CHERS

## Northwestern University Cancer Health Equity Research SPORE

The Northwestern University Cancer Health Equity Research SPORE (NU-CHERS) is a National Cancer Institute funded developmental Specialized Program of Research Excellence and a collaborative program between CHET and the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University (P20CA233304). NU-CHERS will generate scientific findings and establish sustainable, collaborative, academic and community infrastructure that will serve as the foundation for a comprehensive translational cancer research program focused on gynecologic cancer health disparities – the first of its kind in the nation. NU-CHERS has spearheaded the development of a centralized biobank of human gynecologic cancer tissue specimens to be used in health disparities research studies. NU-CHERS teams with basic and clinical investigators to conduct innovative translational research focused on understanding and reducing gynecologic cancer disparities. The initial translational research focus of NU-CHERS is on endometrial and ovarian cancer disparities experienced by Black women. More information can be found at: [www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/sites/chet/research/p20-spore.html](http://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/sites/chet/research/p20-spore.html)



# NU-CHERS Research

## Research Project 1: Understanding Racial Disparity in Endometrial Cancer through Tumor Genomics

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**Leaders: J. Julie Kim, PhD and Dario R. Roque, MD**

Racial disparity is present in endometrial cancer with Black women exhibiting increased aggressive disease and a higher death rate compared to white women. This project investigates the biological etiology through tumor genomics and explores racial disparity for progesterin response given that young Black women exhibit advanced disease with worse prognosis compared to young White women. This is the first comprehensive genomics analysis of endometrial tumors to study the molecular etiologies of racial disparities.

## Research Project 2: Tumor Methyloomics Analysis Link with Racial Disparities in Ovarian Cancer

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**Leaders: Daniela Matei, MD and Emma Barber, MD**

Ovarian cancer remains the deadliest cancer with significantly reduced survival rates among Black women compared to White women, despite similar stage distribution and histological types at diagnosis. This project focuses on epigenetic markers, particularly DNA methylation, which we hypothesize function as a link between socio-economic or environmental factors and genomic alterations to alter the course of the disease and response to therapy. We aim to identify key oncogenic drivers regulated epigenetically in tumors from Black vs. White women and generate useful new resources to continue to address biological questions related to racial differences in ovarian cancer response to treatment.

### Over the past year, the NU-CHERS program:

- Enrolled 203 participants willing to donate specimens yielding 1600 unique samples of blood and tissue from cervical, endometrial, and ovarian oncology (suspicious and/or confirmed) cases. 40% of participants identify as a member of an underrepresented minority group.
- Established a partnership with John H. Stroger Hospital of Cook County to increase the diversity of samples available in the biobank.
- Continued expansion of the research infrastructure to support translational science and submitted an NCI P50 SPORE in Gynecology Cancer Disparities.



# Chinatown Patient Navigation Program

## 華埠醫療導航計劃

### CHINATOWN PATIENT NAVIGATION PROGRAM

The Chinatown Patient Navigation (PN) Program is a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-funded research study that focuses on increasing cancer screening and enhancing cancer care for the residents of Chicago's Greater Chinatown area. The program was first launched in 2013 and has navigated nearly 800 women for their breast and cervical cancer screenings. In 2020, the program was renewed for five years to expand patient navigation as PN 2.0. This expansion includes implementing strategies and tools to support coordination and integration of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)-related efforts across community oncology and community social service settings.

In the second year of the PN 2.0 Program, we have enrolled over 400 men and women from the Greater Chinatown area to receive eligible cancer screenings. We have successfully built and transferred our previously developed REDCap-based patient navigation coordination system to Salesforce, a more integrated, and technologically advanced customer relationship management platform. This will allow us to streamline navigation services with up-to-date follow-ups and referrals. With this platform, we will be able to capture participants' healthcare and social services appointments, identify additional Social Determinant of Health barriers, help navigators ensure resolution and completion of cancer-related screenings, and facilitate collection of implementation evaluation data.



We are also working with two computer scientists to explore the potential of using augmented intelligence (AI) to assist and enhance cancer patient navigation and cancer health communications. We recently held a demonstration session at the Chicago Public Library with a group of participants where they talked about health and exercise with the AI agent. Most participants enjoyed their experiences and expressed that they would use something like this more often. However, a few participants shared that they would rather speak to a real-life person on difficult topics, especially as it pertains to cancer and end-of-life planning.

The Chinatown Patient Navigation (PN) Program is a valuable resource for the residents of Chicago's Greater Chinatown area. The program is committed to increasing cancer screening and enhancing cancer care for all patients, regardless of their language, cultural, or socioeconomic background. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our services, and we are excited to explore the potential of using AI to assist and enhance cancer patient care and communication.



# The OPTIMIZE Study

## Optimizing Patient Navigation for Perinatal Care

In the United States, a global superpower, it is still dangerous to be a pregnant Black woman.



In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported significantly higher rates of maternal mortality among non-Hispanic Black women as compared to non-Hispanic white women. In fact, several studies that controlled for income, educational attainment, gestational age, and maternal health still saw higher rates of maternal and infant mortality among non-Hispanic Black people when compared to all races. This ongoing public health crisis requires urgent perinatal care interventions to better support pregnant Black persons.

Funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, the OPTIMIZE research study is testing a comprehensive perinatal care checklist with patient navigation support across 11 health centers in the Chicagoland area. The goal is to improve a birthing persons access and adherence to pre and postnatal visits through a developed trusting relationship with their health care team. By connecting the patients with resources and comprehensive care during their pregnancy we are testing how to best improve health outcomes for both mother and baby.

Launched in 2021, our center has partnered with two health networks – Access Community Health Network and Alliance Chicago to deliver the intervention to 6 sites, with 5 serving as controls. The intervention was informed by qualitative interview findings from patients and stakeholders within the target communities. It was determined that when trust is established:

- Patients attend their appointments.

- Patients believe the information is in their best interest.
- Health literacy increases.
- Patients open up, believing what their provider is saying.

The informatics teams at each site have built flowsheets within their electronic health record (EHR) systems to guide providers through trust building questions to engage with their patients and better understand their needs. Through this ongoing study, we've learned that partnership development and engagement take time but are necessary for an intervention to be most effective within healthcare settings. We've also accounted for the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have on maternal and child health research such as enrollment, competing priorities, and workforce shortages. Our enrollment and baseline survey completion rates have improved with diligent reminders, personalized contact, and in-person recruitment strategies.





## Community Doula Navigator Study

### Enhancing Perinatal Care Support to Improve Maternal Mortality Disparities

Research has shown that doula care during the perinatal period can improve maternal and infant health outcomes including lower healthcare costs, decreased maternal anxiety and depression, and increased breastfeeding initiation and continuation. A doula is a non-clinical professional who provides emotional, physical, and informational support before, during and after a birthing person's pregnancy journey.

The purpose of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities funded Well-Mama research study is to develop and evaluate an intervention centered around Community Doula Navigators (CDN) providing support to improve health outcomes among pregnant and postpartum Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals. In partnership with the birthing persons healthcare team, the CDN will conduct in-person and telehealth check-ins, support groups, and labor support. During each support opportunity the CDN will focus on one of the following priority areas which was identified as a leading cause of poor pregnancy-related health outcomes:

- Mental Health
- Cardiovascular Health
- Maternal Safety
- Social Support
- Drug/Alcohol Use

The study is conducted across three sites located in Chicago, IL, Baton Rouge, LA, and Newark, NJ. The randomized trial began in June 2023 and in preparation, CDNs and research staff completed a Community Outreach Perinatal Educator (COPE) program with the Commonsense Childbirth Training Institute. Through implementation of the JJ Way model of perinatal care, professionals are prepared to improve and promote healthier outcomes for women and babies by reducing disparities in maternal and child health.



The randomized trial was informed by qualitative interview findings from stakeholders and patients. The aim was to identify barriers and facilitators of access to healthcare, experiences of racism in care, perceptions regarding support persons, hybrid care delivery models, and care team cohesion. Preliminary findings identified that among BIPOC individuals there is a desire for doula care, but a lack of usage of doula services and limited knowledge about a doula's role in the perinatal period.

We continue to meet with the Maternal Health Advisory Board (MHAB), comprised of clinical researchers, physicians, medical directors, doulas, community health workers and executive officers across national universities, health departments, nonprofits, and healthcare organizations. MHAB members use their expertise from their respective fields to guide study development and improvements, with the objective of ensuring the community appropriateness of the research questions, intervention, and evaluation approach. Board members will also advise on the dissemination of research findings to the broader community.



# Community Scientist Project:

Leveraging Citizen Scientists to Infuse Community Perspectives within Bench and Translational Science at Lurie Cancer Center

## Community Scientist Cohort



C. Henley



J. Girotti



R. Rogers



C. Velásquez



J. López



J. Glenn

This project focuses on connecting Community Scientists and Lurie Cancer center (LCC) scientists to develop more approachable and community-centered research material. During small group meetings between the paired Community Scientists and LCC Basic Scientist facilitated by CHET Director, Dr. Melissa Simon, LCC Basic Scientists received valuable insight from Community Scientists regarding (1) the accessibility of the language with which they explain their work and (2) the applicability and significance of their research to the communities that Community Scientists themselves serve. During these meetings, Community Scientists and LCC Basic Scientists worked together to develop concise, accessible, and relevant descriptions of LCC Scientists' research that could be incorporated into infographics. Further group meetings focused on revising the bespoke infographics with feedback from both LCC Basic Scientists and Community Scientists. These infographics will be kept in a library and will be used by both Community Scientists and LCC Basic Scientists for outreach and community engagement efforts in the future.

# The Metals Project:

## Leveraging Citizen Scientists to Examine Environmental Racism in Chicago by Infusing Community Perspectives with Bench and Translational Science at Lurie Cancer Center (LCC)

The Metals Project began in 2022 as a response to anecdotal community concerns and the Environmental Protection Agency’s documentation of disproportionate exposure to heavy metals (including mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic) in the Chicagoland area. Neighborhoods on the South and West side of Chicago are hypothesized to have higher levels of heavy metal pollution from sources such as highways, lead pipes, and industrial waste, which negatively affect human and environmental health.

Two hundred healthy volunteers were recruited at community events throughout Chicago, and participants agreed to provide buccal swabs and sociodemographic data in support of the research initiative. Analysis of the collected samples is underway by LLC bench scientists to determine if there are Gene Expression Signatures Diagnostics of specific exposures or predictive of increased risk of cancer onset.

Our team of five Community Scientists have been critical to informing the design, implementation, recruitment, and dissemination activities necessary to safeguard the community centric emphasis for this project. We believe that environmental racism impacts the health of Chicago residents, and this project aims to partner with communities to reduce heavy metal exposure, limit the impacts of heavy metal exposure on residents' health and advocate for equitable structural upgrades to infrastructure and protections for all Chicago residents.





# Community Engagement Initiatives & Activities

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In addition to CHET’s community-based research projects, we host and participate in multiple activities that promote community engagement and information sharing with the public. Alongside our work with community partners, CHET works with Northwestern Medicine (NM) health systems leaders, clinicians, faculty, residents/fellows, students, and staff to create and support health equity related programming across NM, Feinberg School of Medicine (FSM), and Northwestern University. CHET engages in collaborative efforts with NM Health Equity Teams from the medical student level to university-wide level. These activities include our CHETchat Spotlight Series, our SkinnyTrees: Lift Health for All podcast, and other health equity related events, as we highlight in the following pages.



## CHETchat Spotlight Series

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CHETchats highlight the equity work of our invited speakers and fosters dialogues and ideas about the ways that attendees can engage in work that promotes health equity. These events are open to the entire Northwestern community and the public. The Discussions of Mistrust in Healthcare and Research Entities three-part series centered on having open conversations about academic research distrust in communities of color. The wrongful acts of harm committed by academic entities served as the framework for discussions of distrust within marginalized communities and research. Part one focused on how academic institutions instilled fear of research into communities of color and featured a candid conversation with Dr. Linda Rae Murray, and Jose E. Lopez served to provide a historical context on how distrust developed. Part two discussed reporting contemporary harms and identifying current protection measures for communities of color with Drs. Josef Ben Levi, Erin Paquette, and Nita K. Lee. Part three concluded the series and explained how to foster reciprocal relationships between communities of color and research with Dr. Masahito Jimbo, Dr. Marquita Lewis-Thames, and Paris Thomas.

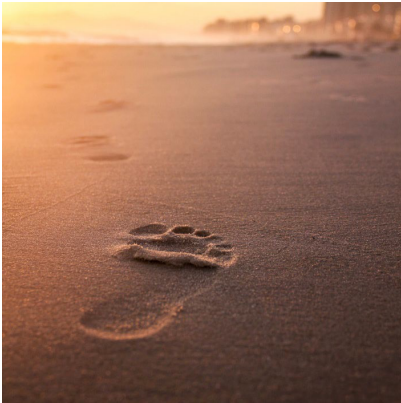
## SkinnyTrees Podcast

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SkinnyTrees: Lift Health for All Podcast aims to highlight voices of people from the research, community, and policy worlds who are doing work that advances health equity. By doing so, SkinnyTrees is creating an easy and accessible way for a larger audience to learn about the health equity work being conducted at Northwestern University and in the

City of Chicago. Since its inception, the podcast has produced over 30 episodes covering topics from the impact of COVID-19 on Chicago communities to a limited series on maternal health and wellness. For more information, you can visit our website at [skinnytreespodcast.com](https://skinnytreespodcast.com) or subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, or Google Play.



## Health Equity Footprint

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Since 2020, CHET has collected information from Northwestern faculty to highlight the depth and breadth of their health equity-related work, programming, and research. This Health Equity Footprint is an online catalog intended to help students, trainees, and researchers identify potential mentors and collaborators with shared experiences or research interests.



## NUFSM Health Equity Week 2023

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The 3<sup>rd</sup>-annual Health Equity was hosted by the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University. Thought leaders and scholars shared insights into the roots of healthcare disparities and facilitated discussions that inform and inspire innovative solutions. More info is available at <https://www.mcgaw.northwestern.edu/diversity-inclusion/health-equity-week/index.html>

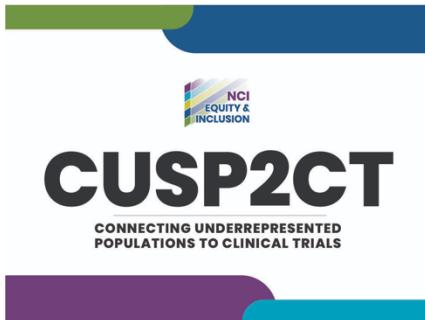
# Increasing Access to Health Information and Diversity in Clinical Trials

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Many of CHET's projects and activities focus on increasing access to health information and eliminating barriers to participation in clinical trials and research studies.

## The ECOG-ACRIN SUPPORT Trial: Multilevel Intervention to Improve Diverse Enrollment in Cancer Clinical Trials

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Funding from the National Cancer Institute's Connecting Underrepresented Populations to Clinical Trials (CUSP2CT) Program will support a 5-year study to leverage the collective resources of the ECOG ACRIN Cancer Research Group (EA), our team's decades of work on improving diversity in clinical trials, and our foundational work in patient navigation and clinical trials research literacy tools to create and evaluate an ECOG-ACRIN Trial SUPPORT Toolkit (SUPPORT intervention).

This intervention aims to improve Black and Latino referral and enrollment in active NCI-supported therapeutic trials with a focus in head and neck, thoracic, and genitourinary cancers, and leukemia and myeloma. The multilevel EA SUPPORT intervention consists of a Clinical Trials (CT) research literacy tool and CT Resource Navigators based at EA who will interface with patients, providers, and community oncology site staff to improve referral and enrollment of Black and Latino patients to CTs. This Hybrid Type 1 cluster-randomized, roll-out effectiveness-implementation trial will be conducted in NCORP community oncology practice sites across the US (with N= 500 Black and Latino patients with cancer). Our collaborative infrastructure and EA SUPPORT multilevel intervention seeks to shift the current clinical trial research base referral and enrollment paradigm and directly remove multiple levels of barriers through innovations in CT navigation and CT research literacy tools.



## Health for All: Library Partnerships to Advance Diversity in Clinical Trials

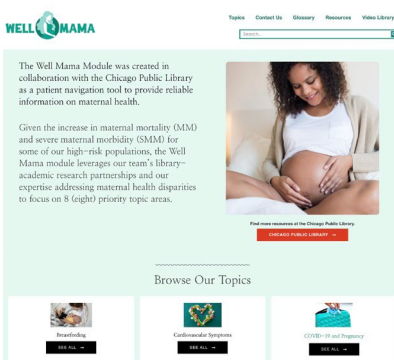
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Funding from the National Library of Medicine supported the development of CHET's Health for All platform ([healthforallproject.org](https://healthforallproject.org)), a web-based tool developed through a design thinking approach to be used in public libraries and hospital patient education centers. The goal of the Health for All tool is to help the general public learn more about clinical trials and to specifically increase clinical trials awareness and knowledge among populations underrepresented in clinical trials. Due to their accessibility and roles as information gatekeepers, librarians and health providers that serve populations that are underrepresented in clinical trials are promising partners for disseminating clinical trials information. In this past year, the Health for All team presented on evaluation results at scientific conferences, highlighting the importance of mistrust in biomedical research entities and improving methods of communication to engage the community on the importance of diversity in clinical research. The Health for All tool will be deployed in CHET's NCI-funded Connecting Underrepresented Populations to Clinical Trials (CUSP2CT) study.



## Advancing Library-Academic Medical Center Partnerships to Navigate Wellness and Scale Preventive Services Access

The Navigating Wellness tool ([navigatingwellness.org](https://navigatingwellness.org)) aims to empower library patrons with accessible health information that they can use to seek out preventive health services, while also empowering librarians to support their patron's search for health information. This tool improves communication and facilitates understanding across patients and healthcare providers, fostering the trust and understanding required to encourage underserved patients to avail themselves of appropriate preventive services. In the past year, the research team advanced the prototype based on sessions with Chicago Public Library patrons, librarians, and other stakeholders to improve the design and usability. The Navigating Wellness tool was presented at the 2023 Society of Behavioral Medicine conference in Phoenix, AZ and the annual American Library Association conference and exhibition in Chicago, IL.



## “Well Mama” Navigating Wellness

CHET received an Administrative Supplement from the Office of the Director of the NIH to add a maternal health focus to the Navigating Wellness tool, as part of NIH's Implementing a Maternal health and Pregnancy Outcomes Vision for Everyone (IMPROVE) Initiative. We developed the Navigating Wellness: “Well Mama” Module ([well-mama.org](https://well-mama.org)) with resources on mental health/depression; cardiovascular symptoms; safety; opioid/substance abuse; and social support. The “Well Mama” module also includes a podcast series featuring community leaders, clinicians, and other experts in the field of maternal health.



# All of Us

RESEARCH PROGRAM

## Precision Medicine Initiative (*All of Us* Research Program)

Funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the *All of Us* Research Program aims to enroll one million or more people from across the US to help speed up medical research. People who join will share information about their health, habits, and what it’s like where they live. By looking for patterns, researchers will learn more about what affects people’s health. The *All of Us* Research Program is becoming one of the most diverse health databases in history enrolling over 710,000 consented participants including more than 80% underrepresented in biomedical research. Researchers will use the data to learn how our biology, lifestyle, and environment affect health. This could help them develop better treatments and ways to prevent different diseases. The program began national enrollment in 2018. In the past year, the program has continued to share genomic results to participants and powering recent research [shaping how we understand health and disease](#). Dr. Simon serves as the Illinois *All of Us* Study’s Patient and Community Engagement Leader.

### All of Us By the Numbers



# of participants who have completed the consent process

**700,000+**



# of participants fully enrolled\*

**485,000+**



# of research projects using *All of Us* data

**6,700+**

\*Fully enrolled participants are those who have shared their health information with All of Us, including giving blood and urine or saliva samples.

Infographic  
from *All of Us*  
September  
2023



## Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University: Office of Equity & Minority Health

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The Office of Equity and Minority Health strives to address the unique cancer issues facing minority and medically underserved populations. Dr. Melissa Simon serves as the Associate Director of Community Outreach and Engagement at Lurie Cancer Center and works to reduce cancer health disparities by focusing on the following:

- **Workforce diversity:** Enhance training for minority individuals pursuing healthcare or biomedical research careers, particularly those focusing on cancer
- **Advocacy and public policy:** Inform the public of cancer policy issues and increase awareness of our established advocacy efforts and self-advocacy skills
- **Community engagement and organizing:** Partner with a broad range of community and public health organizations to better respond to the needs of minority and medically underserved groups



## ECOG-ACRIN Health Equity Committee

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Dr. Simon is the current chair of the ECOG-ACRIN Research Group's Health Equity Committee. The ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group is a collaboration between the Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group (ECOG) and the American College of Radiology Imaging Network (ACRIN). The Health Equity Committee specifically ensures that racial justice and health equity are embedded within cancer clinical trials. These considerations include a broad definition of underserved populations, allowing the committee to ensure that research efforts include a full representation and accrual of underserved groups.

# Diversifying the Workforce and Training the Next Generation of Researchers

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Along with our ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program, we are working to diversify the healthcare workforce and future researchers in novel ways. Our NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Program, T37 Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program, Health Equity Scholars Program, and Career911 online course are just some of the many faculty initiatives, workforce training, and educational programs offered by the Center for Health Equity Transformation.

# Northwestern University Recruitment to Transform Under- Representation and achieve Equity (NURTURE)



The Northwestern University Recruitment to Transform Under-Representation and achieve Equity (NURTURE) Program seeks to accelerate institutional culture change toward inclusive excellence through innovative institutional initiatives in hiring, mentoring, promotion and tenure, evaluation, and institutional accountability to ensure that all faculty can thrive. NURTURE features cluster hiring of a cohort of 15 new early-career faculty in three scientific neighborhoods: Cancer; Cardiovascular; and Brain, Mind and Behavior — unified by a cross cutting theme of “Cells to Community.” NURTURE is a collaborative initiative among Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine, McCormick School of Engineering, and Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. NURTURE is supported by an NIH award to Northwestern University through the Office of Strategic Coordination/Office of the NIH Director as part of the NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Program (award number U54CA272163). The NIH FIRST Program aims to transform academic culture to build a self-reinforcing community of scientists committed to diversity and inclusive excellence. CHET Director Dr. Melissa Simon serves as the Contact Principal Investigator; alongside NURTURE Multiple Principal Investigators (MPI) Clyde Yancy, MD, MSc, vice dean for Diversity and Inclusion at Feinberg School of Medicine; and Eric Perreault, PhD, associate dean for Research in the McCormick School of Engineering.



The NURTURE program aims to disrupt the systemic barriers that impede the full participation of underrepresented group faculty in biomedical academia and to add to Northwestern’s investments in substantial inclusive cultural change. We aim to foster a nurturing environment, so that new faculty advance from merely “surviving” to fully “thriving” as they establish independent productivity and ascend to both tenured and leadership positions. NURTURE will enact true, sustainable diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies that ensure an accountable culture where no group is left behind. The tri-MPI team with synergistic expertise, will be responsible for creating, implementing, and sustaining the mechanisms and infrastructure centered around DEI principles and grounded in a shared governance approach through which NURTURE will complement Northwestern’s strategic plan for achieving inclusive excellence. This plan includes strategies for recruitment of early-career tenure-track URG faculty and effecting changes at the institutional and departmental levels that will further promote the cultural shifts needed toward diversity as a core value and mission. These strategies include processes to engage institutional leadership, existing faculty, and trainees within our strongest scientific communities aligned with the transdisciplinary scientific theme “Cells to Community”. The NURTURE team will orchestrate cluster hiring, make significant contributions to institutional culture change toward inclusive excellence, and enable the activities of NURTURE’s Faculty Development and Evaluation Cores, particularly in evaluation of if/how cluster hires accelerate DEI progress.

For more information about NURTURE, visit <https://nurture.northwestern.edu>

## T37 Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program (NU-MHRT)

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The T37 Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program (NU-MHRT) prepares the next generation of health sciences researchers committed to advancing health equity. Since 2019, the T37 NU-MHRT has supported 33 trainees from underrepresented groups (URG) in medicine and science at the undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, predoctoral, and postdoctoral levels. Each trainee works closely with a Northwestern faculty mentor on a health equity research project and receives individualized professional development for the next steps in their career paths. As we enter our fifth year, 25 trainees have completed the program, of whom 64% are continuing their education in medical school, graduate school, or post-doctoral fellowships and 36% are working in professional positions as faculty, clinicians, researchers or health care consultants. Here we highlight the backgrounds and research of T37 trainees who participated in the program in 2023-2024.

### T37 Trainees

#### Postdoctoral



#### **Ray Ramirez, Dr, MD**

Dr. Ramirez, Jr is a General Surgery Resident at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and an NQUIRES Fellow. He is working with faculty mentor, Yue-Yung Hu, MD, MPH, on the THIRD Trial, a study of resident well-being that addresses the lack of inclusion in the work and learning environments for female, racially/ethnically minoritized, and LGBTQ residents.



#### **Whitney Jones MD**

Dr Jones is a graduate of Howard University College of Medicine and currently a General Surgery Resident at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. Her research project aims to contribute to reducing the rate of recurrent firearm violence in previous victims. Her faculty mentor is Leah Tatabe, MD.



## Blair Simon, MD

Dr. Simon is a Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Fellow at Northwestern University/McGaw Medical Center who is building on his T37 faculty mentor Dr. James Collins, Jr, MD's research on maternal health disparities between foreign and domestic-born Black pregnant persons to focus on the disparities in preterm birth rates specifically among Latinx pregnant persons, and identifying the differences between those who self-identify as black vs. those who do not.



## Charesa Smith, MD

Dr. Smith is a General Surgery Resident at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine. She is working with her faculty mentor, Mehul Raval, MD, MS on research toward the development of pediatric surgery quality improvement protocols that address pre-existing racial, geographic, and socioeconomic inequities that disadvantage pediatric patients from health disparities populations.



## Tonia Branche, MD

Dr. Branche completed her T37 postdoctoral training with Dr. James Collins, Jr, MD in April 2023 and her Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Fellowship at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital in July 2023. She is currently an Instructor in Neonatology at Northwestern University/Lurie Children's Hospital. Her T37 research with Dr. Collins evaluated the effect of maternal nativity and race on preterm infant mortality due to congenital heart disease.



## Predoctoral



### **Aneesha Penn, MS**

Aneesha Penn is a medical student at Eastern Virginia Medical School Class of 2024. Her interest in racial health disparities in head and neck pathologies related to gaps in access to care and disproportionate pollution exposure led her to pursue a career in otolaryngology and to the T37 NU-MHRT. She has been investigating health disparities in chronic sinusitis outcomes during her predoctoral T37 training with Dr. Bruce Tan, MD, MS. Following completion of her T37 training, Aneesha expects to start her residency in 2024.

## Post-baccalaureate



### **Gisely Torres**

Gisely Torres graduated from Northwestern University with a double major in Global Health and Latino/a Studies and is currently working with faculty mentor Melissa Simon, MD, MPH on CHET's WellMama Doula and OPTIMIZE maternal health equity research projects. She plans to attend medical school after completing her post-baccalaureate T37 training.



### **Mehek Bapna**

Mehek Bapna graduated from New York University with a BS in Neural Science and Minors in Public Health and Chemistry in 2023 and started her post-baccalaureate training in the ARISE Health Lab with faculty mentor Nia Heard-Garris, MD, MSc. She has been contributing to the ACEs and Cardiometabolic Health in Pediatrics (ACHiP) study, the Double Pandemic Study on racial discrimination and the COVID-19 pandemic and adolescent psychological distress, and the Cedars, South & West Side Chi study of a stress reduction program for adolescents. She plans to attend medical school after her T37 training.



## Vibhu Kolli

Vibhu Kolli graduated Northwestern University with a Major in Communications and a Minor in Data Science in 2023 and began her post-baccalaureate training at CHET with faculty mentor Melissa Simon, MD, MPH. She is working on the WellMama Doula and OPTIMIZE maternal health equity research projects and plans to attend medical school after she completes her T37 training.



## Tabitha Willis

Tabitha Willis started her postbaccalaureate T37 training after graduating from the Ohio State University with a BS in Medical Anthropology and Biology in 2022. She worked in CHET's Metals Project, a study investigating the geographic distribution of heavy metal exposure across the city of Chicago in response to community activism around disproportionate environmental pollution burdens in communities of color. Tabitha completed her post-baccalaureate T37 training in July 2023 and is currently a medical student at Georgetown University.

## Health Equity Scholars Program

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The Health Equity Scholars program is a research training opportunity that provides individuals with substantive research experience contributing to academic and professional learning around health inequities in Chicago. The HES program provides opportunities to strengthen skills in research, analysis, collaboration, communication, and creative problem-solving to address complex social issues using intersectional approaches. Scholars are paired with a CHET staff supervisor based on their area of interest and may work with a variety of Chicago-based organizations that influence health equity work. To date, forty-six undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, pre-doctoral, and post-doctoral trainees have participated in the Health Equity Scholars Program. The 2022-2023 cohort of Scholars is highlighted below:

### Health Equity Scholars



#### **Nihmotallahi Adebayo, MS**

Nihmotallahi Adebayo, a former CHET trainee and research assistant, returned to CHET where she worked on CHET grant submissions in the summer between her first and second years of medical school at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine.



#### **Sanjitha Boobalan**

Sanjitha Boobalan, a Junior at Loyola University Chicago majoring in Molecular/Cellular Neuroscience conducted qualitative research with the OPTIMIZE and WellMama Doula study team.



#### **Cindy Chan, MPH**

Cindy Chan, MPH is a program manager in the research department at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center and continues to contribute to the Chinatown Patient Navigation program.



### **Chigozirim Asonye**

Chigozirim Asonye is a medical student at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and worked with the NURTURE team.



### **Sooin Choi**

Sooin Choi started medical school at Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine in the Fall of 2023; as a Health Equity Scholar, she contributed to the Chinatown Patient Navigation study, OPTIMIZE, and WellMama doula studies.



### **Arthi Kozhumam, MSc**

Arthi Kozhumam is an MD/PhD student in Northwestern University's Medical Scientist Training Program and has been contributing her expertise in implementation science research to the Library projects team.



### **Angie Li**

Angie Li graduated from Northwestern University in June 2023 with a BA in Neuroscience and a minor in Asian American Studies and continues to contribute to the Chinatown Patient Navigation team.



### **Cordero McCall, MPH, MBA**

Cordero McCall is a medical student at the Medical College of Wisconsin and continues to work with Northwestern faculty member Dr. Adam Murphy on cancer health equity research as part of his clinician-researcher training in MCW's Clinical Research Scholars program.



### **Irene Quan**

Irene Quan, a graduate of Northwestern University's Honors Program in Medical Education, worked with the NURTURE team and started medical school at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in the Fall of 2023.



### **Lauren Scott**

Lauren Scott started an MS in Biological Sciences program at Rosalind Franklin University in the Fall of 2023 and continues to contribute graphic design and social media support to the CHET team.



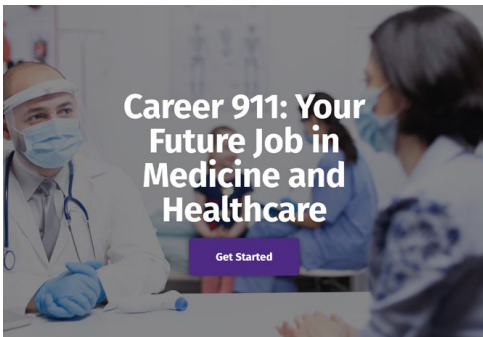
### **Khushal Shah**

Khushal Shah started law school at George Washington University in the Fall of 2023 and continues to work with the T37 NU-MHRT team and contribute to health policy-related manuscript writing.



## Career911: Your Future Job in Medicine – A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

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“Career911” is a free massive open online course (MOOC) focusing on health sciences and health care careers and workforce development. Since launching in April 2015 on the Coursera platform, more than 27,000 students from 160 countries have enrolled. In the past year, Career911 has enrolled 2,465 students with 59

completing the course.

Skills covered in the course include: articulating a personal story, resume and cover letter writing, job search, interviewing, professional networking, and professional communications. Topics are packaged into video-based modules that are designed to allow students to learn at their own pace. Career911 was supported with funds from the Office of the Provost, the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center, and the National Cancer Institute. In addition, we maintain the website [career911.org](http://career911.org) that provides streamlined access to videos and materials for students interested in exploring a career in medicine and healthcare.

A recent student testimonial: “I am beyond grateful for all the creative and engaging lessons you have taught in this course to us! Truly wish I had a teacher like you, who inspired a passion for learning.” (Coursera student, September 2023)

## Uterine Leiomyoma Research Center Lab Immersion Program

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CHET’s Uterine Leiomyoma Research Center Lab Immersion Program provides paid laboratory internship experiences for BIPOC students interested in conducting uterine leiomyoma (fibroids) research. Uterine fibroids are the most common tumor affecting African Americans. They cause irregular uterine bleeding, anemia, and have led to over 200,000 hysterectomies annually in the United States. Interns work on research projects that seek to understand the mechanisms responsible for the development and growth of uterine fibroids in order to reduce its morbidity. Find more information at our website:

<https://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/sites/chet/education/lab-immersion.html>

# Public Policy and Advocacy

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Government institutions and health care systems were created to support the well-being and health of people, but racism and discrimination are deeply embedded in these systems. They are also plagued with complex levels of bureaucracy and politics that make it incredibly difficult to change policies, nonetheless at the speed necessary when a crisis emerges. While CHET's health equity research has the power to influence systemic change long-term, we also recognize that there are often disconnects that may result in academic research taking many years to inform public policy. CHET shares its expertise on multiple health equity issues with local, state, and federal policy leaders in real time to inform policy changes.





## Project Safe Space

After founding the Abuse Prevention Workgroup of the Illinois Department of Public Health's COVID-19 Equity Team in May 2020, CHET sought and received funding from the Northwestern Memorial Foundation to launch Project Safe Space Chicago, which aims to develop and implement a training for health care providers across Northwestern Medicine on effective intimate partner violence (IPV) interventions in a telehealth context. The project has created a one-hour condensed and highly focused evidence-based training program and recorded a 30-minute training video to increase access for frontline providers. This work was a direct response to the increase in IPV and other forms of abuse that resulted from the stay-at-home orders caused by the pandemic, which disproportionately affected Black womxn. While calls to the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline spiked, many social services experienced cuts in funding due to the pandemic. Recognizing that health care visits (including telehealth) may be the only point of potential intervention in some cases, Project Safe Space brings together community leaders from Apna Ghar, Connections for Abused Women and Children (CAWC), Mujeres Latinas en Acción, and YWCA Metropolitan Chicago to train health care providers in best practices for linking patients to IPV and other commonly needed resources and provides these organizations with emergency cash funds they can disburse to their clients to help them seek a safe space, such as a rideshare or temporary hotel stay. The partner organizations have used funds to provide comprehensive direct services to over 500+ survivor program participants including urgent services such as housing/rent, utilities, transportation, legal, food, and more.



## Roe vs. Wade

CHET Director Dr. Melissa Simon provided expert analysis regarding the impact of the United States Supreme Court's reversal of Roe vs. Wade. In interviews with media outlets, Dr. Simon has emphasized that safe abortion care is an essential component of safe maternity care. Overturning this law would increase the already rising U.S. maternal mortality rates. Moreover, Dr. Simon continues to bring attention to the fact that women of color will bear the brunt of this decision, as decades of research show that the impact will fall hardest on those who already struggle to access health care.

**AAPI HERITAGE MONTH  
CELEBRATION: ASIAN AMERICAN  
HISTORY AND HEALTH**

During the month of May, we celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The Center for Health Equity Transformation is facilitating a panel discussion between Dr. Theresa Mah and Dr. Ji-Yeon Yuh about the rise of Anti-Asian hate in the US.

**Theresa Mah, PhD**

- State Representative, Illinois 24th District
- Former college professor who taught US history, Ethnic Studies, and Asian American Studies

**Monday, May 22nd  
12-1 PM CST  
ONLINE VIA ZOOM**

**REGISTER HERE**  
[bit.ly/CHET\\_AAPIO2023](https://bit.ly/CHET_AAPIO2023)

**Ji-Yeon Yuh, PhD**

- Professor of Asian American histories, Asian diasporas, race and gender, and oral histories








## Advancing Asian American Pacific Islander Leadership in Health

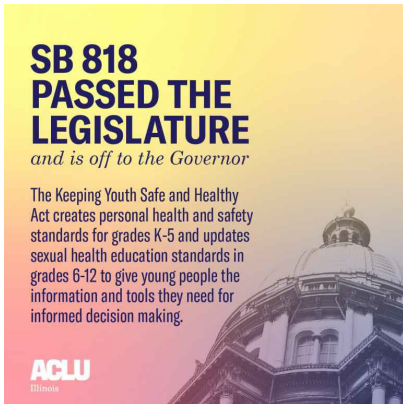
In May, we celebrated Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month with a panel discussion between Dr. Theresa Mah and Dr. Ji-Yeon Yuh to discuss Asian-American history and health. Theresa Mah, PhD is an Illinois State Representative of the 24<sup>th</sup> District and a former college professor of US History, Ethnic Studies, and Asian American Studies. Her scholarship focuses on Asian-American histories of segregation. Ji-Yeon Yuh, PhD is a professor of Asian American histories, Asian diasporas, race and gender, and oral histories at Northwestern University. Her scholarship concentrates on digital oral histories of life narratives of Vietnamese and Korean Americans.



## Women First Research Coalition

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Dr. Simon serves as co-chair on the Women First Research Coalition that advocates for the research needed to address disparities in women’s health, including those related to maternal mortality, heart disease, and cancer.



## Sponsored Bills

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### IL SB 818

CHET sponsored IL SB 818 – Keeping Youth Safe & Healthy Act, which aims to make sex education more inclusive and accessible across the State of Illinois. This CHET-sponsored bill was signed into law on August 2021.

### IL HB 354

CHET sponsored IL HB 354 - Medicaid Reimbursement for Doula and Home Visitors, which would expand the perinatal services covered under Medicaid and has the potential to transform maternal health outcomes.



# The Arts and Humanities in Health Equity

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At the most basic level, art can improve health communication. Compelling visuals, designs, songs, etc. can be more memorable and sharable than statistics because they increase access and cultural relevance. Art can help disseminate health messages, shift public opinion, shape community discourse, or even motivate political will because it is widely recognized as a means for social change and awareness. CHET seeks to partner with artists, writers, and others who can advance health equity through the arts and humanities. In the last year, CHET has hosted several events bridging health equity and the arts and humanities.



**2023 JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION OF BLACK CULTURE, ART, & MUSIC**

Arline T. Geronimus, ScD  
Professor of Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan

Inger E. Burnett-Ziegler, PhD  
Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Northwestern University

E'mon Lauren  
Chicago's First Poet Laureate and Educator

The Center for Health Equity Transformation invites you to join this year's Juneteenth Celebration of Black Culture, Arts, Music, and a thoughtful discussion of persistent health disparities experienced by the Black community.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15TH  
12:00-1:15 PM CST  
VIA ZOOM

**REGISTER HERE**

[bit.ly/2023CHETJuneteenth](https://bit.ly/2023CHETJuneteenth)

SOUNDS CURATED BY DJ STAZI  
anasabarris@gmail.com

Center for Community Health | Northwestern University | IPHAM | Office of Diversity & Inclusion

## Juneteenth

CHET's 2023 Juneteenth Celebration focused on Black Culture, Arts, Music, and a thoughtful discussion of persistent health disparities experienced by the Black community. Drs. Arline T. Geronimus and Inger Burnett-Ziegler joined us in a panel discussion with E'mon Lauren, and sounds were curated by DJ Stazi. Arline T. Geronimus, PhD is a professor of Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan, and author of *Weathering: The Extraordinary Stress of Ordinary Life in an Unjust Society*. Inger Burnett-Ziegler, PhD is a licensed clinical psychologist and associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Feinberg School of Medicine, focusing on access to mental health services for underserved populations. Dr. Burnett-Ziegler is the author of *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: The Emotional Lives of Black Women*, 2021. E'mon Lauren is a local artist and educator, and Chicago's first Poet Laureate.

# Federal, State and Local Engagement

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CHET recognizes that transformative change that can promote health equity will require changes to policies and systems that have historically oppressed people from marginalized populations. We embrace the American Public Health Association's (APHA) concept of Health in All Policies which recognizes that ALL policies have implications on health outcomes. CHET develops connections between researchers, communities, and policymakers that are currently operating in silos. To do this, we provide researchers and community members with opportunities to learn more about the advocacy and policymaking process, and educate policymakers on the academic and community resources available that can inform the policies they develop. Furthermore, we create spaces for all to interact so that opportunities to collaborate become more accessible.

## National Academy of Medicine (NAM)

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Dr. Simon was elected to the National Academy of Medicine in October 2021. The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) is one of three academies that make up the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the National Academies) in the United States. Operating under the 1863 Congressional charter of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academies provide objective advice on matters of science, technology, and health.

## Legislation

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The CHET team is working with lawmakers, including Senator Dick Durbin and US Representatives Bill Foster and Lauren Underwood, to push for more stability of federal funding for scientific and biomedical research through sponsoring the bicameral American Cures Act and the American Innovation Act, intended to provide annual budget increases to federal agencies responsible for a significant part of America's research funding. Additionally, we are supporting the bipartisan MOMMA's Act, which extends coverage under Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to one year postpartum and provides additional support to States to address the maternal and infant mortality crisis. CHET is also supporting ongoing efforts to reform sex education laws in Illinois to ensure that sex education is LGBTQ+ inclusive and contains content aimed at preventing sexual abuse and violence.

## United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF)

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Dr. Melissa Simon is a past member of the USPSTF, which works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications. Over five years on the USPSTF, Dr. Simon helped lead the efforts to address social determinants of health, person-centered language for gender inclusion, and racism in the USPSTF recommendations and in the recommendation making processes. Additionally, she serves on several activities through the National Academy of Medicine, including the Board of Population Health and Public Health Practice, and the Roundtable on the Promotion of Health Equity.

## Advisory Committee on Research on Women's Health

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As an advisor on this Advisory Committee at NIH, Dr. Simon works to give advice and make recommendations on priority issues affecting women's health and sex differences research.



# CHET BY THE NUMBERS

## CHET by the Numbers 2022-23

**\$47M+\***

NIH Funding Since CHET's  
Founding in 2018

**#4**

NIH Funded Principal  
Investigator in  
OBGYN in the US\*\*



**7,032+\***

Skinny Trees  
Podcast Plays



**166+\***

Manuscripts  
Published



**249+\***

Health Equity Scholars,  
CHEC Fellows,  
and T37 Trainees



**35+\***

Community Partners  
Involved  
in Projects



**82\***

Northwestern Faculty  
Featured in Health  
Equity Footprint



**1,560+\***

CHET VOICES  
Subscribers



\*Cumulative since CHET's Founding in 2018

\*\*According to 2022 Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research Report

# Acknowledgements



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# Active Research Grants & Contracts 2022-2023

## **NURTURE: Northwestern University Recruitment to Transform Under-Representation and Achieve Equity**

**NIH U54CA272163 | 9/9/2022-8/31/2027**

The Northwestern University Recruitment to Transform Under-Representation and achieve Equity (NURTURE) Program seeks to accelerate institutional culture change toward inclusive excellence through innovative institutional initiatives in hiring, mentoring, promotion and tenure, evaluation, and institutional accountability to ensure that all faculty can thrive. NURTURE features cluster hiring of a cohort of 15 new early-career faculty in three scientific neighborhoods: Cancer; Cardiovascular; and Brain, Mind and Behavior — unified by a cross cutting theme of “Cells to Community.” NURTURE is a collaborative initiative among Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine, McCormick School of Engineering, and Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences. NURTURE is supported by an NIH award to Northwestern University through the Office of Strategic Coordination/Office of the NIH Director as part of the NIH Faculty Institutional Recruitment for Sustainable Transformation (FIRST) Program. CHET Director’s Role: Multiple Principal Investigator

## **The Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC) NIH U54CA203000; CA2022995; CA2022997 | 9/1/2015-9/30/2025**

The Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC) - This collaborative will accomplish the following objectives: 1) cross-fertilize research among NEIU and UIC faculty and students with RHLCCC-NU across the cancer continuum, from prevention to survivorship; 2) enhance RHLCCC-NU, UIC and NEIU collaborative research efforts and networking opportunities through cross-sponsored conferences, symposia, and research education opportunities; 3) advance team-based research projects that will generate a steady pipeline of students, fellows and faculty that continue in advanced studies; 4) embed innovative experience-learning curricular modifications to expose students to cancer disparities research; and 5) develop scientists who will produce more competitive grant applications and succeed in securing funding. To support our achievement of these objectives in this U54, we have 4 Cores, a ChicagoCHEC Research Fellows Program and we seed research projects annually. CHET Director’s Role: Multiple Principal Investigator

## **Northwestern University Cancer Health Equity Research SPORE (NU-CHERS)**

**P20 NIH NCI P20CA233304 | 9/15/2020-8/30/2023**

The Northwestern University Cancer Health Equity Research SPORE (NU-CHERS) - Centered in Chicago, one of the most diverse cities in the United States, this P20 feasibility and planning proposal to develop the Northwestern University Cancer Health Equity Research SPORE (NU-CHERS) will generate scientific findings and establish sustainable, collaborative, academic and community infrastructure that will serve as the foundation for a comprehensive translational cancer research program focused on cancer health disparities. In this proposal, we set our initial translational research focus to gynecologic cancers, including disparities in endometrial and cervical cancer incidence, early detection, and mortality as experienced by African American women. CHET Director’s Role: Principal Investigator



## **The ECOG-ACRIN SUPPORT Trial: Multilevel Intervention to Improve Diverse Enrollment in Cancer Clinical Trials**

**NIH NCI U01CA274996 | 9/15/2022-8/31/2027**

In partnership with ECOG-ACRIN (EA), this study will develop and evaluate an ECOG-ACRIN Trial SUPPORT Toolkit (SUPPORT intervention) that aims to improve Black and Latino referral and enrollment in active NCI-supported therapeutic trials in head and neck, thoracic, and genitourinary cancers, and leukemia and myeloma. The multilevel EA SUPPORT intervention consists of a CT research literacy tool and CT Resource Navigators based at EA who will interface with patients, providers, and community oncology site staff to improve referral and enrollment of Black and Latino patients to CTs. CHET Director's Role: Multiple Principal Investigator

## **Optimizing Patient Navigation for Perinatal Care**

**NIH NIMHD R01MD014068 | 08/01/2019-07/31/2024**

The Optimize Study: Optimizing Patient Navigation for Perinatal Care - Persistent racial/ethnic disparities in perinatal outcomes are urgent public health concerns, especially for African American women in the U.S. This Hybrid Type 2 randomized cluster trial of 20 community health centers will study the effectiveness of patient navigation and its implementation among African American pregnant and postpartum women. Role: Principal Investigator

## **Patient Navigation 2.0: Addressing the Challenge of Scaling Navigation through Checklist-based Implementation**

**NIH NCI R01CA163830 | 3/15/2012-2/28/2024**

The objectives of this study are to use, disseminate and implement the well-tested patient navigation model to the full continuum of breast and cervical cancer screening through survivorship among Chinese women in Chicago's Chinatown community. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

## **Enhancing Perinatal Care Support to Improve Maternal Mortality Disparities**

**NIH 1R01MD016280-01A1 | 08/24/2021 – 04/30/2026**

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women experience profound maternal health disparities in the US, including rising rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. This study will develop a Well- Mama intervention for pregnant and postpartum BIPOC women, centered around Community Doula Navigators conducting in-person and telehealth check-ins on 5 priority areas (mental health, cardiovascular symptoms, safety, opioid/substance abuse, and social support), supplemented with virtual support groups and labor support. We will conduct a randomized trial in Chicago IL, Newark NJ, and Baton Rouge LA to test whether the Well- Mama intervention increases BIPOC women's receipt of prenatal and postpartum care. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

## **Reducing Disparities in Urinary Control Symptoms for Minority Women**

**NIH NIDDK 1R01DK129849-01 | 09/20/2021 – 08/31/2025**

Given barriers to accessing physical therapy and the behavioral and mental health impacts of urinary incontinence, this project will evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of a culturally specific, home-based, online, community health-worker supported, conservative intervention for urinary incontinence. We hypothesize that improvement in urinary incontinence symptoms of women receiving SUPPORT therapy will be non-inferior to those receiving the gold-standard treatment of in-person physical therapy and will lead to improved mental health. CHET Director's Role: Multiple Principal Investigator



**Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training  
NIH NIMHD T37MD01428 | 07/18/2019-02/29/2024**

The NU-MHRT builds on the collective strength, expertise, and experience of investigators and faculty and proposes innovative training approaches, including, assembling a transdisciplinary team of NIH-funded program faculty; building a cohort of trainees across career stages from undergraduate through postdoctoral; strengthening the pipeline of disparity trainees by reaching out to community college students and planting the seeds of careers in health sciences research; and partnering with minority serving institutions to enhance research training opportunities for their students and strengthen research mentorship skills among their faculty. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

**Advancing Library-Academic Medical Center Partnerships to Navigate Wellness and Scale Preventive Services Access  
NIH NLM G08LM013188 | 09/19/2019-8/31/2023**

This library-academic health center partnership aims to develop a digital tool for librarians and library patrons to navigate wellness and help augment the USPSTF information to enhance the accessibility of up-to-date and tailored, preventive screening and wellness information to underserved populations. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

**Northwestern University PLUS Clinical Trial Site  
NIH NIDDK U01DK126045 | 7/1/2020-6/30/2025**

This site is a part of the PLUS Clinical Trial aiming to improve preventive health approaches to bladder and overall lower urinary tract health. CHET Director's Role: Multiple Principal Investigator (with Kenton and Griffith)

**Chicago Asian Resource Center for Minority Aging Research  
NIH NIA P30AG059304 | 09/01/2018-08/31/2023**

The RCMAR Center in conjunction with the Research Education and Training Core will provide an enriched environment that develops Scholars who: 1) understand the biological, social-cultural, psychological, and behavioral sciences with a specific emphasis on knowledge about mechanisms of action underlying trauma and related outcomes at the individual or population level, focusing on Asian elders; and 2) can conduct innovative pilot research that forms the basis for future minority aging research, ultimately designed to improve the lives of older persons. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator of Research Education and Training Core

**Women's Reproductive Health Research (WRHR-K12)  
Career Development Award Program  
NIH NICHD HD050121 Bulun (PI) | 7/1/2006-6/30/2025**

The major goals of the WRHR program are to develop the careers of physician scientists in the field of Obstetrics and Gynecology. CHET Director's Role: Program Director

**NCTRI Northwestern Leiomyoma Research Center  
NIH P50HD098580 Bulun (PI) | 4/1/2019-3/31/2024**

The major goals of the Leiomyoma Research Center is to understand novel clinically relevant mechanisms responsible for pathogenesis and growth of uterine leiomyomas especially in African American women to reduce associated morbidity in the field of Obstetrics and Gynecology. CHET Director's Role: Research Education and Outreach Core Director

**Leveraging the Learning Health System to Improve Abnormal Cancer Screen Follow- Up in Community Health Center**

**Merck Foundation | 1/1/2017-12/30/2022**

This grant proposes a multilevel intervention to improve abnormal cancer screening diagnostic resolution for low-income patients at community health centers. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

**The Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center**

**NCI P30CA060553 (Platanias PI) | 09/16/13 - 07/31/23**

The goals of this Cancer Center Support Grant are to conduct and support cancer research and to integrate cancer-related research throughout the university; to coordinate and integrate cancer-related activities of the University including community outreach initiatives; to develop and conduct cancer education programs; to promote and participate in state-of-the-are care of cancer patients at the affiliated hospitals of the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University and; to develop and implement the initiatives in cancer prevention and control research. These goals are accomplished through the activities of the 9 established programs and 15 shared resources. CHET Director's Role: Co-Program Leader, Cancer Control and Survivorship and Co-Director of Community Outreach and Catchment

**ECOG ACRIN NCORP Research Base**

**NCI NCORP 1UG1CA189828-01 (Schnell and Wagner mPI) | 8/1/2014-7/31/2025**

The ECOG-ACRIN Cancer Research Group (EA) is dedicated to decreasing the burden of cancer. EA is a vibrant member of the National Clinical Trials Network (NCTN) and the NCI Community Oncology Research Program (NCORP), focused on practice-changing clinical and translational research across the cancer care continuum from prevention and early detection, through the management of advanced disease and its impact. CHET Director's Role: Health Equity Core/Committee Chair and Co-Investigator



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