



BRIDGING THE GAP

REACH POPULATION HEALTH SYMPOSIUM



MARCH 13, 2025
RUTH BADER GINSBERG HALL, 15 WASHINGTON ST. NEWARK, NJ 07102

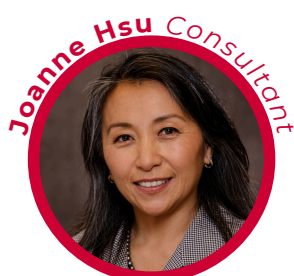
A LOOK INSIDE

BRIDGING THE GAP

Collaborative Pathways to Achieve Health Equity in New Jersey

This symposium, hosted by the Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH) Population Health Table, will explore innovative, community-engaged strategies, and foster collaboration across New Jersey to create long-term change in our communities. Speakers, including community leaders and researchers, will provide actionable recommendations for advancing health equity, enhancing collaboration, and guiding the implementation and evaluation of health policies that effectively target and reduce health inequities.

Organizers



PROGRAM

9:00 AM - 9:45 AM	Registration
9:45 AM - 9:55 AM	Welcome <i>Dr. Rafael E. Pérez-Figueroa</i>
10:00 AM - 10:15 AM	Opening Remarks <i>Dr. Denise V. Rodgers</i>
10:20 AM - 10:35 AM	Newark DOH and Wellness <i>Ketlen Baptiste Alsbrook</i>
10:40 AM - 11:30 AM	Panel: Community Engagement as a Tool in Population Health Moderator: <i>Dr. Rafael E. Pérez-Figueroa</i> Speakers: <i>Dr. Shawna Hudson, David Cozart, Brian McGovern</i>
11:40 AM - 12:10 PM	Sketch Series: Las Promotoras <i>Team SALUD</i>
12:10 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch and Networking
1:00 PM - 1:30 PM	Keynote Speech <i>Dr. Vanya Jones</i>
1:35 PM - 2:25 PM	Panel: Mobilizing Communities to Achieve Health Equity Moderator: <i>Dr. Kristin August</i> Speakers: <i>Sherri Ohly, Tracy Parris-Benjamin, Charles Brown IV</i>
2:25 PM - 2:45 PM	Coffee Break
2:45 PM - 3:35 PM	Panel: Reimagining the Systems of Influence Moderator: <i>Diane Hagerman</i> Speakers: <i>Mariam Merced, Rosabel Pastrana Vázquez, Thalia Sirjue, Nicole Mendoza</i>
3:45 PM - 4:00 PM	Closing Remarks <i>Brian McGovern</i>

KEYNOTE KEYNOTE KEYNOTE KEYNOTE KEYNOTE



VANYA JONES, PhD MPH

Dr. Vanya Jones is an Associate Professor and the inaugural Assistant Dean for Community Engaged Research at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Jones has collaborated with multiple local government and community organizations including currently co-chairing the Baltimore City Health Department's Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC).

Dr. Jones is a member of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board (IRB) Expedited Committee and serves as an Associate Director of the Johns Hopkins University Urban Health Institute. In addition to her work as a community engaged researcher, Dr. Jones is an award-winning teacher and educational mentor. She is also a board member of the Alpha Chapter of Delta Omega, the Public Health National Honor Society.

PANELISTS



**DENISE V. RODGERS,
PHD**

Dr. Denise V. Rodgers is the Vice Chancellor for Interprofessional Programs at Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences. She is also a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at RWJ Medical School. Dr. Rodgers has devoted much of her career to working with and caring for underserved patients and communities. She is currently Chair of the Greater Newark Health Care Coalition Board of Directors.

Ketlen Baptiste Alsbrook was appointed to serve as the Director for the City of Newark's Department of Health & Community Wellness, the state's largest health department, as well as CEO for the Mary Eliza Mahoney Health Center in July 2022. Ketlen holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Montclair State University. She graduated with honors from Rutgers University in 2010, earning a Masters of Public Administration. Ketlen is a proud fellow of Leadership Newark's Class of 2013.



**KETLEN BAPTISTE
ALSBROOK, MPA**



**RAFAEL E. PÉREZ-
FIGUEROA, MD, MPH**

Rafael E. Pérez-Figueroa, M.D., M.P.H., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health and the Associate Dean for Community Engagement, Populations Health, and Public Health Service. He is a fellow of the RWJ Foundation Interdisciplinary Research Leaders Program, the Columbia University Community-Based Participatory Research Program, the National Hispanic Science Network on Drug Abuse, and the New York University Postdoctoral and Transition Program for Academic Diversity.

Vice Chancellor of Dissemination and Implementation Science, Dr. Shawna Hudson also holds the Henry Rutgers Chair of Family Medicine and Community Health. In addition, she serves as Senior Associate Dean for Population Health Research at the Rutgers RWJ Medical School and as a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. In addition, she serves as the founding Director of the Center Advancing Research and Evaluation for Person-Centered Care (CARE-PC). She is a three-time Rutgers University graduate, having completed post-doctoral training as a New Jersey Commission on Cancer Research Fellow.



**SHAWNA HUDSON,
PHD, FSBM**



For nearly 3 decades, David has been a father/family advocate, a community organizer, a minister, and an influential leader. He leads positive fatherhood engagement and programming across Kentucky and beyond as Founder and Chief Visionary Officer of the Commonwealth Center for Fathers and Families (CCFF). He is a past recipient of the Governors Annual Services Awards, receiving the honor of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

DAVID COZART

Brian McGovern, CEO of New Jersey Community Research Initiative (NJCRI) in Newark, NJ, is a seasoned social worker with a master's degree from Adelphi University and has been licensed since 1991. His career includes roles at NYC Health and Hospital Corporation, Queens Health Network, Housing Works, Inc., and HealthFirst. He joined NJCRI in 2001 and became CEO in 2009. His work has consistently focused on equity in healthcare, particularly for underserved communities affected by HIV/AIDS.



BRIAN MCGOVERN



Dr. Kristin August is a Professor of Psychology and Health Sciences at Rutgers University-Camden and the Founding Director of the Graduate Program in Prevention Science. Her research explores how personal relationships influence health behaviors across diverse populations and contexts. She serves as a representative in the Population Health Learning Table for the Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health (REACH) initiative.

KRISTIN AUGUST, PHD

Sherri Ohly is a Founder and the Director of Operations and Development at the Envision CHW Training and Technical Assistance Center. She is based at the University of Wisconsin Madison School of Medicine and Population Health, Population Health Institute. Sherri is dedicated to advancing equitable health outcomes through the empowerment of Community Health Workers (CHWs). Sherri holds a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



**SHERRI OHLY,
BSW**



**TRACY
PARRIS-BENJAMIN, MSW**

Tracey Parris-Benjamin is a master's level licensed social worker. As managing partner of The Outcomes Architect, she works to optimize leadership, leverage relationships, and help organizations gather insights to improve organizational results through executive coaching, strategic planning, training, and motivational speaking. In 2019, she received distinguished honors from Diversity MBA as Top Leader Under 50 and in 2020 was featured in the inaugural issue of the Top 100 Women of Influence.

Charles Brown IV joined the Cherry Hill Free Clinic in 2023 as a community health worker. He is deeply committed to providing care to those in need, both within the community and beyond, and he has a passion for the mental health and well-being of historically underserved populations. Currently, he is enrolled in the Social Work Master's program at Temple University, with an anticipated graduation date of May 2026.



CHARLES BROWN IV



DIANE HAGERMAN

Diane Hagerman joined REACH as Executive Director in April 2022. For 20 years prior, Diane served in several roles with statewide grant-making program New Jersey Health Initiatives, most recently as Director, and oversaw the program's communications functions. She worked directly with grantees to ensure they realized the full potential of their projects by building strong networks among grantees and partners, facilitating access to resources and experts to grow and succeed.



MARIAM MERCED, MA

Mariam Merced has been the Director of the Community Health Promotion program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJUH) since 1991. She has developed numerous theater projects related to health awareness campaigns. She received a B.A. degree in Psychology and Labor Studies from the University of Puerto Rico and a master's degree in labor studies from Rutgers.

Rosabel studied at the Department of Medicine at the Autonomous University of Guerrero, Mexico. She is a Health Ambassador in the City of New Brunswick, and considers her fundamental role to be serving as a bridge between the community and healthcare institutions. She is the Coordinator of the Team Salud Health program at the RWJ University Hospital. She was recently assigned to the Health Window of the Mexican Consulate in New Brunswick, NJ, where she provides preventive health promotion services to the Hispanic Mexican community.



**ROSABEL PASTRANA
VÁZQUEZ**



THALIA SIRJUE

Thalia Sirjue is Chief of Staff at the New Jersey Department of Health and Chief Operating Officer. Prior to her tenure at NJDOH, Thalia managed development lifecycles for Veteran and clinician-focused mobile apps for the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) App Store and led the team that established VA's Innovation Ecosystem to enable the discovery and diffusion of health care innovations across the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). This included launching the Diffusion of Excellence initiative and expanding the VA Innovators Network.

Nicole Mendoza is a PhD student in Communication at Rutgers School of Communication & Information. Her previous research at the University of California Santa Barbara focused on a stress-resilience-thriving framework regarding the undocumented immigration status of college students. Her current research explores the aspects of culturally grounded interpersonal communication in patient-provider relationships and health inequities among the Latino community.



NICOLE MENDOZA

TEAM



SALUD

Ten volunteer Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs), or "Promotoras," make up TEAM SALUD, which are residents of the city of New Brunswick (NB). Our "Promotoras" are trusted frontline health workers in the community who play a crucial role in the city's Latino community. Through the relationships they build, they bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, promote health education and equity, provide access to healthcare services, and address social determinants of health. As part of their training, they participate in health education workshops that provide the necessary information and resources that they can share with the community and help facilitate access to care.

Team Salud uses various methods to carry out their work. Their success comes from the trust between the Promotoras and the community members. They share the same language, culture, religion, and often the same barriers to health accessibility. They often serve as trusted sources of information and support, fostering stronger relationships between healthcare providers and Latino individuals and families. Their impact includes improving health outcomes, increasing healthcare utilization, reducing disparities, and empowering community members to take charge of their health. Overall, their efforts contribute to healthier communities and reduced healthcare disparities among Latinos.

About REACH



The Rutgers Equity Alliance for Community Health is an initiative designed to improve the health and quality of life in three NJ cities by focusing on five key social determinants of health: education, employment, food access/security, housing, and population health. REACH leverages the expertise of community members and the research capabilities of Rutgers University faculty, staff, and students to create our Collaborative Learning Tables (CLTs), which are an essential component of the REACH initiative.

These CLTs support REACH's intentional shift in how Rutgers engages with and serves the state of New Jersey. By fostering meaningful relationships and collaborations, we aim to improve health outcomes through community-based health equity research, education, service, and programming. Members collaborate to share best practices and cultivate inclusive community-academic partnerships.

Today's policy brief represents the perspective of the Population Health CLT, which is dedicated to promoting community-engaged health strategies that prioritize equitable access to health across New Jersey.



The REACH Team

Learn more at



reach.rutgers.edu