



Alliance for Research with Chicagoland Communities

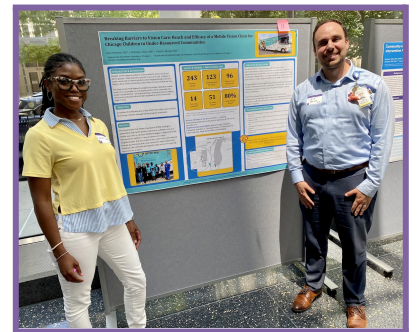
Honoring the Breaking Barriers to Vision Care Partnership: ARCC 2026 Dr. Virginia Bishop Community-Academic Research Partnership Award Winner

The [Alliance for Research with Chicagoland Communities](#) (ARCC), a program of the Center for Community Health at Northwestern University, established the [ARCC Community-Academic Research Partnership Award](#) in 2012 to recognize research partnerships that exemplify strong community-driven research principles and work to impact health equity in Chicagoland communities. This annual award was renamed in 2022 to honor the leadership and partnerships of the late Dr. Virginia Bishop. Dr. “Gini” Bishop, who passed away in February 2020, co-founded ARCC, and served as ARCC’s co-director from 2007–10, alongside ARCC co-founder and current director Jay Brown. “Gini was an inspiration and example of both the art and the science of community partnerships,” Brown said. “Her vision and leadership created the path to establish ARCC at Northwestern and drives not only *what* we do but *how* we do it, centering community leadership and relationships at every step.” Read more about her impact [here](#).



The 2026 Award honors the Breaking Barriers to Vision Care partnership. This community-academic partnership to improve eye health equity for children in historically excluded Chicago communities is between the [Experiences That Matter Foundation](#) (Lead: [Dinai Yelverton](#)) and the Northwestern University Department of Ophthalmology (Lead: [Dr. David Ramirez](#)). *Scroll below to see a listing and photos of participating partners.*

Despite experiencing similar rates of vision problems regardless of race and ethnicity, Black and Latine children in Chicago face significant disparities in vision care access and treatment, driven by poverty, lack of insurance, transportation barriers, and a fragmented referral-based healthcare system. The Experiences That Matter Foundation (ETM) and Northwestern University's Department of Ophthalmology have partnered since 2023 to address these disparities through the 2020 Perfect Vision Campaign (PVC): Chicago's first pediatric mobile vision clinic with the onsite technology to make prescription glasses—same day, at no cost to families.



The partnership was initially established through a [Northwestern University ANCHOR \(Advancing Neighborhood & Community Health, Opportunity & Resilience\) Grant](#). This funded the acquisition and full outfitting of a 35-foot RV as a fully equipped mobile vision clinic. Together, ETM and Northwestern developed the NU x PVC Task Force, a formal collaboration structure guiding program implementation across four areas: clinical oversight, advocacy, research and evaluation, and volunteer engagement. Licensed ophthalmologists, optometrists, and student doctors from Northwestern and Lurie Children's Hospital volunteer at every tour stop, conducting screenings and comprehensive eye exams under a shared standard of care developed specifically for the mobile setting.



In 2025, the partnership completed its inaugural full tour season: 14 tour stops, 243 patients served from 51 zip codes, 123 comprehensive eye exams conducted, and 96 pairs of prescription glasses fabricated and dispensed. In 2026, the partnership is expanding to 20+ tour stops and conducting a formal program evaluation (funded through an [ARCC Research Pilot Seed Grant](#)), collecting HIPAA-compliant data on vision care access, glasses

receipt rates, referral follow-through, and family experience across 15 tour stops. Findings will inform sustainable, equity-driven interventions and contribute to the national evidence base for mobile, community based pediatric vision care. Learn more from their [scientific poster](#).

The Breaking Barriers to Vision Care Partnership is grounded in Northwestern's Center for Community Health's [Principles of Engagement](#): centering community voice and lived experience in program design, maintaining shared leadership and transparency, pursuing racial equity explicitly and unapologetically, and building toward sustained collaboration rather than a single research transaction. Decision-making is shared and the partners have a shared commitment to community-led, equity-driven research. Power dynamics are named and actively addressed. And the community- the families and neighborhoods the Campaign serves- remains at the center of every choice made.

"Access to vision care changes what's possible for a child, and that only works when the effort is rooted in community. Dr. David Ramirez has understood that from day one — it's part of why this partnership works and means so much to me. Northwestern is helping us prove vision health disparities with data, but the lived experiences of the families we serve, tells the real story," shared Dinai Yelverton.



Partners:

[Experiences That Matter Foundation](#): [Dinai Yelverton](#) (Founder and CEO)

Northwestern University: [Dr. David Ramirez](#) (Assistant Professor, Ophthalmology, Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine)

Dr. Nicholas Volpe (Chair, Department of Ophthalmology, Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine) was also critical to the launch and implementation of the Breaking Barriers to Vision Care Partnership.



The award recipients will be honored and serve as keynote speakers at ARCC's upcoming Community Research Learning Exchange on Nov 19, 2026. Registration [here](#). Find further information about the partnership and award at www.ARCCOnline.net.

ARCC Background

Established in 2008, the [Alliance for Research with Chicagoland Communities](#) (ARCC) mission is to catalyze and support research partnerships driven by and rooted in Chicagoland communities' unique assets and experiences to achieve health justice. We support authentic community-academic research partnerships between Chicagoland communities and Northwestern University by providing partnership facilitation, capacity-building resources and technical assistance, seed grants, and advocacy for supportive structural and institutional systems and policies in the research enterprise that center community leadership. Guided by a [Steering Committee](#) of Chicagoland community- and faith-based organizations and Northwestern scientists, ARCC supports community-academic research partnerships by providing partnership facilitation, capacity-building [resources](#) and [technical assistance](#), [seed grants](#), [monthly information and resource updates](#), and advocacy for supportive structural and institutional systems and policies in the research enterprise. ARCC is a program of the [Center for Community Health](#), in [Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine](#).



For more information, www.ARCCOnline.net or ARCC@northwestern.edu