



# 2020 - 2021 Annual Report

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# Table of Contents

<b>Message from the Director</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Our Mission, Vision, and Values</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our Team</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Research and Scholarship</b>	<b>6</b>
Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative (ChicagoCHEC)	7
NU-CHERS	13
Chinatown Patient Navigation Program	15
4R Care Coordination for Patients with Cancer	16
The OPTIMIZE Study	17
Doula Project	18
Community Scientist Project	19
<b>Community Engagement Initiatives &amp; Activities</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Increasing Access to Health Information and Diversity in Clinical Trials</b>	<b>25</b>
Health for All: Library Partnerships to Advance Diversity in Clinical Trials	26
Advancing Library-Academic Medical Center Partnerships to Navigate Wellness and Scale Preventive Services Access	27
“WellMama” Navigating Wellness	27
Precision Medicine Initiative ( <i>All of Us</i> Research Program)	28
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University	29
ECOG-ACRIN Health Equity Committee	29
<b>Diversifying the Workforce and Training the Next Generation of Researchers</b>	<b>30</b>
T37 Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program (NU-MHRT)	31
Health Equity Scholars Program	35
Career911: Your Future Job in Medicine – A Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)	38
Uterine Leiomyoma Research Center Lab Immersion Program	38
<b>Public Policy and Advocacy</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>The Arts and Humanities in Health Equity</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Federal, State and Local Engagement</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>CHET by the Numbers</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>52</b>
Active Research Grants & Contracts	53
Citations	57

# | Message from the Director

**Dear Friends and Health Equity Champions,**

In 2020, the world has watched as the global pandemic and racial injustices dominated the news and put a spotlight on how racism and discrimination have shaped public policies, systems, and individual level access to health care and resources. For over a decade, I have been leading innovative health equity research that engages community members from underserved areas, but often operating within the socially constructed confines in which we use the buzzword “social determinants of health” without acknowledging the underpinning of racism and discrimination in creating systemic health inequities.



— Dr. Melissa Simon

George Floyd’s young daughter Gianna “Gigi” said “Daddy changed the world,” and this statement rings true for the field of academic medicine too. Racism—especially anti-Black racism—has always permeated the institutions to which we look for expertise in medicine. George Floyd’s senseless murder by a convicted former police officer galvanized a worldwide movement and emboldened us to call out racism where we see it, rather than code-switching and avoiding conversations that make some people feel uncomfortable, such as when the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) questioned if systemic racism is real, essentially gaslighting a breadth of communities and people who have experienced it.

Since its founding, the Center for Health Equity Transformation’s (CHET) mission has been to lift health for all by exposing root causes of health inequities. We serve as a hub that pushes boundaries in research, education, workforce development, and community engagement to actualize that mission.


Over the last year, our team has reflected on the impact of our work against systemic racism and what more should be done to advance racial equity. This past year exposed massive gaps between community needs, academic research, and public policy through a health equity lens. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, our team and our work continues to evolve to listen to and meet the changing needs of the communities with which we work. In 2020, we held our inaugural Juneteenth celebration in collaboration with Feinberg's Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which served as the catalyst for our expansion of antiracist work and celebration of Black joy. We have increased our involvement with local, state, and federal policymakers and made a conscious effort to lift community voices more than we ever have before.

As we look ahead to our ambitions for this year, we envision collaborating with artists and innovators to inspire changes that advance health equity, and we keep our long-term goal in mind: **dismantle systemic racism to lift health for all**. Recognizing that this change won't happen overnight, CHET will take a multifaceted approach to our antiracist work:

- Launch a "Navigating Hostile Workplaces" series to equip people from marginalized backgrounds with the knowledge and skills they need to cope as they enter or exit toxic workplace cultures.
- Advocate for reproductive and birth justice by recognizing the continuum of maternal health, starting with access to comprehensive sexual health education and extending well beyond the postpartum period.
- Center community members and their self-identified health needs in our research.
- Push boundaries and create innovative approaches to promote health equity through art and the humanities.

We thank you for your continued support of our work and being co-conspirators in our fight for health equity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MS", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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 has grown to 14 full-time staff members. Between September 2020 and August 2021, we have mentored 13 trainees through our T37 Northwestern University Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program (NU-MHRT), and 10 Health Equity Scholars, as well as 2 interns from Northwestern's Department of Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences (IEMS).

Like many teams, some of our work has transitioned to a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We remain determined in implementing our research projects, conducting community engagement activities, and living our values of promoting equity and inclusion across our team and the communities we serve.

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, 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 the last year, ChicagoCHEC successfully renewed its U54 partnership for another five years with a \$17.7M award from the NCI to 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.

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 <http://www.chicagochec.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. [1] 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. [2] 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.

## **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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In this project, 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. [3] 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 understandings of this population and to develop evidence-informed interventions to better meet the needs of people with the ‘double whammy’ of cancer and disability.

## 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. [4] 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 amongst 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.

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.

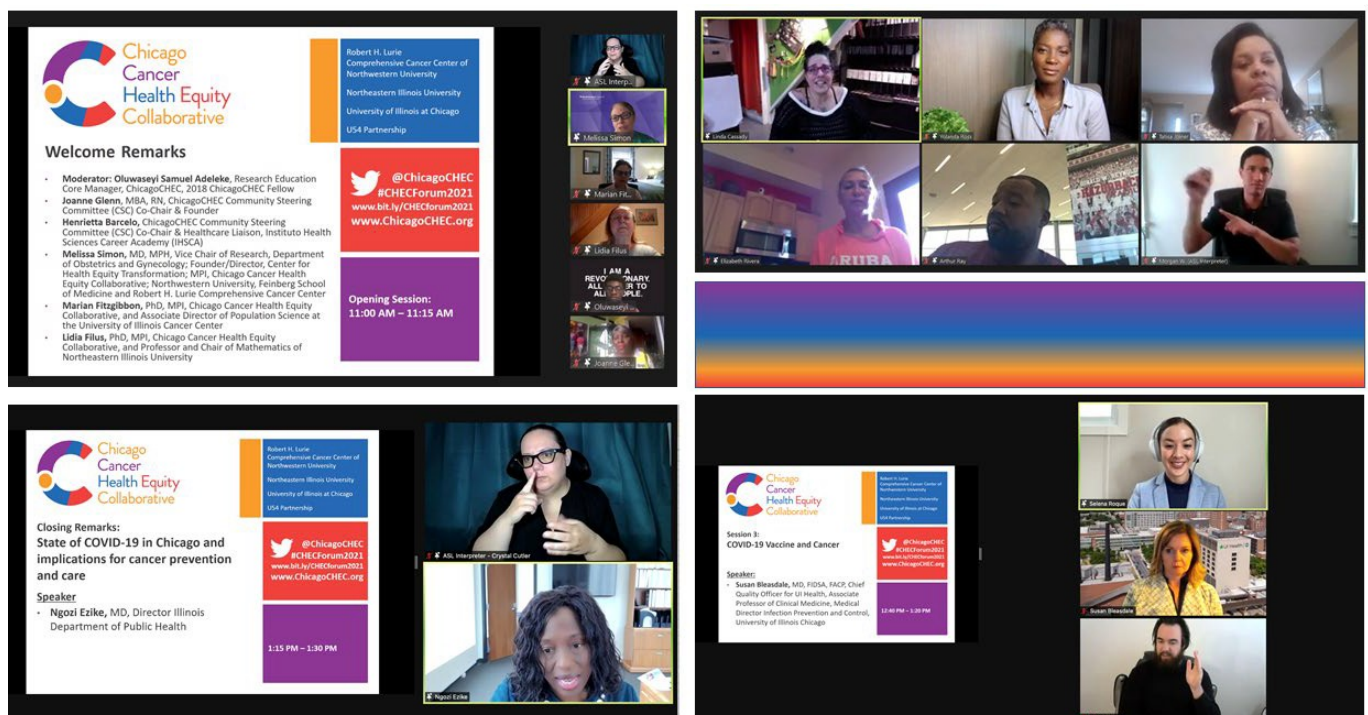
In September 2020 – June 2021, ChicagoCHEC organized, sponsored, or collaborated with 32 community outreach, education, and support group events. We have reached over 1,000 participants through these outreach activities and resources for cancer screening, support groups, early diagnosis, and treatment. Amidst the pandemic, the OC team supported the work of ChicagoCHEC research projects, through enhanced connections with the Community Steering Committee, study recruitment support, and other community connections.

Despite the inability to convene safely in person this year, a successful Annual Community Forum took place virtually on September 17-18, 2020, with 130+ attendees representing diverse communities, professional organizations, cancer survivors, caregivers, and U54 partners. The forum, titled "Addressing Cancer Together During COVID-19: The ChicagoCHEC Partnership," presented a combination of panels with medical experts and care teams focusing on physical, emotional, and mental support, nutrition, and navigating the cancer journey during the pandemic. Within these activities, cancer patients and survivors shared personal stories and testimonies. Cancer health advocates, medical experts, and care teams shared best practices for navigating cancer. The video is available to watch on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfaZ-r3x7TdzYKi2B8wt8jQ>

## CHICAGOCHEC 6TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY FORUM

### Working Together for Better: New Beginnings & New Normal in the Cancer Support and Survivorship Community

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. At our 6th annual community forum this year's theme was "Working Together for Better: New Beginnings & New Normal in the Cancer Support and Survivorship Community." The forum focused on cancer screening and healthier outcomes, cancer research and treatment, cancer and the COVID-19 vaccine, community experiences, and grief, loss, and healing. Find more information and the recordings at: <https://forum2021.chicagochec.org>



Special guests included Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Director at Illinois Department of Public Health; Actress/Writer/Director/Producer and Breast Cancer Advocate Yolonda Ross joined by Community Panelists Tatisa Joiner, Elizabeth Rivera, Linda Cassidy & Arthur Ray.

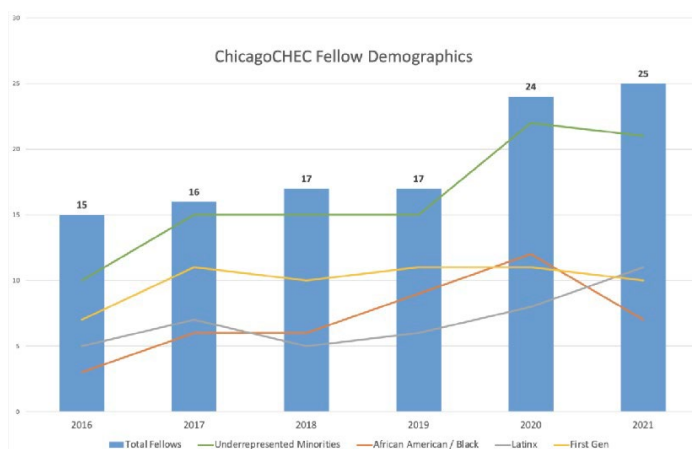
# ChicagoCHEC

## Research Education

### ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program

ChicagoCHEC offers the Fellows Program, as one of CHET's signature workforce development programs. Undergraduate CHEC Fellows are recruited from Northwestern University, University of Illinois at Chicago, Northeastern University, and City Colleges of Chicago, with 15 to 25 Fellows per annual cohort to date.

#### 2021 ChicagoCHEC Research Fellows



Demographics of the CHEC Fellows (2016-2021)

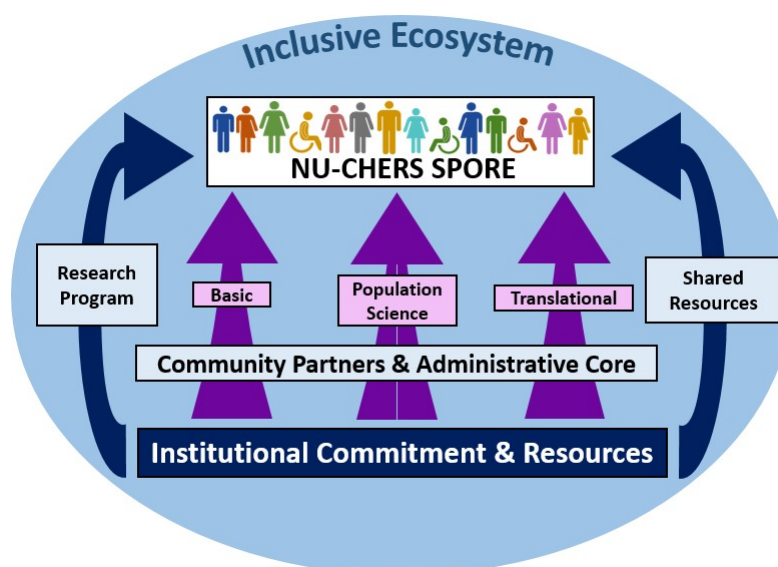


# NU-CHERS

## 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. The initial translational research focus of NU-CHERS is on endometrial and ovarian cancer disparities experienced by Black women. NU-CHERS will also spearhead the development of a centralized biobank of human gynecologic cancer tissue specimens to be used in health disparities research studies. NU-CHERS teams of basic and clinical investigators conduct innovative translational research focused on understanding and reducing gynecologic cancer disparities. Initial research projects focus on endometrial and ovarian cancer disparities as 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. [5] This project investigates the biological etiology through tumor genomics and explores racial disparity for progestin 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 100 participants donating specimens yielding 825 unique samples of blood and tissue from cervical, endometrial, and ovarian oncology (suspicious and/or confirmed) cases. 30% of participants identify as a member of an underrepresented minority group.
- Successfully developed infrastructure to establish a sustainable and expandable biobank.
- Added 4,000+ unique specimens from previous gynecological research to the biobank.
- Research projects have collected preliminary data.



# Chinatown Patient Navigation Program



## 华埠医疗导航计划

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 first launched in 2013 and navigated nearly 800 women for their breast and cervical cancer screenings. With this success and lessons learned, the program received a 5 year renewal from the NCI in 2020 to scale patient navigation in the Greater Chinatown area ("PN 2.0"). The PN 2.0 Program will implement strategies and tools to support coordination and integration of Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) related efforts across community oncology and community social service settings. The PN 2.0 program will continue to tailor a culturally appropriate program for Chicago's Chinatown community, while working toward health systems change to increase access to cancer screening, reduce time to diagnostic resolution, and reduce time to treatment initiation.

# 4R Care Coordination for Patients with Cancer

**4R: The Right Information and Right Care for the Right Patient at the Right Time**

Primary care in community health clinics is crucial for making care accessible for all individuals. However, patients facing a cancer diagnosis must seek care outside of this more familiar setting.

Oftentimes when patients receive a new diagnosis of cancer, their primary care needs are markedly disrupted. Building on our Center’s extensive experience in community-engaged intervention research with providers and health systems addressing needs of medically underserved communities, and in partnership with AllianceChicago, we have implemented a “4R” cancer care coordination project that responds directly to our local community health center partners’ needs and uses a care plan approach to help primary care providers and care coordinators ensure that their cancer patients receive the highest quality cancer care.[9]

The ongoing 4R project is funded by the Merck Foundation. Throughout this project we have worked with Howard Brown Health and Near North Health Services to conduct a care coordination process with patients with cancer. Our work on the impacts of COVID on the cancer care coordination process and particular considerations of implementing 4R with LGBTQ+ patients was presented at the AACR Annual Conference, led by our T37 trainees Nicolas Francone and Jonathon Alhalel.

In Fall of 2020 we were awarded funding through the ECOG-ACRIN collaborative to improve the 4R process for LGBTQ+ patients with cancer. We conducted interviews with clinical care team members, community organization members, cancer survivors, and support people, to understand the needs and barriers around cancer care and primary care coordination. We will use these findings to make improvements to the 4R process. [6]

# The OPTIMIZE Study

## Optimizing Patient Navigation for Perinatal Care

Black pregnant persons experience profound health disparities in the United States, with Black moms dying from pregnancy-related causes at the highest rate of any other group. [7]



Most of these deaths are preventable. Given this public health crisis, there is an urgent need to improve perinatal care, which is the care before and after pregnancy, for Black pregnant persons. Funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, the OPTIMIZE research study will test a comprehensive perinatal care checklist with patient navigation support. The study will work toward increasing pregnant persons' ability to attend their pre and postnatal visits, receive comprehensive care during and in between visits, and by connecting them to resources to address social determinant of health needs.

Our Center is partnering with ACCESS Community Health Network and AllianceChicago to conduct this study in community health centers in Chicago. Since last fall 2020, the OPTIMIZE project team completed development of the study intervention focused on improving care for Black pregnant individuals. After conducting and analyzing a series of qualitative interviews with clinical care providers, community organization leaders, and patients, the final intervention focuses on trust building between patients and providers and patient navigation support during and after pregnancy. ACCESS and AllianceChicago informatics teams have built flowsheets within their electronic medical record systems to prompt providers through a series of questions aimed at building trust with the patient and understanding their needs. The EMR builds also allow navigators to access information about patients' progress and act as a liaison between the patient and health care team. Patient recruitment and implementation of the intervention at several sites, was initiated in Summer 2021.



# WELL MAMA

## Doula Project

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) persons experience profound maternal health disparities in the US, including rising rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. In Fall 2021, CHET was awarded a 5 year grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities to enhance doula care support for BIPOC birthing persons. This study will develop a Well-Mama intervention for pregnant and postpartum BIPOC persons, 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 evaluate the impact of the Well-Mama intervention on patient receipt of prenatal and postpartum care.

# Community Scientist Project

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

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 Scientists 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.



# 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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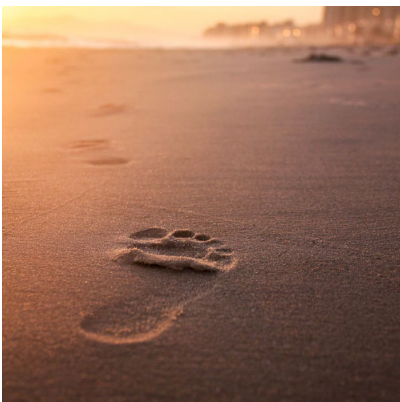
CHETchats highlights the equity work of our invited speakers and fosters dialogues and ideas about the ways that attendees can engage in work that promotes health equity. These events are open to the entire Northwestern community and the public.



## 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 September 2020, the podcast has produced over ten 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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In 2020, CHET began collecting 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.





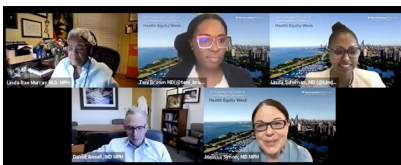
## Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Environmental justice is an important factor to consider when evaluating a community's access to best possible health. The Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) joined us to discuss their Water and Health Study. This study aimed to better understand the impacts of drinking water, urban flooding, and the impact of COVID-19 on Chicago's Little Village neighborhood.



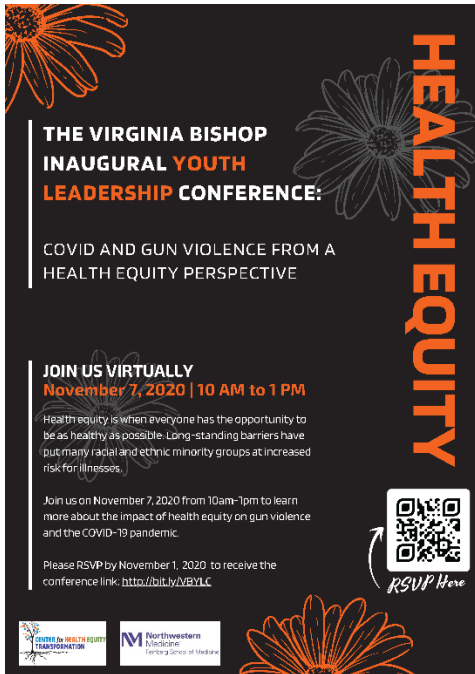
## Public Trust film

Environmental racism is environmental injustice. BIPOC communities are exposed to long-term environmental hazards and destructive environmental projects that affect their health and/or destroy their communities and lands. Many communities are fighting back against policy makers that willfully allow environmental harms. CHET held a discussion with an environmental law professor and a Native American and Indigenous research professor to talk about the history of native lands and public usage.



## NUFSM Health Equity Week 2021

In partnership with the McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University we hosted a carefully curated series of moderated sessions on a variety of topics, thought leaders and scholars from within and outside Northwestern 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/health-equity-week/>



## Inaugural Youth Leadership Events program

First created in honor of Dr. Virginia Bishop - a tireless health equity hero and fierce advocate for the advancement of underserved youths - the Youth Leadership Events program have hosted three informal virtual conversations with over 30 underserved Chicago Youths. These conversations featured Chicago health experts like Melissa Simon, MD, MPH, Geraldine Luna, MD, and Karriem Watson, DHSc and aimed to inform Chicago Youths about the realities of the current COVID-19 pandemic, and the roles they can play in combating misinformation within their social circles. With this program, CHET seeks to promote health equity while providing Chicago Youths with an early introduction into the fields of public health and medicine as well as the opportunity for their voices to be at the center of public health conversations.

## City of Chicago COVID-19 Vaccination Events

When the COVID-19 vaccine was made available early 2021, CHET Staff volunteered at Chicago community mass vaccination events occurring across the city. From a community led pop-up vaccination site outside of St. Agnes Bohemia Catholic Church in Little Village, city-run vaccination site in West Humboldt park, to various senior buildings and community health centers, the team showed up to volunteer and support vaccination efforts.



Feb 28, 2021 Four CHET staff volunteered at a vaccination event where over 1000 dose of vaccines were given at St. Agnes of Bohemia for residents in Little Village.



April 17, 2021 CHET staff at an Erie Family Health Center vaccination event as part of the Protect Chicago Plus at Humboldt Park.



March 12, 2021 CHET staff with other volunteers at a vaccination event at Archer Court, a Chinatown senior building.

# 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.



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

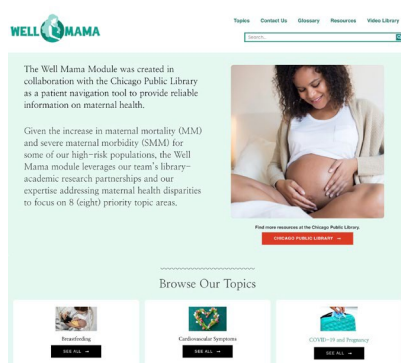
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Funding from the National Library of Medicine supported the development of CHET's Health for All platform ([healthforallproject.org](http://healthforallproject.org)), a web-based tool developed through a design thinking approach to be used in public 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 has enrolled over 50 participants with virtual events co-facilitated with Chicago Public Libraries to evaluate the web-based tool. [8] Findings and lessons learned are being used for the next phase of the research project to increase access to preventive services for underserved populations.



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

The Navigating Wellness tool ([navigatingwellness.org](http://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 has developed a prototype ready for testing with Chicago Public Library patrons, librarians and other stakeholders to improve the design in the next iteration.



### “Well Mama” Navigating Wellness

CHET received a one-year 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](http://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 will be one of the most diverse health databases in history. 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 shared DNA results to participants and contributed to COVID-19 research by creating the COVID-19 Participant Experience (COPE) Survey and testing blood samples for antibodies to help fight the next pandemic. Dr. Simon serves as the IL All of Us Study's Patient and Community Engagement Leader.

### All of Us By the Numbers



More than 407,000 participants who have completed the consent process.

**407,000 +**



More than 296,000 participants fully enrolled.\*

**296,000 +**



More than 650 research projects are using *All of Us* data.

**650 +**

\*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 the *All of Us* September 2021 Newsletter





## 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 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 T37 Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training Program, Health Equity Scholars Program, and Career911 online course are just some of the many workforce training and educational programs offered by the Center for Health Equity Transformation.

## 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) provides health disparities research training experiences to minority and other underrepresented students and trainees at the undergraduate through postdoctoral levels in order to prepare and enhance the next generation of health sciences researchers committed to improving minority health and reducing health disparities. Trainees can focus their research and skill development in any aspect of interest that advances health equity, including but not limited to basic, translational, clinical, and population science. Research theme areas can include women's health, cancer, health care quality and patient-centered outcomes research, chronic diseases, global health, mental health, etc. This program is supported by NIH's National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities and allows CHET to recruit between eight to ten T37 trainees per year.

### T37 Trainees



#### Nihmotallahi A Adebayo, MS

As a T37 trainee, Nihmotallahi A Adebayo, MS worked on CHET's Health for All: Clinical Trials and Navigating Wellness projects. She is currently working as a Research Assistant for CHET and applying for medical school. Nihmot's many accomplishments include two accepted manuscripts (one for *Harvard Public Health Review* and another for *American Journal of Public Health*) and an abstract for the 2021 AACR Cancer Health Disparities virtual conference.



#### Johnny Alhalel, BA

During his time as a T37 trainee Johnny Alhalel, worked on CHET's OPTIMIZE project and the 4R project. He also submitted two manuscripts, one titled "¿Puedo Participar?" Barriers to Access and Representation of Hispanic Patients in Clinical Trials" and the other "Underrepresented Minority (URM) physician exploitation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications to URM physician-faculty burnout and worsening health disparities." Johnny is currently a 4th year medical student at NU FSM and is in the process of applying into ophthalmology residency.



### Jacqueline Bannon, PhD, RN

Jacqueline Bannon, PhD, RN's research focuses on supporting healthy aging and wellness among individuals with HIV. She has worked on an implementation trial of an intervention for people living with HIV who have depressive symptoms and a evaluation of an emergency telemedicine intervention for individuals with HIV during the COVID-19 pandemic. She plans to pursue an F32 postdoctoral fellowship to study heart failure in individuals with HIV.



### Nicholas Francone, BS

During his T37 training, Nicholas Francone worked on the OPTIMIZE trial and a qualitative study of perinatal experiences during COVID-19. Nico also created resources for Spanish speaking cancer survivors in the LGBTQ+ community in support of a study of a new care coordination plan at Howard Brown Health Center. He is currently a 4th year medical student at Northwestern applying for residency in Obstetrics & Gynecology.



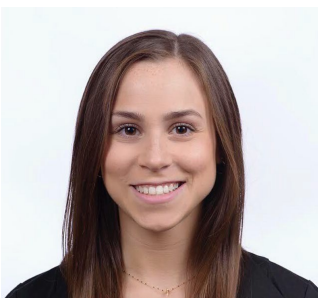
### Shawnese Gilpin Clark, MD, MPH

Shawnese Gilpin Clark, MD, MPH has been co-leading a project called the Double Pandemic Teen Study, to investigate the impact that the pandemics of racism and COVID-19 has had on teens and learn lessons for anti-racist pediatric clinical practice. She plans to build on this research to launch a project to study how anti-racism is taught in medicine and explore the acceptance and denial of systemic racism among healthcare workers.



### Charles Logan, MD

Since starting his T37 training, Charles Logan, MD has submitted abstracts on rural lung cancer health disparities to the Society of Thoracic Surgery and the Academic Surgical Congress and he will be presenting to the American College of Surgeons in October 2021. Charles is currently a general surgery resident at NU with long-term plans to return to Alaska to practice as a thoracic surgeon and work on cancer disparities in the Alaska Native population.



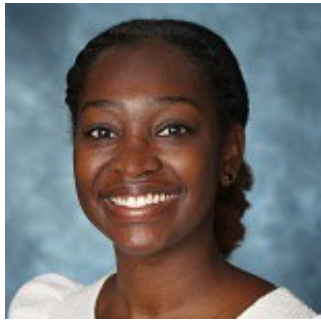
### Toni Madorsky, BA

Toni Madorsky worked on CHET's Health for All Clinical Trials and Navigating Wellness projects and 4R Cancer Care Coordination. Toni co-authored manuscripts on health inequities in the COVID-19 pandemic that were accepted for publication by the *American Journal of Public Health* and the *Harvard Public Health Review*. She is currently an M1 at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago and in the Urban Medicine curricular program.



### **Cordero McCall, MPH**

Cordero McCall, MPH's research explores the underlying significance of social determinants of health on disparities affecting African Americans, particularly chronic disease and mental health disparities. Cordero is currently completing an MBA at St. Louis University and plans to attend medical school apply his health disparities research to advocate for his future patients.



### **Shaunté McKay, MD**

Shaunté McKay, MD's project focuses on determining disparities in referral rates to Pediatric GI clinics for racial/ethnic minorities and patients with low socioeconomic status that have functional abdominal pain disorders. She aims to identify barriers to care, including provider bias, systemic bias, and individual/cultural factors contributing to health disparities and adverse outcomes in patients with functional abdominal pain disorders. Shaunté is currently a Pediatric Gastroenterology Fellow at Lurie Children's Hospital.



### **Cynthia Medina, BS**

Cynthia Medina worked on CHET's Navigating Wellness "Well Mama" module, through a community-based, human-centered design approach. She plans to apply what she learned during her training to reach her career goal of leading research studying health equity interventions to combat childhood obesity and food insecurity in low-income neighborhoods. She is currently a Master of Public Health student at the University of Illinois at Chicago.



### **Amanda Nili, BA**

Amanda Nili is working on a research project studying health disparities in early identification of childhood neurodevelopmental disorders in order to improve methodologies and reduce overidentification which can lead to overmedication and preschool expulsion. Amanda is currently a PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology at Northwestern and plans to publish the results of her research on equitable early childhood mental health identification.



### **Julianna Perez, PhD**

Julianna Perez, PhD is continuing her research on the contribution of social-cultural factors and epigenetic mechanisms to vitamin D production and long-term health consequences for males and females. Her research as a T37 trainee has focused on the impact of vitamin D on immune markers and long-term illness in a cohort in the Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutritional Survey in the Philippines. Julie is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow in Anthropology at Northwestern University.





### **Kevin Wamala, BS**

Kevin Wamala began his T37 training in February 2021 and has contributed to CHET's Community Scientist, Chinatown Patient Navigation, and Health for All projects. He is currently interviewing for medical school and hopes to focus on health innovation and utilizing technology for underserved populations.



### **Garth Walker, MD, MPH**

Garth Walker conducted several studies investigating firearm violence, opioid disparities in urban settings, and Medicaid emergency room utilization rates relative to implementation of the Affordable Care Act. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine and a Deputy Director at the Illinois Department of Public Health.



### **Anna Yang, BA**

Anna Yang worked on the Chicago Chinatown Patient Navigation Program, an NIH-funded research study that focuses on increasing cancer screening and enhancing cancer care for residents of Chicago's Greater Chinatown area. Anna graduated with a dual BA degree in Anthropology and Science in Human Culture in Spring of 2021. She is currently working as a Research Assistant at CHET.

## Health Equity Scholars Program

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The Health Equity Scholars program is a volunteer opportunity that provides individuals with three to six months of substantive experience contributing to academic and professional learning around health inequities in Chicago. Scholars will have the opportunity to strengthen skills in research, analysis, collaboration, communication, and creative problem-solving to address complex social issues using intersectional approaches. Scholars will be 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. This program is open to the general public and those who are affiliated with Northwestern.

### Health Equity Scholars



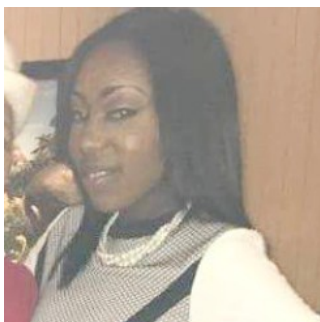
#### **Cindy Chan, MPH**

Cindy Chan, MPH provided support for the Chinatown Patient Navigation project and helped build a patient database for the OPTIMIZE trial. Cindy also helped develop proposals for an Asian American Leadership Program for Northwestern undergraduates and for a partnership with Chicago City Colleges to create a structured mentorship program. She is currently a program manager in the research department at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center.



#### **Michaela Ciulla, BS**

Michaela Ciulla, BS assisted in formatting and adding subscribers for CHET's Newsletter and worked as a Research Study Assistant at the Surgical Outcomes and Quality Improvement Center at NU, helping out with qualitative research being done by the SECOND Trial. She recently joined the CHET team as a Program Assistant.



#### **Ti' Kyla C. Davis, MS**

Ti' Kyla C. Davis, MS assisted in restructuring CHET's Health Equity 101 course with a particular focus on systemic racism and is moving forward to transitioning into project management for health equity within urban communities.





### **Robin Dean**

Robin Dean provided support for the ChicagoCHEC Summer Fellow Program 2020. She is currently a 3rd year medical student at Northwestern.



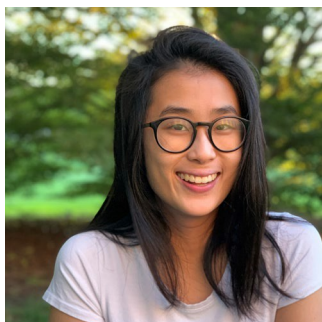
### **Tiffany Guan, BS**

Tiffany Guan, BS brought her commitment to health equity, social justice, and children's rights to CHET's Project Safe Space and the IDPH COVID-19 Equity Team Abuse Prevention Workgroup. Tiffany graduated with a BA in Social Policy & Global Health Studies this spring.



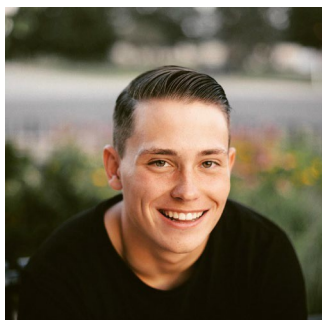
### **Emily Marogi**

Emily Marogi provided support for the ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program 2020. She is currently a 4th year medical student at Northwestern. She is interested in pursuing a career in internal medicine with emphasis on public health, health disparities and intersectional representation.



### **Allison Mo, BS**

Allison Mo, BS helped plan and coordinate CHET's event on the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization's Water and Health Study and has been supporting CHETchats, CHET Conversations and the ChicagoCHEC LEAP program. Allison graduated with a BA in Biological Sciences and Anthropology. She is currently working as a Medical Assistant and applying to medical school to continue her health equity research as a physician and a researcher.



### **Sam Rodegheiro, BS**

Sam Rodegheiro, BS contributed to the OPTIMIZE and CHET's Kitchen programs, including a presentation to the Chicago Food Policy Action Council on CHET Kitchen's partnership with Star Farm. He also developed proposals for a CHET financial wellness grant and a Health Equity Leadership and Policy (HELP) program. Sam is currently working as a research coordinator for the Department of Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery at NU.



## **Iran Imani Torres**

Iran Imani Torres arrived at CHET motivated to develop her skills for analyzing community health trends/challenges and creating plans for health initiatives and policy change for Chicago's underserved communities. She worked with CHET's Project Safe Space and ChicagoCHEC. She is a transfer student from Harold Washington at City College of Chicago and is currently a Junior at The University of Washington to begin her Public Health-Global Health studies.

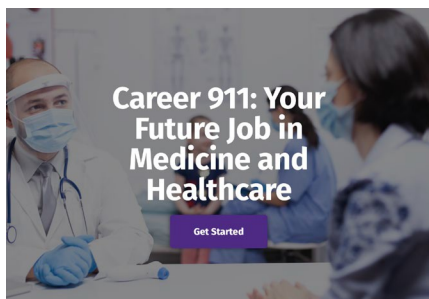


## **Mara Ulin, MD**

Mara Ulin, MD worked on the OPTIMIZE trial and assisted with stakeholder interviews on a qualitative study of perinatal experiences during COVID-19. She is currently completing an OB/GYN residency at Mount Sinai Hospital in Chicago.

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

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“Career 911” 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 20,000 students from 160 countries have enrolled.

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. Career 911 was supported with funds from the Office of the Provost, the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center, and the National Cancer Institute. In the past year, we have converted the Coursera Career911 course content to a new website that provides streamlined access to videos and materials for students interested in exploring a career in medicine and healthcare. During Summer 2021, over 150 high school students from the Chicago area enrolled in the Lurie Children’s Discovering Healthcare Careers and One Summer Chicago participated in Career911 and earned their certificates. For more information visit <https://career911.org>. [9]

## 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. [10] They cause irregular uterine bleeding, anemia, and have led to over 200,000 hysterectomies annually in the United States. Interns will 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 subject matter expertise on multiple health equity issues with local, state, and federal policy leaders in real time to inform policy changes that quickly react to current events—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—and may help prevent future health disparities.



## Project Safe Space

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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. 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 a 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 Accion, 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.



## Speaking Out Against Racism in Medical Journals

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Amid a controversy around racist comments made on the Journal of the American Medical Association podcast, the editor resigned and currently a search committee is working to select a new one – with Dr. Melissa Simon as a member. Beneath this incident lies a deeper problem within the field of medicine that Dr. Simon articulates in a New York Times article, describing the blindness to structural racism and ways in which discrimination became embedded in medicine over generations. Read more at:

[www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/health/jama-racism-bauchner.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/health/jama-racism-bauchner.html)



## Black Maternal Health Crisis Series

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During the week of Mother's Day 2021, CHET partnered with the DuSable Museum of African American History to co-host the two-part Black Maternal Health Crisis Series, in collaboration with the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls. We recognize that maternal health is more than just family planning and reproductive health—it is about birth justice, an upstream, trauma-informed framework that calls for collective action to build intersectional solutions that address the disparate maternal morbidity and mortality gap that exists for Black womxn. The Black Maternal Health Crisis Series reflected on the systemic barriers that exist in maternal health care and public policy, as well as actionable steps we can take to address those barriers.





## Addressing Health Care Deserts

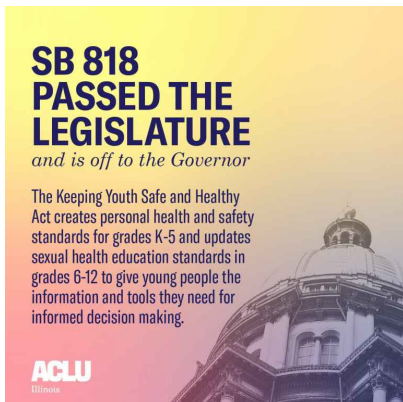
In 2020, Mercy Hospital & Medical Center announced plans to cease clinical operations in June 2021 after plans and funding to merge with three other Chicago hospitals were not approved by the Illinois State Legislature. There already are limited options for emergency and obstetrics services in the South side. This closing would be especially devastating for Chinatown's residents who relied on Mercy Hospital & Medical Center and their outpatient facilities for their health care needs. In support of our community partner the Chinese American Service League (CASL), we joined the fight to keep Mercy facilities and services open. This incident was merely a symptom of the vast health care deserts in Chicago and the deep health care inequities they cause. We must continue to advocate for improved access to health care services across the City of Chicago and State of Illinois. Through the hard work of community activists and local politicians, Insight Chicago, a healthcare organization from the Detroit, Michigan area, was approved to provide services on the previous Mercy Hospital campus. Insight Chicago pledged to stay open as a full-service community acute care hospital for a limited period of time and did not promise an extended presence in the community. Mercy Hospital's previous parent healthcare system, Livonia, Michigan- based Trinity Health, gained approval from the State of Illinois to create and operate a very limited diagnostic healthcare facility in the neighboring Bronzeville area. As of September 2021, there are still very limited healthcare services provided at these two facilities.



## 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. They held a virtual briefing in October 2020 and continue to push for this important effort at the federal level.



## 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's 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

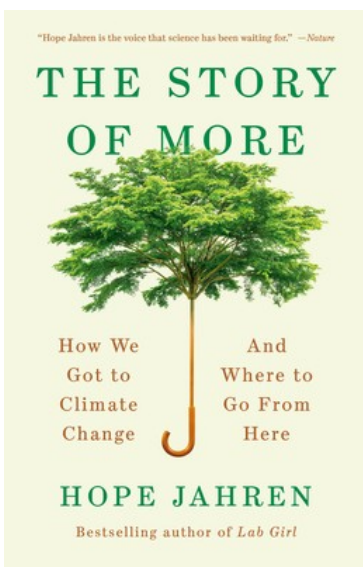
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At the most basic level, art can improve health communication. Compelling visuals, designs, songs, etc. can be more memorable and sharable than statistics because they increase access and cultural relevance. Art can help disseminate health messages, shift public opinion, shape community discourse, or even motivate political will because it is widely recognized as a means for social change and awareness. These benefits generated by art are ideal for artists and health equity advocates who want to increase public education, or look to elevate topics that are either taboo or require more attention. In the last year, CHET as hosted several events bridging health equity and the arts and humanities.



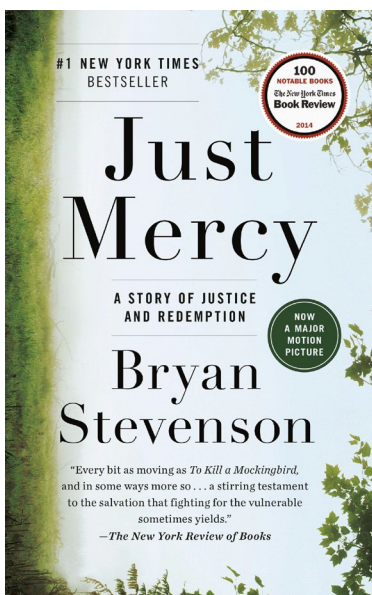
## Juneteenth

CHET's 2021 Juneteenth event strategically hosted three artists, actress Yolonda Ross, photographer Bayeté Ross Smith, and historian, documentarian and art collector, Dr. Kamasi Hill. We discussed different forms of modern and contemporary African American art, how it honors experiences of Black people, celebrates the Black identity, and serves as a catalyst for activism and health equity.



## The Office of the President & One Book One Northwestern

The reading selection for 2021-2022 school year is *The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here* by Hope Jahren. CHET is part of the Steering Committee working with other NU students, faculty, and staff on environmental, sustainability, and equity/justice issues to bring campus wide events & activities throughout the academic year. The book reminds us, as an individual and a society to “use less and share more” and to “take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.



## Just Mercy – One Book Northwestern – criminal justice-themed events

In collaboration with One Book One Northwestern, our Center explored the subject of criminal justice reform in relation to health and equity through a webinar series featuring leaders and researchers that work in the criminal justice field, such as Xavier McElrath-Bey from the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. Another notable guest included Dr. Mary Patillo who discussed the impact of fines and fees in the criminal justice system.



## Collaboration with the Block Museum

In collaboration with the Block Museum, CHET conducted a workshop for ChicagoCHEC trainees with an introduction to an art piece from an African American artist. The trainees then used those skills to develop self-portraits and focus on storytelling and the importance of communicating their stories and experiences.

Combining the arts and health equity is a complex yet innovative method for amplifying health justice and equity. The arts advance our ability to see narratives in the data that we collect and depend on for our research. Additionally, art adds an additional level of humanity that does not exist with numbers alone because it encourages a level of empathy in our understanding to issues of health and human rights. Art, regardless of its medium, is rooted in the expression social justice and activism and can be used as a powerful representation for health equity and justice. For these reasons, the future of CHET will include more work at the intersection of the art and health equity.

In the coming year, CHET envisions the launch of a Health Equity Innovator in Residence program, which would bring experts and innovators from diverse backgrounds including the arts, humanities, and life sciences to the Northwestern University campus (in-person or virtually) to share their fresh perspectives with the NU community and to collaborate with scholars across Northwestern in order to advance health justice and equity.

# 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.



## 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 serves as a consulting 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.

## National Academy of Medicine (NAM)

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Dr. Simon serves as a member of the Board on Population Health (BPH) and Public Health Practice, which "focuses on areas and issues affecting the public's health. In studies ranging from core principles and needs in the field to specific issues such as vaccine safety, pandemic preparedness issues, smoking cessation, health disparities, and reducing environmental and occupational hazards, BPH considers the best ways to ensure the health of the public."

## 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.

## American Gynecological and Obstetrics Society (AGOS)

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As a AGOS council member, Dr. Simon works to advance the health of women by providing dedicated leadership and promoting excellence in research, education and medical practice.

## **Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance (MMHLA) Board of Advisors**

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MMHLA has convened a Board of Advisors – including Dr. Simon as a member – to center the voices of those with lived maternal mental health experience and professional expertise in advocacy efforts. The Board of Advisors will convene four times in 2021 to advise MMHLA’s Board of Directors and staff on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and to ensure that all policies and programs address racial inequities in maternal mental health.

## **City and State Engagement on COVID-19**

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As part of the City of Chicago Mayor’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Provider Executive Committee, Dr. Simon helped with the City to address the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on African American and Latinx communities. She also served a part of Governor Pritzker’s COVID-19 Response team and a member of Illinois Unidos – working to address Latinx disparities from COVID-19.

## **Women’s Reproductive Health Research Career Development Center (WRHRCDC) Program**

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Dr. Simon serves as a member of the Board on Population Health (BPH) and Public Health Practice, which “focuses on areas and issues affecting the public’s health. In studies ranging from core principles and needs in the field to specific issues such as vaccine safety, pandemic preparedness issues, smoking cessation, health disparities, and reducing environmental and occupational hazards, BPH considers the best ways to ensure the health of the public.”

## **American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)**

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CHET’s Director, Dr. Melissa Simon, was named to the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Cancer Prevention Working Group (CPWG). The mission of the CPWG is to establish cancer prevention as a global priority through innovative science, integration of the latest technologies, improved levels of funding, and delivery of effective public education and awareness strategies.

# CHET by the Numbers

**1,200+\***

Voices Newsletter Subscribers

**1,500+\***

CHET Event Attendees

**1,400+**

Skinny Trees Podcast Listeners



**80+**

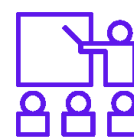
Manuscripts Published

**23**

t37 Trainees and Health Equity Scholars

**35+**

Community Partners Involved In Projects



**82\***

Highlighted in Health Equity Footprint

**25,000+\*\***

Career 911: Massive Open Online  
Course Learners



**\$34M+\***

NIH Funding Since CHET's Founding

\*Cumulative since CHET's founding

\*\* Since course launch In 2015

# Acknowledgements



The Center for Health Equity Transformation is grateful for funding, and operational support provided by the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Institute for Public Health and Medicine, with research program funding support provided by the National Cancer Institute (U54CA202995; U54CA202997; U54CA203000; P20CA233304; R01CA163830). National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (R01MD014068; R01MD016280; T37MD014248-02), National Library of Medicine (G08LM012688; 5G08LM013188-02; 3G08LM013188-02S1). National Institute on Aging (P30AG059304), National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease (1U01DK126045-01), Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (K12HD050121; 5P50HD098580-02), Merck Foundation, ECOG ACRIN, and Pritzker Foundation. The content of this report is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of CHET's sponsors.

# Appendix

## ChicagoCHEC Accomplishments



## Our Mission

To advance cancer health equity through meaningful scientific discovery, education, training, and community engagement



## Accomplishments of the First 5 Years (2015-2020)

### Research & Scientific Discovery

- **Funded 9 grants** for 32 investigators
- **60 extramural grants** awarded to ChicagoCHEC investigators
- **195 peer-reviewed publications**
- Developed **two smartphone application** for breast cancer survivors (in English and Spanish) and cancer survivors with disabilities for use across phones, tablets and computers.



### Education

- **89 students** from NEIU, UIC, City Colleges of Chicago, and NU completed the ChicagoCHEC Fellows Program; all were either URM (85%) and/or first-generation college students (60%)
- **10 Fellows** completed the Laboratory Experiences and Programs (LEaP)
- **30 students** engaged in a subsequent cancer research lab experience



### Training

- **29 Early Career Investigator Mentorship**  
Promotion and tenure of **17 faculty members**
- **90 students** (60% URM) receive cancer research and career development opportunities on ChicagoCHEC projects
- Development of **cancer-relevant curriculum** at NEIU
- Establishment of the NU-LCC's **Center for Health Equity Transformation (CHET)**



### Community Engagement

- **24-member** community advisory group convened quarterly
- **120 community events** reaching **18,800+ individuals**
- **14 peer-reviewed** health policy publications co-authored with community members
- **12 community organizations** involved with ChicagoCHEC projects



## In the next 5 Years (2020-2025)

ChicagoCHEC will continue to work with the community to implement innovative cancer research, education, and outreach programs aimed at eliminating Chicago's cancer disparities.



# Active Research Grants & Contracts

## **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. 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. Role: 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. 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 | 09/19/2019-5/31/2022**

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

### **Administrative Supplement to Navigating Wellness**

**NIH NLM G08LM013188-02S1 | 09/01/2020-05/31/2021**

Supplement to create a "Navigating Wellness Maternal Health Module" - addressing a) maternal health and depression; b) cardiovascular symptoms; c) safety; d) opioid/substance use and e) social support/agency. 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

**Epigenomic Biomarkers of HIV-Associated Cancers in Nigeria: Epigenomic Biomarkers of HIV-Associated Cervical Cancer**  
**NIH U54CA221205 | 8/1/2017-7/31/2022**

Nigerian women face one of the worst prognosis in the world when diagnosed with cervical cancer, and this prognosis worsens with HIV infection. This work aims to elucidate the epigenetic biomarkers in HIV associated cervical cancer. Identification of epigenetic markers predicting progression will also provide opportunities for developing future therapeutic targets for the management of cervical dysplasia and cancer. CHET Director's Role: Project Principal Investigator: Epigenomics of Cervical Cancer in HIV infected women

**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-care 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

**Administrative Supplement to the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center  
NCI P30CA060552- Supplement 9/1/2020 – 8/31/2021**

Leveraging Citizen Scientists to Infuse Community Perspectives within Bench and Translational Science at Lurie Cancer Center. CHET Director's Role: Program Director

**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

**Illinois Precision Medicine Consortium (IPMC)  
1UG3OD023189 (Greenland PI) | 07/01/16-06/30/21**

The Illinois Precision Medicine Consortium is comprised of Northwestern, University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Chicago. Precision medicine seeks to capitalize on growing capabilities in the areas of genomics, clinical phenotyping, clinical informatics, EHR availability and interoperability, and mobile health technologies to improve understanding of human health and disease. CHET Director's Role: Co-Investigator; Patient and Community Engagement Leader

**Improving Low Income Women's Health Care at Community Health Centers  
Pritzker Foundation | 9/1/2016-8/31/2022**

With our well-established community engaged research partnership, we will implement an intervention 4R Care Delivery Model (4R = Right information and Right Treatment to the Right Patient at the Right Time), which was developed to identify and address gaps in community nested comprehensive cancer care in 3 large community health centers with a strong footprint in low income, minority communities across Chicago. CHET Director's Role: Principal Investigator

# Citations

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**“To be a trailblazer, you have to be brave because not many people at the top look like you [...] whether you succeed or fail, you will stand out. Staring failure in the face and accepting that it’s a necessary part of the path, that is what it takes to be a trailblazer.”**

**– Melissa Simon, MD, MPH**