



# POP HEALTH CENTRAL

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## POPULATION HEALTH IN ACTION

### Rutgers Cancer Institute's Catchment Area Community Needs and Clinical Priorities

*Contributing Authors: Daniel Pearson, Program Manager for Research and Catchment Data, Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence, Rutgers Cancer Institute, Sarah Scharf, DrPH, MPH, Executive Director, Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence, Rutgers Cancer Institute, Deputy Director, ScreenNJ*

As New Jersey's only [NCI-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center](#), Rutgers Cancer Institute is required to identify a "catchment area" –the geographic region it serves to help focus its research and community outreach to address cancer burden and risk factors. The catchment area for the Rutgers Cancer Institute is the entire state of NJ.

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

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[Rutgers Cancer Institute](#) (RCI) first established its catchment area priorities in 2020 and re-evaluated them in 2024 using a data-driven, community-informed process led by the [Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence \(CHECoE\)](#). A prioritization matrix was employed and considered factors such as data availability, cancer burden, community needs, alignment with state and national cancer priorities, research strengths, feasibility of action, and existing evidence-based strategies.

The review engaged stakeholders across the cancer center, including program leaders, the Clinical Trials Office, the Executive Committee, the [Community Cancer Action Board \(CCAB\)](#) and community partner organizations. As a result, gynecologic cancers (uterus, ovary, cervix) were added as a priority, reflecting the high burden and significant racial and ethnic disparities of these cancers in NJ, as well as clinical leadership and community support. Infectious risk factors for cancer, Human Papillomavirus and Hepatitis B & C, were also added due to increasing impact and strong alignment with research programs.

**Effective January 1, 2025, RCI priority areas include the:**

- Cancer Sites: Breast, prostate, lung, colorectal, melanoma, gynecologic
- Risk Factors: Obesity, tobacco use, hereditary risk, environmental exposures, access barriers, infectious agents, and social determinants of health

**How to Engage with CHECoE**

To help researchers, clinicians, and community partners align with these priorities, CHECoE offers tailored support and collaboration opportunities.

To request support from CHECoE:

**•For researchers, clinicians, or academic staff:**

Complete the CHECoE Research Support Request Form - [click here](#)

**•For community members or organizations:**

Complete the CHECoE Community Services Request Form - [click here](#)

**Rutgers Cancer Institute Catchment Area Priorities**  
Effective January 1st, 2025

**Cancer Sites**

• Breast    	• Lung    
• Colorectal   	• Melanoma  
• GYN Cancers   	• Prostate   

**Risk Factors (and Icon Key):**

• Obesity/Metabolic Dysregulation 	• Hereditary Cancers 
• Infectious Agents 	• Access Barriers 
• Tobacco Use 	• Social Drivers of Health 
• Environmental Exposures 	

**Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation Honors Merck for Mothers**

*Contributing Author, Jeana Wirtenberg, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Professional Practice & Executive Director, Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation*

The [Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation \(RICSI\)](#) held its inaugural [Corporate Social Innovation \(CSI\) Excellence Awards](#) on May 1, 2025, to recognize and celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of organizations, groups and individuals that are demonstrating the potential for business to achieve social good. Recognition was given to corporations with demonstrated success across the four RICSi pillars: Giving Back to Society, Aligning Profit and Purpose, Engaging in Responsible Business Practices, and Advocating for Social Issues with the highest overall awards for companies that have successfully integrated these concepts into their business.

Among the winners, recognition was awarded to three exceptional organizations, highlighting initiatives that are promoting health equity and population health: Merck for Mothers, Novo Nordisk, and Black Women in Clinical Research (BWICR).

### **Overall Excellence Award Winner: Merck for Mothers**

Merck for Mothers is Merck's global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Every two minutes, a woman dies from complications related to pregnancy or childbirth, with historically underrepresented groups facing disproportionately higher rates of maternal mortality. More than 90% [of all maternal deaths](#) occurred in low- and lower-middle-income countries, and most could have been prevented.

[Merck for Mothers](#), a \$650 million global initiative focused on improving maternal health outcomes worldwide, represents the company's long-standing commitment to Global Maternal Health. The company implemented programs to increase equitable access to safe, high-quality, and respectful care during pregnancy and childbirth in over 70 countries, reaching over 30 million women and exceeding its 2025 goal. The company considers this evidence that the proposed solution works, that it achieves impact at scale, and is sustainable after its funding ends. The initiative is also helping make progress toward the [UN's Sustainable Development Goal 3.1](#).

According to [Jacquelyn Caglia](#), Head of Merck for Mothers and Director of Social Impact and Sustainability, "a cornerstone of Merck for Mothers' success is its deep commitment to collaborating across sectors to develop sustainable solutions tailored to the needs of mothers across the globe." Taking a 'whole-of-society' approach, Merck for Mothers works with a diverse array of partners such as governments, NGOs, patient groups, professional associations, research institutions.

"Merck for Mothers is the largest-scale, private sector-led initiative addressing maternal health. This innovative program is groundbreaking not only in its level of commitment but also in its comprehensive and collaborative approach to addressing complex healthcare challenges" says Caglia.

For an overview of Merck for Mothers, check out the video [here](#) and highlight reel of the event [here](#).



*From left to right: Jacquelyn Caglia, MPH and Jeana Wirtenberg, PhD*

## POPULATION HEALTH NEWS

### **The Power of Prevention: 2025 NJ Immunization Conference Highlights**

*Contributing Authors: Colleen McKay Wharton, Project Director, Community Living Education Project (CLEP), Program Direction, Public Health Activities, Rutgers School of Public Health & Laura Warne, Communication Specialist, Rutgers School of Public Health*

On June 10, 2025, the [Rutgers School of Public Health Center for Public Health Workforce Development](#), in partnership with the [New Jersey Department of Health \(NJDOH\)](#), hosted the [2025 New Jersey Immunization Conference at Rutgers University](#).

This annual event focuses on increasing vaccination uptake in NJ by bringing together stakeholders across the fields of public health, health care, and private industry. This year's conference, "The Power of Prevention: New Jersey's Path to a Healthier Tomorrow," provided both general updates and recommendations on vaccine administration and discussed the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine and HPV-related cancers.

[Jeffrey A. Brown](#), Acting Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health, summarized the priority the NJDOH puts on vaccines, saying, "access, quality, affordability -- When you're talking about healthcare, all three of those facets are really important for patients in accessing the healthcare system. There is not a single thing that I can think of that's more affordable, yields higher quality outcomes, and is more accessible than vaccines."

The Conference's keynote presentation detailed an exciting multi-year partnership between [Rutgers Student Health Services](#), [Rutgers Office of Population Health](#), NJDOH, [ScreenNJ](#), Cancer Institute of NJ, [School of Communication and Information](#) and [Rutgers Communications \(R-Comm\)](#). Project participants used post-pandemic COVID-19 vaccine momentum to study Rutgers student HPV vaccination status, improve data quality, educate students on HPV and the benefits of vaccination, facilitate on-campus vaccination, and promote community engagement within the Rutgers student body.

The keynote panel presentation was given by [Mary E. O'Dowd](#), MPH, Executive Director, Health Systems and Population Health Integration, Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences; [Noa'a Shimoni](#), MD, MPH, Associate Vice President for Student Health and Wellness, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Health and Wellness, New Brunswick, and Associate Professor of Family Medicine, New Jersey Medical School; and [Yonaira M. Rivera](#), PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Communication, Rutgers School of Communication and Information. Together they shared how the project began and evolved over the past six years.

O'Dowd summarized the initial motivation for starting this project, recalling how the University, "really struggled with HPV data because it's not required for school entry, and so it's not required to be put into the system. There is also a long and storied history of the HPV vaccine in terms of how it was rolled out and how we might improve uptake of that vaccine. I started thinking there's a lot of opportunity for improvement here."

[David J. Cennimo](#), MD, FACP, FAAP, AAHIVS, Associate Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#) gave an update on the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which coincidentally took place only hours after the Secretary of Health and Human Services announced that the ACIP had been disbanded. Dr. Cennimo stressed the strong data on vaccine effectiveness. "A lot is changing... except the science. What we believed to be the best recommendations yesterday are still there."

**Breakout sessions included:**

- [Vaccines for Children \(VFC\)](#)
- Maternal and Child Health Vaccination
- NJ Immunization Information System
- Communication Strategies to Enhance Vaccine Uptake programs

The conference concluded with a presentation by [Jay Middleton](#), a cancer survivor who used humor and his love of cycling to raise awareness of HPV-related cancers and discussed his fundraising for cancer treatment.



*From left to right: Mary E. O'Dowd, MPH, Yonaira M. Rivera, PhD, MPH and Noa'a Shimoni, MD, MPH*

## Rutgers Health Service Corps: Impact Report 2024–2025

*Contributing Authors: Jack Hemphill, MHA, Program Manager & Director, Rutgers Health Service Corps, Office of Population Health & Brandi Blackshear, MSW, Special Projects Coordinator, Office of Population Health*

This past year marked the inaugural launch of the [Rutgers Health Service Corps \(RHSC\)](#), a university-wide initiative that mobilized 50 dedicated students from diverse academic backgrounds to address critical population and public health needs across the state. RHSC members and volunteers contributed over 4,000 service hours on six main population health projects, as well as additional ad hoc opportunities shared by our campus and community partners.



### The RHSC signature programs include:

- Assembling and distributing over 3,000 colon cancer screening kits for low-income patients at the [Eric B. Chandler Health Center](#)
- Creating and disseminating over 10,000 Narcan nasal spray kits across Rutgers' campuses to reduce opioid overdose deaths
- Promoting breast, colon, cervical and lung cancer screening among low-income patients using the University Hospital Newark and RWJ University Hospital in New Brunswick
- Conducting diabetes, hypertension other preventive screenings at local senior centers and other community settings
- Providing interactive pediatric asthma education management workshops to children and parents in Newark
- Partnering with the RWJ Community Health Worker Program to help patients discharged from the Emergency Department access follow-up care

Recognition of the RHSC's impact is growing. In July, the RHSC was honored with a national [Presidential Volunteer Service Award](#) from AmeriCorps, recognizing its commitment to strengthening NJ communities through impactful service. The program was recently awarded a College Service Grant to expand current initiatives and support the development of new, student-led service projects—including a microgrant pilot to fund 1-2 student-designed initiatives in the coming academic year. Additionally, the RHSC was featured in Rutgers Today for its colon cancer screening ("[Rutgers Students Are Saving Lives](#)") and community-based health education work ("[Student Volunteers Provide Range of Preventative Health Screenings](#)").

The team is looking forward to recruiting the next cohort of RHSC students and expanding its impact in the year ahead. RHSC applications for new student members will open in September.

## **In Its 3rd Year at Rutgers, The Lab for Immigrant Rights & Mental Health Remains Steadfast in Its Mission**

*Contributing Author: Dr. Germán A. Cadenas, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology and Associate Director of Center for Youth Social Emotional Wellness*

The [Lab for Immigrant Rights & Mental Health](#) was established at Rutgers to conduct research that advances our understanding of humane policies, programs, and services that affirm the dignity of immigrants. When the most vulnerable groups in society are protected and empowered by basic civil and human rights, the health and well-being of all people benefits. The lab is guided by [innovative co-mentoring principles](#) to support the success of individuals who have been on the margins of psychology and health.

Over the first two years at Rutgers, the lab has thrived, attracting over 20 graduate and undergraduate student researchers, strengthening partnerships with community organizations, contributing to media and public information, and hosting a Sally Casanova Scholar and a Rutgers Population Health Fellow. As the lab rises to its third year, these are some projects that are energizing us:



### **Mental Health Interventions for the Current Context**

Supported by a Rutgers REACH grant and leveraging a longstanding collaboration with the nonprofit Immschools, our lab is piloting the [Empowered & Healthy Immigrant Families intervention program](#) at schools in NJ. Using a social determinants of health lens, the program aims to promote the empowerment and mental health of young people who come from immigrant families. Piloting of the program has been fruitful, and early results are very promising, suggesting that a brief intervention can help buffer the trauma experienced by immigrant communities. This research was presented at The Migration Conference in London, UK this past June.

### **Policy and Well-being of the Immigrant Workforce**

Researchers are also analyzing national datasets and qualitative data to examine the impact of the policy climate on the health and well-being of immigrants in the workforce. One study explores how state-level immigration policy climate indices are linked to safe working conditions, discrimination, and mental health. Another project with the nonprofit Define American used qualitative methods to understand how publicly identified artists who are immigrants protect their mental health as they navigate career and social challenges. Both studies were presented at the American Psychological Association Convention.

## CONSORTIUM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

### Featured speaker at Rutgers Population Health Consortium September 2025 meeting

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

#### Meet Mary E. O’Dowd, MPH

Mary E. O’Dowd, MPH, is the Executive Director of Health Systems and Population Health Integration for Rutgers Health. She leads and supports multi-disciplinary population health-related programs and research projects by developing partnerships with healthcare and public health partners at the state, local, and community level. Prior to joining Rutgers, O’Dowd served as the Commissioner for the NJDOH where she promoted population health initiatives during an extraordinary transformation in the healthcare delivery system.



#### Meet Noa’á Shimoni, MD, MPH

Noa’á Shimoni MD MPH serves as Associate Vice President for Student Health and Wellness across Rutgers University. She advances data-driven initiatives to improve college student health and well-being. Her work focuses on expanding access to preventive care, including HPV education and vaccination, screening, and early intervention. She and her collaborators employ multipronged strategies to address both education and access to improve health outcomes.

#### Meet Megan Castro, MBA

Megan Castro is a Senior Strategic Communications Specialist at Rutgers University, providing internal and executive communications and strategic campaign services to Rutgers–New Brunswick and Rutgers Health. Meg is a collaborative and curious strategic communications professional whose career in higher education spans all the way to the west coast at the Claremont Colleges and includes work in marketing, social media and event management. She holds an MBA with a concentration in marketing from the University of La Verne and a BA in Psychology and Political Science from Rutgers University.



## NEW FACES IN THE POPULATION HEALTH OFFICE

### Meet Our New Population Health Fellow, Erin Scott, M.Ed, LPC, ACS

In August 2025, the Rutgers Office of Population Health welcomed its fourth population health fellow, Erin Scott, M.Ed, LPC, ACS. Erin is a Licensed Professional Counselor, an Approved Clinical Supervisor, and a doctoral candidate in the Family Science and Human Development program at Montclair State University.



Erin has more than a decade of clinical experience in various mental health settings, including MTSS school-based counseling programs, intensive outpatient care, residential treatment centers, and correctional facilities. In private practice, Erin specializes in supporting Black and Brown women as they navigate racialized and gendered stress, as well as maternal mental health concerns. She also provides culturally responsive supervision to pre-licensed therapists and has received advanced training in trauma, perinatal, and maternal mental health. Additionally, Erin has taught courses in child development and interpersonal relations at Montclair State University.

Erin's research interests center on how social determinants of health, resilience, and intersectional systemic oppression across the life course shape mental health outcomes within the Black community. Her work focuses on gendered racism, social justice, and health equity, with a strong commitment to bridging research and practice through advocacy, program development, culturally grounded interventions, and community engagement.

### Meet Our New Office of Population Health Interns

#### **Doris Umutoni Mwambutsa** (Summer 2025 IFH Research Intern)

Doris Umutoni Mwambutsa is an intern for the Office of Population Health at Rutgers University, where she is actively involved in health promotion initiatives through the Rutgers Health Service Corps. She is a second-year MPH student, concentrating in Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health. She earned her BSN in 2023 in Oklahoma. She worked for a year as a Registered Nurse in an inpatient post-surgical and medical-surgical unit. Her professional interests include pediatric health, global nutrition, primary disease prevention, and the social determinants of health and their impact on populations. Long term, she hopes to pursue a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in Pediatrics.



**Varshiini Ramesh** (Summer 2025 Rutgers Health Service Corps Intern)

Varshiini Ramesh is a second preprofessional (PP2) year pharmacy student at the Rutgers Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy. She is also a part of the first cohort of the PHOENIX program, which exposed her to various healthcare careers and triggered her interest in pharmacy. At Rutgers, she is involved in pharmacy clubs such as the New Jersey Society of Health-System Pharmacists (NJSHP) and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA).

Varshiini is also one of the Impact the Outcome Committee Directors for the 2025-2026 school year, where her role is to plan events under NJSHP that target underserved populations. She is interested in pursuing a career in clinical pharmacy, particularly specializing in cardiology, ambulatory care, or oncology. In addition, she is also interested in exploring careers in industry pharmacy, particularly in medical affairs and clinical pharmacology/trials, as well as in research.

**Tanvi Narava** (Summer 2025 Rutgers Health Service Corps Intern)

Tanvi Narava is an incoming student at Rowan University, where she will be pursuing a medical degree through the 3+4 BS/DO program. She is deeply passionate about healthcare access and health equity, with a particular focus on overdose prevention and youth intervention. Over the past two years, she has led her own statewide initiative, presenting to students on how to respond to overdose emergencies. She hopes to one day turn her project into a global initiative. Tanvi aspires to earn her DO, along with a Master's in Public Health and an MBA, with the goal of combining clinical care and administrative leadership to improve patient outcomes and advance equitable healthcare.

**Mindfulness Moment****Mindful Nature Walk**

As we enjoy the outdoors with loved ones, friends, or on our own, we can incorporate mindfulness in different ways. One strategy that can be used to help us if our minds have wandered and we find ourselves distracted with many thoughts is Focused attention (FA) meditation. As the [Harvard Medical School](#) points out, FA can be helpful in improving your ability to direct your attention to tasks. In nature, FA meditation can look like focusing on the details of a plant, a tree and its leaves, or a body of water, if your mind is wandering or has a lot of thoughts coming up. This [guided exercise](#) from Mindful gives you an example of FA meditation in nature in the form of a Mindful Garden Walk.



## Upcoming Events

### **Save the Date: Rutgers Health Hackathon**

October 10-12, 2025

The third annual Rutgers Health Hackathon will be held on October 10-12th on the RWJ Medical School and University Hospital campus in New Brunswick. This event will feature multidisciplinary, multisector teams including undergraduate, graduate, and health professions students, clinicians, health information technology and industry experts to create innovative ways to solve a broad range of healthcare challenges. For more information and future registration information, please visit the website [here](#).

### **Save the Date: NJ Public Health Association 2025 Conference and Awards Dinner 150 Years of Public Health in NJ: Where do we go from here?**

October 16, 2025

This event is focused on celebrating NJPHA's 150-year anniversary of the organization's work and advocacy and to plan for the future of public health in the State of New Jersey. The conference will be held at the National Conference Center, East Windsor, NJ. For more information and future registration, please visit their website [here](#).

### **Registration Open: 34<sup>th</sup> School Health Conference, NJ American Academy of Pediatrics**

October 22, 2025

This conference is dedicated to keeping current healthcare professionals within the space of pediatric care aware of best practices and current innovations taking place. Participants who are seeking continuing education credits (CNE/CME) or dedicated to learning more about pediatric care are encouraged to register on NJAAP's website. To register, please visit the website [here](#).

## Upcoming Health Observances

### **September**

- Suicide Prevention Month
- Prostate Health Month and Prostate Cancer Awareness
- National Sickle Cell Awareness
- World Health Day (September 9, 2025)

### **October**

- National Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- Domestic Violence Awareness Month
- National Bully Prevention Month
- National Health Education Week (October 21-25)

### **November**

- National Diabetes Month
- Lung Cancer Awareness Month
- Native American Heritage Month
- Rural Health Day (November 11, 2025)