

COVID-19 has severely impacted poor people of color. From the beginning, racial and ethnic disparities in both COVID cases and deaths were present and continue as new variants emerge. To understand the response to and impact of COVID-19, researchers from Delaware State University implemented a longitudinal study using a community engaged research approach in nine underserved Delaware communities. Lessons learned from this study will be shared with community and state partners to tailor and improve public health messaging.

WHERE

Nine underserved communities in Delaware



WHEN

March 4 to Oct. 31, 2021



WHO

1,086 Delaware adult residents



THE POPULATION

Delaware residents older than 18 years in the specified underserved communities



Residents' race and ethnicity were Black, Hispanic or White

WHAT HAPPENED

The research team identified the nine study communities based on the Community Health Index, a score calculated by the Delaware Division of Health based on community health indicators. Researchers collaborated with two community health advocacy agencies – Wilmington Hope Commission (WCAC) and the Sussex County Health Coalition (SCHC) – to gain access to trusted facilities in the study communities, promote the study, support initial recruitment, and conduct recruit-back efforts.



Researchers gave participants a survey and took a COVID-19 serology test upon enrollment and 6 and 12 months later.

- The survey asked about demographics, socioeconomic, COVID-19-related beliefs and practices, general health, and COVID-19 testing and vaccination.
- The serology test indicated if the participant had a COVID-19 infection in the previous several months
- The survey was translated from English into Spanish and Haitian Creole.

Researchers set up a site in each community to recruit and screen participants.

- Community residents were hired to help at study sites, including in translation.
- Community partners provided information to help inform the study and share findings with community members

LESSONS LEARNED

Community engaged research is possible during and critical during a pandemic.



Locations with stronger academic-community partner relationships had much higher enrollment in the study.

Building beneficial relationships between researchers and community members takes time, patience, effort, and trust, but the long-term impacts are worth it.

Maintaining community partner relationships allows researchers and policymakers to know how to better address community barriers in the future more quickly and effectively.

SUMMARY

Community engaged research (CEnR) is necessary to help reduce health disparities in underserved communities. CEnR recognizes the expertise of community members and values their involvement in identifying solutions for themselves and their communities. When using this research method, it is important to keep in mind that building trust with the community itself is essential for success. Using CEnR practices in underserved communities allows researchers and communities to come together to build long-lasting partnerships, influence future health policies and improve COVID-19 statistics and barriers.



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This summary was released in March 2023. This summary includes only the results of a single study. Other studies may find different results. The study was supported by the NIH RADx[®] Underserved Populations (RADx-UP) initiative.

To read the published research article, radx-up.org.

A Research Collaboration with

Delaware State University

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