



# REACHING TOGETHER

REACH (RACIAL ETHNIC APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY HEALTH)  
GRANT NEWSLETTER

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JUNE 2021 | VOLUME 4

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## A Message from the REACH Program Director

Greetings from the REACH Team! I hope that everyone is staying safe and maintaining great health and wellness during these times! Since our last update, we have continued to make great strides in our work. We have laid solid foundations throughout several projects, and have begun implementation on a new pilot program! In addition to the work under the primary REACH strategies, we have also been working within the space of COVID-19 and seasonal flu to provide resources and education pertinent to underserved

populations that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. We look forward to continuing our great work, and are excited to share some of these updates with you!

In Health,

Ashley Carmenia

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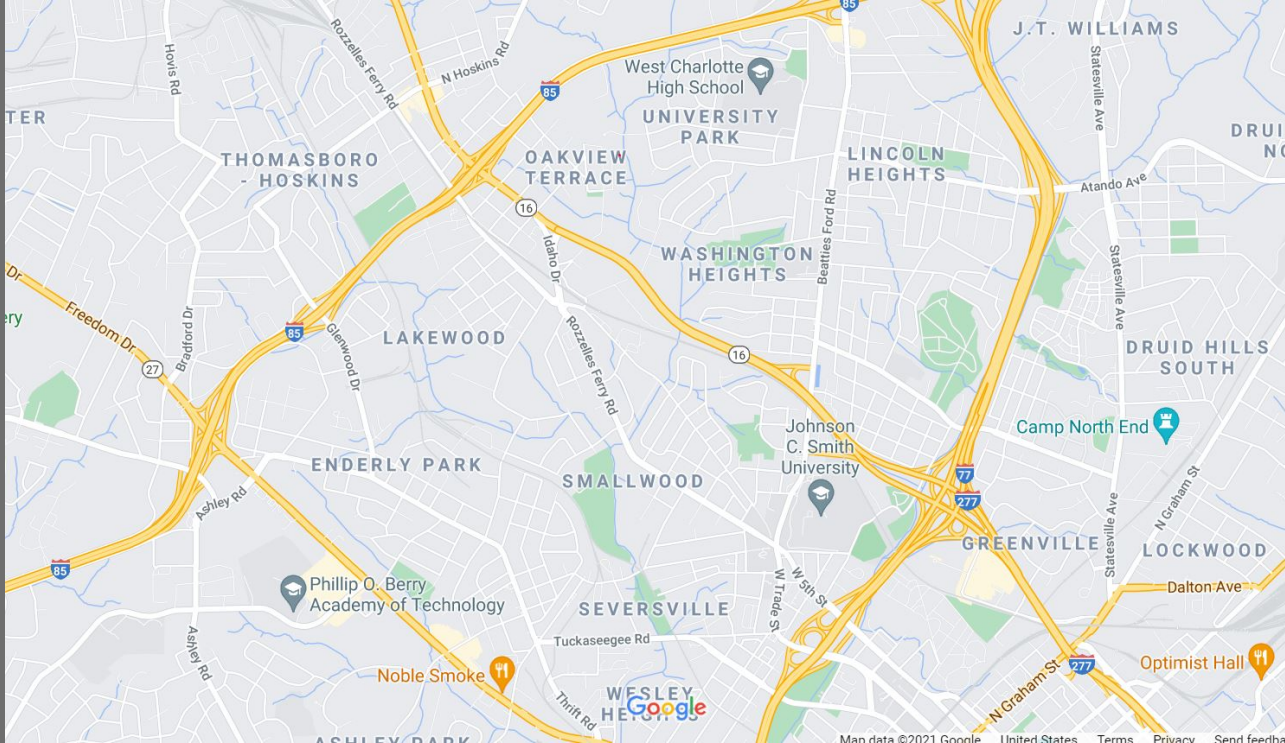
## Targeting Flu and COVID-19 Through Evaluation and Community Partnerships

In the spring, RAO Community Health was awarded additional supplemental funding from the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) – Immunization Services Division (ISD) to increase vaccine awareness and confidence, specifically targeting activities around COVID-19 vaccinations. Much like the progress made with the flu supplement, funding will aim to impact those in our target population by developing outreach activities that are community driven.

To do so, RAO Community Health has partnered with the Department of Health and Human Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and community partners throughout Mecklenburg and Cabarrus county, to conduct a Community Needs Assessment with three main goals: 1) detail barriers to vaccine uptake, 2) equip influential messengers and 3) use findings for programmatic development. With findings planned to be presented in the fall, this will allow RAO Community Health to tailor outreach specific to the needs of our community, especially as the community prepares for an upcoming flu season and more resources for COVID-19 become available.

We recognize that it will take great effort and collaboration with organizations that are entrenched in the community. Thus far, we have gone into the community and partnered with several organizations to vaccinate where people live, work and play. If you're interested in partnering with us to provide education, resources, or to mobilize vaccination opportunities, please email Ashley Carmenia, [acarmenia@raoassist.org](mailto:acarmenia@raoassist.org).

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## Continuing the Quest to Complete Streets

Our partners at Sustain Charlotte are continuing to make great strides in the work they are doing in the community! Recently, Sustain Charlotte and RAO Community Health collaborated with Smart Growth America to beta-test a metric report tool for communities to measure the environmental, economic, public health, and safety impacts of various complete streets projects. The beta-testing of this tool has been very successful, and we believe that it will yield great data and information for the community. We look forward to publishing the results of these findings! [Click here](#) for additional updates from Sustain Charlotte.

## Creating a Doula Pilot Program to Increase African American Representation

RAO Community Health partnered with Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) and Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center to develop the inaugural Doula Impact Pilot Program. The goal of the program is to create a strategic program model to increase the numbers of African American doulas in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County. Selected recipients in this pilot program will complete initial DONA-certified doula training at JCSU, and receive intimate training and direct mentorship from a certified Doula at Novant Health as they complete their clinical experience and work towards certification.



In early spring, RAO Community Health announced we would offer a scholarship to those interested in the program. The purpose of the scholarship was to ease the financial burden for the cost of initial training. The scholarship program received overwhelming interest with close to 30 applicants, and from states as far as Arkansas.

The initial cohort of doulas will begin their training in late spring and continue their coursework on various topics, such as lactation and breastfeeding 101, throughout the summer. By creating this program, RAO Community Health aims to not only increase the presence of African American doulas in the local hospital systems, but ultimately create a lasting positive impact on Black maternal and child outcomes in the community at large.



### App Chat

Our C.A.R.E. app continues to do extremely well, with increased downloads and app utilization rates. Our software development team has made additional updates by adding new features to the app. You asked and we delivered! We are excited to announce the release of the Android version! It is now available for download via Google Play. Please download and let us know what you think!

[Download for iOS](#)

[Download for Android](#)



### Welcome Madeline!

#### Meet our new Program Assistant, Madeline Niederman!

Madeline started at RAO Community Health as an intern, and quickly established herself as a part of the team. She discovered her passion for community health while completing her undergraduate degree. She then decided to further pursue her interest in public health by attending Baylor University where she will obtain her Master's in Public Health in June 2021. Madeline is excited to begin her journey in public health and looks forward to assisting the REACH team in their current and future programs. Welcome Madeline!



<https://raoassist.org/flu-grant/>

## Building Confidence in COVID-19 and Flu Vaccines through Community Discussions

As the COVID-19 vaccination phases opened up to anyone over the age of 16, we witnessed healthcare and public health institutions all over the nation scramble to schedule and vaccinate as many people possible. Unfortunately, these institutions did not expect the opposition expressed by communities of color and in clinical settings, as many residents had questions and concerns about the available COVID-19 vaccines' safety and effectiveness. We now know that building vaccine confidence is as equally important as vaccine acceptance. Unwavering trust in the community leads to increased vaccinations, which ultimately results in fewer COVID-19 and flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths.

RAO Community Health accepted the challenge in combating vaccine hesitancy by building confidence through virtual community town hall and panel discussions that addresses the concerns of the Black community as part of the "Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Adult Immunization" project for the CDC's NCIRD – Immunization Services Division. These discussions have highlighted local health practitioners and community influencers who provided their expertise on the topics of "Understanding and Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy in the Black Community" and "Building Vaccine Confidence in the Black Community". If you missed them, please be sure to watch [here](#).

## How Lending a Helping Hand Impacted Healthy Eating

In our October 2020 newsletter, RAO Community Health announced our participation in the "Healthy Helping" initiative brought to the community by Reinvestment Partners and Food Lion. Healthy Helping is a healthy food prescription program that provides households \$40 per month to purchase WIC-approved fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned). To receive the \$40, customers swiped their MVP Food Lion card and paid with their SNAP EBT card.

With a \$3.5M state appropriation of CARES Act funding since COVID-19, Healthy Helping reached 37,000 North Carolinians impacted by COVID-19. Healthy Helping expanded accessibility to healthy food statewide and became the largest program of its kind in the nation. The program had a 93% satisfaction rate, with participants loving the convenience of shopping at Food Lion and buying healthy food. During their initial enrollment, 97% of participants reported that they already shopped at Food Lion.

RAO Community Health acknowledges that the work around hunger and food access was exacerbated due to the increase of economic hardship associated with the pandemic. We will continue to support initiatives that reach vulnerable populations in the pursuit of enhancing their quality of life.

**To find out more information about the REACH Grant, click [here](#).**



**RAO Community Health**

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