



# REACHING TOGETHER

RACIAL ETHNIC APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY HEALTH (REACH)  
GRANT NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 2022 | VOLUME 6

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## A Message from the Health Equity Director

Greetings from the REACH team! We are excited for all the great projects and events we have in store this year. We are now in Year Four of our grant cycle, and are working even harder to address gaps in health disparities that have been further widened due to the ongoing pandemic. Despite these challenges, our team is working to continuously develop partnerships with new community organizations to strengthen the impact of our work. Among

several projects we have planned for this year, we are proud to announce that our organization was awarded funds from United Way of Central Carolinas' United Neighborhoods initiative to increase access to care and improve health and well-being in the Lakeview Neighborhood. In addition, we received funding from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) to implement and support equitable Farm to Early Childhood Education. We look forward to continuing the great work we have planned for 2022!

In Health,

*Ashley Carmenia, MPH*

## What's Next?: How to Apply Our Findings from the Needs Assessment

With continued partnership from the Health and Human Services Department at University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and funding from the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) – Immunization Services Division (ISD), RAO was able to complete our Community Needs Assessment in December 2021. The goal of the needs assessment was to target activities related to COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. The needs assessment was a major effort that included multiple stakeholders throughout Mecklenburg and Cabarrus counties. Data was collected in three phases: 1) community stakeholder interviews, 2) focus groups defined by age & geographic location, and 3) survey dissemination. Collectively, RAO received feedback from close to 300 individuals and entities. Major findings from the needs assessment included:

- Partnerships through collaborations: The need to identify non-traditional partners (i.e. activists, faith-based organizations, hair stylists) that are currently established in highly vulnerable areas of our community.
- Communication Strategies and Messages: Acknowledging and speaking to historical mistrust of medical professionals in vulnerable populations of our community. In addition to tailoring messages for specific audiences (i.e. parents/guardians, children), as the scope of vaccine accessibility widens.
- Multi-Component strategies: Establish multi-component approaches to address barriers to vaccine uptake – focusing not only on accessibility, but perceived knowledge and efficacy of sub-populations.

Ultimately, the findings from the needs assessment identified when addressing vaccine uptake, one size does *not* fit all. There is a need to tailor each outreach event and communication campaign specific to the program partner/audience. Also, providing community members the opportunity to receive services related to other necessities (i.e. housing and nutrition services) simultaneously ideally yields positive results. As an organization, we aim to address barriers to vaccine administration by applying this holistic and equitable approach.



## Collaborating with Public Transit to Create Safer and Accessible Streets

Did you know that public transit not only gets people to their jobs, grocery stores and other daily destinations, but it's also an active form of transportation? Most transit riders reach their bus stop or light rail station by walking or riding a bicycle. Even people who park their vehicle at a Park & Ride to take the bus tend to get in many more steps throughout the day than people who commute to work by driving. A 2005 study found that 29% of respondents were able to achieve 30 minutes or more of daily exercise by walking to or from public transportation ([based on data from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey](#)).

Sustain Charlotte is working to support all residents who ride transit by working alongside neighborhood associations and community organizations to speak up for safe, walkable, and bikeable streets and off-street paths connected to public transit. We are conducting walkability audits and providing technical assistance to neighborhoods to identify gaps in their active transportation networks. Using those results, we will work together to implement a strategy of asking for more investment in sidewalks, protected bike lanes, crosswalks, greenways, and other infrastructure to make it easier to be active in daily life.

At Sustain Charlotte's recent Biketoberfest event, more than 600 people participated in a family-friendly day of exploring the community on two wheels. We included an introduction to public transit routes in the area and encouraged

participants to combine walking, bicycling, and riding transit to travel throughout central Charlotte. The event also highlighted the need for investment in every part of Charlotte to make our streets truly safe and accessible for people of every age, ability, and income level.

*-Sustain Charlotte*

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## Creating Healthy Food Opportunities in the Community

We are honored to announce that RAO was one of eight organizations to receive the Association of State Public Health Nutritionist (ASPHN) capacity building [CABBAGE](#) grant, a sub grant to the Farm to Early Childhood Education (ECE) initiative. For this work, we will be partnering with Bright Future Early Learning Center to create two on-site produce gardens that can be utilized by facility, students, and parents/guardians. The ECE initiative will provide an introduction to the Color Me Healthy curriculum to spark interest in healthy eating and physical activity in students. Adult garden education will also be offered to students and parents/guardians that will cover the basics of gardening; while providing vital information on SNAP garden and SNAP double bucks programs. The project will culminate with a family hands on gardening education session. Sessions will be led by one of Mecklenburg Counties own Master Gardens with deep roots in Charlotte's history and sustainability.

In addition, RAO and Loaves & Fishes/Friendship Trays were highlighted in the CDC's DNPAO internal newsletter last month for our work on the specialty food box program. We are excited to see that our approach to "food as medicine" has captured the attention of our peers. Our partners at Loaves & Fishes/Friendship Trays are also in the process of writing a revolutionary new food donation policy for their brick and mortar and mobile delivery locations. The policy will call upon the CDC's food service guidelines, the Healthy Eating Research Nutrition (H.E.R.) charitable pantry guidelines, and the USDA's food service guidelines to shape the quality of food items received and donated.

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## Continuing to Increase Support in Maternal Health for African Americans

Last year, RAO launched our pilot Doula Impact program in partnership with Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) and Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center. The goal of the program is to create a strategic program model to increase the number of African American doulas in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County. We are proud to announce that our initial cohort of students completed their training, and our second cohort of doula students are currently enrolled and active in the program. We received a tremendous response to our second round of scholarship funding for training with over 100 applicants! We plan to award another round in the spring.

We are also thrilled to announce our new pilot program, "Daddy B.E.A.N.S." with Q.C. Cocoa Beans, a local non-profit organization that assists new and expectant families of color in improving their overall health and wellbeing through nutrition counseling, lactation, and feeding support. In partnership, we have begun planning and developing a breastfeeding and parenting peer-to-peer support and mentoring program for African American fathers. We are currently recruiting new and expecting fathers throughout Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County, with implementation of the program to be underway by late spring. For more information, please contact Ashley Carmenia ([acarmenia@raoassist.org](mailto:acarmenia@raoassist.org)).

We Are Now on NCCARE360!

Kicking off the new year, RAO is excited to announce that we are now featured on NCCARE360! NCCARE360 is a statewide website designed to connect individuals to various resources within their local communities. We are currently accepting referrals for our Housing and Utilities Assistance and our PrEP Prevention Program. We are also encouraging everyone to review the eligibility requirements before submitting a referral. Find us on NCCARE360 [here!](#)

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



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