



POP HEALTH CENTRAL

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POPULATION HEALTH NEWS

University Hospital Newark's Initiatives to Improve Maternal Health and Infant Health in NJ

Contributing authors: Colette Barrow Adams, PhD, MPA, MDiv, Executive Director, Community and Population Health, University Hospital Newark; Edna Dickson-Amoako, MPA, CHES, Population Health Navigator/Centering Coordinator, University Hospital Newark

[University Hospital Newark](#) is a critical partner in the efforts to improve maternal and infant health in the Greater Newark community. Two of their initiatives include [CenteringParenting](#) and [CenteringPregnancy](#).

On December 19, 2023, University Hospital and [Rutgers New Jersey Medical School](#) conducted the inaugural session of the CenteringParenting cohort. The first cohort consisted of seven parents and their newborns. The successful CenteringParenting model caters to the unique needs of new parents. It was designed to create a supportive community for families while providing comprehensive healthcare in a group setting that enhances connection and shared learning.

Edited by: Donna Meeker-O'Rourke, Nathalia Gomez, Kathryn Corpuz, & Mary O'Dowd (RBHS)

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

Contact us at:

 vcpherbhs.rutgers.edu

This model is based on the well-child visit, which has the following individual and group care components:

- **Individual Care:** This consists of health assessments, immunizations, and developmental screenings that follow the American Academy of Pediatrics’ “Bright Future” guidelines.
- **Group Care:** This includes well-baby check-ups, parent education, and community building. These sessions cover developmental milestones, feeding, sleep, early literacy, and more, allowing parents to interact with healthcare providers and each other.

University Hospital also hosts the CenteringPregnancy initiative, which is an innovative prenatal care model that unites expectant parents in a shared experience. CenteringPregnancy went live at University Hospital’s OB/GYN Department in July 2019.

Unlike conventional one-on-one prenatal appointments, CenteringPregnancy combines medical check-ups with facilitated group discussions and educational activities. This program consists of nine group sessions, each lasting 90 minutes; one-on-one care with a provider for private concerns; and group sessions with other expectant parents for open discussions. These sessions cover a range of topics from nutrition and exercise to childbirth and postpartum care, providing valuable knowledge and fostering confidence in expectant parents. The Journal of Women’s Health highlighted that CenteringPregnancy programs decrease preterm birth risks, increase breastfeeding rates, and improve perceptions of peer support.

CenteringPregnancy and CenteringParenting are evidence-based models of group medical care that transcend traditional exam room settings. Patients participate in comfortable group settings, comprised of 6-12 individuals with similar health conditions, fostering a supportive community that promotes knowledge, skills, and confidence.

These transformative models incorporate health assessment, interactive learning, and community building, driving positive health behaviors and superior health outcomes.



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New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute: Maternity Action Plan (MAP) Work Advances in 2024



At the April 2023 Population Health Consortium meeting, Linda Schwimmer presented the [New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute’s](#) (NJHCQI) work to improve maternal and infant health (MIH) outcomes in our state. Their efforts will accelerate in 2024 with new virtual and in-person work sessions and a collaborative focus on improving access to doula care. The NJHCQI will continue to advance their [Maternity Action Plan](#) (MAP), which provides a path forward to address New Jersey’s maternal health crisis. To register to participate and learn more read the full story [here](#).

UPCOMING HEALTH OBSERVANCES

January

- Cervical Health Awareness Month
- National Birth Defects Prevention Month
- National Blood Donor Month

February

- American Heart Month
- Burn Awareness Month
- National Cancer Prevention Month
- National Eating Disorder Awareness Week (2/26-3/1)
- World Cancer Day (2/4)

March

- Brain Injury Awareness Month
- National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
- National Kidney Month

April

- Foot Health Month
- Head and Neck Cancer Month
- Minority Health Month

POPULATION HEALTH IN ACTION

Training Rutgers Student Educators to address the Opioid Crisis in New Jersey

Contributing author: Kelley Hamilton, MPH, Health Educator, RWJ Medical School

The [Rutgers Interdisciplinary Opioid Trainers](#) (RIOT) program educates both graduate students at Rutgers University and community members throughout New Jersey on the opioid crisis and Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD). The RIOT program was created by the [New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services](#) (NJ DHMAS) in partnership with [Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Division of Addiction Psychiatry](#).

Graduate students enrolled in various Rutgers programs including medicine, pharmacy, psychology, social work, and public health take part in the RIOT course. To equip these future healthcare providers, RIOT's 18-hour semester course helps students obtain knowledge and background on the opioid epidemic and understand the importance of medications for opioid use disorder (OUD). RIOT recently completed training their Fall 2023 cohort of graduate students.

Did you know? The number of overdose deaths involving opioids, including [prescription opioids](#), [heroin](#), and synthetic opioids (like [fentanyl](#)), in 2021 **was 10 times** the number in 1999. (CDC)

Since its inception in 2019, RIOT has trained 245 graduate students in the health sciences at Rutgers University on Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), the opioid epidemic, and concepts of substance use disorders. A large portion of the course is dedicated to exploring MOUD, covering essential medications such as methadone, buprenorphine (suboxone), and naltrexone (vivitrol). MOUD are medications used to treat OUD by helping to reduce cravings and alleviate withdrawal symptoms.¹ These medications have been shown to reduce overdose and overall mortality.² Students gain an understanding of how MOUD can play a pivotal role in recovery and harm reduction from OD.

After completing the RIOT course students go on to provide free, community presentations to groups throughout New Jersey. These RIOT community presentations are 60 minutes long and are held live online via Zoom. RIOT has provided over 135 community presentations throughout New Jersey, reaching more than 2,179 individuals. Attendees of the presentation learn about factors contributing to the US opioid crisis, the proper uses of naloxone for overdose reversal, signs of OUD, commonly held myths and beliefs about treatment for OUD and the key role of MOUD to enhance patient outcomes.

Over time the RIOT program has been effective at providing students and community members alike with knowledge and statistics on the opioid epidemic and MOUD, helping to reduce stigma surrounding these medications.

RIOT

Rutgers Interdisciplinary Opioid Trainers

To register for a free RIOT presentation, contact addictionpsychiatry@ubhc.rutgers.edu, call 732-235-4341, or visit our website at www.RURIOT.org.

1. SAMHSA, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2023). Medications for Substance Use Disorders. <https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders#>
2. CDC – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023). Opioid use disorder: Preventing and treating. <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/healthcare-professionals/prescribing/opioid-use-disorder.html>

Empowering Students in Healthcare Service: The Impact and Evolution of SCANS

Contributing authors: Nathalia Gomez, Population Health Project Support Assistant, Office of Population Health; Kritika Sharma, Medical Student(M2), New Jersey Medical School; Jack Hemphill, Associate Program Manager, Office of Population Health

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a notable decrease in the number of screening mammograms undertaken by women. This prompted [Dr. Humaira Chaudhry](#), Chair and Chief of Service of Radiology at [New Jersey Medical School](#) (NJMS), to initiate a student-led patient navigator program at [University Hospital Newark](#) (UH) in partnership with the [Rutgers Office of Population Health](#). The program offered outreach for breast cancer screening and assisted patients in scheduling appointments, particularly within the University Hospital Newark Emergency Department.

In collaboration with leadership at the [NJMS Department of Emergency Medicine](#), the student patient navigator program was launched in the summer of 2022. It focused on providing educational outreach for breast cancer screening and aiding in appointment scheduling for low-acuity emergency department patients who were not up-to-date on their screenings. To establish proof of concept, the program engaged 30 patients during its summer inception, and over 50% were successfully navigated and received a screening mammogram. This initiative marked the inaugural effort of the [Rutgers Health Service Corps](#). Since its inception, the program has undergone significant evolution, expanding to an additional site at [Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital New Brunswick](#) (RWJUH) including colon, lung, and cervical screenings to its outreach efforts, and becoming an established student organization recognized as SCANS.

What is SCANS?

SCANS (Students for Cancer Awareness and Navigating Screenings) is a student-led organization with a mission to provide students with hands-on learning experiences as patient navigators, while promoting early cancer detection and prevention among hospital patients and the community. Working in collaboration with [ScreenNJ](#) and the [SAVE program](#), SCANS expands the availability of screenings for patients, ensuring accessibility regardless of insurance status.

What do SCANS student patient navigators do?

SCANS student patient navigators act as guides, helping patients navigate through the healthcare system. Following the [United States Preventive Services Task Force](#) (USPSTF) cancer screening guidelines, students find patients eligible for cancer screenings, leveraging the hospital's EHR system. After receiving confirmation of interest, patients are guided through a brief questionnaire confirming their eligibility including such criteria as age and medical/family history. Throughout engagement, students take the time to provide screening education, answering concerns about fears and misconceptions, and providing patients with resource referrals as well. The final task is connecting patients with their appropriate appointment scheduling program, sending appointment reminder calls, and following up to confirm appointment attendance.

What have been some of the outreach successes to date?

Since August 2023, over 50 students at both locations have been able to identify over 300+ patients initially eligible for breast, cervical, lung and/or colorectal cancer screenings. Of these patients, 118 were available and engaged to determine if they were up to date on these screenings. All patients that were not up to date have been referred to partner scheduling programs to schedule their appointments for screenings.

In addition to service within RWJUH and UH, SCANS student patient navigators have had the opportunity to help at outreach external events and fairs, including the [Sustainable Health and Wellness Village Festival](#) at Branch Brook Park, Newark this past September. During this event, students collaborated with the Newark community to promote awareness of current cancer screening guidelines and improve health literacy. They conducted patient screenings to check for up-to-date adherence and gathered information from interested individuals for future appointment scheduling. After this event, interested and eligible community members were further navigated for future appointments.



SCANS student patient navigators volunteering at the Sustainable Health and Wellness Village Festival alongside SCANS co-founders, Kritika Sharma and Jack Hemphill (September 22, 2023 Newark, NJ)

CHECK OUT WHAT SCANS STUDENT PATIENT NAVIGATORS ARE SAYING:



"On my first shift as a student patient navigator, one of the patients we engaged had brought a friend with her to the ER. Her friend also turned out to be eligible for and interested in cervical cancer screening! This experience highlighted how our simple interactions with patients can ignite change throughout the community"

-Antonia Sames, NJMS 2027

"The most rewarding part of serving as a student patient navigator at SCANS is the meaningful connections I establish with members of the Newark community. Being a reliable source of support for patients and creating a positive impact at such an early stage of my medical career has been an incredible and fulfilling opportunity"

-Hrithika Ravuri, NJMS 2027

"SCANS is a great way to get involved in helping patients and talking to patients directly as a patient navigator. I hope that we can continue to educate and engage patients, reducing any gaps that patients have to cancer screenings. Early cancer detection is extremely important, and by talking to more patients about this significance, we can aid in cancer prevention and make sure no one is at a disadvantage"

-Jessica Kim, Rutgers 2025

"I envision the future impact of SCANS' mission and work on the community will help not only improve access to cancer screenings but the education we provide to patients regarding cancer screenings will hopefully spread through the community through word of mouth. I also envision that the students involved with the organization will learn more about our community and how, on so many levels, we can work to combat health inequities"

-Alexandra Sobocinski, NJMS 2027

"As a student patient navigator, I have the privilege of witnessing the lengths that compassion and understanding can achieve in the medical setting; what truly excites me the most is empowering our patients with the knowledge and resources to better their own health. During my encounters, I often share laughter, stories, or even sorrows with my patients— but it is during these moments I feel most connected to the community and most inspired to continue advocating for well-being accessible to all."

Kritika Sharma, NJMS 2026 (Cofounder of SCANS)

FOSTERING HEALTHCARE INNOVATION: Launch of the Inaugural Rutgers Health Hack

Contributing authors: Jay Naik, Vice Chair for Clinical Innovation, Department of Medicine, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; Naveena Yanamala, Director of Artificial Intelligence and Data Science in the Division of Cardiovascular Disease and Hypertension, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and Director, RWJUH Innovation Center; Daniel Schaer, Assistant Professor, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; and Ethan Halm, Vice Chancellor for Population Health, Rutgers Health.

From November 3rd to November 5th, the inaugural [Rutgers Health Hack](#) took place at the [Robert Wood Johnson Medical School](#), (RWJMS) convening multidisciplinary teams comprising healthcare professionals, engineers, designers, developers, and business experts. The event was dedicated to collaborative problem-solving in healthcare, leveraging technology and innovation. Co-sponsored by [Rutgers Health](#), the RWJMS, [RWJ University Hospital](#), the [Biomedical Entrepreneurship Network](#), and the Foundation for Health Advancement, the three-day hackathon saw multidisciplinary teams competitively tackling various healthcare challenges, spanning digital health, patient engagement, population health, and home hospitalization. These teams then presented their proposals to a panel of judges, vying for \$10,000 in cash prizes.



The event commenced with a virtual welcome from [Chancellor Brian Strom](#), followed by a keynote address delivered by Jeffrey Mathers, distinguished fellow, chief architect, and vice president of software engineering and external collaboration at [Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine](#). Throughout the event, 16 teams comprising 151 participants from diverse backgrounds collaborated intensely. Among them were individuals with expertise in medicine/science/research (31%), engineering/AI/computer science (35%), business/management (22%), and design/other fields (10%). Hailing from 8 states, 18 countries, and 26 unique institutions from across the country. Participants came from a broad range of fields including medicine, pharmacy, public health, computer science, engineering, communications, design, arts and sciences, health technology, business, and law.

After a weekend of dedicated work, teams refined their innovative solutions in preparation for the final pitches on the last day. The top three winners were:

1st Place \$5000 - Sixth Sentiment: an AI solution transforming voice recordings into objective psychiatric metrics.

2nd Place \$3000 - Tiny Talk: a device attached to medication bottles that audibly announces drug names and usage instructions, aiding the visually impaired through a push-activated speaker.

3rd Place \$2000 - CO2PD: a remote app designed to provide COPD education, breathing therapy, and mental health support to address anxiety among COPD patients.

The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback from all involved, marking it a resounding success. It underscored the significance of interprofessional collaboration and highlighted the commitment of Rutgers, the RWJBarnabas Health System and partners to fostering innovation for the betterment of New Jersey communities.

CONSORTIUM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

For this newsletter edition, we want to take a moment to introduce you to some of the new members of the Rutgers Population Health Consortium. Learn more about each member below.

Meet Nathalia Gomez-Artica

In September 2023, Nathalia Gomez-Artica, a senior at Fairleigh Dickinson University, joined the Rutgers Office of Population Health team as a Population Health Project Support Assistant supported through a Federal Work Study Program. This came after Nathalia's successful internship with the team during the Rutgers Institute for Health's Summer Research Program 2023 working on a project to improve breast cancer screening among vulnerable women at University Hospital in Newark and Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) University Hospital in New Brunswick. Her primary role in the study involved serving as a student patient navigator, engaging eligible patients for mammograms, and serving as an interpreter/translator for Spanish-speaking patients. During this time, she, alongside the rest of the study's leadership team, co-founded SCANS (Students for Cancer Awareness and Navigating Screenings) at New Jersey Medical School and RWJ Medical School.



Currently, Nathalia is actively contributing to health communication, education and promotion efforts, community service projects and the Rutgers Health Service Corps. She has worked to develop public and population health service opportunities for fellow students with a particular focus on health communication addressing food insecurity, and the development and dissemination of the Office's X page (formerly known as Twitter) and YouTube videos.

Nathalia is a Health Studies major on the Science track at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Upon graduation, she would like to continue working on public and population health projects. In the future, she plans to pursue a graduate degree in Public Health or Health Administration.

Meet Dr. Yonaira Rivera and Nicole Mendoza



Yonaira Rivera, PhD, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, School of Communication and Information, and Associate Member of the Cancer Prevention and Control Program at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey. She studies and teaches about the roles of culture, community, digital media, and communication in public health. A core faculty member of Rutgers Global Health Institute, she has developed original methods of qualitative research to study how individuals use social media. This work is a component of her broader research and outreach related to cancer health disparities in Latino communities, where cancer is a leading cause of death. To inform the development of culturally relevant and community-focused health communication interventions.

Dr. Rivera investigates how social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp may influence Latinos' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and, ultimately, their health. She also serves as a project rotation sponsor and mentor for the Population Health Fellowship, mentoring the current fellows, Kathryn Corpuz and Donna Meeker-O'Rourke, in health communications and approaches for qualitative research. Dr. Rivera will present at the next

Population Health Consortium meeting on February 5, 2024 with her research student, [Nicole Mendoza](#): Contextualizing health (mis)information engagement and utilization among Latino/a/x social media users.

Nicole Mendoza is a PhD candidate at the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. Her research focuses on using anti-racist and systemic approaches to understanding the experiences of health inequities in historically marginalized populations. Her work is inspired by her personal experience of being a first-generation college student with parents who immigrated from Mexico. Throughout her career in higher education, she did not see other folks like her or those who have similar lived experiences as her. This drives her passion to collaborate with the Latino community in order to represent their lived experiences and to use her privilege of being part of an institution to better serve their personal narratives and health initiatives.

RUTGERS HEALTH AND WELLNESS CORNER

The Intensive Outpatient Clinic (IOC) Gets an A

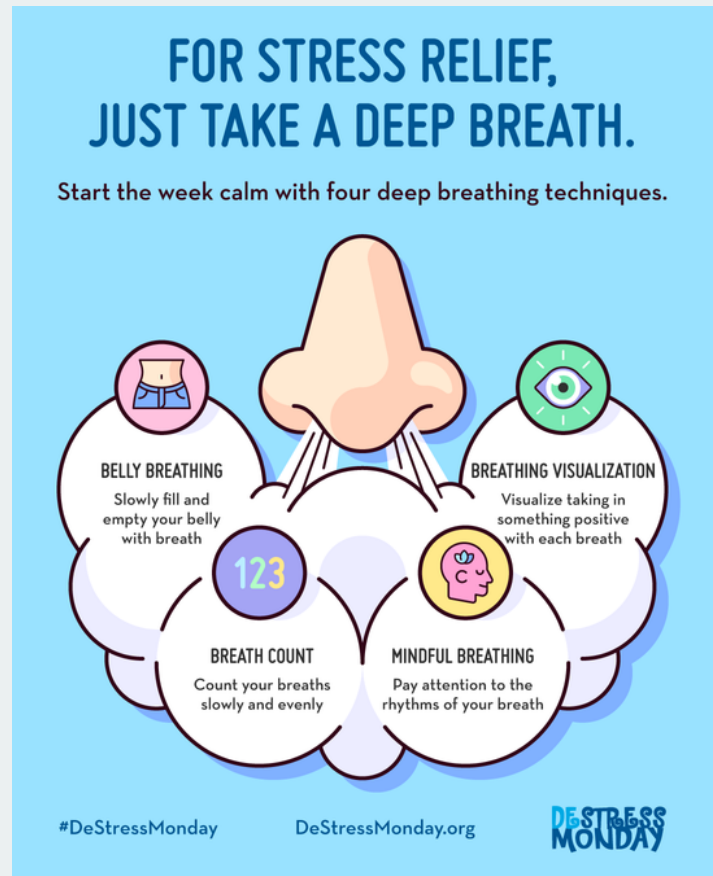
Contributing author: Kim M. Spinelli, Senior Program Coordinator, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

The [Intensive Outpatient Clinic](#) (IOC) is the newest unit in the Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services (RCAAS). It was established as a community-based resource for adults with autism that have complex, crisis-level support needs, what is known in the field of behavior analysis as "severe challenging behavior." Examples include, self-injury, aggression, property destruction, pica (ingesting inedible objects), elopement (leaving caregivers), and problematic ritualistic behaviors. Continuing its alignment with the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology's (GSAPP) mission to address the needs of underserved populations, and the RCAAS's staunch commitment to being a change leader in supporting autistic adults, the IOC was founded to meet a growing need. It fills the gap between regular service provision and in-patient and development centers. Dr. Julia Iannaccone was hired in late 2022, and the clinic took its first patient in early 2023.

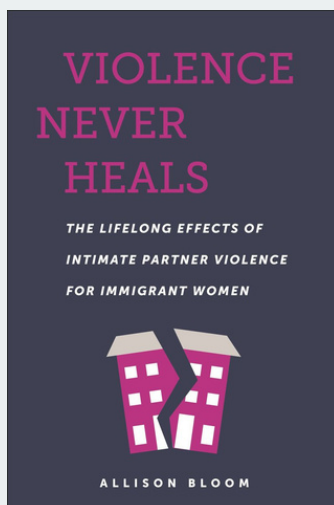
Learn more about the Clinic and read the full article [here](#).

MINDFULNESS MOMENT

Feeling anxious or stressed?
Stop for a moment and take a slow deep
breath. Read more [here](#).



Reading/Resource Recommendations



Across the United States, one in three women experiences violence in their intimate relationships. More resources are now being devoted to providing these women with immediate care; but what happens to survivors, especially those from marginalized communities, as they grow older and grapple with the long-term effects? In *Violence Never Heals*, Allison Bloom presents a life-course perspective on the disabling experience of violence in Latina immigrant communities.

Telehealth Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement vs Usual Care in Individuals With Opioid Use Disorder and Pain

This randomized clinical trial demonstrated that telehealth delivered Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE) was a feasible adjunct to methadone treatment with significant effects on drug use, pain, depression, treatment retention, and adherence. Read the full article [here](#).

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Applications open up on March 6, 2024 for the third round of Rutgers [REACH Grants](#). The purpose of REACH's grant funding is to put research into practice by working in partnership with community residents and leaders on new approaches to bring about long-lasting systemic change and achieve health equity by addressing issues of inequity that include structural and systemic racism impacting all five of our social determinant focus areas. REACH is designed to support Rutgers faculty, students and staff to engage in equitable, longitudinal and sustainable community-based scholarship. Get more details [here](#).
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Calls for Proposals to Support Indigenous-Led Systematic Inquiry: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has announced a new call for proposals to support Indigenous-led systematic inquiry to enhance the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and to generate approaches to improve health equity. This will be achieved by funding community-prioritized investigation and elevating and integrating Indigenous cultures and knowledge-building practices. **Proposal due: March 1, 2024.** Learn more [here](#).
- Advance Health Equity among Populations Experiencing Health Disparities: The Bridge-to-Care Initiative (R01 Clinical Trial Optional): *Bridge-to-Care* will support research that leverages healthcare-community partnerships to address the social circumstances and conditions that influence health. The solicitation emphasizes that these must be true partnerships; the intervention may not simply be a referral or connecting of resources. "Social needs-targeted care is a strategy that can be more widely implemented to improve health within patient populations. LOI (optional) due 2/21/24. Application deadline is 3/22/24. A pre-application webinar for prospective applicants will be held on February 15 from 1:00-2:00pm ET. Registration information can be found [here](#).
- AMCHP's Replication Projects for 2024-2025: Each year, the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) awards between \$15,000-\$25,000 to up to four organizations to replicate a practice from the MCH Innovations Database. Based on their readiness to begin replication, awardees will receive peer coaching and guidance from a representative of the practice as well as tailored assistance from AMCHP to help adapt the practice to their unique context and situation. Application deadline: March 1, 2024. Learn more [here](#).
- THRIVE Grant: The THRIVE grant program is designed to provide seed funding to investigators for the testing of initial hypotheses and collecting of preliminary data to help secure long-term funding by the National Institutes of Health and/or other major granting institutions. Preference will be given to studies in which both a non-clinical and clinical researcher are engaged in either design, conduct, or analysis of the study results. Awards are between \$20,000-\$50,000. Deadline to submit letter of intent: April 8, 2024. Learn more [here](#).



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Population Health Fellowship

The Rutgers Health Office of Population Health is actively recruiting the next Population Health fellow to join their team! This is a one-year program with an optional second year renewal. Fellows are full-time, salaried staff (possessing at least a Master's degree) that work as an integral member of the team on a variety of experiential learning projects and rotations to develop their skills in population health improvement, health equity, and leadership.

- To learn more about the fellowship, please visit the website link [here](#). The position closes **2/5/24**.
- The position posting is: <https://jobs.rutgers.edu/postings/217124>



Applications being accepted for the Rutgers Youth Enjoy Science (RUYES) Program

The [Rutgers Youth Enjoy Science \(RUYES\) Summer 2024 Program](#) is a high school summer research internship program supported by the [Office of Education and Training](#) at [Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey](#). The application portal opened on November 4th, 2023, and will remain open until all positions are filled. Early decisions will be made on February 23rd and the regular deadline is May 1st. The RUYES program seeks to encourage youth from groups that are underrepresented in the biomedical sciences to pursue cancer research and healthcare careers. For more information on the program and application process, please visit their website [here](#).



Happy Birthday Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences

In the fall of 2023, Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS) celebrated its 10th anniversary. This marked a momentous milestone in health advancements that impacted Rutgers and the partners and communities that we serve in New Jersey. Check out our 10th anniversary [\(RBHS 10th Anniversary | Rutgers Health\)](#) webpage to learn more about our achievements this past decade as RBHS, the people who have made an impact in these efforts, and our path moving forward as Rutgers Health.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Save the date for the Rutgers Health Anniversary Symposium entitled, "Uncovering Solutions to Health Inequities"

Wednesday, March 20, 2024, 9:00am - 3:00pm

Join the Rutgers Health community on March 20, 2024, for a symposium to explore health equity and disparities in our communities through research, care, public policy, and community outreach. Speakers include: Eliseo Pérez-Stable, Director, National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, NIH; Kaitlan Baston, Acting Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Health; Margo Brooks Carthorn, Tyson Family Endowed Term Chair for Gerontological Research, Associate Professor of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania. Experts and advocates unite as we delve into crucial discussions on fostering equitable health care outcomes and how Rutgers can contribute to making the world well.