

# *Working Together for a Healthier Philadelphia*

# a letter from our leadership team

**Accelerate Health Equity (AHE)** launched in March 2022 with organizations across the Philadelphia region coming together to form a multi-year initiative aimed at combating systemic racism and barriers to health equity. AHE is designed to produce tangible improvement in these issues and, ultimately, positive changes in health outcomes for Philadelphians.

Much of Philadelphia's health research functions in silos, and AHE has taken a leading role in building bridges across institutions. AHE runs pilot programs and initiatives which will then be scaled throughout the city to achieve maximum impact, with the collaboration of corporate social responsibility partnerships, foundations, and other partners. To aid in this goal, AHE has set up a first-of-its-kind Steering Committee made up of healthcare leaders in Philadelphia who are committed to making significant contributions to improving health outcomes for Philadelphians.

A year since our launch, we are excited to share our inaugural annual report on the progress we have made alongside our AHE partners and collaborators. In this report, you'll learn about our multiple city-wide projects, first series of grant recipients, and pilot programs and initiatives, many of which are housed within individual AHE member institutions. While city-wide outcomes will take years of innovative research and action to improve, AHE is proud to begin forging that path by delivering impact at a smaller scale – to individuals, within pilots, and between partnerships – and driving change through sustainability, scaling, and systems-level impact.

Together, as a collective, we will use our work to advance health equity, encourage cross-institutional information sharing, and ultimately achieve city-wide improvements for the health outcomes of Philadelphians. Research dissemination is a pillar of AHE and our results from individual projects and partnerships are reported on a rolling basis through our website and social media. It's crucial that we share our progress, and that's why we are thrilled to present our inaugural annual report to our partners, peers, and our city.



**RICHARD SNYDER, MD**



**VICTOR CARABALLO, MD, MBA**



**MEGHAN LANE-FALL, MD, MSHP, FCCM**



**KEVIN VOLPP, MD, PHD**

## about **AHE**

Accelerate Health Equity (AHE) is a city-wide initiative aimed at addressing health equity and racism, and advancing health through a unified approach. Our mission is to fight racism within healthcare by supporting and evaluating evidence-based interventions to address racism and improve the health of Black Philadelphians.

Philadelphia has consistently ranked last out of the state's 67 counties in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Rankings based on data analyzing quality of life, health factors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. AHE is digging deep into this data and shaping pilot programs to address health conditions and social determinants of health.

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# WHO WE ARE

## our priorities

Our initiative builds on a large number of equity-directed efforts that have been ongoing in the city and brings together a diverse group of key stakeholders representing health systems, payors, and community organizations to work collaboratively to improve health outcomes in Philadelphia.



**IMPROVE  
HEALTH EQUITY**

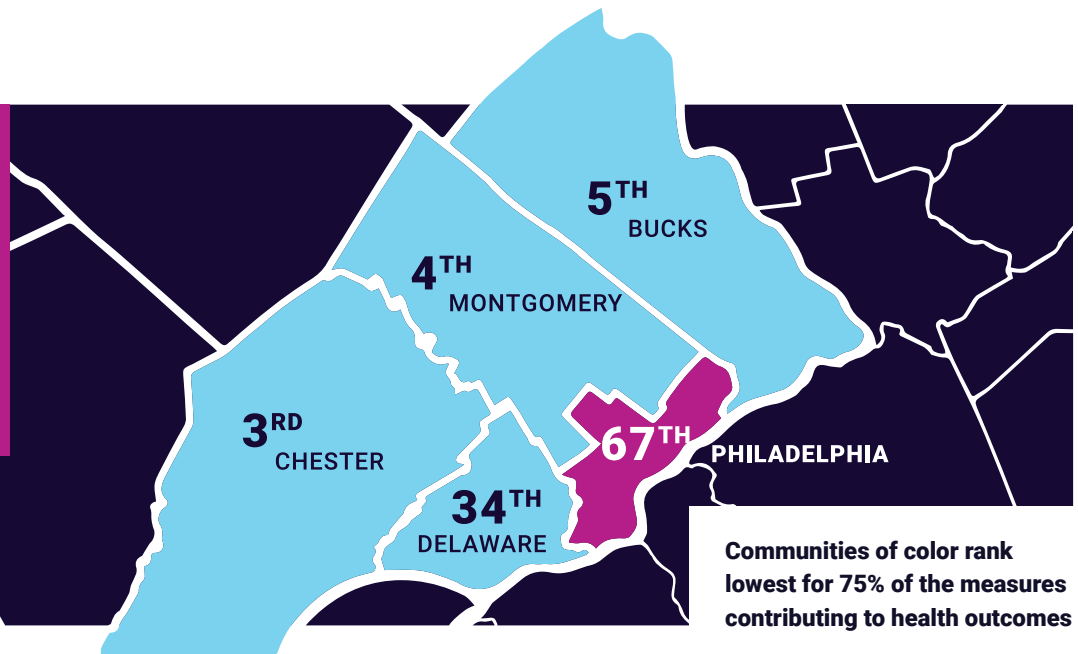


**ADDRESS  
RACISM**



**ADVANCE  
HEALTH**

PHILADELPHIA HAS RANKED 67TH OUT OF 67 COUNTIES FOR HEALTH OUTCOMES IN PENNSYLVANIA FOR THE LAST DECADE.



Communities of color rank lowest for 75% of the measures contributing to health outcomes

## AHE

### at-a-glance

**12**

FOUNDING HEALTH  
SYSTEMS AND  
PARTNERS

**\$500k**

DISTRIBUTED IN  
GRANT FUNDING TO

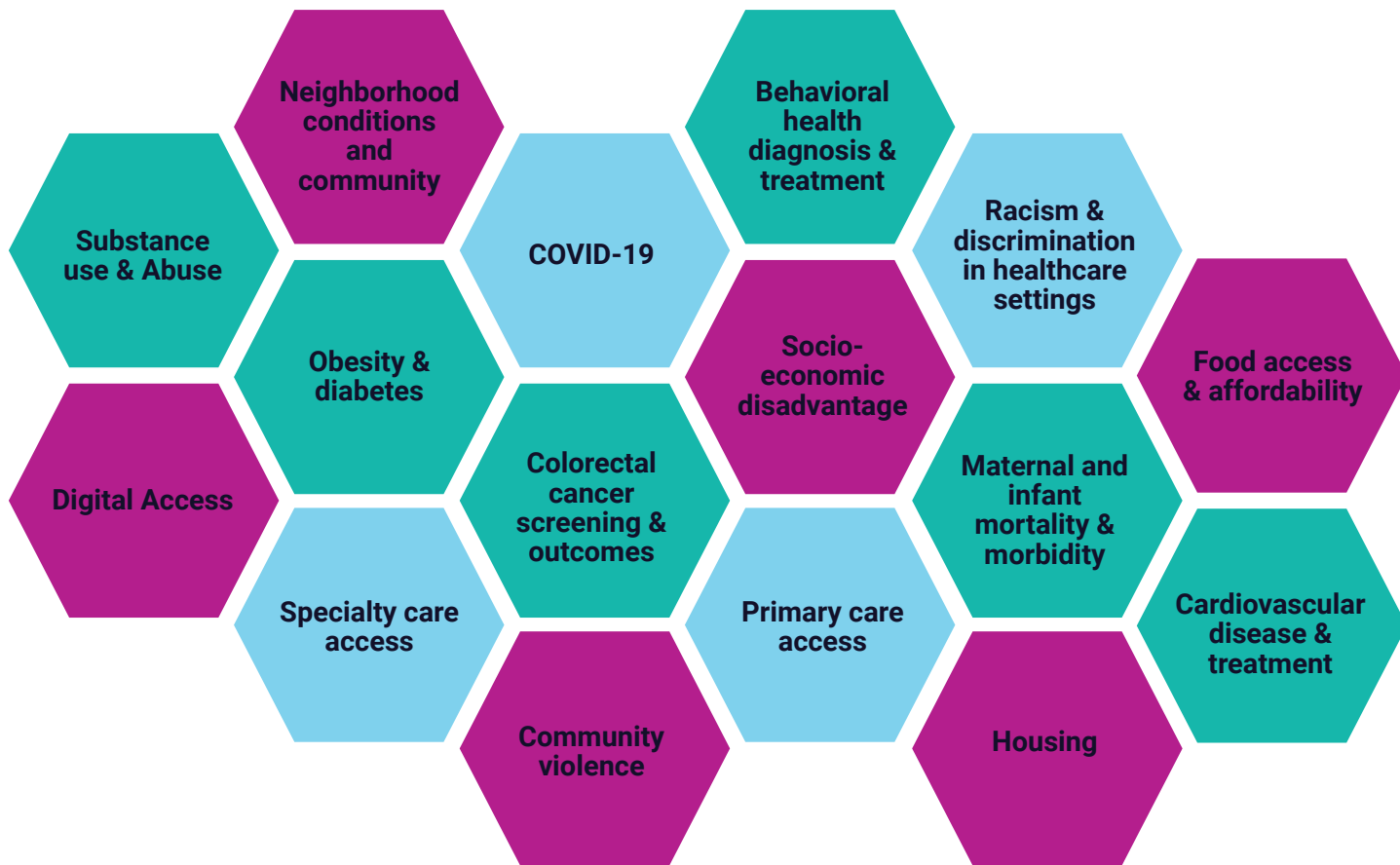
**6**

DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS  
ACROSS PHILADELPHIA



# our focus

To help guide and ensure our work tackles the most important issues facing city residents, AHE identified topic areas based on the [2019 Philadelphia Community Health Needs Assessment](#) conducted by the Health Care Improvement Foundation and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, along with input from key stakeholders and our Steering Committee.



CLAIMS DATA FROM NEARLY

**720,000**

PATIENTS ANALYZED  
TO EXAMINE HEALTH  
DISPARITIES IN THE CITY

OVER

**\$3 million**

SPENT ON  
PARTNERSHIPS

# WHO WE ARE

AHE consists of **12 leading institutions in healthcare** across the city of Philadelphia, including payers and providers. This innovative partnership brings together leaders and changemakers to help dismantle racism within our city's healthcare system, in order to improve health outcomes for Philadelphians – this goal is vital to the well-being of our city as a whole. Hear from some of the leaders that comprise AHE's core partners:

“At CHOP, we believe that it is foundational to give every child a fair chance at a healthy future and that every child should receive equitable care regardless of race, language or gender. I join my colleagues throughout CHOP who are committed to making this possible and I am grateful to Independence Blue Cross for creating Accelerate Health Equity to address racism in medicine and to advance health equity in our community and beyond. I am proud of the progress we have made to date and I know we will continue to make a difference for children for many years to come.”

**Madeline Bell**  
President and CEO,  
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

“Our partnership with Accelerate Health Equity helped us become even more introspective to identify opportunities for growth and learning within our regional health system. Trinity Health Mid Atlantic's work with AHE helped lay the foundation for a caregiver support program for the seriously ill and led us to our most recent collaboration in the regional coalition to eliminate race-based medicine.”

**James Woodward**  
President and CEO, Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic

“Racism is a public health crisis. Our commitment to eliminating disparities through many initiatives including collaboration with Accelerate Health Equity remains unwavering...a collaborative effort is the only way to make equity a reality. Through this partnership and the Disparities in Care Colloquium that Main Line Health hosts annually, we know that we have true partners in addressing this problem on a regional basis.”

**Jack Lynch, FACHE**  
President and CEO, Main Line Health

“At Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM), we understand that it takes a multi-faceted approach to address social determinants of health to combat inequality in our healthcare system. We remain a proud partner of Accelerate Health Equity, working with organizations across the Philadelphia region to advocate for policy change, to support evidence-based interventions that improve physical and mental health, and to educate and engage our local communities.”

**Jay S. Feldstein, DO**  
President and CEO, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine



“ We at the Dornsife School of Public Health have had a major focus on health equity and social justice from our very foundation as a School. We are delighted to work with many partners in Philadelphia, as well as nationally and even globally, to understand the fundamental structural and systemic drivers of health inequities and identify the strategies and policies that we need to implement as a society to eliminate them.”

**Ana V. Diez Roux, MD, PhD, MPH**

Distinguished University Professor of Epidemiology and Director of the Urban Health Collaborative at Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health

“ Considering that the Philadelphia VA Medical Center provides healthcare to such a large number of Philadelphia's minoritized patients, it is essential that the VA be included in regional initiatives like AHE that address health equity issues. I look forward to CHERP's participation as a new member of AHE as a potential conduit to implementing solutions.”

**Peter W. Groeneveld, MD, MS**

Director, Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion, CPL Michael J. Crescenzi (Philadelphia) VA Medical Center

“ Our region is renowned for its excellent health care institutions and spirit of innovation. We have the talent, resources, and commitment to address health equity from every angle — and Accelerate Health Equity brings us together in a common cause. This novel initiative provides a strategic framework that enables us to use readily available data and collective stakeholder resources to drive change and optimize outcomes.

Independence Blue Cross is proud of our collaborations through Accelerate Health Equity. The work of the Regional Coalition to Eliminate Race-Based Medicine has already resulted in Black patients receiving life-sustaining organ transplants that would have otherwise been unavailable to them. Through a partnership with the Colorectal Cancer Alliance, we are increasing colorectal cancer screening rates in Black Philadelphians. Accelerate Health Equity's support of the Well City Challenge: Mind and Heart Health is sparking innovation across the community.

We expect our efforts to drive positive impact, and we appreciate the collaboration of the Accelerate Health Equity partner organizations in driving progress. We are on a journey to identify and eliminate race-based disparities and barriers in health care.

**Gregory E. Deavens**

President and CEO, Independence Health Group



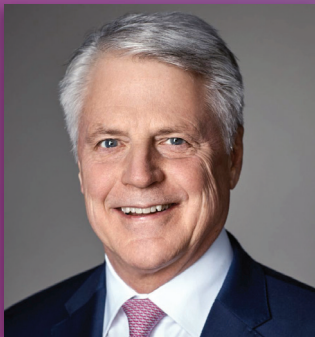
## AHE steering committee

Our Steering Committee includes health equity experts and leaders from our partner organizations, all of whom are well-positioned to make significant contributions to improving health outcomes in Philadelphia. Since inception, we have convened the AHE Steering Committee over 25 times to share information, foster partnerships across institutions, and discuss opportunities for investing in vital health equity initiatives. Meet our current Steering Committee members:



**TYRA BRYANT-STEPHENS, MD, MPH**

- Chief Health Equity Officer, Center for Health Equity, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Director and Founder, Community Asthma Prevention Program (CAPP), Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia



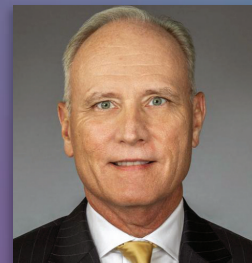
**RICHARD SNYDER, MD**

- AHE Co-lead
- Executive Vice President Facilitated Health Networks, Independence Blue Cross



**MEGHAN LANE-FALL, MD, MSHP, FCCM**

- AHE Co-lead
- Director, Penn Implementation Science Center at LDI, Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania
- David E. Longnecker Associate Professor, Anesthesiology and Critical Care, Perelman School of Medicine



**STEVE CARSON, MHA, BSN, RN**

- Senior Vice President, Population Health, Temple University Health System
- CEO, Temple Center for Population Health, Temple University Health System



**VICTOR CARABALLO, MD, MBA**

- AHE Co-lead
- Vice President Quality Management and Chief Safety Officer, Independence Blue Cross



**KEVIN VOLPP, MD, PHD**

- AHE Co-lead
- Director, Penn Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics (CHIBE)
- Mark V. Pauly Presidential Distinguished Professor, Perelman School of Medicine and the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania



**CHRISTOPHER COLLUM, MBA, MSHA, FACHE**

- President, Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital, Trinity Health Mid-Atlantic





**ANA DIEZ ROUX, MD, PHD, MPH**

- Distinguished University Professor of Epidemiology and Director of the Urban Health Collaborative, Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health



**U. TARA HAYDEN, MHSA**

- Vice President, Community Health Equity, Jefferson Collaborative for Health Equity, Thomas Jefferson University and University Health



**RON KEREN, MD, MPH**

- Senior Vice President, Chief Medical Officer, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Gerald D. Quill Distinguished Chair in the Department of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia



**JOANNE MCFALL, MBA**

- Market President, Keystone First



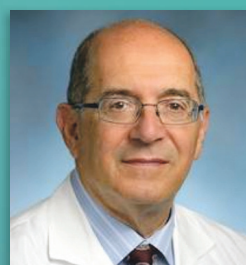
**PETER W. GROENEVELD, MD, MS**

- Director, Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion, CPL Michael J. Crescenzi (Philadelphia) VA Medical Center
- Professor of Medicine, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania



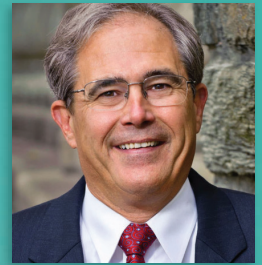
**STACEY KALLEM, MD, MSHP**

- Director, Division of Maternal, Child, & Family Health, Philadelphia Department of Public Health



**BARRY MANN, MD**

- Chief Academic Officer, Main Line Health
- Professor Department of Surgery, Drexel University School of Medicine



**KENNETH VEIT, DO, MBA, FACFP**

- Provost, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dean Professor, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

We would like to recognize and thank the following integral members of AHE's original steering committee and leadership:

**CHERYL BETTIGOLE, MD, MPH**

- Commissioner for the Philadelphia Department of Public Health
- Adjunct Professor of Medical Ethics and Health Policy

**SANDRA BROOKS, MD, MBA**

- Former Chief Medical Officer, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital
- Former Executive Vice President, Chief Community Health Equity Officer, Thomas Jefferson University

**RAINA MERCHANT, MD, MSHP FAHA**

- Vice President and Chief Transformation Officer, University of Pennsylvania Health System
- Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine, University of Pennsylvania

**MARCY ROST**

- Former Executive Vice President, Chief Strategy and Communications Officer, Independence Blue Cross



# WHO WE ARE

## AHE staff

AHE operates through a Research and Administrative Hub housed at Penn Medicine, following the model set by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Policies for Action (P4A) program. Like P4A's Hubs, the AHE Hub works to develop, support, and manage the portfolio of AHE projects and partnerships focused on reducing and eliminating racial health disparities in Philadelphia.

The AHE Hub provides support ranging from administrative — convening the Steering Committee, project management, budget tracking, website updates, and communications — to direct research — directing research pilots and projects, data analysis, and academic publications — as well as producing calls for proposals and grants management. Meet our staff:



**ERICA DIXON, PHD**  
• Director



**ELISSA KLINGER, SM**  
• Director, Equity and Innovation



**JOSEPH HARRISON, MBDS**  
• Project Manager



**CHARLES RARESHIDE, MA**  
• Senior Data Analyst



**CHALANDA EVANS, MPH**  
• Assistant Director



**MELISSA BERKOWITZ, MPP MS**  
• Project Manager



**KALEY MALTZ, BA**  
• Communications and Engagement Manager



# the **AHE** conceptual model

AHE conducts research pilots and projects, performs city-wide analyses, maintains community partnerships, and provides funding for innovative research. All of our work centers around our conceptual model of health – this model acknowledges the complex interplay of factors affecting health and health equity, while centering our work on the understanding that systemic racism and discrimination impact all levels of health.

## 01

- Stress of living in a racist society
- Mental Health and social support

## 07

- Impact of COVID-19 on health
- Impact of COVID-19 on finances
- Discriminatory housing policies

## 02

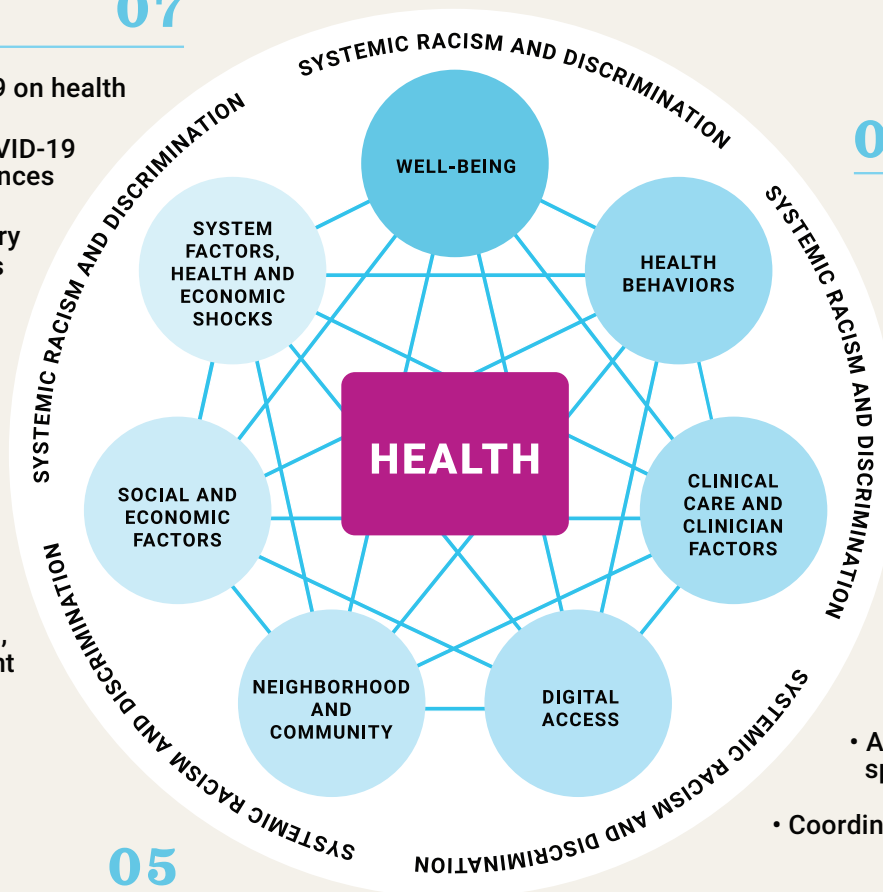
- Dietary nutrition
- Level of exercise
- Alcohol/tobacco consumption

## 06

- Housing instability, living conditions
- Access to education, employment

## 03

- Racism/discrimination in health care settings
- Access/referrals to specialty care
- Coordination of care



## 05

- Exposure to environmental toxins, violence
- Access to food, green spaces

## 04

- Access to health information/education
- Access to telemedical services



# AHE projects

Over the last year, AHE has been hard at work planting roots and developing pivotal health equity initiatives. We've launched several flagship projects, forged key partnerships, conducted research studies among patients and providers, and committed to providing small and large grant funding across a variety of focus areas. Take a look at our portfolio to date:



## research projects

AHE conducts rigorous and solutions-oriented research to dismantle racism and achieve health equity, with the goal of producing evidence-based insights that can be used to scale solutions across institutions and communities.

### Connecting ED Patients to Critical Financial Assistance

Topic tags:

#### Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Each year, more than **\$80 billion** in public benefits — including assistance with food, income, housing, and healthcare — goes unclaimed across the United States. Hospitals, specifically Emergency Departments (EDs), offer a novel opportunity to reduce financial stress for low-income patients and engage them regarding benefit eligibility.

AHE conducted patient surveys at two large, academic EDs in Philadelphia and found that most patients with public or no insurance were eligible for additional state and federal benefits — on average, ED patients were eligible for nearly four unclaimed benefits. 75% expressed interest in receiving help with benefit applications from a hospital-based team following their visit to the ED.

An upcoming randomized controlled trial, in partnership with Penn Medicine and Benefits Data Trust, will test whether a text message intervention can successfully connect ED patients to benefits navigators following discharge.

Partners:



Penn Medicine





## Improving Maternal Health Through SDoH Screenings

Topic tags:

### Maternal and Infant Health

Social determinants of health (SDoH) – such as financial resource strain, stress, and food insecurity – play critical roles in maternal morbidity and mortality, particularly for patients of color. Yet, incorporating SDoH screening into clinical workflow is complex, with unique challenges in the obstetric setting. To better understand stakeholder perspectives on how to effectively conduct SDoH screenings, AHE launched a qualitative study in the clinical setting.

Beginning in February 2023, AHE enrolled **15 healthcare personnel** – physicians, nurses, nurse-midwives, administrators, and social workers – and **15 patients** across five prenatal care sites associated with Penn Medicine. Results from this ongoing study may be used to design an evaluation of a wider implementation of SDoH screenings that can be integrated into the care of future patients and impact patient outcomes.

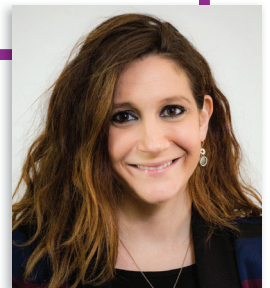
Partner:



Working with AHE has been an amazing experience; their dedication to maternal health equity, broad research skills, and teamwork has truly elevated this project and the voices of its participants. I know the product of this work will have a profound impact on how we care for prenatal patients with social barriers to care, and how we connect them to critical resources."

**Rebecca F. Hamm, MD, MSCE**

Assistant Professor, Maternal Fetal Medicine, University of Pennsylvania; Senior Fellow, Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, University of Pennsylvania; Vice-Chair, Patient Safety and Quality Committee, Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine





## community partnerships

AHE partners with community-based organizations and other institutions to help strengthen local infrastructure and increase community capabilities. Through these partnerships, AHE provides administrative resources, evaluation support, and strategic thought partnership.

“

Being part of the Well City Challenge has taught me the power of partnership. Meeting with established organizations that have successfully forged trusting relationships with youth and their families has helped me refine my vision for That Could Be Me® and ensure it embodies the voice of the community. It's so important to learn from who you intend to serve, and the phrase “seek first to understand, then to be understood” has stuck with me throughout the Challenge. This process has been one of co-creation and enduring partnership, which is such an amazing way to build something.”

**Derrick Tarver**

Executive Director of  
That Could Be Me Foundation



## Investing in Community Innovators and City-wide Solutions

Topic tags:

### Cardiovascular Health, Behavioral Health

A commitment to community engagement and partnership drives AHE's goals and priorities. In 2022, AHE began working with the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia (ELGP) to advise the **Well City Challenge 2.0 (WCC)**, a social impact program supporting local innovators with new ideas for healthcare solutions to overcome existing barriers to equitable care for Philadelphia's Black and Brown communities. This iteration of the challenge focuses on supporting community members with ideas and projects that target improvements to cardiovascular and mental health.

As partners and advisors, AHE helped to shape the challenge by co-facilitating listening sessions for community members and civic organizations across the city, and reviewed over **90 applications** submitted by residents of **46 unique zip codes in the greater Philadelphia area**. Of those applicants, 15 were chosen to enter the WCC incubator phase – AHE helped to mentor three teams to prepare them for the challenge's public pitch competition and advise them on how to center health equity in their proposed work.

Leaders from AHE made up a portion of the final selection panel where six finalists competed for the grand prize of **\$50,000**. The 2023 Well City Challenge winner, **TCBMe (That Could Be Me)**, is a wellness ecosystem tailored for Black and Brown youth. TCBMe uses technology to expand its reach and reimagine how culturally competent counseling expertise is codified, replicated, democratized to deliver services equitably. TCBMe initiatives include peer-to-peer social self-care, and a tech-driven variation on mental health first aid training.

Partners:



**Economy League**

GREATER PHILADELPHIA

POWERED BY

**Independence**



## Reducing Inequities in Colorectal Cancer Prevention

Topic tags:

### Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. In Philadelphia, non-Hispanic Black individuals face the highest rates of colorectal cancer mortality compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

**Cycles of Impact (COI)** – a partnership between Independence Blue Cross (Independence), AHE, Penn Medicine, and the Colorectal Cancer Alliance (CCA) formed in 2022 – is designed to address inequities by driving **5,000 completed screenings** for colorectal cancer in Black individuals ages 45 to 75 in Philadelphia. This initiative, provides patients with a full suite of wrap-around treatment and support services, in addition to supporting community partnerships, leading awareness campaigns, conducting research and evaluations, and providing colonoscopy referrals and wrap-around services.

The research arm of this initiative will evaluate the effectiveness of awareness campaigns in impacting screening behavior, changes in screening completion rates for Black populations in Philadelphia, the difference in screening completion rates among Black populations by insurance type, ZIP code, navigation modality, and time to colonoscopy after a positive screening.

Partners:





Our team designed the IGNITE intervention to address the multitude of layered mechanisms that generate persistent health disadvantages for Black Americans...with support from Independence Blue Cross, AmeriHealth Caritas, and Accelerate Health Equity, we are excited to bring the IGNITE Kids intervention to children and families across the city..."

**Dr. Aditi Vasan, MD, MSHP**

Attending Physician, Childrens Hospital of Philadelphia; Lead Investigator, IGNITE Kids Study



## Advancing Science in Child Health Equity Research

Topic tags:

### Neighborhood Conditions

Black children in the United States fare worse across nearly every health indicator, a disadvantage that starts before birth and results in stark racial gaps in child health and well-being – these disparities persist into adulthood. In Philadelphia, Black adults have higher rates of premature cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other health conditions, and face higher rates of community violence, poverty, as well as racism and discrimination in healthcare settings.

With support from Independence, AmeriHealth Caritas, and AHE, the **IGNITE** research team at the University of Pennsylvania was awarded **\$700,000** over two years to expand their ongoing research study – which examines the impact of significant concentrated investment on Black Philadelphians affected by structural racism – to include **480 school-age children**, with plans to contribute additional funding up to **\$1.5 million total**. This expansion, known as the IGNITE Kids study in partnership with Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, leverages and builds on the resources and infrastructure of the existing IGNITE study to significantly advance the science around child health equity.

IGNITE Kids was created with the idea that these interventions can have an impact on youth well-being, mental health, and academic performance of children of households receiving the intervention, and allows for the ability to evaluate this impact. This project, which will conclude in 2025, provides AHE and our partners the opportunity to gather evidence and test large-scale interventions that could be scaled across Philadelphia for maximum impact.

Partners:





## Combating Systemic Racism in Healthcare

Topic tags:

### Racism and Discrimination in Healthcare

In spring 2023, AHE was proud to partner with Penn Medicine on the submission of the “Patient-Oriented Research and Training to Accelerate Learning (PORTAL)” program for a P30 Center Core Grant – we anticipate funding due to strong scoring from the review panel.

The aims of PORTAL include:

- training diverse learning health system (LHS) scientists who are embedded in health system operations;
- catalyzing LHS research by building data resources and supporting scientists to complete the projects prioritized by our stakeholders;
- testing interventions among representative patient populations in several priority areas;
- and ensuring their equity before implementation across health systems.

AHE and PORTAL will work together to amplify opportunities for scholars in our region. These close ties will allow us to accomplish multiple mutually beneficial initiatives, including:

- providing PORTAL training opportunities throughout the AHE network;
- partnering on analytic and research studies, as well as sharing results of research studies on our Equity Dashboard;
- and learning from the Equity and Community Engagement core led by Penn Medicine’s Center for Health Equity Advancement.

Partner:



## Removing Barriers to Vital CPR Training

Topic tags:

### Cardiovascular Health

The Mobile CPR Project, a joint partnership between Independence and Penn Medicine, will seek to offer free CPR and AED training to communities with known low rates of bystander CPR training and delivery during cardiac arrest events in Philadelphia. This project seeks to remove barriers to training – including travel logistics and cost – by leading CPR training efforts at community centers, faith-based organizations, public libraries, and other locations within the communities.

Partners:





## city-wide analyses

AHE works to analyze the current state of healthcare access across the city of Philadelphia. These efforts help us to understand the racial disparities in healthcare journeys that impact health outcomes.



### Improving Equitable Access to Specialty Care

Topic tags:

**Behavioral Health, Cardiovascular Health, Maternal and Infant Health, Specialty Care Access**

Facilitating equitable access to specialty care is a key priority area for AHE. Utilizing claims data from January 2017 to December 2021 for Independence-insured patients in Philadelphia, AHE data analysts and researchers are analyzing patterns to better understand racial disparities in healthcare access. This includes condition screening, condition onset and diagnosis, referral to specialty care, and different types and timing of medical procedures and clinical care decisions. Additionally, there is a focus on healthcare journeys, with special attention on prenatal and maternity care, cardiology conditions, and mental and behavior health.

The results of this analysis will be used to identify targets for interventions aimed at reducing health disparities and improving equitable whole-person health. By understanding care pathways and pinpointing where members face inadequate care, we can design data-driven member outreach and engagement.

Partners:



## Supporting the Regional Coalition to Eliminate Race-based Medicine

Topic tags:

### Racism and Discrimination in Healthcare

Members of the Regional Coalition— many of which are part of AHE – will work together to remove race “adjustments” from 15 commonly used clinical decision support tools that may adversely impact patients’ outcomes. The group will work to phase out the use of race as a variable in some of the tools. They will also collaborate on alternative best practices that do not reinforce a biological understanding of race.

Clinical guidelines and clinical decision tools help doctors determine the best way to care for their patients. Race is, in some cases, still used as one of the variables in those tools even though it is not an objective biological trait. Using race as a variable can adversely influence the care a patient receives – it can also impact their outcomes. The Regional Coalition extends the work of AHE and drives further efforts across the Philadelphia region to combat systemic racism and barriers in healthcare.

“

The healthcare system has a legacy of treating race as a biological fact, rather than a social construct. As a result, race has inappropriately become a component of many clinical decision tools in use today. We need to address it now so that all patients, no matter their background, have the best possible health outcomes.”

**Dr. Seun Ross, DNP, MS, CRNP-F, NP-C**  
Executive Director, Health Equity,  
Independence Blue Cross



Partners:







## grant funding

AHE provides funding in Philadelphia to promote innovative research, elevate early-career investigators, and support community organizations in advancing health equity. Offering both small grants and larger awards allows us to invest in a variety of key initiatives that expand the breadth and depth of AHE's funding portfolio.



Looking Out for Kids removes an obstacle to those marginalized in our community and allows them to succeed academically. We are all aware that our Black and brown communities are most affected by this inequity – I will not let children in our community fail because of their vision.”

**Brandy Scombordi-Raghu, OD**

Director, School Vision Program, Salus University; Assistant Professor, Pennsylvania College of Optometry; Clinical Care Provider, Pediatrics and Binocular Vision Services and Emergency Services



## Supporting Early Childhood Vision Care in Philadelphia

Topic tags:

### Specialty Care Access

Early vision care is arguably the most essential basic service young school students require – the majority of scientific and education researchers agree that approximately 75 percent of learning is through vision.

Salus University's **Looking Out for Kids (LOFK)** program provides high-quality, free to low-cost services to under-insured, uninsured, and economically disadvantaged children in K-12 public schools in the Greater Philadelphia region. LOFK also provides high-quality supervised training for participating future optometric professionals.

With support from AHE's grant, LOFK will offer an array of quality vision care services, including vision screenings, comprehensive exams, and corrective lenses, for students at two public schools in low-income Philadelphia neighborhoods: General George Meade and Kennedy C. Crossan Elementary schools. In total, approximately **120 pairs of free glasses** will be distributed to students.

Recipient:





## Preventing Gun Violence Through Health System Interventions

Topic tags:

### Community Violence

Gun violence is a crisis in Philadelphia, and gun violence research is critical but underfunded. AHE believes gun violence is a health equity issue. In 2023, AHE launched its inaugural grants program to support innovative projects focused on the efficacy, outcomes, and scalability of health system-based interventions in Philadelphia.

Over \$350,000 was awarded to researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Jefferson Health, Penn Medicine, and Temple Health to support four one-year-long intervention programs and research projects ranging from secondary data analysis, community education intervention, and healthcare provider education intervention.

Recipients:



## Expanding Health Services for School District of Philadelphia High School Students

Topic tags:

### Behavioral Health, Specialty Care Access

Health Resource Centers provide health education, confidential counseling, health screenings, and referrals to social services for adolescents. In Philadelphia, Health Resource Centers are operated in **16 School District of Philadelphia (SDP) high schools**, through a longstanding partnership with AccessMatters and the SDP. Health Resource Centers are part of SDP's strategy to increase student access to health education and services. With support from AHE and other funders, AccessMatters, SDP, and the Philadelphia Department of Health have developed the Health Resource Centers+ model which expands the center's core services to include increased services such as behavioral health screening and counseling, and expanded reproductive health services.

Beginning in the Fall of 2023, this new model will be implemented in two high schools in Philadelphia. In addition to funding support, AHE will be facilitating a research evaluation partnership to help assess the impact of this model on students and their health.

Recipients:



Partner:



# AHE- affiliated projects

In addition to projects started and managed by AHE, our core partners are leading health equity initiatives at their respective institutions. Here are just a few highlights of AHE-affiliated projects across the city of Philadelphia:

## Providing Housing Security and Other Support to Improve Health Outcomes

Topic tags:

### Housing Access

Black Philadelphians experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness, and women of color experience the highest eviction rates and housing cost burden – the COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened these disparities.

Steven Carson, MHA, BSN, RN – Senior Vice President of Population Health at Temple Health and AHE Steering Committee member – and his team are at the helm of Housing Smart, a program that aims to improve the health of people experiencing homelessness by delivering stable housing and support services.

To qualify for Housing Smart, participants must be frequent utilizers of emergency rooms; have a chronic health condition, a serious mental illness, and/or a substance use disorder; and be experiencing homelessness. Participants are met where they are on their recovery journey and assisted in achieving (and maintaining) permanent supportive living.



## Fighting Food Insecurity

Topic tags:

### Food Access

In Philadelphia, access to healthy food varies widely by race and by neighborhood. Areas with disproportionately low numbers of healthy, high-produce stores and an overabundance of unhealthy, low-produce stores are concentrated in low-income neighborhoods, primarily affecting Black and Hispanic Philadelphians.

PCOM's mission is to educate health professionals to care for the whole person and advance the health of diverse communities. One way the institution is working toward that mission is by operating food pantries at three Healthcare Center locations: City Avenue, Lancaster Avenue, and West Cambria Street.

At each food pantry, families receive food bags intended to subsidize their food supply and last up to two weeks. For many living in food deserts, this is a critical lifeline to nutritious food. Since its launch, the initiative has distributed over 5,000 pounds of food to over 2,400 families.



## Achieving Equitable Health Outcomes for West Philadelphians

Topic tags:

**Food Access, Housing Access, Maternal & Infant Health, Primary Care Access, Racism & Discrimination in Healthcare, Socioeconomic Disadvantage**

**Together for West Philadelphia (TfWP)** is a nonprofit coalition that launched in 2018 with the goal of improving cross-sector collaboration around the social determinants of health. Their board represents many organizations and anchor institutions of West Philadelphia.

Fundamental to their work is a network of “Trusted Venues,” faith-based organizations and community schools that residents already turn to for support. From 2020-2022, TfWP piloted the Helping Hubs program. As Helping Hubs, Trusted Venues referred community residents to TfWP, and volunteer graduate students trained by TfWP partnered with residents to help them connect to existing resources that met their social needs.

Today, the organization is focused on supporting community leadership to address upstream, systemic sources of health disparities. TfWP facilitates communication between stakeholders who otherwise compete or never interact, positioning them to more effectively leverage the many assets of West Philadelphia.





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