



Helping Empower, Advocate, and Lead Through Health

Project HEALTH

Breaking the link between poverty and poor health

Project HEALTH works to break the link between poverty and poor health by mobilizing undergraduates to implement sustained public health interventions in partnership with urban medical centers, universities, and community organizations. Working closely with health professionals at our partner hospitals, our student volunteers devote more than 75,000 hours annually to community- and hospital-based programs designed to help poor children and their families address the broad spectrum of issues that determine health and well-being.

OUR APPROACH

Because the health and well-being of children depends on factors ranging from exercise and nutrition to medical care to housing and economic circumstances, Project HEALTH takes a holistic approach to intervention – providing individual solutions to the complex problems faced by the more than 7,000 underserved families we encounter yearly.

- Our help desks in hospital clinics connect the families of poor children with vital social services such as housing, food assistance, and medical insurance.
- Our after-school health programs for children with asthma, obesity, and diabetes provide the skills they need to better manage their diseases.
- Our enrichment programs for children with sickle cell disease and HIV help them overcome the social isolation and poor academic performance that often accompany those diseases.

Providing low-cost, high-impact interventions, Project HEALTH is transforming the lives of families, enabling physicians to treat the whole child, and creating a new generation of young people dedicated to community service.

BENEFITING FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND PARTICIPANTS

As a volunteer organization, Project HEALTH runs 23 programs for over 2,500 low-income families in Boston, MA; New York, NY; Providence, RI; Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; and Chicago, IL

- Families gain the resources necessary to improve their children's health and mitigate the health effects of poverty.
- Improved overall children's health reduces the strain on the health care system.
- The knowledge that social and economic determinants of health will be addressed empowers health care professionals to treat the whole child.



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- Social workers, knowing that help is available for the many routine cases they face, are freed to concentrate on more intensive cases.
- Our sustained community-based programs complement the efforts of communities and public service organizations hard pressed to meet all of the needs of poor families.
- Student volunteers acquire leadership skills, develop deep commitment to their communities, and exercise values that they carry back to their campuses and into their subsequent careers.

THE PROJECT HEALTH DIFFERENCE

The attributes that set Project HEALTH apart among community service programs, include:

- A health care focus that is unique among university-based community service programs, most of which are geared toward educational interventions
- A record of accomplishment over ten years, during which Project Health has expanded from a 10-member group on a single campus to a thriving program in five major urban areas.
- A holistic approach to the health and well-being of children that extends the scope of care available to them
- Mentoring of volunteers by health care and community service professionals
- “Reflection sessions” during which volunteers discuss and evaluate their work, learn from each other and their mentors, and deepen their commitment to public service

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Project HEALTH is powered by an inexhaustible resource: the successive waves of idealistic undergraduates who arrive on campus year after year looking for a meaningful way to have an impact on the community beyond the classroom. Admitted to the program through a competitive application process that ensures we send only the most committed, able, and sensitive people into the community, our volunteers have a profound impact on children’s lives. Conversely, the program has a profound impact on our volunteers, imbuing them with an ethic of public service that they carry with them for the rest of their lives.

OUR HISTORY

Project HEALTH was founded in February 1996 by ten Harvard University undergraduates as a pilot program in the Department of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center. Led by Harvard sophomore Rebecca Onie and Dr. Barry Zuckerman, Project HEALTH set out to confront barriers to proper health faced by low-income families and engage undergraduates in intense, entrepreneurial service.



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Between 1996 and 1998, Project HEALTH launched its first programs, including the Family Help Desk, Asthma Swimming Program, Girls Fitness and Nutrition Program, and STRIVE Sickle Cell Teen Group. The success of Project HEALTH in Boston captured the interest of both Lifespan, the medical group supporting Hasbro Children's Hospital, and students at Brown University. Together, they united to bring Project HEALTH to Providence, Rhode Island.

In September 1999, Project HEALTH brought together Harlem Hospital Center physicians and Columbia University undergraduates to serve the well-documented pediatric health needs of the Harlem community.

In July 2001, with the support of the Novartis U.S. Foundation, Project HEALTH established its fourth site in the nation's capital, partnering with George Washington University and the Children's National Medical Center.

In July 2006, Project HEALTH partnered with the Baltimore City Health Department, Baltimore HealthCare Access, Inc., Loyola College and Johns Hopkins University to bring a family help desk to the Johns Hopkins pediatric facility, the Harriet Lane Clinic.

HOSPITAL-BASED PROGRAMS

Situated in pediatric waiting rooms, neonatal units, adolescent medicine departments, and community health centers, our hospital-based programs include:

Family Help Desks serve over 2000 families per year at five sites. These clinic-based resource desks extend care into the waiting room by using the clinic as a point of intervention to assist families in navigating complex systems, overcoming barriers, gaining access to community resources, including food, housing, job training, child care, and fuel assistance.

Advocating Success for Kids (ASK) pairs volunteers with individual families and works closely with pediatricians, educators, social workers, and psychologists on staff to implement steps towards a child's success in the Boston Public Schools.

Project Baby provides information and advocacy for families of the 2,000 babies born in Boston Medical Center's Birth Place every year, connecting families with housing, food, health insurance, cash assistance, and child care; providing information on specific newborn needs; educating families about breast feeding; and developing relationships with families in order to follow up after the mother and child's hospital visit.

The Adolescent Resource Center (ARC) connects adolescents in the Boston Medical Center Adolescent Center with information about child care, job training, cash assistance, health insurance, housing, food, sexually-transmitted diseases, birth control, and parenting. ARC volunteers provide the teens particular support in accessing college admissions materials, financial aid information, and college preparatory assistance through the Count on College initiative.



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The Women's Resource Center, located at the OB-GYN clinic of Boston Medical Center, serves a diverse group of primarily low-income women ranging from pregnant teens to seasoned grandmothers and seeks to improve the broadly-defined health of women and their families through information, referral services, and support and advocacy on issues ranging from housing to child care to health insurance.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Partnering with urban community centers, Project HEALTH in collaboration, with physicians, educators, families, and community leaders helps provide afterschool programs for children with chronic health conditions. These community-based programs are designed to help children take control of their health through education, one-on-one mentoring relationships, and physical exercise:

Asthma Swim addresses the leading cause of ER visits, hospital admissions, and school absenteeism among children by helping children better manage their disease, build lung capacity through swimming, and compensate for missed school through intensive academic assistance.

Girls Fit/Nut provides a fitness and nutrition program for preadolescent overweight or obese girls that helps them incorporate safe exercise into their daily activity; explore appealing and culturally-sensitive food options while focusing on the elements of a balanced diet; and build self-esteem through one-on-one mentoring relationships with volunteers.

Boys Sport/Nut, modeled on Girls Fit/Nut, provides preadolescent boys who are overweight or inactive with a variety of fitness activities and opportunities to explore improved nutrition and benefit from both one-on-one mentoring and peer support as they work to change lifestyle habits.

Girls Diabetes is designed to reintegrate children with this chronic medical condition into their communities by providing them with peer support, disease management skills, and, ultimately, self-confidence – results that could not be accomplished in a doctor's office.

STRIVE provides intensive mentoring, peer relationships, and individual tutoring for children with sickle cell disease to mitigate the personal, social, and academic struggles that these children face as a result of the frequent hospitalizations that attend their condition.

Ujima, which means “collective work and responsibility,” works within Harlem Hospital's Family Care Center, a comprehensive clinic for HIV-positive youth and their families, to provide peer group activities, mentoring, and academic support for adolescents infected and affected by HIV.