

Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence

Executive Summary | Impact Report 2021

We are delighted to share our annual impact report on the work of the Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence, a formal partnership between the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Rutgers School of Public Health.

Established in 2019 and guided by our mission, vision, and 2019–2025 Strategic Plan, the Center has undertaken an ambitious mix of strategies and activities focused on achievements supporting five pillar goals. Advances made in 2021 are yielding transformative results that will impact awareness, prevention, and care for years to come.

Pillar 1: Structure

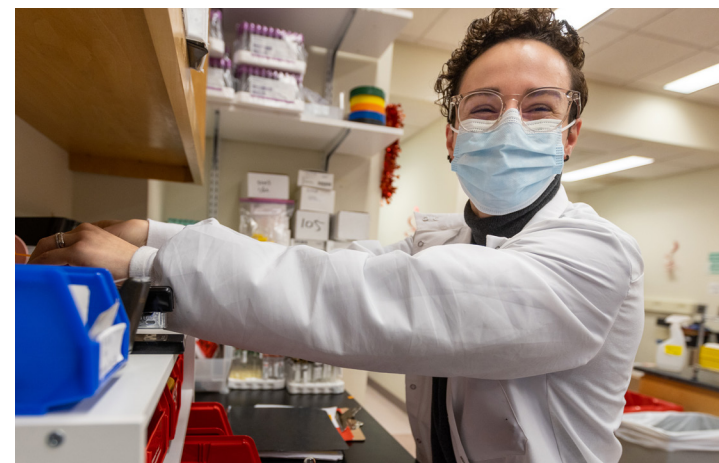
In 2021, the Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence continued to strengthen its foundation and grow its resources to better serve New Jersey communities. Officially designated a “Center of Excellence” by Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, funding increased from \$5 million to \$7 million, thanks to enhanced support from the New Jersey Department of Health for the [ScreenNJ](#) program. These funds also enabled an expansion of staff to carry out ScreenNJ’s cancer screening and risk reduction work, including a new statewide patient navigation team. Meanwhile, the Center’s membership—researchers, healthcare practitioners, educators, community stakeholders, and community outreach professionals—increased by 28%. And new communications and marketing materials were created to support visibility and awareness efforts.

Pillar 2: Research

The Center fosters interdisciplinary, [community-engaged research](#) addressing New Jersey cancer priorities and cancer health equity in populations suffering disproportionate cancer burdens. To support its robust research activities, in 2021 the Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence created the powerful [STRIDE](#) data and visualization platform. [Disparities-focused cancer health research](#) was supported by grants totaling more than \$500,000, awarded by the Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence to 11 investigators for projects ranging from triple-negative breast cancer disparities to the patient/caregiver dyad. In addition, programs sparking results-oriented exchange of knowledge and ideas around research included four “Works in Progress” meetings; a forum for researchers; Community Scientist input on grant applications; and the new Science Cafés program, bringing together researchers and community members.

Pillar 3: Education & Training

The Center strengthens the ability of professionals and volunteers to promote cancer health equity—from post-secondary students to faculty and public health practitioners. In 2021, the Center continued to implement innovative [Project ECHO®](#) initiatives, using this proven tele-mentoring approach to improve patient care outcomes. The Center was designated an ECHO Hub, and completed the first Spanish-language ECHO program of its kind. A Center-organized retreat facilitated collaborations



Mission

Advance the achievement of equitable access, improved health care quality, and better outcomes across the cancer continuum—prevention, early detection, treatment, survivorship, and end-of-life care—through:

- Research
- Education and training
- Community outreach and engagement
- Public policy advocacy





Vision

Be the leading center in the nation for achieving cancer health equity, improving the quality of cancer care, and reducing the cancer burden.



between researchers and community members, and a distinguished lecturer series featured six speakers who provided diverse perspectives on cancer health equity research. The first cohort of Rutgers Cancer Institute-certified [Community Scientists](#) graduated—prepared for participation in research proposal reviews, research advisory committees, and scientific review boards. A second cohort is in training.

Pillar 4: Community Outreach and Engagement

The Center’s dedicated Community Outreach and Engagement team spans New Jersey, promoting bi-directional, meaningful participation in the design and implementation of education, research, and dissemination of information supporting cancer prevention and control. In 2021, this work vastly improved cancer screening access for colorectal and lung cancer—above and beyond set goals; expanded partnerships to 137 organizations, with 215 clinical and community partner sites statewide; established a Latino Advisory Council for the New Brunswick community; grew the Center’s Nurse Navigator network to 124 members promoting lung cancer screenings; and brought researchers and cancer health equity thought leaders together for two Community Cancer Action Board meetings where they shared vital information about breast cancer care of Black women and biorepository/biobanking consent.

Pillar 5: Policy

The Center advocates for local, state, and national policy rooted in evidence-based approaches to achieving cancer health equity. In 2021, impact at the state level included collaboration with the Rutgers Center for State Health Policy to analyze cancer screening data and produce a policy report—

[Trends in Cancer Screening Among Medicaid Enrollees in NJ: 2011–2017](#)—revealing that cancer screening rates in New Jersey are lowest for Medicaid recipients, with wide geographic variation in disparities. And the *New Jersey Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan* was developed by the Cancer Health Equity Center of Excellence’s leadership and members in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Health and community stakeholders across the state. At the national level, it was my pleasure to present at the American Cancer Society’s *Future of Cancer Care* forum about how health equity can be advanced via cancer policy.

My deepest gratitude and respect to our community partners, staff, and faculty for their dedication and expertise, that continues to have a positive, measurable impact throughout New Jersey and beyond.

Sincerely,

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