



UD PARTNERSHIP FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PRESENTS:

YEAR IN REVIEW 2026



2025-2026

— YEAR IN REVIEW —

Presented by Partnership for Healthy Communities

Director's Letter

The past year has been a very busy one for the Partnership for Healthy Communities! We have brought on many new partners focused on a variety of public health issues including improving chronic disease advocacy and care and preventing gun violence. We welcome you to read on to find out more about our work in this Year in Review.

Several of the Partnership's core projects continue to progress. Alongside the Delaware Division of Public Health and Healthy Communities Delaware, work continues on the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan or SHIP. This year, through Community Conversations focused on the five priority health outcomes – avoidable injury, chronic disease, maternal and infant health, mental health, and premature death – the SHIP's "crew" has engaged with more than 70 coalition stakeholders.

The Partnership continues its involvement with the University's Public Health Program, which now includes a newly approved Bachelor of Science in Public Health. A key strength of our Public Health Program is the ongoing engagement from Partnership for Healthy Communities Steering Committee, which also serves as the Public Health Program's Advisory Committee. We thank all the members for their input on our curriculum, our practicum placements, and the key professional skills our students need to enter the public health workforce and we look forward to sharing more with you about this new undergraduate program.

With all that is happening, we continue to focus on meaningful engagement and support with our community partners. Ensuring our work is reciprocal and grounded in giving back to partners is key for the Partnership's long-term goal: healthy, thriving communities for all Delawareans through service-learning, scholarship, and research. As always, if you are looking for engagement or partnership, please reach out to us on LinkedIn or contact Kate Culhane-Suluai directly at kcsuluai@udel.edu.

In partnership,

Jennifer Horney, PhD, MPH, CPH
Director, Partnership for Healthy Communities
University of Delaware College of Health Sciences



**Partnership for
Healthy Communities**
A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Contact: [LinkedIn](#) | [Website](#) | Email: phc-info@udel.edu

Inside, we also talk about...

As we look back on another year of progress at Partnerships for Healthy Communities (PHC), we're proud to share the partnerships, programs, and people driving positive change across Delaware.

From innovative research and education to community engagement and collaborative action, these stories reflect our shared commitment to advancing health equity and improving the well-being of communities throughout the state. Thank you for being part of this journey as we celebrate another year of impact and look ahead to the opportunities still to come.

Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



UD Partnership for Healthy Communities

By: Gracie Stapleton
Health Behavior Science Student, University of Delaware

My name is Gracie Stapleton, I am a senior Health Behavior Science major with a concentration in Disability Studies at the University of Delaware. Since February, I have had the opportunity to complete a practicum internship with the UD Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC). Through this experience, I have gained valuable insight to the importance of community based public health and the impact collaboration has on improving health outcomes across Delaware.

One of the most meaningful parts of my internship was leading and presenting a “Choose Your Own Health” activity at the Spotlight Delaware Health Care Summit in April. This interactive project explored chronic disease, maternal health, behavioral health, and rural health management and allowed participants to follow different healthcare decisions and outcomes based on real barriers individuals face. The goal of the activity was to help participants better understand how social determinants of health and healthcare systems influence a person’s health outcomes.

Working on this project strengthened my ability to communicate public health concepts in an readily accessible way. I enjoyed combining creativity with research to develop an activity that was easily digestible and encouraged discussion on healthcare systems. Seeing participants interact with the project and reflect on how policy, access, and support systems affect health outcomes was rewarding. It showed me the importance of making public health education interactive, relatable, and community centered.

Throughout my practicum experience, I also gained a greater appreciation for the work that goes into building healthier communities. I had the opportunity to collaborate with professionals who are passionate about improving health equity and addressing community needs across Delaware. This experience helped me better understand the importance of community engaged work and how collaborative partnerships can advance health equity and improve the wellbeing of communities across Delaware.

As someone interested in epidemiology and disability advocacy, this experience reinforced my passion for improving health outcomes through education, prevention, and community collaboration. After graduation, I plan to complete the University of Delaware’s Master of Public Health program with a concentration in Epidemiology. I hope to continue working in public health to help create more equitable and accessible healthcare systems for communities across Delaware and beyond.

**Supervisor Note: Katlyn Culhane-Suluai, MPS
Program Manager, Partnership for Healthy
Communities at University of Delaware**



Gracie brought so much enthusiasm and creativity to her practicum experience. She was always willing to take on a new challenge and approached each opportunity with a positive attitude and genuine interest in the work. Her ‘Choose Your Own Health’ project was a great example of her ability to think creatively while making important public health concepts accessible and engaging. It was a pleasure to have Gracie as part of our team and to see the thoughtful contributions she made during her time with PHC.



Stronger Together: Expanding Access for Delaware's LGBTQ+ Community

By: Matt Castrina
Program Manager, CAMP Rehoboth



When organizations committed to equity unite, they create more than a single day of service – they expand access, build trust, and strengthen communities. For the past two years, the University of Delaware's Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC), Delaware Technical Community College's Georgetown Campus, and CAMP Rehoboth, an LGBTQ+ community center serving Southern Delaware and beyond, have partnered to host Empowered Futures: Legal & Healthcare Readiness Day in Georgetown, Delaware. Designed specifically for the LGBTQ+ community, over the two years, this free event has served over 100 individuals in southern Delaware by offering a safe, affirming space to complete essential legal and healthcare documents—like healthcare proxies and advance directives—while connecting participants with over 20 supportive community resources here in Delaware.

The work of Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC) is aligned with why CAMP Rehoboth got started – to Create A More Positive (CAMP) environment for all. Events like the Legal & Healthcare Readiness Day and joining PHC for other on and off campus events allows LGBTQ+ individuals to learn about affirming resources and providers that accept and support them as they are. That access and information is important throughout Delaware and particularly important to southern Delaware where the level of growth of services is struggling to match the growth in population.

A big thank you to Kate Culhane-Suluai for their incredible leadership and collaboration on the events. Needless to say we are looking forward to more collaboration and in particular the next Readiness Day here in Sussex County!



Healthy Communities Delaware

By: Kate Dupont Phillips, MPH, CHES, PAPHS
Executive Director, Healthy Communities Delaware and Senior Advisor of Strategy & Impact, Delaware Community Foundation



A person's overall well-being is shaped largely by the communities where they live, learn, work, and play. The “Vital Conditions” are properties that communities all need, all the time, to ensure that everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.

Healthy Communities Delaware (HCD) is a statewide initiative managed collaboratively by the Delaware Community Foundation, University of Delaware Partnership for Healthy Communities and the Delaware Division of Public Health. Since its launch in 2019, HCD has brought together community leaders, residents, and funding partners to advance health and well-being across Delaware through investments in Vital Conditions such as humane housing, a thriving natural environment, and health and safety. In Fiscal Year 2026, HCD invested over \$2.3 million in twelve of Delaware's most underserved neighborhoods through partners such as Habitat for Humanity of New Castle County and Milford Housing Development Corporation.

“We believe that sustained, strategic funding around the Vital Conditions can help to build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive,” said HCD Executive Director Kate Dupont Phillips. “This investment directly empowers resident-led solutions organized by communities that lays the foundation for lasting, generational change in Delaware.” HCD collaborates with investors such as Nemours, Capital One and Corteva to increase philanthropic impact.

Beyond the Classroom: DPT Students Contribute Nearly 3,000 Hours of Service to the Greater Delaware Community

By: Terrence McGee, Department of Physical Therapy, University of Delaware

When Doctor of Physical Therapy students at the University of Delaware (UDPT) step outside the classroom, the learning does not stop. It changes direction. Skills practiced in lab become instinct in practice, as they work alongside members of the community.

Across the Class of 2026, that pattern repeated itself often. The cohort contributed to 2,969 hours of service across 20 activities spanning adaptive athletics, stroke rehabilitation, limb loss care, falls prevention screening, and undergraduate mentorship over their two years in the program.

A Program Built On Breath

UDPT's service-learning program is not organized around a single event or population. It spans a range of community engagement: general volunteerism, promoting the profession of physical therapy, and promotion of primary and secondary prevention in health and wellness.

Adaptive athletics drew the largest participation, with 26 students working directly with athletes with physical disabilities as training partners and exercise coaches. Several described using motivational interviewing skills before they had formally studied the technique.

"I found myself using motivational interviewing without even knowing it," one student said. "I was asking people questions about how they could incorporate exercise into their daily life, and I was doing it instinctively, from the experience, before we ever covered it in class."

Ten students rotated through the Limb Loss Clinic, nine took part in the SMASH stroke rehabilitation study, and nine served as mentors through the Undergraduate Mentorship Program. Seven joined Amputee Soccer, six participated in Fun Fitness and Special Olympics, and six engaged in health advocacy and profession-promotion outreach.

Learning in Reverse

A consistent theme in student reflections was that service-learning reversed the usual order of instruction. Experience came first. Classroom framework followed. Students who worked in the Limb Loss Clinic before the topic appeared in their coursework described a distinct advantage once it did.

"Doing it first with no formal knowledge was useful to see firsthand," one student said. "Then when we learned it in class, it was much easier to understand. I already knew what they meant and why it mattered."

(Continued) That sequence, experience first and theory second, showed up across programs. Psychosocial coursework became more concrete after supporting the adaptive athletics program. Rehabilitation principles that had seemed abstract made sense after twelve weeks working alongside a stroke survivor in SMASH.

A Shift in Perspective

The learning students described was not only technical. Reflections also pointed to a change in how students understood capacity, community, and the scope of service itself. In adaptive athletics programs, students described entering with one set of assumptions about capability and leaving with a different one. In SMASH, students who built rapport with a single participant over several months said the relationship itself was the primary lesson: consistency, communication across difference, and treating each participant as a whole person navigating a complex recovery.

"The biggest thing I took away was communication with different groups of people," one student said. "Working with someone you haven't had exposure to before, you learn to treat them as a person and to feel comfortable, because that can be genuinely challenging when you haven't had that experience."

For some, the experience broadened their definition of service altogether.

"Initially, I viewed service primarily as direct patient care," one student wrote. "But these experiences showed me that mentorship, education, and community engagement are also essential aspects of professional service within physical therapy."

Shaping the Clinician

The program's clearest long-term outcome may be in how students describe the clinicians they intend to become.

"These experiences reinforced the importance of approaching rehabilitation holistically," one student noted. "Physical therapy extends beyond exercises and treatment sessions. It involves building relationships, supporting behavior change, and helping individuals integrate movement into meaningful aspects of their lives."

The mentorship programs produced a related finding: students who did not see themselves as teachers discovered that they were.

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"I never thought mentoring was something I would enjoy. I didn't think I was capable of it," one student said. "But once I tried it, I realized how rewarding it was. Once I have my own skills established, I want to be able to pass them on."

What the Community Received

The communities served by these students received trained observers conducting falls risk screenings, practicum aides supporting outpatient clinics, walking partners accompanying stroke survivors, and mentors guiding students earlier in their educational path toward the profession. Across 20 programs and nearly 3,000 hours, that is the clearest measure of what this program produces: students who are applying their training before they graduate, and communities that benefit from it now.

Community Partnership Spotlight: Exploring Nintendo Switch e-Bowling for Healthy Aging

By: Beth Orsega-Smith, PhD,
Professor, Department of Health Behavior and Nutrition Science

During Summer 2025, University of Delaware faculty members Drs. Beth Orsega-Smith, Greg Dominick, and Nancy Getchell partnered with Howard Weston Senior Center to explore the feasibility and acceptability of using the Nintendo Switch as the next generation platform for electronic bowling (e-bowling). The project engaged undergraduate student researchers Kamari Lewis (McNair Scholar) and Samantha Papili (Undergraduate Summer Scholar), and PhD student Serena Schade in community-based research focused on healthy aging and technology.

Howard Weston Senior Center currently participates in the Northern Delaware Wii Bowling League. With the Nintendo Wii no longer in production, senior center leadership recognized the need to transition to the Nintendo Switch platform while maintaining the social and physical benefits of league play.

Twenty-two older adults (mean age = 75.7 years) participated in 4 weekly Nintendo Switch bowling sessions over the summer. Student researchers served as coaches and technology guides, helping participants learn the new gaming system while fostering teamwork and socialization while providing encouragement. Following the program, participants shared their experiences through focus groups and interviews.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Participants described the experience as enjoyable, easy to learn, and an opportunity to build friendships and stay active. As exemplified by quotes from participants, "it's nice to get out, to have other people doing the same stuff that you enjoy" and "I enjoy the social aspect of it...I also played a lot of sports before I got ill. So I'm real competitive. I enjoy the game itself." Most expressed interest in continuing Nintendo Switch bowling at the senior center, while several requested additional training to become confident using the system independently.

This partnership demonstrates how community-engaged research supports healthy aging by combining technology, physical activity, and social connection. The findings will inform the development of future training programs that empower older adults to confidently adopt emerging technologies while sustaining participation in community-based e-bowling programs.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

By: Jordan Myrick
Health Behavior Science Student, University of Delaware

My experience this semester as an intern with the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) team and the Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC) has been tremendously rewarding. In terms of professional development, I have had multiple opportunities to gain experience and skills in health promotion, policy, and research that will be valuable in my future career as a public health professional. For example, through my work developing a legislative scan, I learned more about health policy and how it both reflects and influences the health needs of a population. While writing a report on the health of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Delaware, I exercised epidemiology and data analysis skills and studied disparities in health status between different populations within the state. Through my interactions with community organizations and advocates in the SHIP coalition, I have broadened my knowledge of health issues affecting Delawareans and current strategies in place to address these issues.

In addition to fostering my professional development, my internship experience with the SHIP and PHC has also influenced my desired academic and educational paths. Prior to my internship, I knew I was interested in pursuing graduate studies in epidemiology. However, I was still uncertain about how I could tailor my experience to better align with my interests in topics like health equity and social justice. Through this internship, I was introduced to a variety of organizations that match my interests, and connecting with these organizations to seek out employment, volunteer, or extracurricular activities is one strategy I can use to create a graduate education more reflective of my interests. As mentioned previously, my internship with the SHIP also gave me the opportunity to learn more about the health status of populations within Delaware. As a graduate student, I can expand on some of the research I began during my internship to further design my graduate education in a way that matches my goals.

Finally, I believe that my experience with the SHIP and PHC has encouraged my growth as a person. During coalition meetings and community conversations, I was able to gain insight into the perspectives and needs of individuals with

Finally, I believe that my experience with the SHIP and PHC has encouraged my growth as a person. During coalition meetings and community conversations, I was able to gain insight into the perspectives and needs of individuals with backgrounds different from my own. I feel that I now have a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of populations in Delaware, and I am committed to learning more. Throughout my internship experience, I often gained a sense of fulfillment from being able to create and share resources that could be used by actual community members. I enjoyed working with a team of individuals who are dedicated to engaging communities through discussion and public awareness, and I learned a lot about how community-engaged work can allow for the development of relevant and sustainable health promotion initiatives and plans. In the future, I hope to model the SHIP team's commitment to advancing health for all Delaware communities in my own career.

Supervisor Note: Alexandra Wynn, PhD
Postdoctoral Researcher
Program in Epidemiology, UD College of Health Sciences
Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

"Hosting students are central to the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan, which emphasizes engaging communities that live, learn, and work in Delaware. Jordan Myrick, an incoming MPH student, took on one of SHIP's major projects by reviewing over 1200 legislative acts introduced by the 153rd Delaware General Assembly from 2024 to 2026. During her internship with SHIP, Jordan's work was essential, as this legislative review helps assess Delaware's progress in health and wellness and informs organizational programming based on current state policies."



Year Four of the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) 2025 - 2026

By: Alexandra Wynn, PhD, Jamie Kananen, MPH, and Yendelela Cuffee, PhD, MPH

The Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) is a five-year strategic plan to address Delaware's priority health issues. The SHIP internal team is led through a collaboration with the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Division of Public Health (DPH), the University of Delaware (UD) Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC), the UD Department of Epidemiology, and the SHIP Partnership Coalition. The Coalition consists of stakeholders from organizations across the state, representing every domain of the Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being Framework.

As of July 2026, the Coalition has over 150 members and represents 70 organizations in Delaware. The goal of the SHIP is to define objectives and strategies for five key health priorities identified through a State Health Assessment (SHA): mental health, chronic disease, maternal and infant health, avoidable injury, and premature death. Since the publication of the SHIP in April 2025, the internal team has collaborated with the SHIP Partnership Coalition to implement and continually refine the strategies outlined in the SHIP. Since Coalition members and organizations are the active implementers of SHIP strategies, the SHIP internal team aims to support stakeholders through capacity building, public health messaging, knowledge and resource sharing, and advocacy.

From 2025–2026, the SHIP team and Coalition worked to design action plans to further define how to advance the objectives and track progress for meeting the objectives. Year four of the SHIP was a direct reflection of how public health partnerships, such as the Coalition, and public health strategic plans can help reduce Delaware's health disparities by focusing on community engagement and the de-fragmentation of our current systems.



SHIP Initiatives

The SHIP has several accomplishments from year four to highlight. SHIP led a speaker series and published several workbooks and reports that aid Coalition members in advancing their goals and, in turn, the SHIP's health goals. Some of the SHIP initiatives include:

- Speaker Series:

- The SHIP Coalition convenes bimonthly and quarterly, with members collaborating to reach shared health goals. Each meeting features a guest speaker, and the SHIP team appreciates the Delaware Division of Libraries, Rural Health Coalition, Wilmington University, Healthy Communities Delaware, End Community Violence Now (ECVN), Community Health Advocacy Mobilization Group (CHAMG), the American Diabetes Association (ADA), and the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) for their participation as speakers during year four.

- Legislation Scan:

- Jordan Myrick, an incoming UD MPH student and SHIP intern, created a legislative scan in Excel that analyzed over 1200 legislative acts for their alignment with the Vital Conditions for Health and Well-being during the legislative session from January to June 2026. This tool aims to be a comprehensive resource for advocates and community organizations to better understand health policy, craft initiatives and programs aligned with state policy, and gauge political progress toward health and well-being goals.

- A Comparative Analysis of Maternal and Infant Health Programs:

- Athena Bruess, a second-year UD MPH student and SHIP intern, conducted a comparative analysis of state-level maternal and infant programs across Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. The main purpose of this report was to identify strategies, program models, and funding sources to enhance Delaware's maternal and infant health efforts.

- Community Data Resource Guide:

- Jamie Kananen, MPH, created a SHIP community data resource guide to aid Coalition organizations in finding relevant state data sets for understanding community health and wellness. This guide includes background information, highlights key data categories and measures, and provides publication dates, data source timelines, links to the latest data, and access to archived reports.

Year Four of the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) 2025 - 2026

By: Alexandra Wynn, PhD, Jamie Kananen, MPH, and Yendelela Cuffee, PhD, MPH

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- Evidence-Based Workbook for Community Health and Well-Being:
 - Developed in collaboration with the Community Health Advocacy Mobilization Group (CHAMG) and Elena Lynn, a second-year UD MPH student and SHIP intern, this workbook offers resources for community-based organizations (CBOs) to identify evidence-based programs or interventions that can enhance health and wellness within their communities. It includes strategies focused on specific topics, examples of successful community interventions, and literature and reviews on promoting health and wellness.
- Delaware's Firearm Violence Data Infrastructure:
 - Dr. Wynn, lead of the SHIP, worked with ECVN to produce a commentary published in the Delaware Journal of Public Health in March 2026. The commentary aimed to acknowledge firearm violence as a public health issue, describe the scope of firearm violence here in Delaware, and advocate for a standardized, statewide data system to address firearm violence effectively.

SHIP Annual Report

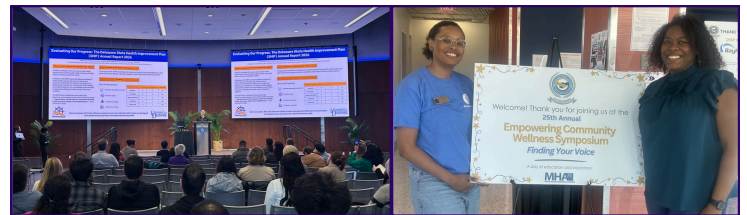
In addition to the SHIP programming, the SHIP team is preparing the SHIP Annual Report for release at the end of 2026. The Annual Report will provide an update on the original SHIP indicators, showcasing our progress towards achieving our objectives, identifying gaps in achieving our overarching priority health outcome goals, and efforts to refine the original strategies.

The 2025 SHIP report originally listed 42 objectives. Out of these, 12 showed measurable progress, and six achieved their targets. Three objectives stayed the same, while 15 declined. Data for six objectives is currently unavailable. Objective performance by priority health outcome is as follows:

- Mental Health — 0 out of 5 (0%) objectives improved and/or were met.
- Chronic Disease — 8 out of 15 (53%) objectives improved and/or were met.
- Maternal and Infant Health — 3 out of 6 (50%) objectives improved and/or were met.
- Avoidable Injury — 4 out of 11 (36%) objectives improved and/or were met.
- Premature Death — 3 out of 5 (60%) objectives improved and/or were met.

There was varied progress across priority health outcomes. Mental Health and Avoidable Injury emerged as

the priority that requires the most attention over the remainder of the SHIP cycle. Premature Death (substance use) and Chronic Disease demonstrated the greatest progress according to objective performance. This reflects Delaware's strategic focus and dedication to prevention and treatment through care coordination, health navigation, mobile services, harm-reduction efforts, and education. For more information about the upcoming Annual Report, read the SHIP's recent article titled "[Promoting Healthier Communities Through the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan](#)" in the Delaware Journal of Public Health, published in May 2026.



SHIP Community Conversations

From April to June 2026, the SHIP team collaborated with several partners across the state to conduct six community conversations (hybrid sessions). The aim of the community conversations was to facilitate open, inclusive discussions about Delaware's health strengths and key challenges. The SHIP team discussed findings from the 2022–2023 State Health Assessment (SHA) and the SHIP priority health outcomes. To further advance health outcomes, the SHIP team asked attendees whether the priorities reflected their needs, what was missing, and how they would address the issues they identified. The SHIP will use this information to further guide strategies and implementation efforts on behalf of the Coalition. Thank you to the following locations and partners:

- April
 - Kent County: Student population at Delaware State University (DSU; Dover)
 - New Castle County: LGBTQIA+ population at the Route 9 Library in partnership with the University of Delaware Pride Caucus (New Castle)
- May
 - New Castle County: Disability community at the Freedom Center for Independent Living (Middletown)
 - Sussex County: Senior population at the Rural Innovation Hub in partnership with the Rural Health Coalition (Georgetown)
- June
 - Kent County: Housing-insecure community at Neighborgood Partners (Dover).

Year Four of the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) 2025 - 2026

By: Alexandra Wynn, PhD, Jamie Kananen, MPH, and Yendelela Cuffee, PhD, MPH

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- Sussex County: Veteran population at the Laurel Public Library in Collaboration with American Legion Post 17 in Lewes, Delaware, and CAMP Rehoboth (Laurel)

A total of 66 individuals attended the SHIP community conversations. Despite targeting specific communities, several themes emerged across all community conversations. The following core issues emerged:

1. **Access to Care and Healthcare Workforce Capacity:** provider shortages, long wait times, fragmented systems of care, and inadequate culturally responsive services
2. **Mental and Behavioral Health:** increasing the behavioral health workforce, expanding substance use prevention and treatment, improving suicide prevention, reducing stigma, and integrating behavioral health into primary and emergency care
3. **Social Determinants of Health:** transportation, housing instability, food insecurity, employment security, environmental health, language accessibility
4. **Prevention, Health Education, and Health Literacy:** nutrition, healthy relationships, HIV prevention, and maternal and infant health
5. **Community Partnerships and Social Connection:** increasing cross-sector collaboration, peer support groups, and mobile and community-based services.
6. **Inclusive, Person-Centered Care:** expanding culturally responsive care, LGBTQIA+ affirming, disability-informed, trauma-informed, and whole-person care.
7. **Service Navigation and Care Coordination:** enhancing centralized resource hubs, community health workers, referral systems, and public awareness of services

Please see the upcoming annual report for an in-depth review of all community conversations

Visit the SHIP's website (www.delawareship.org) to access meeting recordings, minutes, presentations, and the SHA/SHIP reports. You will also find news related to the Vital Conditions for Health and Wellbeing framework, along with ongoing basic needs resources such as food pantries, mobile health vans, and housing resources in all three counties of Delaware. If you are interested in becoming a Coalition member, contact Info@DelawareSHIP.org.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences

Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

By: Catlynn Senquíz, MS
University of Delaware Graduate, Health Promotion '26

During my Spring Independent Study, I had the opportunity to work with the Delaware SHIP (State Health Improvement Plan) team through the Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC). Serving primarily as a Communications and Implementation Coordinator, I supported a variety of projects focused on community engagement, coalition collaboration, and health equity initiatives across Delaware. This experience allowed me to strengthen both my professional and interpersonal skills while gaining a deeper understanding of public health work at the community level.

Throughout the semester, I maintained communication efforts and relationships with SHIP Coalition members, helped manage the SHIP website, and created materials for coalition meetings including presentations, agendas, and notetaking documents. I also continued leading the SHIP social media platforms on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, helping increase engagement and expand outreach to over 350 LinkedIn followers, 680 Facebook followers, and almost 300 Instagram followers. In addition, I developed deliverables for tabling events, coalition collaboration projects, and public engagement initiatives. Another major part of my work involved supporting the SHIP Community Conversations, where we engaged directly with populations of focus across Delaware, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, seniors, students, and individuals with disabilities. These conversations emphasized the importance of listening to communities and ensuring that public health initiatives are informed by the voices and experiences of those most impacted. Through this work, I gained a stronger understanding of health equity and how to create inclusive and accessible spaces for community input and collaboration.

One of the most meaningful experiences during my independent study was attending my first professional conference, Campus Compact 2026, in Chicago alongside PHC Program Manager Kate Culhane-Suluai. Together, we represented the Delaware SHIP on a national scale by presenting our breakout session, "Pollinators in Action: Building Bridges Through Delaware's State Health Improvement Plan." This opportunity strengthened my

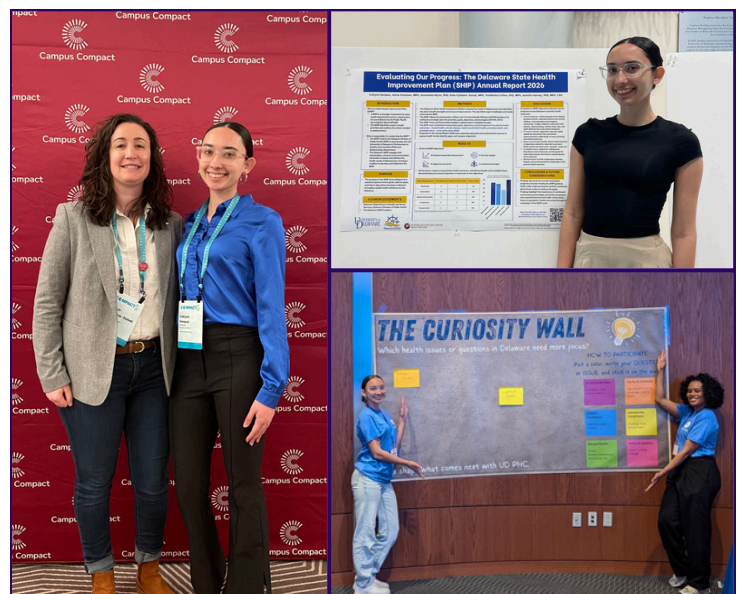
confidence in public speaking, networking, and professional collaboration while demonstrating the broader impact of community-engaged public health work. Other memorable experiences included tabling at community events and supporting interactive engagement activities such as the Curiosity Wall at the Spotlight Health Care Summit 2026.

This independent study not only fulfilled an academic requirement, but also contributed toward earning my Certificate in Community Engagement at the University of Delaware. More importantly, it reinforced my passion for community-centered public health work and showed me how communication, outreach, and relationship-building can directly support healthier communities. My experience with Delaware SHIP and PHC has inspired me to continue pursuing opportunities that advance health equity and improve the well-being of all Delawareans through meaningful community engagement.

Supervisor Note: Katlyn Culhane-Suluai, MPS
Program Manager, Partnership for Healthy Communities at University of Delaware



"Serving as a practicum and independent study site is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work at the Partnership for Healthy Communities. It allows us to mentor the next generation of public health professionals while benefiting from the energy, ideas, and dedication they bring to our team. Catlynn was an outstanding addition to our team throughout her independent study. She consistently demonstrated professionalism, initiative, creativity, and a strong commitment to community-centered public health. From supporting coalition engagement and communications to representing the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan at a national conference, she approached every opportunity with enthusiasm and made meaningful contributions to our work. We are incredibly proud that Catlynn graduated from the University of Delaware this spring and are excited to see where her career takes her. She will undoubtedly be an asset to any organization she joins, and we are grateful for the impact she made during her time with our team."



Beyond the Ride: Lessons from the Health & Transit Buddy Project

By: Bet Key Wong, MSN, RN, CFCS, CNOR(e)
Co-founder, Nurses & Neighbors Collaborative



In mid-2025, the University of Delaware Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC)'s Katlyn Culhane-Suluai and Alexandra Wynn met with Nurses & Neighbors' Rose Rossi and me to discuss a potential project focused on reliable transportation as a vital condition of health. The effort aligned with the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) objective to increase the use of public transit and safe mobility options. The following summer, PHC matched nursing student Zion Brockington Davis with Nurses & Neighbors through the Summer Health Scholar Program. Together, we set out to learn more about transportation barriers facing older adults.

Our Health & Transit Buddy project began with a simple observation: older adults were missing medical appointments not because they did not want to go, but because they were unsure how to access available transportation. In Zion's community survey, respondents shared that they typically drive themselves, yet many had not considered alternatives for times when they could no longer drive because of illness, recovery, or other temporary limitations. Some had stopped driving, lived alone, or hesitated to ask family and friends for help. Many were also unfamiliar with services such as DART, Uber Health, and other community transportation options that increasingly rely on digital tools.

This mirrors emerging research on digital health literacy among older adults. Recent findings show that lower-income seniors, individuals living alone, and people with disabilities experience greater digital health literacy challenges, even though most are interested in learning how to use digital tools when provided with appropriate support. That insight shifted our thinking. We realized that improving transportation access is not simply about providing more rides—it is about providing guidance, confidence, and someone to help navigate increasingly complex transportation systems. That realization became the foundation of our Health & Transit Buddy model, where trained volunteers help older adults build the confidence to navigate transportation options before a crisis occurs.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the project was introducing Zion to Delaware's network of community organizations. Through meetings with transportation leaders, nonprofit partners, public health coalitions, and volunteers, she experienced firsthand how community partnerships shape health beyond the walls of hospitals and clinics. The League of Women Voters helped extend the reach of our community survey, while Zion's previous

(Continued) experience with Lori's Hands and her own lived experiences enriched conversations with older adults and caregivers. Coming from Philadelphia, Zion was initially unfamiliar with Delaware's community network. By the end of the summer, she had experienced firsthand how organizations across the state collaborate to improve health, giving her a broader perspective on nursing's role beyond direct patient care. The project also reinforced the value of community-engaged learning. Through PHC, we connected students, faculty, healthcare professionals, and community organizations working toward the shared goals of the Delaware SHIP. Together, we began developing educational materials, community resources, and a Health & Transit Buddy Toolkit to support transportation confidence, literacy, and mobility planning across Delaware.

The greatest lesson from this partnership may not be the toolkit itself, but the realization that communities need more Health & Transit Buddies. Trained Health & Transit Buddies—including community volunteers, students, and retired healthcare professionals—can help bridge the gap between transportation resources and the people who need them most. Sometimes the most valuable service isn't providing a ride—it's providing the confidence to use one. As our partnership with PHC continues, we look forward to building on these lessons through continued research, student engagement, and community collaboration. Together, we're helping make mobility an essential part of health equity in Delaware.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Nurses & Neighbors Collaborative

By: Zion Brockington
University of Delaware Student



This summer, I had the privilege of completing my practicum with Nurses & Neighbors under the mentorship of Bet Key Wong through the University of Delaware's Partnership for Healthy Communities Summer Health Scholar Program. Although Bet is based in Sussex County and I live in northern Delaware, we met weekly over Zoom to collaborate on our shared goal of addressing transportation barriers for older adults. Those meetings became much more than project updates. They were opportunities to brainstorm ideas, discuss community needs, and learn how meaningful partnerships are built across organizations and counties.

Our project, the Health & Transit Buddy, was inspired by a simple but important observation: many older adults miss or delay healthcare not because transportation services do not exist, but because they are unaware of them or lack the confidence to navigate increasingly digital transportation systems. Throughout the summer, I attended Health Literacy Council meetings, Health Literacy Subcommittee meetings, Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (DESHIP) meetings, and Healthy Communities Delaware meetings, where I gained firsthand insight into how health literacy, transportation, and cross-sector collaboration intersect to influence health outcomes. I also developed and distributed a community transportation survey, analyzed responses, and helped create the Health & Transit Buddy Toolkit, a resource that brings together transportation information, educational materials, and community outreach strategies to improve transportation confidence across Delaware.

This experience transformed me both personally and professionally. As a nursing student, I often focus on the care patients receive inside healthcare settings. Through this practicum, I realized that some of the greatest barriers to health occur long before a patient enters a clinic or hospital. Listening to older adults discuss concerns about losing the ability to drive, recovering from procedures without reliable transportation, or feeling overwhelmed by technology reminded me that compassion also means helping people navigate the systems that affect their health. It strengthened my communication skills, expanded

it strengthened my communication skills, expanded my understanding of public health, and showed me the value of meeting people where they are.

Working alongside Bet was one of the most meaningful parts of my practicum. Every week, we met over Zoom to discuss our progress, troubleshoot challenges, and think creatively about how we could make transportation resources more accessible. What inspired me most was not just the project itself, but Bet's unwavering commitment to showing up for people who are too often overlooked. She approached every conversation with the mindset that everyone deserves the opportunity to access healthcare with dignity and confidence. Watching her advocate for older adults taught me that nursing is not limited to caring for patients at the bedside. The most important part of being a nurse is showing up for those who cannot always advocate for themselves and working to remove the barriers that stand in their way. That lesson reshaped how I view my future career and reminded me that advocacy is just as important as clinical knowledge.

One of the most exciting parts of this experience is knowing that our work will continue beyond the summer. Bet is currently applying for grant funding to expand the Health & Transit Buddy initiative into a digital application that could become a statewide resource for older adults, caregivers, and community organizations. Knowing that something I helped build may continue to grow has shown me that meaningful community work creates lasting impact long after a project officially ends.

This practicum deepened my understanding of community-engaged work and reinforced the mission of the Partnership for Healthy Communities. Advancing health equity requires listening to communities, building meaningful partnerships, and creating sustainable solutions that address the barriers people face every day. As I continue my nursing journey, I will carry with me the lesson Bet taught me through her example: the most important part of being a nurse is showing up for those who cannot always show up for themselves. That commitment to advocacy, compassion, and community partnership is the kind of nurse I hope to become, and one I know will help improve the health and well-being of all Delawareans.

Supervisor Note: Bet Wong, Nurses & Neighbors

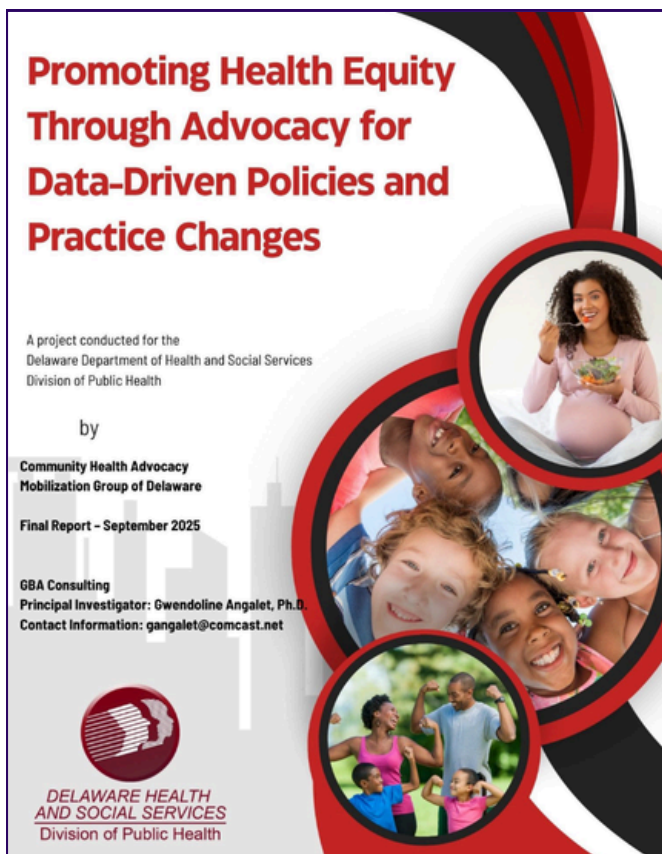
"As a small, all-volunteer organization, hosting a PHC Summer Health Scholar significantly expanded our capacity. Zion helped move our Health & Transit Buddy project forward through community outreach, interviews, survey development, and toolkit design—work that would have taken us much longer to accomplish on our own. She also brought a fresh, intergenerational perspective that complemented the experience of our volunteers."

Promoting Health Equity Through Advocacy for Data-Driven Policies and Practices: Community – Engaged Research for Addressing Chronic Health Conditions in Vulnerable Delaware Communities

By: Gwendoline Angalet, Ph.D., Dorothy Dillard, Ph.D., Henry Smith, III, Ph.D.

During the past year, we released the report, Promoting Health Equity Through Advocacy for Data-Driven Policies and Practice Changes, prepared by Community Health Advocacy Mobilization Group in partnership with Delaware State University Interdisciplinary Health Equity Research Center Community Engagement and Dissemination Core. This report is the product of the commitment, expertise, and hard work of the very dedicated research team of Dr. Henry Smith III, Dr. Dorothy Dillard, Mr. Matthew Billie, and Dr. Gwendoline Angalet. This report was made possible through financial and editorial support from the Division of Public Health's Bureau of Health Equity, with a special "shout-out" to Sequoia Rent and Inaya Wahid. The heart in this report came from the members of the Community Health Advocacy Mobilization Group (CHAMG), represented by the CHAMG Planning Team, and the over 100 community members who gave of their time and expertise to talk with us during the community conversations.

The following overview of the report is intended to encourage you to open and read it. (Image below is a clickable link to access the report).



Overview

In this report you will find:

- A landscape of resources and services related to health conditions
- Analysis of chronic health conditions in 52 high-needs census tracts in Delaware
- Information about those chronic health conditions, service shortages, quality of life issues, and relevant contextual factors within the 52 census tracts
- Information about health disparities and outcomes within the 52 census tracts
- Policy recommendations and practice changes for improvements in the most serious chronic health conditions
- Plans to enhance overall community engagement in the work on chronic health conditions

Summary Report Description

The research project to promote health equity through advocacy for data-driven policies and practice changes was undertaken to demonstrate how data at the census tract level and dynamic, continuous community engagement could drive the development of solutions, grounded in social determinants and community assets, that were relevant to the communities intended to be the beneficiaries. The results of the research are presented in the report, prepared to share with decision-makers, community members, and organizations throughout the state who want to make positive changes to reduce health disparities and improve outcomes among community members who have or are at risk of developing chronic health conditions.

In the report, we recommended policy and practice changes to improve health outcomes in the chronic health conditions facing Delawareans living in high-need communities across the state, as defined by the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) of 0.75 or greater. Before that, the most pressing, referred hereafter as priority chronic health conditions, were identified by examining data from reliable sources on the My Healthy Community data platform. (The platform has been shutdown with priority data being transferred to the Delaware Open Data Portal.) The analysis showed that the priority chronic health conditions are obesity, depression, and heart disease. Conditions were examined, based on the data and research, and the contextual factors that appeared to influence or drive the prevalence of those conditions.

Promoting Health Equity Through Advocacy for Data-Driven Policies and Practices: Community – Engaged Research for Addressing Chronic Health Conditions in Vulnerable Delaware Communities

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(Continued) Those contextual factors included access to healthy food, open spaces/parks, transportation, medical professionals, insurance (coverage), health literacy, and DE 211 (resources). The review showed that many community assets were available to address drivers of health conditions. However, in our community conversations, residents of high needs communities noted that community assets frequently were not accessible, adequate, affordable, or culturally appropriate.

We together with the CHAMG Planning Team synthesized all the information gathered to help frame the policy and practice changes presented in this report, aimed at improving health equity. The draft recommendations were presented to community members throughout the state to get their feedback on whether they made sense in relationship to their experiences. The final recommendations are summarized below:

1. **Enhancing community engagement** in health policy planning and implementation.
2. **Increasing financial support** for grassroots organizations that provide health services in high-need areas.
3. **Improving health literacy** initiatives across the state.
4. **Expanding the healthcare workforce** to be representative of all Delawareans.
5. **Expanding Medicaid coverage** to include social determinants of health.

Actions Taken Based on the Report

Given that we did not want this report to sit on someone's computer or a shelf somewhere, we began to work on implementation of the recommendations. Since the report was issued, the CHAMG in partnership with DSU IHER CED Core have taken the following actions:

- Shared the report through various channels, including partner websites
- Doing presentations for interested groups
- Hosting follow-up community conversations in partnership with community partners for community members to get their feedback on the most pressing health issues they and the community are facing and potential solutions to address them
- Embedding the recommendations into the work of the CHAMG
 - Serving as an information hub on promising practices and connector to capacity building opportunities and community resources

- Serving as an information hub on promising practices and connector to capacity building opportunities and community resources
- Partnered with the University of Delaware SHIP Team, the Health Literacy Council of Delaware, and DPH to inventory evidence-informed promising practices in health promotion, health literacy, and culturally and linguistically appropriate standards; and capacity building opportunities to support implementation of those practices
- Advocating for practice and policy changes and resources to remove barriers to access
- Surveyed CHAMG members on their use of evidence-informed promising practices in health promotion, health literacy, and culturally and linguistically appropriate standards in their work
- Collaborating with other coalitions such as the SHIP Coalition, Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Coalition, and Westside Grows Together

We are including this link to the report, desu.edu/sites/flagship/files/final_chamg_report_dph_approved_10312025-compressed.pdf, with the request that you let us know the messages that resonate with you and what actions you might take as a result of reading the report. We hope that you will be able to use the information contained in the report to be advocates for change in your organizations and in the communities that are part of your service network. Next, we ask that you share the report with your constituents and the community through your newsletters, social media, and other channels. The ultimate value of the report will be that community members take action that will likely lead to reducing the prevalence of chronic health conditions and improving health outcomes for our community.

For more information, please contact Gwen Angalet at gangalet@comcast.net or Dorothy Dillard at ddillard@desu.edu.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Community Health Worker Association of Delaware

By: Zaire Blackwell
University of Delaware Student



Supervisor Note: Erin Ridout, MSW, MPH Manager, Community Health Impact

"The Community Health Workers Association of Delaware (CHWADE) is grateful to the Partnership for Healthy Communities (PHC) for connecting students with community organizations through meaningful practicum experiences. As a small, volunteer-led nonprofit, CHWADE has benefited greatly from the research, expertise, and fresh perspectives MPH practicum students bring to advance our mission. In 2026, CHWADE is pleased to host Zaire Blackwell, who will conduct research on Community Health Worker (CHW) Medicaid reimbursement and contribute to efforts supporting a sustainable CHW workforce in Delaware."

This summer, I had the opportunity to complete my practicum with the Community Health Worker Association of Delaware through the Partnership for Healthy Communities. Throughout the summer, I researched how different states reimburse Community Health Worker services through Medicaid. My work focused on comparing billing codes, reimbursement rates, provider requirements, and other policies to help identify strategies that could support Delaware as it continues developing its own reimbursement model.

Coming into this practicum, I knew Community Health Workers were important because they help connect people to healthcare and other resources. What I didn't realize was how much work goes into making those services financially sustainable. This experience gave me a much better understanding of how policy, reimbursement, and healthcare financing all work together. I spent a lot of time reading Medicaid State Plans, fee schedules, and reimbursement policies, but I also had the opportunity to meet with physicians and policy leaders who helped me understand how these decisions affect organizations and the communities they serve.

One thing this practicum really taught me is that improving healthcare isn't always about creating something new. Sometimes it's about learning from what already works. Looking at how other states approached Community Health Worker reimbursement helped me realize that there isn't one perfect model. Every state has different priorities, different challenges, and different resources. That made me think more critically about what would actually make sense for Delaware instead of simply copying another state's approach.

As an MPH student studying Health Policy and Management at the University of Delaware, this experience connected everything I've been learning in class to a real policy issue. It also reinforced why I'm interested in healthcare leadership. My long-term goal is to become both a physician and a healthcare leader, and this practicum reminded me that meaningful change happens at every level of healthcare. Individual providers make a difference every day, but good policy and strong leadership can improve care for entire communities.

The biggest thing I'll take away from this experience is that community-engaged work doesn't always happen face-to-face. Sometimes it's done through research, collaboration, and policy development that helps organizations better serve their communities. I'm grateful to the Community Health Worker Association of Delaware and the Partnership for Healthy Communities for giving me the opportunity to contribute to work that supports Community Health Workers and advances health equity across Delaware



UD's Public Health Program: Improving and Expanding Academic Public Health

By: Lauren Camphausen, Assistant Director, Public Health Program, University of Delaware

A core mission of the University of Delaware's Public Health Program is to prepare the future public health workforce to meet our most critical public health challenges. Achieving this requires the program to engage in continual improvement and growth as new diseases emerge, policy environments change, and AI becomes integrated into electronic health records. To that end, the Public Health Program collaborated over the past year to develop and launch an undergraduate degree program in public health. The university approved a new Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH) this spring and undergraduates will soon be enrolling in the program. Increasingly, there is a high level of interest in public health degrees among undergraduate students, and the addition of the BSPH will strengthen the Public Health Program's academic pipeline for developing a highly skilled workforce. UD's Public Health Program offers a diverse breadth of professional pathway opportunities in public health, and the program is committed to delivering rigorous, high quality public health education, engaging students, faculty, and community partners in impactful public health research and scholarship, and facilitating community engagement and collaboration to improve the public's health. UD's Public Health Program is grateful for the input and support from our internal and external partners, most notably the members of the Partnership for Healthy Communities steering committee and our partners at the Delaware Division of Public Health. We look forward to continual growth and improvement of academic public health programs, guided by and responsive to community priorities, at the University of Delaware.



Recognizing UD's Impact on the World

By: Tabitha Groh | Photo illustration by Jeffrey C. Chase
Originally published January 15, 2026

The University of Delaware has been recognized by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for its commitment to and excellence in collaborative, community-based partnerships that create positive change. UD is one of more than 230 institutions recognized this year by the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, the leading framework for assessing community engagement in U.S. higher education.



"This designation is a fitting reflection of UD's commitment to work that matters," UD President Laura Carlson said. "I want to thank everyone who contributed to the extensive effort to document our impact through our research, teaching and service. Such work is at the very foundation of who we are, how we work and what we do at UD."

Since earning the Community Engagement classification initially in 2015, the University has worked to build a culture of community engagement, which was reflected in the recent submission for continued classification. Bringing together a committee of representatives from across UD, the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) spearheaded the self-study effort, gathering evidence of how faculty, staff and students partner with local nonprofit organizations, agencies and businesses to serve the public good. The committee identified exemplary academic-community partnerships, including the longstanding [Legislative Fellows Program](#), which links qualified students with the research needs of the Delaware General Assembly; [New Directions Early Head Start](#), which supports Delaware families with very young children; and [HEALTH for All](#), which provides workforce training via mobile physical and behavioral health screenings and health education throughout Delaware. CEI, which is charged with enhancing University-wide capacity for community engagement, is looking to the future. Building on the momentum of the reclassification, CEI is working on several initiatives to advance the practice and understanding of community engagement, including on-demand foundational training and the systematic tracking of partnerships. For more information about community engagement at UD, visit the [CEI website](#).

Strong Kids, Bright Futures: Delaware School Nurses Make it Possible

By: Lauren Covington, PhD, RN
Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, University of Delaware



On October 10, 2025 nearly 300 school nurses from across Delaware gathered at UD's STAR Campus, both in person and online, for the third annual School Nurse Professional Development Day, hosted in partnership with UD's College of Health Sciences. This year's theme, Strong Kids, Bright Futures, brought nurses together to confront a challenge that's reshaping their profession: a rising student mental health crisis that shows no signs of slowing down.

The Reality on the Ground

School nurses across Delaware are seeing it firsthand. At one elementary school, a nurse saw 25 students before 11 a.m. on a single day, spending less than eight minutes with each. At a Red Clay high school, a nurse logged 62 visits in just four hours — on top of 68 scheduled medications. As Mandy Pennington, supervisor of health services for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, told UDaily, "Pre-COVID, it did not look like this." Anxiety, she explained, often shows up in the nurse's office as a stomachache or headache; a child's way of communicating something they can't yet put into words.

A Day of Learning and Connection

Nurse Blake and Congresswoman Sarah McBride opened the day, followed by expert presenters Dr. Terri Hinkley, Executive Director of the National Association of School Nurses; Dr. Thomas Craney, school psychologist for the Indian River School District; Ashley Steinbrecher of UD's Center for Disabilities Studies; and Nicole Zehnder of the Delaware Department of Education — each sharing their knowledge on navigating the increasingly complex landscape of student health.

Speaking with UDaily, Elizabeth Speakman, chief nurse administrator and senior associate dean of UD's School of Nursing, put it this way: *"School nurses play a vital, yet sometimes underappreciated, role in the lives of children. You are the backbone of student health — the first responders, the educators, the advocates, and the listeners who ensure that students are safe, healthy, and ready to learn."*

Dr. Lauren Covington, assistant professor of nursing and founder of the School Health Initiative for Engagement, Leadership & Learning in Delaware (SHIELLD), echoed that commitment, telling UDaily: *"It's a priority for CHS to advance this work by providing opportunities for school nurses to collaborate and network, raising awareness of the vital role they play, and ensuring they receive the investment they deserve."*

Voices from the Field

In UDaily's coverage of the day, Denise Buffin, president of the Delaware School Nurse Association and a school nurse at Mount Pleasant Elementary in the Brandywine School

(Continued) District for nearly three decades, pointed to what more is needed: additional social workers for home visits and case management, and more support for families at risk of entering state custody.

Downstate, Mary Stuart, a school nurse at Mariner Middle School in the Cape Henlopen School District, described to UDaily the added challenge of practicing in a more rural area without nearby tertiary care: *"The school nurse's office becomes this catch-all space, where you're the canary in the coal mine for a student who's struggling."*

Shaping Solutions Together

Pennington, Buffin, and Stuart are all part of SHIELLD, the working group founded and led by Covington that meets monthly to identify challenges school nurses face, develop solutions, and pursue funding to address them. Recently, the team was awarded funding from Delaware Health Sciences Alliance to develop and pilot a practical, evidence-based tool that explicitly integrates school nurses into Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, a widely integrated academic and behavioral equity framework used in Delaware schools, yet school nurses remain largely absent from the process. This is a primary step in giving school nurses a seat at the table where student mental health challenges are being discussed.

A Personal Reflection

Stacey Robinson, a school nurse for Indian River School District, a SHIELLD member and the National Association of School Nurses Director for the Delaware School Nurse Association shared her own reflections on the day:

She described stumbling onto "school nurse TikTok," where school nursing is often reduced to a joke — nurses portrayed as sitting around handing out ice packs. The stereotype might be good for a laugh among nurses who live the reality, she said, but it worries her how the broader public perceives the profession as a result. What she hears from nurses in the field tells a very different story: navigating student health isn't getting easier, and the best practices around it keep shifting, sometimes daily. That's exactly why professional development days like this matter, she said — *"school nursing can be an isolating profession, and building community is essential"*.



End Community Violence Now

By: Danielle Fisher

Program Officer, End Community Violence Now



Over the past year, one of End Community Violence Now's proudest accomplishments has been expanding access to public health education and information related to gun violence prevention across Delaware. As community violence intervention efforts continue to grow statewide, ECVN has worked to help strengthen understanding of gun violence as both a public safety and public health issue requiring coordinated, data-informed, and community-centered solutions.

Through statewide convening, educational initiatives, technical assistance, and ecosystem-building efforts, ECVN has continued elevating the importance of accessible gun violence data, transparent reporting practices, and the need for policies and investments to be informed by both research and lived experience.

Throughout this work, ECVN has been grateful for opportunities to collaborate with partners connected to the University of Delaware and the State Health Improvement Plan, including Dr. Alexandra Wynn. These collaborations have included participation in conversations at the Community Violence Intervention Summit focused on how public health frameworks can better inform violence prevention policy and implementation efforts statewide. ECVN and Dr. Wynn also collaborated on discussions surrounding the importance of strengthening data infrastructure and public health approaches to addressing gun violence. Together, they published *How Strong Data Infrastructure Could Transform Delaware's Firearm Violence Prevention Ecosystem* in the Delaware Journal of Public Health. In addition, ECVN has worked alongside SHIP partners to explore ways to better provide prevention education and public health resources to K-12 administrators, students, and families, recognizing the important role schools and caregivers play in prevention, intervention, and long-term community wellbeing.

ECVN also appreciated opportunities to collaborate on grant review and capacity-building efforts aimed at helping organizations across Delaware access stronger implementation tools, public health guidance, and technical support to advance evidence-informed violence prevention strategies. These partnerships continue to reinforce the importance of cross-sector collaboration in building healthier, safer, and more equitable communities across Delaware.

Strong Kids, Bright Futures: Delaware School Nurses Make it Possible

(Continued) She encouraged attendees to get involved in small, sustainable ways: joining the Delaware School Nurses Association, attending school board meetings, engaging with their union or PTO, or simply talking with local policymakers about the realities of the job. She also pointed to fellow school nurse advocate Robin Cogan, "The Relentless School Nurse," whose recent writing challenges the idea that school nurses are meant to carry the weight of the job alone — arguing instead for the kind of peer connection and support that sustains nurses over the long term.

Fueled by Generous Support

This year's event was possible thanks to the generosity of our sponsors: University of Delaware College of Health Sciences, University of Delaware School of Nursing, Delaware Diabetes Coalition, Rescue One, Nemours, Bayad Home Health Care, Ahl and O'Connor Orthodontics, Beebe Healthcare, Neurelis, and the Department of Health and Social Services Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

In the News

- The event also drew local media coverage! WDEL was on hand to capture the day. [Watch the video coverage here.](#)
- Read the full UDaily feature, "[Stronger Together](#)," by Amy Cherry: udel.edu/udaily.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

By: Athena Bruess
UD Master's of Public Health Graduate Student

My summer PHC practicum has been one of the most educational and meaningful experiences of my Master of Public Health education. While working with the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), I had the opportunity to contribute to statewide public health initiatives that address the social and systemic factors influencing the health of Delaware residents. Through research, program evaluation, collaboration, and attending events and meetings, I gained a greater understanding of the work required to translate data into meaningful action in the public health field.

Throughout my practicum experience, I worked on several projects supporting Delaware SHIP priorities, including writing a comparative analysis report of public health programs across Delaware and neighboring states, taking part in weekly and quarterly meetings, attending community conversations, and assisting in creating educational content for SHIP communication efforts. One of my projects that I am learning the most from is the comparative analysis of mental health programs across Delaware and neighboring states. I learned how to identify innovative strategies being implemented across the other states that could strengthen Delaware's public health initiatives regarding mental health. This experience taught me the necessity of using evidence to inform policy and highlighted the way collaboration across different organizations can result in more effective and equitable public health solutions.

Professionally, this practicum strengthened my skills in research, informative writing, data interpretation, and communicating public health information in a way that can be digestible to diverse audiences. I also learned how public health agencies work alongside community organizations, healthcare systems, academic institutions, and policymakers to improve population health. After seeing these partnerships in action, I recognized that long-term improvements in population health require coordinated efforts involving multiple sectors rather than individual interventions.

Working with Delaware SHIP also increased my understanding of community-engaged public health. This has been done through listening to community voice, identifying shared priorities, and creating strategies that reflect the needs of Delaware residents. Whether researching transportation, maternal and infant health, mental health, or chronic disease prevention, I saw how community input and organizational collaboration are important in order to advance health equity and improve quality of life. This experience also closely aligns with the mission of PHC by demonstrating how evidence, partnership, and community engagement can create sustainable improvements in health and well-being.

As I advance my MPH studies in Epidemiology and prepare for medical school, this practicum has broadened my perspective on healthcare. My long-term goal is to become a physician who integrates public health principles into clinical practice. I now have a greater appreciation for how policies, community resources, and social determinants of health shape patient outcomes long before someone walks into a clinic. This experience has strengthened my commitment to addressing health disparities through both patient care and population health initiatives.

Supervisor Note: Alexandra Wynn, PhD
Postdoctoral Researcher
Program in Epidemiology, UD College of Health Sciences
Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)



"The Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) hosts students to provide practical experience for future public health professionals. Athena Bruess, a second-year MPH student, has greatly contributed to the SHIP team through her passion for maternal, infant, and mental health, as well as her excellent writing skills. The team appreciates Athena's efforts in advancing SHIP's mission through public health translation, analysis, and report writing."



The Academy: Education, Advocacy, and Impact

By: Kate Smith, MD, MPH

Executive Director, Delaware Academy of Medicine & Public Health



In October of 2025, the Delaware Academy of Medicine/Delaware Public Health Association rebranded, formally becoming the Delaware Academy of Medicine & Public Health. This rebranding was the final step in a membership- and board-driven process to better position us as public health experts in the State of Delaware. Rebranding aside, our mission remains the same: *to enhance the well-being of our community through education, the promotion of public health, research, and targeted investments*. We continued to offer educational opportunities for the public and those working in healthcare and strengthened our advocacy position in the state with a strong presence in Dover during legislative session.

Education

Between June 2025 and the end of June 2026, the Academy – through our Delaware Health Force program – provided four different Delaware Mini Medical School (DMMS) sessions to students in Delaware. These virtual six-week sessions offer high school and undergraduate students a look at what different health careers entail. Over the summer, the Academy presented a session in which each presentation was given by speakers from different healthcare institutions in the state. In the spring, DMMS offered a six-week session of Delaware Mini Dental School, showcasing all the different dental professions. All our previous sessions can be found at our website, <https://delawareminimed.org>.

Delaware Youth Medical Academy (DYMA), a merit-based program of Delaware Mini Medical School, is an initiative for high school students to further learn about careers in the health sciences, offering mentorship with medical students, residents, and healthcare professionals; career building workshops; hands on skills workshops; and various certifications. This year, DYMA created a Student Council, allowing them more input into the clinical and skills building offerings within the State. In 2026, fourteen new students have been inducted into DYMA.

The Academy's Student Internship Program is open to all students in high school, undergraduate, and graduate school. We partner with schools across the state and work with students of many different backgrounds and interests to further their interest in public health and provide them with an opportunity to discover the role public health plays in our Delaware communities. The Academy is currently hosting seven interns for the spring cohort (four high school and three undergraduate).

Promotion of Public Health

Through various partnerships, the Academy was able to offer education events throughout the year for both the public and those in healthcare.

- **2025 Delaware Healthcare Workforce Summit** (September; with the Delaware Health Care Commission). Presentations included panels and keynote discussions on how data can inform policy, align initiatives, and advance health in the First State.

- **Clinician's Guide to PFAS: Exposure, Effects, and Action Against the Forever Chemical** (September; with the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH)). Presentations discussed the challenges of PFAS remediation, its health effects, and the current efforts by the State and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC).
- **2025 Immunization Summit** (December; with the DPH). Presentations included the state of infectious and vaccine preventable disease in Delaware, vaccines for vector borne diseases and HIV, and a panel discussing federally subsidized vaccines. The keynote speaker was Dr. Michael Osterholm of the Vaccine Integrity Project.
- **2026 Frank M. and Robert R. Hoopes Medical/Dental Lecture** (February; with the Delaware State Dental Society and the Hoopes Family Foundation). The Keynote presentation, "Optimizing Head and Neck Radiation Outcomes While Reducing Side Effects" was given by Dr. Thomas P. Sollecito, Chair and Professor of Oral Medicine, University of Pennsylvania.

The Academy's Annual Meeting and Award Ceremony was held on April 29, 2026, and highlighted maternal and child health in Delaware with awardees Dr. David Paul and the Delaware Healthy Mother and Infant Consortium (DHMIC). Our keynote speaker was DHSS Secretary Christen Linke Young.

The Immunization Coalition of Delaware (<https://immunizedelaware.org>), funded by DPH, held quarterly meetings about immunization rates in Delaware, updates on the measles outbreaks throughout the nation, and provided expert advocacy on vaccine preventable disease.

Research

As Delaware's only PubMed accredited, peer-reviewed journal, the **Delaware Journal of Public Health** (<https://djph.org>) works to highlight public health research and successes in the First State. Our Guest Editors are experts in their chosen fields and help the editorial team to curate issues that focus on topics important to public health and the health of Delaware communities. Our authors come from healthcare and public health

The Academy: Education, Advocacy, and Impact

(Continued) institutions throughout Delaware (and occasionally outside of it), showcasing just how collaborative public health in the First State can be. Our last several issues include:

- The Future of Academics and Research – Public Health Success Stories (May 2026)
- AI and Big Data in the Health Sciences (March 2026)
- Advances in Maternal and Child Health (December 2025)
- Nutrition and Malnutrition as a Determinant of Health (November 2025)
- Substance Use, Abuse, Treatment, and Recovery (September 2025)

Delaware Health Force

(<https://dehealthforce>), a public-private partnership with the State, has been collecting information about Delaware's healthcare workforce, and working with the workforce subcommittee of the Delaware Health Care Commission to research and address healthcare workforce shortages and trends, and recommend strategies to strengthen the workforce in Delaware, thereby addressing healthcare access (one of the Social Drivers of Health). This collaboration includes the Delaware Nurses Association (DNA), Delaware Healthcare Association (DHA), the Delaware Healthcare Facilities Association (DHFA), the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, the Medical Society of Delaware (MSD) and many others.

What's Next?

For the rest of this year, the Academy will be working on coalition building, partnering with other public health institutions, and—as always—increasing the overall health of all Delawareans. We will continue to offer educational opportunities for the lay public and those working in healthcare fields, and we encourage all Delawareans to read the Delaware Journal of Public Health (and even submit an article!) and join us as a member.

Delaware is not perfect. There is has room for improvement in health outcomes and wellness. But together, we can work collaboratively to address root causes, and make it better!

The Art of Collaboration

By: Vanesa Simon, Mariposa Arts



I often think of my creative practice as a collaboration with Creativity. There is an invitation that comes my way. A thought of how nature is speaking to me and what color, what image might hold that sentiment. Or sometimes they are emotions that I have no words for, ones that only the embodied act of drawing can help move through my being. It is all an invitation. Similarly, my collaboration with the UDPHC team came with an invitation. “What can we help you with? We believe in the work of Mariposa Arts and want to help in any way we can.” Invitations are so generous. How beautiful it is to be invited in.

For the past year, Kate, Dr. Cuffee, Dr. Wynn, and I have been meeting together every month to move forward a project I had been ideating but needed the space to think through and plan. HE+ART™ (Health Equity and Art) has been coming to fruition through our working group. Those meetings have been so meaningful for me as a “solopreneur.” I am often working alone and having folks hear my ideas aloud is incredibly valuable. And their generosity has also been extended by making connections throughout the SHIP network.

HE+ART™ is a program that brings together creative practice and wellbeing through artist-led workshops and take-home art kits. Designed to be low-barrier, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive, it offers accessible ways for people to use art for stress relief, connection, and overall wellbeing, both in community and at home. Through HE+ART, we seek to make creative practices more accessible across communities and to use them as a vehicle for sharing valuable health resources available throughout our state. A creative wellbeing kit can include flyers for free screenings or health events, information about health organizations serving communities, and a healthy outlet through creativity.

I seek to center the arts and creative practices as part of our health systems. Not as a “nice” extra or an add-on, but embedded across health systems, creating a shift from treatment to prevention. The arts are an integral part of our wellbeing. Think about how you feel when you listen to music or sing. When you read a book that widens your worldview. When you look at artwork that speaks to you for some reason. The arts are a powerful tool for expressing emotion, building resilience, challenging our perspectives, and supporting healing.

I am so grateful for the UDPHC team that so generously invites me in and makes room for my voice at this table. My voice is the voice of many.

I have been a Patient. I am a 12-year cancer survivor. I have known despair facing a diagnosis that profoundly changed how I see myself and the world. I have known treatments that, although necessary, stripped me of my dignity. My treatments were completed in two years but “surviving” meant learning to live with after-care and the many ways it changed my life. Finding a way to thrive would not have been possible without Creativity. Along with science, medicine, and mental health resources, the arts gave me a way to process my experience and move towards healing. I credit that creative process with supporting my wellbeing and, ultimately, helping me move beyond a medical trauma toward Post-Traumatic Growth.

Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Health Literacy Council of Delaware

By: Amanda Proch
Health Behavior Science Student, University of Delaware

Supervisor Note: Emma Braun, HLCD, PMG Consulting

"It was a pleasure working alongside of the Partnership for Healthy Communities with their student practicum placement this spring. Amanda assisted in expanding the Health Literacy Council of Delaware's capacity by supporting subcommittee and general membership management as well as contributing to outreach regarding community events. Amanda also contributed to Delaware's first analysis of statewide community health needs assessments, raising awareness for the critical need for health literacy."



This spring semester I had the opportunity to intern with the Health Literacy Council of Delaware. The Health Literacy Council of Delaware is a statewide collaborative focused on raising awareness, as well as increasing advocacy, training/education, and outreach efforts related to health literacy. In short, the council is advocating to make health information easier to understand. Community work has always been in my best interest when working towards my future career goals. The HLCD has given me the ability to engage within the local Delaware community, such as, attending conferences, tabling for the HLCD, attending stakeholder meetings, shadowing with fellow partners, and overall teaching me about the awareness surrounding health literacy within the state of Delaware.

My favorite part about doing my internship with the HLCD was getting to sit in and listen to real conversations that needed to be had about Delaware's community revolving health literacy. I have never attended a professional conference before, so this experience I gained from the HLCD really opened my eyes on what community wellbeing looks like. Being in the same room with people who care just as much about the healthcare system and the community was inspiring. Even if my career goals were not specifically healthcare related, I definitely have a plan to be engaging with community partnerships and helping create a healthier and more positive society.

Engaging with community members and gaining that exposure has been exactly what I was looking for in an internship. I also want to acknowledge the skills that the HLCD has taught regarding health literacy. The HLCD shares numerous practices and tools on how the healthcare system can create a more meaningful experience with their patients or their community members. These practices include teach-back, plain language, prioritizing information, and many more. I was very lucky enough to already have gained some knowledge on these methods from previous courses I had taken at the University of Delaware, but from being around these practices I learned so much more about how to use them. I think for HBNS464 this was a great experience for me because of how much involvement I had within the community.



Working Together for Health Equity: Reflections on Partnership and Progress

By: Sequoia Rent, PCED
Chief, Bureau of Health Equity, Delaware Division of Public Health

The Delaware Division of Public Health's (DPH) Bureau of Health Equity (Bureau), recognizes that advancing health equity requires more than a shared vision. Advancing health equity and making an intentional impact requires strong partnerships, meaningful collaboration, and a commitment to learning and growing together. Over the past year, the Bureau has continued to support implementation of the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) by bringing partners together across sectors to strengthen capacity, share knowledge, and advance collective action toward healthier communities.

One of the most impactful initiatives this past year was the Health Equity Webinar Series. Community professional leaders as subject matter experts contributed to the success of the series through collaboration with the SHIP post-doctoral fellow, Bureau chief and community partners. Designed to provide accessible, practical learning opportunities, the series brought together public health professionals, health care organizations, community-based organizations, advocates, and other stakeholders from across Delaware. Each session created space for participants to explore health equity concepts, learn from subject matter experts, and engage in discussions about how to act and apply these principles within their own organizations and communities.

The webinar series also highlighted the value of state agency partnerships with higher education organizations. Through the involvement of University of Delaware (UD) students and faculty, along with the SHIP Post-Doctoral Fellow, Dr. Wynn, the collaboration helped bridge academic expertise and community practice. These connections strengthened the quality of the series while creating opportunities for shared learning, professional development, and relationship-building among partners committed to improving intersectional health outcomes across the state.

Beyond the webinars themselves, the initiative fostered new partnerships and strengthened existing ones. Participants connected across sectors, identified shared goals, and explored opportunities for future collaboration. These relationships support the broader goals of SHIP by encouraging coordinated efforts to address the social and structural factors that influence health and well-being.

Perhaps most encouraging has been the continued interest in expanding the reach of the webinar content. The Community Health Worker Association expressed interest in incorporating the Health Equity Webinar Series into its learning management training platform as a resource for approved professional development hours for community health

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY: A FOUR-PART WEBINAR SERIES

Join us for a dynamic webinar series exploring four key health equity priorities — Women's Health, Minority Health, Housing Insecurity, and Youth Health.

These sessions will foster cross-sector dialogue, highlight intersectionality, and provide actionable strategies to address disparities in health outcomes.

All webinars hosted live on Zoom. Click the links below to register:

- Webinar 1: **Youth Health** - Friday, October 3, 2025 (10 a.m. to 12 p.m.)
- Webinar 2: **Women's Health** - Wednesday, October 8, 2025 (12 p.m. to 2 p.m.)
- Webinar 3: **Housing Insecurity** - Thursday, October 16, 2025 (12 p.m. to 2 p.m.)
- Webinar 4: **Minority Health** - Tuesday, October 21, 2025 (12 p.m. to 2 p.m.)

Why Attend?

- Gain insights from health equity leaders
- Understand intersectional challenges and solutions
- Participate in meaningful dialogue
- Walk away with actionable steps

Who Should Attend?

- Public health professionals, educators, community leaders, advocates, policymakers, and anyone interested in advancing health equity

WEBINAR SPEAKERS

YOUTH HEALTH
Dr. Michelle Ratcliff

WOMEN'S HEALTH
Erin Ridout

HOUSING INSECURITY
Sarah Rhine

MINORITY HEALTH
Dr. Yendelela Cuffee

DELAWARE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Division of Public Health

Partnership for Healthy Communities
A COMMUNITY RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

(Continued) workers. This opportunity reflects the practical value of the series and its potential to support workforce development and health equity capacity building well beyond the original audience.

In addition to the webinar series, the Bureau continued to collaborate with community partners, especially through the SHIP Coalition, with support from the UD PHC team, students, and the SHIP post-doctoral fellow. The Bureau also supported conferences, convenings, and other opportunities that brought stakeholders together around shared priorities. These efforts reinforced the importance of connection, collaboration, and collective action in creating the conditions that allow all Delawareans to thrive.

As we reflect on the past year, the Bureau of Health Equity within the Delaware Division of Public Health is grateful for the partnerships that have helped move this work forward, including our ongoing collaboration with the University of Delaware and the many organizations and individuals engaged through the SHIP Coalition and committed to advancing health equity throughout the state. Together, we are building stronger relationships, expanding learning opportunities, and creating momentum for lasting change. We look forward to continuing this work in the year ahead.

Together in Motion: Building Healthier Communities Through Science, Education, and Partnership

By: Roxana Gabriela Burciu, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology and Applied Physiology, University of Delaware

Healthy communities are built through relationships. They grow when universities open their doors, when students learn alongside the people they hope to serve, and when knowledge is shared in ways that make a difference in people's lives. Across the Department of Kinesiology and Applied Physiology (KAAP) at the University of Delaware, these connections are at the heart of community engagement. Throughout the past year, KAAP faculty, students, and staff partnered with schools, healthcare providers, community organizations, veterans, and individuals living with chronic health conditions to promote health and well-being across Delaware. Through education, clinical programs, outreach, and community-based initiatives, KAAP works to make health information, resources, and opportunities more accessible while preparing the next generation of health professionals.

Inspiring Future Generations Through Education and Discovery

A key part of KAAP's community engagement begins by inspiring future scientists, clinicians, and health professionals. Throughout the year, students of all ages were welcomed to explore the science of human movement, exercise, and neuroscience through hands-on learning experiences.

Elementary students discovered the connection between the brain and body during Brain Day, while high school students explored biomechanics and movement science through National Biomechanics Day and the Delaware Governor's School for Excellence. Faculty and graduate students from KAAP, together with colleagues in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Neuroscience Program, launched the University of Delaware's first Pre-College Neuroscience Camp, welcoming high school students from four states for a week of immersive, hands-on learning. Through interactive workshops, laboratory experiences, and mentorship, participants explored the science of the brain while gaining insight into pathways in neuroscience, healthcare, and research. These experiences provide more than exposure to science, they create opportunities for students to imagine themselves as future contributors to improving human health.



High school students participating in the University of Delaware's Pre-College Neuroscience Camp gain hands-on experience with electroencephalography (EEG)

Partnering With Communities to Support Health and Wellness

KAAP's commitment to community engagement extends beyond campus through partnerships that support individuals throughout different stages of life and health. Faculty, students, and staff work alongside community members to share knowledge, provide resources, and create opportunities that encourage healthier lifestyles. Through the Delaware Center for Neurologic Rehabilitation & Recovery Research (DCNR3), faculty and students collaborate across disciplines to advance rehabilitation and recovery for individuals with neurological conditions while creating opportunities for education and public engagement. The University's Parkinson's Disease Registry, which includes more than 100 individuals living with Parkinson's disease, strengthens connections between community members and researchers while supporting efforts to better understand and address the challenges faced by individuals and families affected by Parkinson's disease.

Community engagement also means being present where people gather and where support is needed. Faculty and graduate students represented the University of Delaware Parkinson's Disease Registry at events including the Living Well with Parkinson's Expo, ChristianaCare's Annual Parkinson's Disease Symposium, and local Parkinson's disease support groups. Through educational presentations, conversations, and resource sharing, the team helped increase awareness about Parkinson's disease, promote the importance of exercise and wellness, and connect individuals and families with information and support.

Improving Health Through Clinical Service and Shared Experiences

Direct service is a cornerstone of KAAP's community impact. Each week, approximately 90 community members participate in the Exercise Counseling Clinic, a community-based program that provides supervised exercise opportunities for individuals living with chronic cardiovascular, metabolic, pulmonary, and other health conditions. Guided by faculty and supported by graduate students in the Clinical Exercise Physiology master's program, the clinic helps community members improve their health while providing students with valuable hands-on experience in clinical care.

(Continued) KAAP also partners with veterans and student-athletes through the Veterans and College Athletes Together (VCAT) program. Through twice-weekly group exercise sessions, military veterans and University of Delaware student-athletes build connections while promoting physical activity, social support, and overall well-being. Graduate students further extended this commitment through community education initiatives, including sharing evidence-based information on veteran health and safety with members of the Delaware National Guard and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Students also contributed to stroke and brain injury support groups through educational presentations that connected rehabilitation research with the experiences of individuals and families affected by stroke.



Veterans and College Athletes Together (VCAT) pairs local veterans with members of UD's men's ice hockey team for high-intensity workouts twice a week in the gym at the Field House.

Developing Future Leaders Through Mentorship and Service

Community engagement is also an important part of student development within KAAP. Graduate students contribute as educators, mentors, clinicians-in-training, and community partners, gaining experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom learning. Graduate students demonstrated leadership through initiatives such as the Scientista Symposium, where they co-directed programming focused on mentorship, professional development, and increasing the visibility of women in science. Through these leadership roles, along with their involvement in outreach and clinical programs, students develop the skills needed to become thoughtful healthcare professionals, scientists, and leaders.



The Scientista Symposium, co-directed by KAAP graduate students, brought together students and professionals while creating opportunities for mentorship, professional development, networking, and greater visibility for women in science.

Together, these efforts reflect the many ways KAAP connects with communities—through education, clinical care, outreach, and research partnerships. By working alongside schools, healthcare organizations, community groups, and individuals across Delaware, faculty, students, and staff continue to build relationships that support healthier communities and improve lives.

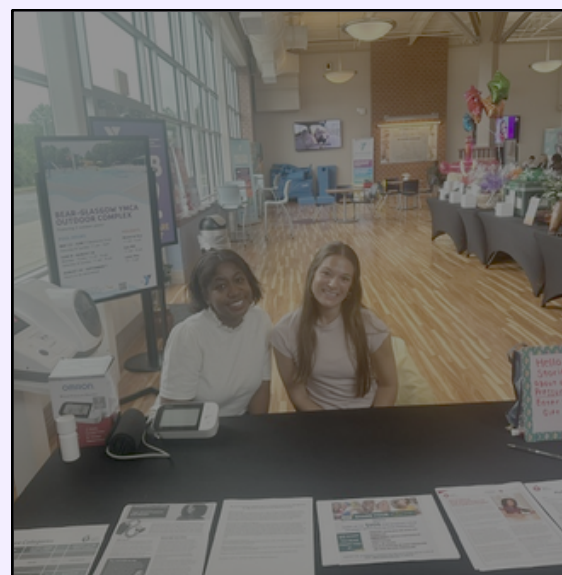
Community Blood Pressure Study Recruitment at the YMCA

By: Yendelela Cuffee, PhD, MPH

Associate Director, Partnership for Healthy Communities
Assistant Professor, Epidemiology Program at University of Delaware

Over a three-month period, Isabella Tullio (MPH Epidemiology Grad '26) and I conducted in-person recruitment for a blood pressure research study at the local YMCA each Tuesday and Wednesday. This community-based recruitment effort provided an important opportunity to engage directly with YMCA members and visitors, raise awareness about high blood pressure, and connect community members with valuable health information and resources.

In addition to supporting recruitment for the study, our presence at the YMCA complemented the organization's ongoing efforts and initiatives to increase awareness and screening for high blood pressure. Through these interactions, we were able to encourage community members to learn more about their blood pressure, understand the importance of regular screening, and take proactive steps toward cardiovascular health. This collaboration demonstrated the value of partnering with trusted community organizations to expand access to health education, promote preventive health practices, and support research participation within the community.



Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Black Mothers in Power

By: Tracey Oitumbe
University of Delaware Student

My summer practicum with Black Mothers in Power (BMIP) has been a great way for me to integrate my public health education with community-based practice. Many of the ideas I had previously learned came from lectures and assignments, but this experience allowed me to see how the concepts relate to the actual needs and realities of Black mothers and families in Delaware.

Personally, this experience has increased my confidence and helped me become more deliberate in how I communicate public health information. I discovered that information must not only be accurate but clear, accessible, culturally relevant and useful to the intended population. Professionally, I gained hands on expertise in doing research on community health issues, developing educational materials and organizing program information to support the organization's operations. The practicum enhanced my communication, research and program planning skills and helped better understand how community partnerships can be used to address various needs. Overall, the experience made me more confident in my abilities and better equipped for future public health roles.

During my practicum, I supported Black Mothers in Power by developing the organization's logic model, researching community education topics relevant to Black mothers and families and creating flyers for events designed to educate Black mothers and families. I assisted in developing website material that comprised of reliable information, resources and support for Black mothers and families across Delaware that was easily accessible.

My work with BMIP helped me to connect what I had learned in school to real-world public health challenges. I developed a more practical understanding of how to identify community needs, recognize gaps in available services and information, and consider how unequal systems affect different populations. Seeing these realities made the coursework concepts more meaningful.

At BMIP I learned that meaningful community engagement begins with listening to what people need rather than

assuming what is best for them. It requires respecting the lived experiences of the people being served. I recognized the importance of collaborating with communities rather than creating programs or resources for them. Additionally, BMIP's work demonstrated that improving maternal and family health involves more than just providing medical care. It entails addressing systemic inequities and social determinants of health that affect people's daily lives including poor housing conditions and limited transportation, low socioeconomic status and unequal access to resources.

These barriers often overlap, making it difficult for Black mothers and other ethnicities to achieve positive health outcomes. Through my duties at BMIP, I saw how community-based organizations respond to different needs through advocacy, education, support services and connection to resources. Overall, this experience helped me understand that when communities, community organizations, academic institutions and public health professionals work together, they can better identify gaps and develop solutions that advance health equity and improve the well-being of Delawareans.

Supervisor Note: Shané Darby
Founder & Executive Director of Black Mothers in Power



"This summer, our practicum student has made a meaningful contribution by leading the review and update of our program evaluation tools, including our logic models and evaluation maps across multiple programs. This work is strengthening our ability to measure outcomes, demonstrate impact, and improve services for the families we serve. Having a PHC-supported practicum student has been invaluable for a small nonprofit like ours, where staff capacity is often limited. The additional support allows us to advance projects that are critical to long-term sustainability while providing a future public health professional with hands-on experience in community-based evaluation and program development. We chose to host a student this summer because we believe in investing in the next generation of public health leaders. We wanted to provide a meaningful learning experience while benefiting from fresh perspectives, new ideas, and dedicated support for projects that directly strengthen our organization's impact."



HEALTH for All Program (H4A): Delivering Mobile Healthcare, Screenings, and Health Education—Empowering Communities Across Delaware Through Student Engagement

By: Christine Sowinski, Program Manager, UD HEALTH for All

HEALTH for All (H4A) continues to transform access to care by meeting communities where they are. For more than five years, H4A has partnered with trusted community organizations to deliver holistic health and wellness services directly within neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, and workplaces. Through a network of more than 21 community-based partners, H4A expands access to care, addresses social drivers of health, and helps build healthier, more resilient communities.

Quotes from Community Members/Community Partners/Students

“This program has been extremely valuable at our site. This partnership has been life changing for our members who can't afford to access health care, have transportation barriers, or are intimidated, unsure or fear being embarrassed when trying to access health information or get health care.”

“We are big fans of this program and it has helped the members of our community significantly! Looking forward to more events!”

“I truly appreciate the opportunity to observe and learn about the H4A program. The staff are dedicated and genuinely care about serving the community. They are also knowledgeable and experts in their field. They understand the needs of the population they serve and offer their services based on those needs, while also considering the real-life challenges the population faces daily.”

“I truly can not say enough good things about the HEALTH for all Program. I have had so many opportunities that I would not normally get the chance to experience without the H4A program. Having the opportunity to work in the community has opened my eyes to so many things and helped me to see first hand the importance of health education and promotion. I have had the opportunity to meet so many different kinds of people and hear their stories, which has helped me to see the way that different people live, which has shown me how important it is to give back if you have the ability and resources to do so.”

“Just wanted to take a moment to thank you again for carving out a space for my partner to get checked out. He is undocumented with no insurance so we try to avoid urgent care when possible.”

Integrating Community Health & Wellness Outreach with Student Engagement:

- More than 70 University of Delaware students representing three colleges and seven academic programs participated in 235+ H4A community initiatives across 21+ communities.
- These efforts reached 2,500+ individuals while providing students with hands-on, community-based learning experiences.
- Collectively, these efforts supported 1,400+ workforce development hours through its student preceptorships, helping prepare the next generation of health professionals.

Community & Clinical Care Impact:

- 161 clinical care visits provided directly in the community.
- 1,145 health screenings completed, including:
 - Blood pressure, blood sugar, scoliosis, A1C, biometric screenings, and hearing and vision assessments, Point – of care testing, health education and counseling, and referrals and support for individuals at risk for ASCVD.
- 92 episodic and primary care visits, addressing both episodic and chronic health needs.
 - Services provided included:
 - Comprehensive physical exams and sports physicals
 - Contraceptive care and management of sexually transmitted diseases
 - Treatment for urinary tract, skin structure, sinus, dental, allergy, upper respiratory, and ear infections
 - Diagnosis and management of chronic diseases
 - Care coordination with specialists, screening programs, and primary care providers
 - Assistance with navigating health care benefit
 - Physical and Sport Physicals



HEALTH for All Program (H4A): Delivering Mobile Healthcare, Screenings, and Health Education—Empowering Communities Across Delaware Through Student Engagement

(Continued)

Health Education & Community Outreach:

- 169 Health Education tables featured at community sites:
 - Topics such as: heart health, diabetes, women's health, and mental health, awareness month topics, etc.
 - 1,414+ individuals engaging
 - Students created 9 customized topics based on the specific needs identified by community partners
- Participation in seven community health fairs, including Delaware Diabetes Expo, Delaware State Fair, Newark Community Day, Healthy Aging Day at the Dover YMCA, Newark Charter High School Health Fair, Weston Senior Center Health Fair, Mid County Senior Center Health Fair.
 - Provided wellness screenings, guidance and education materials
 - Engage diverse community members to raise awareness about preventive care, and strengthen connections with local partners



Academic Collaborations & Experiential Learning:

Athletic Training Collaboration

- H4A partnered with UD Kinesiology & Applied Physiology
 - Athletic Training students assisted with blood pressure screenings at two health fair events.

English Program Engagement

- A cohort of English course students facilitated “Writing as a Way of Healing” workshop
 - Offering community members a supportive space to explore personal expression and the therapeutic power of writing.

Health Behavior Science Engagement

- Nutrition students collaborated closely with community partners to:
 - Identify unique health needs within the population to develop tailored educational materials designed to effectively engage and inform specific audiences, ensuring that the content was culturally relevant, accessible, and supportive of positive health outcomes.

Physical Therapy Collaboration

- H4A partnered with:
 - UD Physical Therapy Department
 - Delaware Falls Prevention Coalition
- Hosted free balance and falls risk assessments, along with education on local resources to 25+ community members at three community sites.

Social Work Engagement

- H4A served as a precepting site for a Master of Social Work (MSW) student from the program's inaugural cohort, advancing workforce development and fostering the next generation of social work professionals.

Student Led Health Education Presentations

- College of Health Sciences, Health Behavior and Nutrition Science Student and College of Education and Human Development, Social Work student:
 - Met with and collaborated closely with partners to gather information
 - Designed and delivered tailored health education sessions
 - Reached 50+ attendees through interactive presentations

Professional Presentations & Guest Speaking

- H4A Program Manager
 - Delivered presentation on Budgeting and Resource Management to graduate students in Social & Environment Determinants of Health Class
- H4A Nurse Practitioner
 - Delivered an in-depth presentation on managing and preventing Metabolic Syndrome

Social Work Engagement

- H4A served as a precepting site for a Master of Social Work (MSW) student from the program's inaugural cohort, advancing workforce development and fostering the next generation of social work professionals.

Highlights:

- Advanced workforce development
 - Expanded training and mentorship opportunities through the successful preceptorship of an inaugural MSW student.
- Awarded grants
 - LabCorp Charitable Foundation
 - Sussex County Health Coalition
- Collaborative Community Event with Food Bank of Delaware and Mid County Senior Center

HEALTH for All Program (H4A): Delivering Mobile Healthcare, Screenings, and Health Education—Empowering Communities Across Delaware Through Student Engagement

(Continued)

- In partnership with the Food Bank of Delaware, Mid County Senior Center, H4A hosted a mobile pantry and health screening event that served 65+ families. Several students joined H4A in the community, gaining hands-on experience in delivering health and wellness support.
- Diabetes Risk Screening Initiatives
 - Finalized partnership with the Delaware Division of Public Health, through which H4A screened 200+ underserved community members for uncontrolled diabetes risks, provided personalized feedback and resources, and referred individuals to the Diabetes Self Management Education Program.
 - In partnership with the Department of Health Behavior and Nutrition Sciences, H4A received a LabCorp Charitable Foundation grant to implement a multidisciplinary diabetes prevention model. The program uses a team-based approach with a health coach and nurse practitioner to conduct screenings, provide education on healthy behaviors, and connect participants to resources. Surveys and staff interviews are used to evaluate participant outcomes and program feasibility. In five months, over 100 individuals have participated
- Featured Media Coverage
 - [UD College of Health Insider for Community food distribution event partnership](#)
- Thoughtful Donations Provide Warmth, Connection, and Support
 - HEALTH for All received a generous donation from the Springmill Sewing Group, including handmade Giving Dolls and Twiddle Muffs that provide comfort, companionship, and engagement for children and seniors in our community. These thoughtful gifts are making a meaningful difference by offering warmth, connection, and support to those we serve.



Health Behavior and Nutrition Sciences Partners with HEALTH for All to Help Prevent type 2 Diabetes

Estimates suggest that diabetes prevalence in Delaware nearly doubled from 2003 to 2023 in adults. As described in the HEALTH For All (H4A) summary, H4A partners with many community organizations across Delaware to offer free local screenings and health education implemented by a nurse practitioner. Dr. Laurie Ruggiero, professor in Health Behavior and Nutrition Sciences (HBNS), focuses her work on reaching underserved communities to address diabetes prevention across primary, secondary, and tertiary public health levels. She has been collaborating with H4A for several years and highly values the opportunity to partner with its incredible team on initiatives that address this important mission. Supported with funding from the Labcorp Charitable Foundation, she and the H4A team (Christine Sowinski, MSM, Program Manager; Heather Milea, MSN, FNP-BC, AGACNP-BC, Clinical Lead) are collaborating to implement and evaluate a multidisciplinary team model, including the H4A nurse practitioner and a health and wellness coach to further address diabetes risk. The health coach (Stephen McLaren, MS, NBC-HWC; a UD HBNS graduate), supplements the screening and education efforts of the nurse practitioner by completing diabetes risk factor screenings and providing interested individuals with personalized person-centered feedback, educational resources, motivational lifestyle change tips, and information on local programs, such as the Diabetes Prevention Program (offered by HBNS's nutrition clinic), to help support individuals in lowering diabetes risk. Also, for those who report a prior diabetes diagnosis, the health coach provides information about available diabetes self-management and nutrition education programs, such as Dining with Diabetes (offered by UD's Cooperative Extension), to support them in their diabetes self-management efforts. To date, the team has reached over 100 community individuals across Delaware in over 25 screening events. Community individuals have reported high levels of satisfaction with their experience with this multidisciplinary team model overall. On an individual level, we were delighted that a prior participant stopped by a recent event to share her story and it started with "you literally saved my life". She shared how participating in a screening and meeting with the team motivated her to join a Diabetes Prevention Program and to make healthy lifestyle changes to reduce her risk. In addition to offering continued community screening and education events, project activities focus on examination of the implementation of the model, along with planning for sustainability.

Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

By: Elena Lynn
Public Health Graduate Student, University of Delaware

Supervisor Note: Alexandra Wynn, PhD
Postdoctoral Researcher

Program in Epidemiology, UD College of Health Sciences
Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)

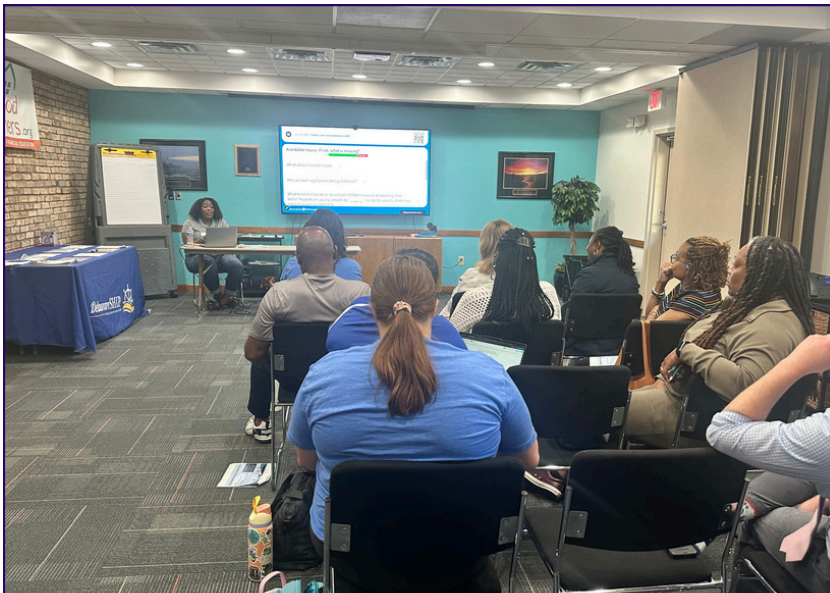


"Students bring an invaluable perspective to the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) team. Elena Lynn, a second-year MPH student at UD, elevates SHIP to a policy analysis level by examining the strengths and gaps of each county's comprehensive plan in Delaware and comparing them across counties. Without Elena's input, SHIP would lack insights into how the state can enhance each plan to support the upcoming state health assessment (SHA) and SHIP cycle."

This summer practicum has been a great opportunity for me to learn about my future career as well as gain valuable experience working in this field. For this practicum I have had the opportunity to work with Delaware State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) to improve public health in various sectors across the state of Delaware. This experience has given me a broader understanding of how collaborative and community centered efforts are vital to creating change and improving the lives of all people in Delaware.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this summer has been serving people I previously have not had the chance to interact with and hear about their personal lived experiences. I have really enjoyed my time meeting people such as veterans and people who are housing insecure. I have gotten to engage with the community and also community organizations that help the community which has allowed me to see the various levels at which public health works. Through this practicum, I have been able to do a deep dive into the connection between policy and health and how this impact is felt across each county in Delaware. I have also been taking particular notice to how it impacts rural Delaware compared to other more urban or suburban areas in an effort to promote health equity. Community engaged work is necessary in order to promote health equity adequately and effectively as the people who live in the community are able to have a voice and their needs can be met.

Academically, this practicum has allowed me to apply concepts I have learned during my Master of Public Health coursework to real world scenarios and public health challenges. This has strengthened my communication skills, policy analysis and community engagement and reconfirms my commitment to going into this field. I am grateful for this opportunity to be able to develop my skills and become a more effective public health professional.



University of Delaware's School of Nursing: SNO Community Connection

By: UD's Student Nurse Organization

This year, SNO nursing students showed up for our neighbors across Delaware and Maryland — mentoring future nurses, stocking food pantries, and getting hands-on in the communities we serve. Here's a look at where our members made an impact.

Brandywine School District Life Savers Program

The Brandywine School District (BSD) Lifesavers Program introduces middle and high school students to nursing and healthcare careers through hands-on, interactive learning experiences. This afterschool program, occurring 6-7 times over the course of the semester, focuses on increasing early exposure to nursing, particularly for first-generation students and those from underrepresented backgrounds, helping them explore healthcare pathways in an engaging and supportive environment. SNO students help facilitate educational skills stations and serve as mentors and role models; talking with BSD students about life as a nursing student, what college is really like, and the many paths available in healthcare. These informal conversations are often the most powerful part of the program, leaving a lasting impression on participants. *Program Advisors: Melinda Acevedo, MSN, RN-BC, CHSE (Instructor, School of Nursing) and Joanne Thomas, MSN, RN (Associate Instructor, School of Nursing)*

FISH Food Bank at St. Paul's Church

FISH (Fellowship in Serving the Hungry) Food Bank was founded by UD students years ago at St. Paul's Church, and SNO has volunteered with the effort for approximately a decade. FISH distributes food to 30 families in the Newark area every third Thursday and Friday of the month, and SNO members volunteer at every distribution. Beyond distribution, SNO members created health pamphlets on common health concerns to hand out with food pickups and have taken clients' blood pressure on-site. This past fall, SNO ran its annual Thanksgiving food drive, placing donation bins in McDowell Hall and turning collection into a friendly, competitive contest between nursing classes. In the spring, SNO followed up with a hygiene drive for FISH, once again filling the bins thanks to generous nursing students. By the Numbers:

- Over 1,500 food items collected and delivered during the fall Thanksgiving drive
- Monthly volunteer support at FISH's food distributions for ~10 years running

Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services

Alongside the FISH food drive, SNO ran a fall hygiene drive to benefit Upper Bay Counseling and Support Services. Donated items were assembled into full-size hygiene bags and delivered to Upper Bay clients in time for the holiday season.

Beads for Diabetes

In November, SNO hosted a bracelet-making team-building activity funded by SNO fundraising. The finished bracelets were sold for \$5 each in Trabant, with all proceeds donated to Beads for Diabetes, supporting scholarships that send teens and adults with Type 1 Diabetes to Diabetes Training Camp. This has become an annual SNO tradition. Several hundred dollars have been donated to Beads for Diabetes scholarships.

Do Care Doula

In February, two senior nursing students, Jenna Coary and Jaila Maddrey, completed their community health clinical at Do Care Doula's food pantry in Dover, providing basic necessities to community members in need. They noticed clients most needed hygiene items, feminine products, and dental care items, and had nothing to carry their supplies home in. Jenna and Jaila brought the need back to the SNO executive board, which organized decorated donation bins in McDowell Hall. Nursing students and the entire School of Nursing responded generously, contributing hygiene items and reusable canvas bags that made a real difference for their clinical community partner. Over 500 items were collected, including reusable canvas bags for clients.



Thank you to every SNO member who volunteered this year. Your time and generosity strengthened our community partnerships across Delaware and Maryland.

Building Connections, Strengthening Communities

Advisor: Alyssa Lanzi
President: Faith Stagge
Secretary: Olivia Dallas
Treasurer: Emily Frazer-Abe

University of Delaware Community Connectors (UDCC) is a graduate student organization committed to strengthening connections between researchers and Delaware communities. By building trusted relationships with underrepresented and minoritized community members, the organization helps graduate students develop the confidence and skills needed to engage with diverse populations. Through community engagement, service, and professional development, the organization helps graduate students develop the skills needed to conduct research that is collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to community needs.

Over the past academic year, Community Connectors hosted two events designed to strengthen community-engaged research and science communication. The Community-Centered Science Communication Workshop provided graduate students with practical strategies for communicating research in ways that are accessible and engaging to diverse community audiences. The organization also hosted the UDCC Science Mixer, which brought together graduate students and community members in an informal setting where students shared their research. The event created opportunities for the community to interact directly with researchers while helping graduate students gain confidence in communicating their work beyond academic settings.

UDCC also coordinated volunteer opportunities with organizations across Delaware, creating meaningful opportunities for graduate students to engage with the local community. Throughout the year, members volunteered at a variety of community events, including the Great Human Race at the Western YMCA, the Newark Senior Center Flea Market, the Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway at the Woodlawn Library, the Do Care Doula Pantry Drive, and the Newark Spring Community Clean-Up, among others. These experiences allowed students to build relationships with community members while supporting organizations dedicated to improving health and well-being throughout Delaware.

Community Connectors believes that meaningful research begins with meaningful relationships. By creating opportunities for graduate students to volunteer, communicate their research, and engage directly with diverse communities, the organization is helping cultivate the next generation of researchers who value trust, collaboration, and community partnerships as essential components of impactful research.

As UDCC continues to grow, the organization looks forward to expanding partnerships, increasing opportunities for engagement, and strengthening connections between researchers and communities across Delaware.

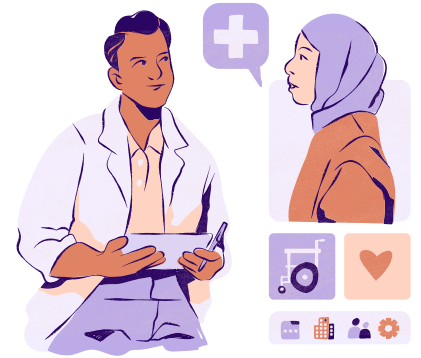


Building Community Through Partnership: PHC Student Practicum Experiences



Division of Developmental Disabilities Services

By: Alex Krumenacker
UD Master of Public Health Epidemiology Student



This summer, I had the privilege of completing my practicum with the Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS). At its core, DDDS goes beyond providing services: it empowers individuals to build greater independence and thrive at home and in their communities. I am grateful to have seen that mission in action and to work alongside staff who truly care about the people they serve.

My primary project involved reviewing the DDDS application process to identify barriers and opportunities for improving efficiency, accessibility, and equity. One activity that stood out was leading outreach for a feedback survey. This gave me the chance to connect directly with applicants and hear their perspectives, which helped shape my recommendations to division leadership. I also developed an instruction guide and flyer in both paper and digital formats to reduce the burden on those navigating the system. The paper version will meet people where they are at community events, while the digital version will live on the DDDS website among existing guidance materials.

Professionally, my time at DDDS allowed me to apply my public health training in a real-world setting, an experience that has prepared me well for a future career in epidemiology. I gained valuable skills in systems analysis, program evaluation, and government operations. Collaborating with staff across the division also strengthened my ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences and build lasting relationships. As a sibling of someone with a developmental disability, this work resonates deeply with me, having seen how the design of a system can influence access to services, quality of life, and long-term health outcomes. That lived experience is part of why I chose public health and continues to drive my advocacy for underserved populations.

Ultimately, the practicum showed me that community-engaged work must start with listening and acting on what people share. Creating lasting change requires not only understanding community needs but also ensuring that their voices are reflected in key decisions. This aligns with the Partnership for Healthy Communities' mission to advance health equity and improve the well-being of all Delawareans. Moving forward, I will carry with me the importance of elevating community voices in every role I take on. Thank you to DDDS, the Partnership for Healthy Communities, and the UD Master of Public Health Program for the opportunity to contribute to something so meaningful.