

## **Project: Community Health and Nutrition**

**Project Leader: Lindiwe Sibeko**

### **Project Overview**

Most Americans fall short of achieving national guidelines for achieving healthy dietary intakes, particularly of fruit and vegetable intake. This has contributed to unprecedented obesity rates in the US for both child and adult populations. Disparities in achieving national dietary guidelines are particularly evident in low income and some racial and ethnic minorities, population groups with high levels of food insecurity and poor health status. Additionally, the city of Springfield has an infant mortality rate (IMR) that is nearly double that of the state of Massachusetts (8.8 versus 4.7 deaths per 1000 live births, before the age of 1). Racial disparities are at the core of these distressing figures, with African American IMR being higher than the white counterparts (8.2 vs 3.2). The CDC estimates the infant mortality gap in the black population can be reduced by at least 50% through increased breastfeeding among African American women.

This work will address the nutritional health issues of low income and racial and ethnic minorities who are at high risk of food insecurity and poor health outcomes, including overweight and obesity. Training of undergraduates and graduate students will focus on delivery of nutrition education to underserved populations in the community. Both Extension education activities and research will be advanced by developing partnerships in the community to provide effective nutrition education and to motivate behavior changes that will increase dietary quality for target populations and strengthen collaboration with community organizations to increase availability and access to affordable and healthy food. Through a similar community collaborative approach this work is also focused on increasing breastfeeding rates among African American women to help reduce the unacceptably high rates of IMR in that population.

### **Activity Summary – 2019**

- Establish postpartum (community-based) program to encourage breast feeding (1)
- Serve as an expert advisor and speaker for 3 Committees: Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition Springfield; International Board of Certified Lactation Consultants; Center for Research on Families (3)
- Service Learning: Nutrition Education (12)

### ***Total educational contacts***

	<u>Youth Contacts</u>	<u>Adult Contacts</u>
In Person	220	92
Indirect Contacts (Print, Web, etc...)		

### **Narrative Summary and Impact**

The BCAC is a coalition I initiated in Springfield in 2017, with the primary objective of addressing breastfeeding disparities in the community, that lead to poor health outcomes among Black women and children in Springfield. Efforts of the coalition to raise awareness and form partnerships/collaborations to address poor quality of maternity care delivered to women of color is beginning to gain traction, with community stakeholders offering their support of the coalition's work. In this regard we have been offered free space (and use it) multiple times by a well-established parenting organization (Square One) in the community to conduct our work. Organizations are now offering opportunities for future collaborations and facilitate introductions to individuals/groups that can assist the coalition to further their work. Community development and mobilization around community health issues is a long process, however, through commitment to participatory approaches, the mission of BCAC is slowly unfolding and the work is progressing. In Spring 2020, the coalition will launch their 6 session group-based prenatal program targeting pregnant women of color. This program will provide an essential platform to offer an essential service to families of color. The program will also offer postpartum support, and important aspect of continuum of care, and ultimate contribution to improved health outcomes in families of color.

My integrated nutrition program continues to develop through several ongoing initiatives:

1. The Springfield based coalition (BCAC) that I developed has developed a group based prenatal program aimed at engaging women of color in early prenatal care to be piloted Spring 2020. The goal is to leverage the prenatal program as a bridge between institutional and community services that women of color can trust and where they can access high quality care throughout the perinatal process, and supported in their postpartum period and parenting development.
2. My current research activity also includes two NIH-funded studies: 1. I am a PI (part of multi-PI) of a randomized diet intervention investigating the impact of a fruit and vegetable rich diet on breast cancer risk in a diverse population of lactating women. The study began in Fall 2019. 2. As a co-investigator of a study examining peer and social networks of middle school students and their impact on weight related behaviors that include diet, physical activity and screen time. This longitudinal study has completed 6 waves of data collection.
3. My integrative program is also focused on training senior level undergraduate students in delivering nutrition education in the surrounding area. Students learn to conduct needs assessment with community partners, and identify nutrition education needs; then to design/plan, implement and evaluate nutrition education activities that meet the needs of adverse audiences. These service learning focused nutrition education activities facilitate a critical opportunity for UMass students to participate in civic engagement,

serving diverse populations and engage productively with surrounding communities in respectful and mutually beneficial ways.

### **Collaborating Organizations**

- Center for Research on Families
- Mercy Medical Services
- Breastfeeding Community Action Coalition
- Women, Infants and Children Food and Nutrition Service (WIC)