

Winter 2023



Growth and New Beginnings

By Tabia Henry Akintobi, PhD, MPH
MSM PRC Principal Investigator

The Morehouse School of Medicine, Prevention Research Center (MSM PRC) celebrates many new beginnings in 2023. I am pleased to welcome new members of our leadership team, who are all learning about the people, partnerships and processes central to our community-centered mission. In this issue, you will learn more from Rosanna Barrett, DrPH, new MSM PRC Director.



We have also welcomed three new Community Coalition Board (CCB) members who are settling into their first year of leadership and service. They reflect reach and relationships in rural and urban Georgia, partnerships by and for Latinx communities, and in marketing and communications. They join other CCB members, who govern, rather than advise our work to ensure it is community-led, translated and sustained. Ms. America Gruner is one, among them, and will share about her background and service in this newsletter.

I am always humbled to learn how the service of our community health workers is recognized as central to advancing the development and health of the neighborhoods with which we seek to partner and serve. Ms. Adrienne Proeller's recent acknowledgement, detailed later in this issue, is positive proof of her essential role in our quest for continued community trustworthiness. Finally, we exist to serve students, future learners and emerging leaders. We celebrate their experiences and successes in this issue. The MSM PRC mission is to:

1. Conduct interdisciplinary **community-based applied public health prevention research** with African American and other minority and health disparity populations experiencing persistent health disparities.
2. **Train underrepresented community-based researchers and public health practitioners** and
3. **demonstrate the value of community coalitions** in conducting research.

We encourage you to remember your “*why*” as you live, lead, learn, serve and partner. I have great expectations as we continue, with you, to lead and advance community-centered health equity.

Central to this is learning from the community what they need, in the amount that they need it, to ultimately, live their best lives. Looking forward!

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Looking Forward with Optimism and Great Expectation to 2023!



By Rosanna Barrett, DrPH, MPH
MSM PRC Center Director

As the new Director of MSM PRC, I am elated to continue, for almost 20 years, to serve the community through public health research and practice. As a PRC, we wholeheartedly embrace the MSM’s vision of “leading the creation and advancement of health equity,” to effect actionable and sustainable policy, system, and environmental changes in communities throughout Georgia.

As we reminisce on the latter part of the third quarter to the ending of the last quarter of 2022 (August – December), we strategically paused to recount our accomplishments and revisit lessons learned to build capacity and enhanced knowledge and skills. During the latter 5 months of 2022, it had been extremely busy but highly rewarding, as we successfully implemented programs, hosted community coalition board and staff retreats and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention site visit, facilitated community engagements, conducted Community Needs and Assets Assessment (CHNAA), and coordinated other events. I am enormously impressed by the dedication and tenacity of the team as most of the staff “hit the ground running” being new to the PRC, but rose triumphantly as they excelled at meeting the challenges that were encountered.

I look forward with optimism and great expectation to what we are poised to achieve in 2023. The PRC staff and affiliated faculty are enthusiastically ready to take on new funding opportunities and continue existing programs to effect positive changes within communities. I wholeheartedly believe that our public health interventions will have more lasting and profound impact if acknowledged, supported, led, and sustained by those affected by health and healthcare challenges. Therefore, we are mere facilitators and conveners of such interventions, and we humbly accept the role to serve beside, not in front of, community as research partners, to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to equitably live and thrive at their optimal best in an ever-evolving health and healthcare system and environment.

Find out more about the PRC and the work we are doing by visiting our website:

https://www.msm.edu/Research/research_centersandinstitutes/PRC/index.php



Join us in our quest to make a positive and lasting difference in Georgia and beyond!



Spring 2023 is on the Horizon!

By LaShawn Hoffman MSM PRC CCB Chair



I am extremely excited about the work MSM PRC has accomplished in partnership with the CCB. We have recognized the importance of having a collective community voice to ensure the well-being of the people in the communities we serve.

The CCB is at the forefront of ensuring the work of MSM PRC is closely aligned to research practices and that outcomes truly benefit the community. From the various community trainings to the implementation of key interventions, the CCB practices the principles of community-based participatory research to guide and develop every aspect of any project that engaged many Georgia communities and beyond.

With the dedicated members of the CCB who consist of a diverse group of community advocates, academic partners, and agencies, our commitment to reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes for every person is a responsibility we don't take lightly. Through our linkages to communities, neighborhoods, and organizations, we can ensure the research conducted is community centered and focused on the most important people, which is **YOU!**

We are always seeking new partnerships, collaborations, ideas, innovative tools that will help towards the advancement of health equity. Over the past year, we extended our area of reach to include more Georgia communities, revised our governing documents to ensure we have youth and emerging adults represented on the board. We work daily to maintain an interpersonal stance that is open to others in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person.

Currently, we are seeking the unique perspective of emerging and young adults (ages 18-25) who are essential to preparing the next generation of health equity champions contributing to and learning of community centered approaches to advancing population health to join our board.



If interested, please scan the QR code for more information.

If you are interested in getting more involved, contact us!



New CCB Member: Youth and Emerging Adult

Elijah Richardson

Elijah is a first year Master of Public Health student at MSM who is passionate about public health and advancing health equity. He will join the CCB for a year of service.

"My passion for improving the health outcomes of African Americans, has formulated my pursuit of work and education to do so in an impactful way. I believe my skills, knowledge base, and passion within the broad scope of public health have provided me the opportunity to serve on this Board. I am fully prepared to commit to the theme of the PRC and the Community Coalition Board."

Expanding Our Reach with CLILA: Against COVID-19 Disparities

By America Gruner MSM PRC CCB Member



Coalition of Latino Leaders, CLILA, was founded by America Gruner 16 years ago to respond and advocate for the many needs of the Latino community in Northwest Georgia. CLILA's founder America was fortunate to collaborate with MSM PRC by way of Dr. Rhonda Holliday to increase COVID-19 vaccine resources and education. Along with other community organizations and educational institutions – in the Georgia Peers for Equity Against COVID-19 and for Health (GAPEACH) program within Northwest Georgia Community Health Workers (Promotores) were able to conduct various COVID outreach and educational activities with Latinx youth ages 18-24. Some of the activities were specific for the project and others were included in our existing activities.

Community members were also made aware of the GAPEACH survey due to promotion on CLILA's social media, ads in the local newspaper, and even advertisement on the local radio station. We are grateful for MSM PRC and Dr. Holliday for allowing us to work together and including young Latinx community members from Northwest Georgia to reflect the unique characteristics of our community.

Our two champions, Promotores, canvassed at least 1,200 local residential homes and dozens of businesses distributing flyers inviting youth of the target population to participate in the GAPEACH survey and provided other evidence-based information to promote COVID vaccine and prevention. Both Promotores created a video interviewing young people as they provided their perspectives on COVID-19. Naturally, we were able to reach a lot of community members by distributing flyers during our weekly vaccine events. Also, at least 169 youth and young adults ages 18-24 were vaccinated during our weekly community vaccine events.

Core Research: Project Take Charge

By Samantha Martin, MA Project Director

Project Take Charge is up and running at our partner institutions, Albany State University (ASU), Atlanta Metropolitan State College (ATLM) and Morehouse College (MC). Each school has been paired with a community-based organization (CBO) to implement HIV testing, educational activities, and condom distribution on their campuses. The partner CBOs include NAESM (MC), Aniz (AMC), and Thrive SS (ASU). Through these collaborations, the campuses implemented HIV testing and education during the Morehouse College Freshman Move-In Week, campus-wide wellness events on all campuses, and on World AIDS Day. We have also partnered with the MSM Student Health and Wellness center to support additional HIV testing and education for Morehouse College students.



Visit the Project Take Charge website for condoms at no cost to students at participating institutions.

(Left to right) Project Director, Samantha Martin with students Christian J. Andrade Herrera (Albany State University), Calecia Simon (Atlanta Metropolitan State College), and David Holloway (Atlanta Metropolitan State College) at Peer Health Educator Training at the MSM Student Health and Wellness Center.

Project Take Charge has also launched its condom distribution website. This website provides free condoms and supplies to students from each campus, as well as information and resources on HIV and substance use. Project Take Charge conducted three additional trainings for peer educators at each institution. Project Take Charge will continue to work with each of these campuses to increase HIV awareness, access to condoms, and HIV testing to students and their surrounding communities. We will soon begin an assessment of the program to support the development of a toolkit to implement Project Take Charge at other HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions in the future.

Exceptional Contributions



Ms. Adrienne Proeller, being presented with an award from Antonio Lewis, Atlanta City Councilman, District 12

(Left to Right)

Adrienne Proeller, MSM PRC Community Health Worker; Antonio Lewis, Atlanta City Councilman, District 12

MSM PRC Community Health Worker (CHW), Adrienne Proeller, was honored at the 2023 State of the District event. The event was attended by District 12 residents, as well as city, state, county and federal elected officials and their representatives. Adrienne was presented with a plaque for recognition of her exceptional contributions to District 12. Her dedication, hard work, and commitment for advocating for the community has made a significant impact. This selfless service should not go unnoticed.

Mr. Ruben Burney Sr. being presented an award of recognition for over 8 years of service as the Chair of the Data Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) Committee.

(Left to Right)

LaShawn Hoffman, MSM PRC CCB; Ruben Burney Sr., PRC MSM CCB Member, Dr. Tabia Akintobi, MSM PRC Principal Investigator



The DME committee provides leadership, guidance and support for all relevant community-facing data associated with the MSM PRC. Recent activities have included: review and update of the CHNAA; input within the administration and recruitment strategies for the CHNAA; guidance on the development of research/evaluation recruitment tools; and revisions to the CCB satisfaction survey.

Community Engagement Day 2023: Resilience, Recovery, and Renewal



By Charity Starr Mitchell, DMin MDiv, LMSW
Director of Community Engagement

Following two years of navigating life on a virtual landscape, the MSM Office of Community Engagement recognized that it was time to renew the College's commitment to health and equity in the Atlanta community. Under the leadership of Dr. Charity S. Mitchell, on October 22, 2022, with the partnership of Antioch Urban Ministries, Inc. (AUMI), MSM opened the doors of its missional communal space and invited the Atlanta community to cross the threshold of social isolation and embark on a health and equity journey during our annual Community Engagement Day (CED) event.

As in the past, Community Engagement Day is a day committed to celebrating the community partners and individuals that advance health equity in the city of Atlanta. We recognize the COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted health challenges and structural barriers to health equity that many under resourced communities faced prior to its inception. Because of the communal wisdom of MSM's Community Health Workers, HEAL Clinic residents and our institutional partners, many vendors represented on CED provided resources that directly addressed the community's needs.

Through meaningful sponsorships from corporate sponsors like Amazon and partnerships with Johnson & Johnson, countless no cost services and incentives were offered to participants. Included in these services were: point of care health screenings, COVID screenings, COVID vaccines, health and wellness tutorials, financial health advisement, STEM/STEAM youth activities, food demonstrations, meals, health education stations and a variety of wholistic health alternative options. Approximately 65 partner vendors participated in the event, of which 15 were MSM affiliates. To aid in the logistical side of event management, students from Morehouse College and Spelman College served as volunteers for the event.

To kick off the festivities, the Mistress of Ceremony, Asia Rivers, Program Manager for the GAPEACH Project, ignited the fire of celebration among the participants by setting the tone for the occasion. Following the initial welcome, participants were officially greeted by MSM's esteemed administrative leaders such as, Dr. Tabia Akintobi ((Principal Investigator of the PRC and the Dean of Community Engagement), Dr. Rick Kittles (Senior VP for Research) and Dr. Errol Crook (Senior Associate Dean Clinical Affairs and CMO Morehouse Healthcare). Community leaders such as Commissioner Natalie Hall and Council Member Kim Scofield graced the participants with their call to social action and encouraged the community to vote and become involved with civic activities across the city.



The Office of Community Engagement staff inspires to leverage existing partnerships and increase awareness within the community about Community Engagement Day 2023. Our staff is presently meeting with internal and external partners to coordinate efforts and broaden our reach to Atlanta residents with the hope of transforming our local Atlanta communities into communities of care. Please reach out and share your interests with us by using the QR code below, we can't wait to hear from you!



MSM PRC Student & Partner Engagement

We thrive through the support of our student interns, fellows, and graduate research assistants. During Fall and Winter 2022, MSM PRC had the great pleasure of welcoming the following scholars to engage in research and community-based initiatives:



Faruq Ali Cisse

Senior at Morehouse College

Project: MSM PRC Evaluation Projects

Faruq believes, as Dr. King once said at the National convention of the Medical Committee for Human Rights "Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman". His long-term goal is to become an orthopedic surgeon, however, after studying abroad and learning about global initiatives he became curious about social determinants of health. With an interest in non-clinical factors that influence a person's health, he aims to obtain a Master of Public Health with a concentration in nutrition.

Then during the fall of 2022, Faruq interned at the PRC at MSM and assisted with evaluation and preparation for Community Engagement Day. "This experience gave me the opportunity to work on initiatives that benefited many people who have been let down by our health-care system. I learned about and contributed to community initiatives, as well as learned about policy planning. It was an extraordinary experience!"



Mekhi Hill

MPH Student, Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health

Project: Georgia CEAL, Graduate Research Assistant

Mekhi is a proud graduate of North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University and currently a second year Master of Public Health scholar. He is the founder of The Better Days Project, Inc a non-profit organization dedicated to uplifting and empowering BIPOC communities by raising awareness and providing access to mental health resources to help them live fulfilling lives. He joined MSM PRC as a Graduate Research Assistant to work on Georgia Community Engagement Alliance Against COVID-19 (GA CEAL) projects.

During his time at the MSM PRC, Mekhi assisted in developing the 2023 GEORGIA Community Engagement Alliance Against COVID-19 Disparities Pediatric Survey. "This experience has allowed me to understand the importance of data collection and how it can be used to improve the health of communities. While at the MSM PRC, I became more interested in prevention and realized that this measure is the future of healthcare."



Jalicae Norwood

MPH Student, Chamberlain University

Project: MSM PRC Evaluation Projects

Jalicae is a proud graduate of Alcorn State University and second year Master of Public Health scholar. As an intern for MSM PRC, she had the opportunity to work with the evaluation team to conduct the CHNAA survey to community members of metro-Atlanta and throughout the state of Georgia.

"When looking for an internship I knew I wanted a program that would make me feel at home and provide me with the best learning experience possible with a direct impact to my community. MSM PRC provided me with that and much more. In doing so, I was able to assist researchers by connecting with community members to identify their health needs and concerns, in an effort to provide resources to build healthier communities. The most rewarding part of my time at MSM PRC was being able to advocate for community members and contribute to the impactful work that is being done to bridge the gap of health disparities that plague our communities through surveys, health fairs, and community meetings. My learning experience at MSM PRC has equipped me with skills needed to continue to serve my community as a public health practitioner."



Tameka Jones, MPH

Fellow, Centers for
Disease Control and
Prevention

Tameka Jones comes to us from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and her public health career spans over two decades. Ms. Jones has held various leadership positions in government and private industry, both domestically and abroad. Some of her public health efforts have included working to reduce drug and alcohol addiction, COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, health disparities, movement disorders and women health issues. Ms. Jones last CDC assignment prior to joining the PRC, included serving as Emergency Operations Lead with the HHS CDC COVID-19 Team – Hospital Data Implementation Unit. Her team worked with US states to support COVID-19 response efforts and hospital data reporting.

Ms. Jones earned a Master of Public Health from Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University and completed research studies in Accra, Ghana and Dakar, Senegal. Ms. Jones also attended Wagner School of Business at New York University and completed her research studies at the World Health Organization in Geneva Switzerland. Ms. Jones is a former recipient of the prestigious Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF) Program established by President Jimmy Carter and spent two years working on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee in Washington, DC.

During Ms. Jones fellowship with the MSM PRC, she will be working across a number of projects including but not limited to the CHNAA, Community Engagement Day, Georgia CEAL, and the MSM PRC CCB. She is also helping the PRC with the development of various PRC and/or PRC Community Health & Preventive Medicine (CHPM) initiatives for disseminations of project outcomes and best practices.



Tai Chambers

MPH Student,
Morehouse School of
Medicine

Project: Core
Research Project -
Project Take Charge

Tai is a second year Master of Public Health scholar at MSM. As an intern for MSM PRC, he had the opportunity to work with the core research project for two years as a graduate research student.

"I began working with the PRC as a 1st year MPH student at MSM and thus far it has been a joy! I have been given the opportunity to work as a graduate research assistant for Project Take Charge where I worked with and learned from researchers how to properly manage data, conduct literature reviews for research proposals, and develop behavioral and attitude surveys for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) awareness and HIV prevention for students at Morehouse College, Albany State and Clark-Atlanta University.

Tai believes Project Take Charge has equipped him with the tools necessary to continue his journey in seeking health equity and serving those communities most impacted by disparity gaps in care. He plans to utilize these analysis skills in evaluation to ensure that health interventions are efficient and impactful for the communities being served.