

REACH U.S.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

A REACH Action Community (AC)

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insidevcu/0801healthdisparities/
index.html](http://www.vcu.edu/insidevcu/0801healthdisparities/index.html)

REACH U.S.

Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health

Across the U.S. (REACH U.S.) is a national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) program aimed at eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. It utilizes community-based approaches to reduce the burden of chronic illness in specific at-risk populations. There are 22 **REACH Action Communities** using practice-based and evidence-based programs. These programs look at cultural and environmental influences related to health disparities and their underlying causes. They develop, evaluate, and share their culturally specific and relevant strategies and best practices.

ISSUE

The REACH U.S. program at the Virginia Commonwealth University focuses on infant mortality. The Promoting Healthy Pregnancies Coalition (PHPC) was founded in Richmond more than 15 years ago to address racial and ethnic disparities in infant deaths. Today, racial and ethnic disparities in infant death rates in Virginia mirror those of the nation with an African American infant mortality rate that is two times higher than that of whites. In addition, African American women are less likely to seek prenatal care. Approximately one fourth (23%) receive no prenatal care or fail to initiate care until the 2nd or 3rd trimester (VA Health Statistics, 2003). Since prenatal care is associated with adverse birth outcomes, the VCU REACH U.S. program focuses on improving prenatal care compliance.

ACTIVITIES

- Uses a health system navigation approach, assigning each woman to a case navigator who serves as an empathic coach guiding her through the existing systems of care and teaches her the skills to eventually navigate those systems without assistance.
- Utilizes an efficacy-building, motivational approach to assist a woman in identifying her needs, establishing goals to meet her needs, and addressing any barriers that may arise.
- Works in collaboration with community partners to bridge gaps in services. Provides modest behavioral incentives to increase the motivation program participants to attend prenatal care classes and scheduled prenatal visits; participants receive tokens that can be exchanged for baby clothes, diapers, personal care items, etc.
- Conducts computer-based health disparity training to teach healthcare providers how to identify personal biases and to use culturally-sensitive approaches in the care of their patients.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- As of December 2010, the Health System Navigation program enrolled approximately 120 women to test the prenatal health navigation intervention against standard practice.
- Project staff members have begun providing training in the tailored intervention to community partners and outside agencies interested in improving prenatal care compliance and birth outcomes.

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