

Buffalo Center for Health Equity Annual Report

DECEMBER 2024



Buffalo Center
for Health Equity

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Table of Contents



PAGE **SECTION**

| | |
|----|-----------------------|
| 04 | Introduction |
| 05 | Capacity Building |
| 06 | Organizational Chart |
| 07 | Partnerships |
| 08 | Programs & Activities |
| 14 | Commendations |
| 16 | Acknowledgments |

Introduction



A Message from BCHE Leadership

As we reflect on 2024, a year marked by transformative progress, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) celebrates the impactful strides we have made in creating healthier, more equitable communities. Through the collective efforts of our dedicated team, passionate partners, and engaged community members, we have tackled some of the most pressing health disparities affecting Buffalo.

Major initiatives such as the **Food as Medicine Research**, establishing an **Indoor Food Production Facility**, developing programming for **National Institutes of Health/University at Buffalo Research Grant** and our **Maternal Health Programming** underscores our commitment to addressing the root causes of health inequities. These initiatives have not only delivered vital resources like nutritious food and health education to over 2,000 individuals but have also provided culturally sensitive care and advocacy to improve health outcomes on the Eastside.

Our new headquarters on the Campus of Canisius University, and collaborations on initiatives like the Igniting Hope Community Conference, have brought together diverse voices to improve mental wellness and neighborhood revitalization. Moreover, BCHE's Audio/Visual Podcast Studio has served as a platform to share stories, raise awareness, and build a collective understanding of the social determinants of health.

This work is deeply personal and profoundly impactful, driven by a vision to ensure that everyone in Buffalo can live a healthy and fulfilling life. None of this would be possible without the unwavering support of our team, board members, and the countless individuals and organizations who stand beside us in this mission.

As we turn toward 2025, we renew our focus on expanding our reach, strengthening partnerships, and innovating programs to address emerging health challenges. Together, we are not only envisioning a brighter future but actively building it.

With Heartfelt Gratitude,
Leadership of the Buffalo Center for Health Equity

Capacity Building



Fiscal Responsibility

There is great intentionality in the transparency and accuracy of the BCHE's finances. The caliber of financial management and stewardship of the organization's resources received a boost in 2024 when Conway Porter CPA, P.C. was selected to ensure independent oversight of the organization's fiscal processes and procedures. The firm is responsible for the integrity of the general ledger of accounting documented in QuickBooks, the preparation of financial statements, budgeting, financial analysis of operations, financial reporting and compliance related to all funding sources. Conway Porter CPA, P.C. ensures that all funds are used for their intended purpose.

Legal Review

Further building upon our strength as an organization is the engagement of Harter Secrest & Emery, LLP Attorneys and Counselors who now serve as our organization's legal counsel to ensure that contractual agreements are consistent with best practice and follow the letter of the law.

New Location

BCHE's physical plant has **two (2) new locations** dedicated to meeting our mission of addressing the problems that impact our community's health. Led by the BCHE's Chief Operating Officer and Executive Staff from President's Office at Canisius University, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity secured its **new headquarters in the Health Sciences Building on the University's campus**. Our new headquarters, located on the beautiful campus of Canisius University allows the organization to expand its research work through collaborations with Canisius University's Pre Medical, Pre Dental, and Health Sciences Departments. This collaboration enhances the research activities previously established in our work with the University at Buffalo.

Our past efforts to advance food security on the Eastside served as the impetus to establish our second worksite on the grounds of **Harvest House, located at 175 Jefferson Avenue**. As a result of operational support from Rite Aid Foundation and Highmark Foundation, Harvest House now supports our food security and sustainability activities such as: Food as Medicine initiative, which has more than doubled the number of households served from approx. 111 in 2023 to an anticipated 500 in 2024 (roughly 2000 individuals).

Organizational Chart



Partnerships



BCHE has built strong partnerships with local organizations, government agencies, and community leaders, enhancing our programs.

Key partners include:

- BestSelf Behavioral Health
- Buffalo Go Green
- Buffalo Prenatal Perinatal Network
- Buffalo Sewer Authority
- Calming Nature Doula
- Canisius University
- Community Health Equity Research Institute
- Erie County Medical Center
- Erie County Office of Health Equity
- Harvest House
- HEALTHeLINK
- Highmark Health
- Home Beneath Our Feet
- LISC WNY
- National Witness Project
- No Menthol Buffalo
- Rite Aid Foundation
- UB School of Public Health
- WNYIIC



Pictured: Multi-agency collaboration for 1115 waiver.

Programs & Activities



Program Overview

The Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) has made significant strides in 2024, championing initiatives that address health inequities, environmental justice, community development, and policy advocacy. Below is a cohesive and detailed look at BCHE's key programs and achievements, reflecting its commitment to fostering a healthier and more equitable future for all.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

- Reached over 2,000 individuals through food distribution and health education in the Food as Medicine program.
- Engaged 700+ participants in the Hypertension Project.
- Successfully hosted Maternal Health and Youth Gun Violence Prevention events and forums.
- Engaged participants with National keynote speakers at the Igniting Hope Conference 2024.
- Established collaborative efforts with cultural groups like the Seneca Nation to honor and shed light on the needs of Indigenous peoples.



Programs & Activities



Sustainable Practice

EPA AIR QUALITY PROJECT

In collaboration with the University at Buffalo and the Federal EPA, BCHE monitors air quality and temperature in East Buffalo neighborhoods, offering vital data on environmental health disparities.

INDOOR FOOD PRODUCTION

In partnership with the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and Buffalo Go Green, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) launched a transformative indoor food production facility in a 40-foot shipping container, located at Buffalo Go Green's Zenner Street urban farm. This \$300,000 initiative enables year-round hydroponic farming, focusing on sustainability and nutrition education for underserved communities in East Buffalo. The facility is branded "Feeding the Roots. Blossoming a community," will grow vegetables and herbs, providing fresh produce for residents and promoting sustainable farming practices. This project emphasizes vocational training in agricultural technology. Through community engagement programs, residents will learn about hydroponic gardening while contributing to the reduction of food insecurity in the area. This project aligns with the state's clean energy goals by utilizing low-energy methods to grow food and reduce the environmental impact of traditional agriculture.

Health Equity Initiatives

HYPERTENSION PROJECT

This program engaged over 700 participants in blood pressure monitoring and education, with plans to expand in 2025. Supported by the Highmark Blue Fund, BCHE also launched blood pressure kiosks at Harvest House and plans to install additional kiosks in underserved areas.

Programs & Activities



FOOD AS MEDICINE PROGRAM

The First Fruits Food Pantry has made significant strides in addressing health disparities on Buffalo’s East Side by leading the way in the “Food as Medicine” initiative. This program integrates medical and dental care with fresh food distribution to improve public awareness of the health impacts of nutrition. The distribution is managed by the team at Harvest House, where patrons receive food as part of their routine medical and dental visits. With support from professionals at the University at Buffalo, including doctors and nutritionists, participants benefit from motivational interviewing and personalized nutrition counseling. In partnership with Harvest House, Rite Aid Healthy Futures, and the Buffalo Bills Foundation, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) provided nutritious food and health education to over 1,000 individuals in 2024, promoting better dietary health across the community. This integrated approach not only addresses food insecurity but also works to track and improve health outcomes for those struggling with poor health and food access.

BUFFALO’S CITY HEALTH DATA DASHBOARD PROJECT

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation, this initiative provides the BCHE with access to extensive SDOH data in a monitored information repository. The data is secured by the City of Buffalo for use in the BCHE’s engagement, policy advocacy and research work. The data is derived in part through community engagement work and educational programming for youth.

MATERNAL HEALTH PROGRAM

BCHE’s Maternal Health Program, in collaboration with UCLA, Confident Girl Mentoring, and local doulas, works to address systemic maternal health disparities and improve access to culturally sensitive care. The program’s latest initiative advocates for Medicaid-credentialed doulas who are also Certified Lactation Consultants (CLCs) to bill for breastfeeding and lactation services—services that have traditionally been limited to licensed healthcare providers like nurses and doctors. By including CLC-certified doulas, the program diversifies the maternal and infant health workforce, which is expected to improve outcomes for both mothers and babies. This initiative also aims to reduce healthcare costs by minimizing the need for additional medical interventions.

Programs & Activities



SUPPORTING UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO'S EFFORTS

BCHE plays a key role in supporting the University at Buffalo's \$3.6 million NIH grant aimed at addressing health inequities in Western New York. Through this collaboration, BCHE helps guide the establishment of the Center of Excellence in Investigator Development and Community Engagement. This center trains early-career faculty and researchers, focusing on social determinants of health such as poverty, housing, and racism. BCHE's involvement ensures that community voices are central to the research process, fostering solutions that drive long-term change in Buffalo's underserved communities.

Community Engagement and Advocacy

YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION EVENT

The Building Bridges: Youth Voices Against Gun Violence event empowered youth to address gun violence, fostering leadership and actionable change.

IGNITING HOPE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

This initiative is dedicated to addressing mental health and fostering neighborhood revitalization. It achieves this by hosting community forums and workshops aimed at expanding access to mental health resources and mobilizing residents to influence policy change. In 2024, the Igniting Hope Conference: Building an Environmentally Just Community attracted over 400 attendees and covered critical topics like housing, green construction, food systems, environmental advocacy, and maternal health. A memorable highlight of the conference was Dr. Taylor's impactful presentation on the work at the Center for Urban, which resonated deeply with participants. One attendee shared a poignant reflection: "These issues are real and unresolved, so we must do our best to step up and make the changes for the movement towards equality and freedom." The conference also highlighted powerful testimonials from participants about how BCHE's programs have positively impacted their lives, reinforcing the significance of community engagement in tackling health disparities.

TOBACCO AND MENTHOL BAN ADVOCACY

BCHE collaborated with the American Heart Association, No Menthol Buffalo, and UB to counter misinformation about menthol cigarettes, advocating for protective health policies.

Programs & Activities



MEN'S HEALTH

In collaboration with Open Buffalo and the FATHER's Group, BCHE has created safe spaces for men to discuss both mental and physical health concerns. This initiative fosters open dialogue and provides crucial support, empowering individuals to take ownership of their health outcomes. By focusing on the importance of culturally sensitive care, this program aims to dismantle stigmas surrounding men's health while promoting long-term wellness in the community. This approach not only enhances individual well-being but also builds a strong sense of collective responsibility for community health.

PHEARLESS INITIATIVE

BCHE proudly supports the PHEARLESS (Public Health Regenerative Leadership Synergy) initiative, a transformative program dedicated to cultivating the next generation of public health leaders. Focused on regenerative leadership, PHEARLESS seeks to create sustainable, positive change within complex systems. By uniting public health professionals and community leaders, the initiative fosters collaboration to develop innovative solutions addressing systemic health inequities. BCHE plays a key role in enhancing the program by offering training, mentorship, and hands-on leadership opportunities. These efforts equip participants with the skills needed to tackle public health challenges, build resilience in communities, and engage in effective problem-solving, preparing over 15 future leaders to drive long-term improvements in health and well-being.

Workforce Development Programming

INSTITUTE FOR NON-PROFIT PRACTICE, RISE FELLOWSHIP

BCHE Community Engagement staff conducted a presentation to the participants of the RISE Program. This initiative is designed for early career individuals looking for impactful leadership development opportunities to propel their careers. The presentations provided participants with information regarding how mission-driven, social impact organizations, like the BCHE, function which develop essential leadership and professional skills.

WATER EQUITY AMBASSADOR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

In partnership with the Buffalo Sewer Authority and the U.S. Department of Labor, participants received training on Civil Service exams and apprenticeships, enhancing career opportunities.

Programs & Activities



Cultural Information and Educational Advocacy

SENECA NATION PARTNERSHIP

BCHE joined the Seneca Nation to raise the Haudenosaunee flag over City Hall during Native American Heritage Month, honoring Indigenous culture and addressing historical trauma.

BCHE AUDIO/VISUAL PODCAST STUDIO

An innovative platform designed to amplify local voices, creating a space for meaningful dialogue about health equity and the social determinants of health. It highlights transformative individuals and organizations addressing these issues while offering high-quality podcast production and post-production services. Weekly episodes showcase impactful work and produce engaging social media content through smaller clips. Additionally, the studio serves as a production hub for community-driven initiatives, including the Buffalo Fatherhood Initiative and Igniting Hope. This aligns with BCHE's mission to elevate community-led solutions and raise awareness of critical health and social challenges



Commendations



George F. Nicholas, CEO

City and State NY Power List
2024 Responsible 100 Leaders Award

Buffalo Business First
2024 Power 100 Leaders of Color



Allita Dockery, COO

Buffalo Business First
2024 C-Level & Hall of Fame Award



Dr. Willie Underwood, CMRO

University of South Carolina School of Medicine
Honorary Doctorate, Public Service, May 2024



Sheena Woods

Buffalo Black Achievers Inc.
2024 Black Achiever Award

Commendations



Samantha Hidalgo

Buffalo Center for Health Equity

2024 Recognition Award for Organizational Leadership

Igniting Hope Conference



Sherman Webb-Middlebrooks

Fathers & BYMoC / Reimagine I am the Change

2024 Service Award

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. Rho Lambda Chapter

2024 Fatherhood Award



Giavanna Cuomo-Browne

University at Buffalo Department of Psychology

2024 Outstanding Community Service Award

Acknowledgments



The Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) extends its profound gratitude to Highmark Health, Canisius University, University at Buffalo, and all of our dedicated partners, and engaged community members whose unwavering commitment has propelled us toward achieving our mission. Your collective contributions—through expertise, collaboration, and passion—have strengthened our programs and initiatives, ensuring that we continue to dismantle barriers and promote health equity across Buffalo.

To our staff, your tireless dedication and innovative efforts have been the foundation of our success. From program implementation to community engagement, you have championed the vision of BCHE every step of the way.

To our partners and supporters, thank you for your invaluable contributions, resources, and shared commitment to equity. Organizations like the Erie County Office of Health Equity, Buffalo Go Green, and the UB School of Public Health, among others, have been instrumental in creating a robust network of collaboration that amplifies our impact.

And to the community members we serve, your trust, feedback, and resilience continue to inspire us daily. You remind us why we exist—to ensure that every individual in Buffalo has access to the resources and opportunities necessary for a healthy and fulfilling life.

Together, we are building a future where health equity is not just an aspiration but a reality for all.

The Buffalo Center for Health Equity (BCHE) expresses its deepest appreciation to the visionary foundations and corporate sponsors whose generous support has been instrumental in laying the foundation for our transformative initiatives. This unwavering commitment fuels our mission to address systemic health disparities, enabling impactful programs and meaningful change in the communities we serve.

- Highmark Health Foundation / Highmark Blue Fund
- Rite Aid Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Health Foundation of Western and Central New York
- CDC Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- John R. Oishei Foundation
- American College of Cardiology
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
- Alcott Foundation
- New York Power Authority

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