

ABSTRACT ID# P50

Title: Evaluating the impact of community-engaged research partnerships on communities

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Background: Since 2010, the University of Minnesota Clinical and Translational Science Institute (UMN CTSI) Community Health Collaborative grant program has funded community-academic research partnerships with potential to impact practice and policy changes that improve population health. However, limited program evaluation exists to describe whether and how projects conducted by community-academic research partnerships result in tangible benefits to communities. UMN CTSI evaluated 23 funded community-academic partnerships and their specific community-engaged research projects. The projects, conducted in various urban, suburban and rural settings and often focused on underserved populations and underlying health disparities, included diverse communities. The evaluation reviewed partnership characteristics and how project research findings were translated through partnership collaboration into practice, shaping both policy and best practice.

Methods: Evaluators conducted a retrospective evaluation using a mixed-method approach to gather descriptive information about partnership methods and project impact. Community and university co-PIs separately completed surveys and participated in semi-structured interviews to describe research partnership methods, processes for translating research outcomes to realize community benefit, and projects' tangible benefit to communities.

Results: Findings reveal diverse community-academic partnership types and methods. While nearly all partnerships were new, community partners actively engaged in a wide range of research activities and most collaborations continued post-award. Co-PIs identified benefits to communities including best practice changes, statewide health care legislation, and policy changes on diverse health issues. Additional benefits include building community organizations' reputations and sustained research partnerships.

Conclusions: These findings illuminate characteristics of community-academic partnerships that resulted in tangible benefits for community organizations and community health.