

# Addressing Local Public Health Needs through Collaboration with Community-Based Organizations

Rayna Haque<sup>1</sup>, Marzia Maliha<sup>2</sup>, Kaneza Kadambaya<sup>3</sup>, Maha Sheikh<sup>4</sup>, Senila Yasmin<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Northeastern University, <sup>2</sup>Sidney Kimmel Medical College, <sup>3</sup>Harvard Medical School Center for Bioethics, <sup>4</sup>Tufts University School of Medicine

## - BACKGROUND -

The **Academic Public Health Corps** (APHC) is a novel academic-practice partnership dedicated to supporting local public health throughout Massachusetts. Created in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, its members have assisted more than 130 local health departments with contact tracing, health communications, and health equity efforts.

**Community Based Organizations** (CBOs) directly serve their community members and often represent the needs and interests of marginalized populations. Their close connection to the population allows them to create strong relationships and design programs and resources suited to the needs of their communities.

In the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, APHC partnered with community-based organizations (CBOs) to address vaccine hesitancy and improve overall community health.

## - METHODS -

### SELECTING CBOs

In March 2021, MA COVID-19 Community Grants were allocated to select CBOs to aid Massachusetts communities deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The APHC partnered with two community partners from among the grant recipients:

- ❖ The Association of Islamic Charitable Projects (AICP)
- ❖ The Somali Parents Advocacy Center for Education (SPACE)

### STRUCTURE

Each APHC/CBO partnership had a 1-to-1 liaison pairing. The APHC liaison collected feedback from community members that demonstrated a need for culturally appropriate resources on topics like vaccine safety, then continued to meet frequently with the CBO liaison throughout the partnership.

## - RESULTS -



**KEEP WEARING  
MASKS AND  
TAKING PROPER  
PRECAUTIONS  
AGAINST COVID-19.**

Find more information at  
[cdc.gov/covid19](https://cdc.gov/covid19) &  
[mass.gov/covidvaccine](https://mass.gov/covidvaccine)

Figure 1: Representative Health Promotion Materials

APHC Corps members created several graphics that included religious and cultural imagery that the CBOs' audiences could relate to (Figure 1).

The APHC hosted programming that was tailored for the community, including a virtual COVID-19 Q&A panel with Muslim health care professionals that included live Arabic translation. The APHC also collaborated with the AICP to conduct a live virtual event with a Muslim nutritionist who discussed nutrition during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Attendee feedback from both events was very positive, and community members are eager for more public health programming and educational opportunities.

Some limitations of our work included: small group size, limited time available to support organizational needs, and lack of in-person support.

## - DISCUSSION -

This model of outreach by the APHC illustrates culturally intentional ways of addressing specific population needs at the local level. These partnerships highlight ways that including CBOs can amplify the work of local governmental public health and health equity.

The APHC was able to support CBOs in mobilizing public health resources and promoting health education in culturally and religiously sensitive ways.

These collaborations support existing research indicating community partnerships help to establish trust and improve community health.

## - CONCLUSION -

In cultivating collaborative partnerships, organizations are better able to address health inequities and to amplify the work of local public health, especially for communities that are hard to reach through traditional public health channels.



In the future, the APHC would like to pursue additional initiatives with its CBO partners:

- A mental health and wellness event series for the MA Somali and Muslim community
- Connecting CBOs to local boards of health in their area
- Promoting partnerships between CBOs and other non-profit organizations and working as liaisons between them

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals and organizations for their support and work on this project: Amelia Thyen (APHC), Aaroni Adusumilli (APHC), Asha Abdullahi (SPACE), Rawan Chaaban (AICP), Jennifer Tsoi (MHOA), Antonia Blinn (MADPH), Sumbal Shahzadi (UMB), David L. Swain (BUSM), and the Academic Public Health Corps members.