



2026

BI-ANNUAL REPORT

Vanderbilt
PI+ER

Program for
Population
Health and
Engagement
Research

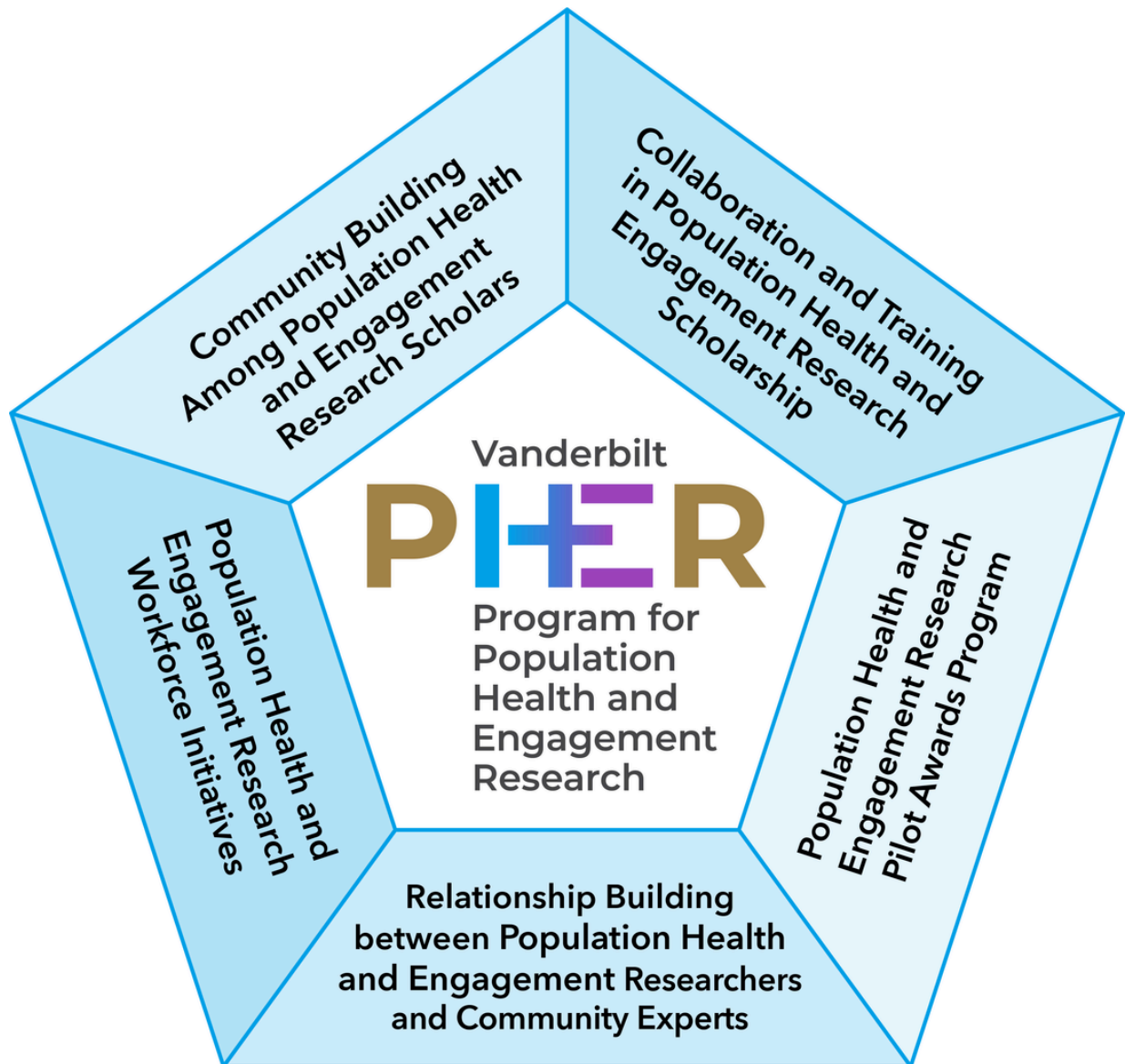


Table of Contents

Overview	1
Statement of Intent.....	2
Executive Summary	3
Leadership & Governance.....	4
Inaugural event.....	5
Community Advisory Board.....	7
Strategic Pillars.....	8
Strategic Framework.....	9
Strategic Roadmap (3-Year Plan).....	10
Process Metrics.....	11
Alignment with 2024-2027 Roadmap.....	12
Early Accomplishments.....	13
Partnerships.....	14
Accomplishments & Activities	15
Accomplishments & Activities (Community).....	16
Accomplishments & Activities (Academic).....	17
Select Publications.....	18
LOIs and grant applications.....	19
Emerging Resources and Future Directions	20
Manuscript (Scoping Review).....	21
Microlearning Series Modules.....	22
Landscape Analysis (Directory).....	23
Website.....	24
Looking Ahead	25

Vanderbilt



Program for
Population
Health and
Engagement
Research

Overview



Mission

To establish a community of scholars and collaborators across VUMC to generate and advance research to inform and guide innovative solutions that advance our understanding of population health, and leverage engagement research to promote health and health outcomes to “achieve optimal health across populations”.

Vision

To become the nation’s leader in population health and engagement research by creating a rigorous environment for application-driven research with rapid response to policies and practices

Intent

Founded in 2023 under the guidance of Drs. Velma McBride Murry and Stephen Patrick, PHER experienced a leadership transition in 2024, with Drs. Velma McBride Murry and Ebele Umeukeje now leading. Its main goal is to promote and support community-focused, multi-stakeholder research to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. PHER aims to create a Vanderbilt-wide community of researchers, trainees, and partners interested in research to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities across Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center. This network is designed to raise institutional awareness of the policies, practices, and collaborations necessary to enhance health equity. It also serves as an academic hub for medical students, faculty candidates, junior faculty, and experienced scholars dedicated to this field. By emphasizing community partnerships, research, scholarship, education, and training, PHER creates a framework for resource sharing, pinpointing research gaps in health disparities, and cultivating future scholars and leaders dedicated to enhancing health outcomes in diverse communities.

Sponsors

The work of PHER is made possible by funding from the Center for Health Services Research (CHSR), Office of Community Health & Engagement (OCHE) and the Institute for Population & Public Health (IPPH)



pictured: Dr. Sunil Kripalani (CHSR), Dr. Consuelo Wilkins (OCHE), and Dr. Russell Rothman (IPPH)

Executive Summary

Vanderbit Program for Population Health and Engagement Research (PHER)

*Advancing Population Health Research Through Collaboration,
Innovation, and Community Engagement*

The Program for Population Health and Engagement Research (PHER) is a multidisciplinary initiative at Vanderbilt Health dedicated to advancing innovative, collaborative, and community-engaged research that improves health outcomes across populations. By bringing together researchers, clinicians, community leaders, health systems, and policy stakeholders, PHER serves as a catalyst for developing, implementing, and translating evidence-based solutions that address complex population health challenges and promote optimal health.



Velma McBride Murry, PhD, MS
Co-Director



Ebele Umeukeje, MD, MPH, FASN
Co-Director

Executive Summary

Leadership and Governance

PHER is co-directed by Dr. Velma McBride Murry and Dr. Ebele Umeukeje and is supported by an Executive Committee composed of institutional leaders whose expertise spans population health, health services research, and community engagement:

- Dr. Russell Rothman, Vanderbilt Institute for Population and Public Health (IPPH)
- Dr. Sunil Kripalani, Center for Health Services Research (CHSR)
- Dr. Consuelo Wilkins, Office of Community Health and Engagement

The Executive Committee provides strategic oversight by evaluating PHER's progress, refining program priorities, identifying emerging opportunities, and guiding membership of the PHER Community-Academic Advisory Board (CA²B).

Inaugural Event



Executive Summary

Building a Collaborative Community

PHER was officially inaugurated on June 11, 2024, at the Tennessee State Museum. The inaugural event introduced PHER's leadership, Executive sponsors, and Community-Academic Advisory Board while bringing together investigators, clinicians, trainees, community organizations, and institutional partners committed to improving population health. Highlights included keynote remarks by Dr. Consuelo Wilkins, presentations from Drs. Russell Rothman and Sunil Kripalani, an interactive research "Connect-a-thon" that fostered new collaborations, and a performance by Vanderbilt's "Dr. Jazz" ensemble led by Dr. Joe Schlesinger. The event generated tremendous enthusiasm and established a strong foundation for an engaged and collaborative research community.

Community-Academic Partnership

A distinguishing strength of PHER is its **16-member Community-Academic Advisory Board (CA²B)**, co-led by **Dr. Melinda Aldrich** and **Ms. Faye Pryor**, and composed of leaders representing academia, healthcare, and community organizations.

PHER CA²B members include:

Ms. Claudia Barajas, Dr. Cristin Fritz, Ms. Leslie Boone, Dr. Elisa Gordon, Dr. Nancy Cox, Pastor Aaron Marble, Dr. Taylar Dickson, Dr. Eduardo Lopez Martinez, Dr. Peter Embi, Dr. Stephania Miller-Hughes, Dr. Jennifer Erves, Ms. Amy Richardson, Ms. Tene Franklin, and Dr. Ashley Spann

Community-Academic Advisory Board

2024-2026

The Program for Population Health and Engagement Research engages both community and academic experts to carry out our mission.



Melinda Aldrich
Co-chair



Faye Pryor
Co-chair



Claudia Barajas



Leslie Boone



Nancy Cox



Taylor Dickson



Peter Embi



Jennifer Erves



Tene Franklin



Cristin Fritz



Elisa Gordon



Aaron Marble



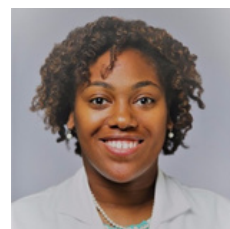
Eduardo Lopez Martinez



Stephania Miller-Hughes



Amy Richardson



Ashley Spann

Executive Summary

The CA²B provides guidance on PHER's strategic direction while supporting:

- Development of PHER's identity and visibility
- Strengthening partnerships across VUMC, Meharry Medical College, and community organizations
- Dissemination of research findings to community audiences
- Organization of research webinars and educational programming
- Identification of collaborative funding opportunities
- Advancement of PHER's five strategic pillars

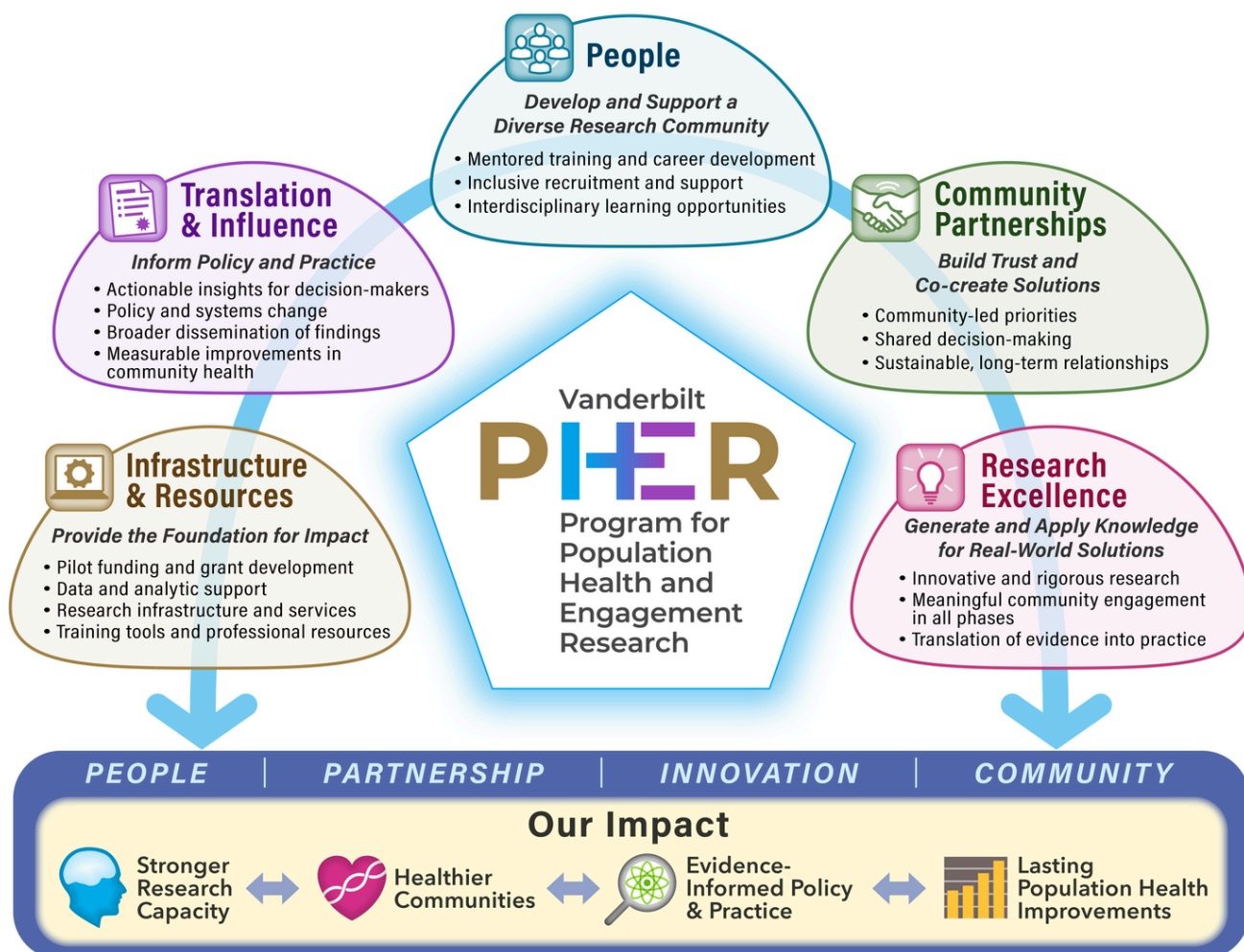
Strategic Pillars

PHER's activities are organized around five interconnected pillars:

1. **Community Building** — Creating a vibrant network of investigators engaged in population health and engagement research.
2. **Collaboration and Training** — Expanding interdisciplinary educational and career development opportunities for trainees and faculty.
3. **Research Catalyst (Pilot) Awards** — Supporting innovative early-stage research projects with high potential for future external funding and scientific impact.
4. **Community Partnerships** — Building sustainable relationships between researchers, healthcare systems, and community experts to co-develop impactful research.
5. **Workforce Development** — Strengthening the future population health research workforce through recruitment, mentorship, and training in rigorous, equitable, and reproducible research.

PHER Program Strategic Framework

Healthier communities through population health and engagement research, collaboration, and training.



Executive Summary

Strategic Roadmap (2024–2027)

PHER's three-year strategic plan provides a roadmap for sustained growth and impact.

Year 1: Foundation and Relationship Building

Focused on establishing infrastructure through scholarly engagement, community partnerships, training development, and an inaugural research catalyst funding program.

Year 2: Expansion and Collaboration

Emphasizes interdisciplinary research teams, expanded educational programming, workforce fellowships, collaborative proposal development, and engagement symposium.

Year 3: Implementation and Impact

Focuses on scaling successful projects, translating research into policy and practice, expanding national collaborations, evaluating workforce initiatives, and increasing scholarly dissemination and external funding.

Executive Summary

Process Metrics For PHER

In addition to pillar-specific measures, PHER could establish a small set of program-wide implementation metrics to assess whether the strategic roadmap is being executed effectively:

1. **Reach:** Number of investigators, trainees, community partners, and organizations engaged annually.
2. **Engagement:** Percentage of participants who actively participate in ≥ 1 PHER activity per year.
3. **Interdisciplinarity:** Percentage of projects and activities involving multiple disciplines or departments.
4. **Community engagement:** Percentage of research projects incorporating community partners in planning, implementation, or dissemination.
5. **Research pipeline:** Number of ideas progressing from networking → pilot funding → collaborative proposal → external funding → implementation.
6. **Training pipeline:** Number of trainees progressing from training → mentorship → research participation → independent research activity.
7. **Partnership pipeline:** Number of relationships progressing from initial engagement → co-development → active research collaboration → sustained partnership.
8. **Infrastructure:** Number of new resources, tools, datasets, methods, or research-support mechanisms established.
9. **Timeliness:** Percentage of planned activities completed within the annual strategic-plan timeline.
10. **Continuous improvement:** Percentage of PHER programs/activities evaluated annually and modified based on participant, investigator, and community feedback.

Executive Summary

Alignment with the 2024-2027 Roadmap

Year	Strategic Emphasis	Priority Process Metrics
Year 1 – Foundation & Relationship Building	Build infrastructure and establish relationships	Membership growth; baseline investigator network; number of community partners; training infrastructure; inaugural pilot award cycle; participation rates
Year 2 – Expansion & Collaboration	Increase interdisciplinary activity and workforce development	New research teams; training participation; mentor–mentee relationships; fellowship recruitment; collaborative proposals; symposium participation; expanded community partnerships
Year 3 – Implementation & Impact	Scale, translate, disseminate, and sustain	Projects advancing to implementation; policy/practice engagement; national collaborations; external grant submissions; workforce progression; dissemination activities; sustained partnerships

Executive Summary

Early Accomplishments

PHER has rapidly established itself as a hub for collaborative population health research.

Highlights include:

- Launch of the PHER pilot award supporting innovative community-engaged research.
- Funding of two investigator-led projects during the 2024–2025 cycle, including Dr. Uchenna Anani's study examining parental trauma and resilience in the neonatal intensive care unit, which resulted in an abstract selected for presentation at the **2026 Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting**.
- Growth of an active interdisciplinary research community producing:
 - More than **60 peer-reviewed publications**
 - Over **65 scientific and community presentations**
 - Approximately **30 grant and Letter of Intent submissions**
 - Numerous collaborative research projects addressing chronic disease prevention, health disparities, transplantation, food insecurity, cancer disparities, and community-engaged research.
- One of our community partners reached **more than 6,600 individuals*** through culturally responsive programming while maintaining collaborations with over 100 community organizations, significantly expanding PHER's reach and impact.

Executive Summary

Partnership across Vanderbilt Health

PHER partners with other programs and centers across Vanderbilt Health that also work to address population health, community engagement, and community research.

Some of these programs and centers include:

- Institute for Public & Population Health
- Center for Health Services Research
- Office of Community Health & Engagement
- Meharry-Vanderbilt Community Engaged Research Core (CERC)

Accomplishments & Activities

Community and Academic

Summary

This section highlights activities and accomplishments of PHER CAB members (and the organizations that they represent) that align with the mission and vision of PHER.

During the 2024–2026 reporting period, PHER members and their organizations had the following accomplishments:

One of our community partners, Siloam Health:

- served more than 6,600 individuals* through culturally responsive programs **and**
- maintained collaborations with over 100 partner organizations.

Together, these efforts advanced PHER's mission of generating and translating population health and engagement research to improve equitable health outcomes.

Members from within academia collectively:

- demonstrated research productivity, community engagement, and population health impact.
- had more than 60 scholarly publications
- gave over 65 scientific and community presentations
- completed 30 grant and Letter of Intent submissions
- led/co-led multiple active research projects focused on:
 - health equity
 - chronic disease prevention
 - food insecurity
 - transplantation
 - cancer disparities
 - community-engaged research

Accomplishments & Activities

Community*

3 programs and services

6,600 individuals served

82 outreach activities

115 partnering organizations

44 grants applied for

Spotlight Organization



16

**The data highlighted is derived from community members reached by Siloam Health, led by PHER CA²B member.*

Accomplishments & Activities

Academic*

66 publications

67 presentations and posters

30 grants submitted and
planned for submission

11 active research projects
reported

Accomplishments & Activities

Academic

Select Publications

Murry, V. M. (2025). Seizing the moments and lessons learned from the global response to COVID-19 pandemic: Creating a platform to shape the scientific and public discourse of research on adolescence, Invited Special Issue, Journal of Research on Adolescence, 25, 5;35:e13020.

Ukoli F, Kumar J, Nzerue C, Adediran E, Johnson D, Samuel A, **Miller-Hughes S.** Research Design and Methods in Community Team Lifestyle Immersion Program for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control. Int J Sci Basic Appl Res. 2025 May 17;77(1):213-225. Epub 2025 Jul 26. PMID: 42165028; PMCID: PMC13185515.

Richmond J, Fernandez JR, Bonnet K, Sellers A, Schlundt DG, Forde AT, Wilkins CH, **Aldrich MC.** JAMA Netw Open. 2024 May 1;7(5):e2412880. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.12880.PMID: 38819825

Gordon EJ, Gacki-Smith J, Smith JD, Wicklund C, Duquette D, Muhammad L, Dong S, Yevugah B, Anderson G, Friedewald J, Gilbert A, Tandon D, Burgess-Bishop J, Fox M, Shuck M, Binion PA, Crawford V, Coleman C, Howard J, Agrawal A. APOL1 Genetic Testing and Counseling Does Not Reduce Living Kidney Donors' Willingness to Donate: A Non-Randomized Controlled Trial. Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology; 2026; In Press.

Kemberlee Bonnet; Erin M. Bergner; Melissa Ma; Kathryn Taylor; Emily Desantis; Maria A Pena; Queen Henry-Okafor; Toddra Liddell; Devika Nair; Rachel Fissell; Julie Iwelunmor; Collins Airhihenbuwa; Joseph Merighi; Kenneth Resnicow; Ruth Q. Wolever; Kerri L Cavanaugh; David Schlundt; **Ebele M Umeukeje.** African American Perspectives On Motivational Strategies To Improve Hemodialysis Treatment Adherence: A Qualitative Study (CJASN). October 16, 2024. PMID: 39412894 DOI: 10.2215/CJN.0000000580.

Arredondo BC, Baugh A, Iverson GL, Christopher GC, Visweswaran S, Gerberding JL, Menetski JP, **Lopez-Martinez EA,** Perry W, Persaud N, Sady MD, Stringer AY, Wilson M (2026) Changing the narrative: Proceedings of a summit on advancing precision in health assessment, Health Equity 10:1, 46–69, DOI: 10.1177/24731242261419949.

Accomplishments & Activities

Academic

Select LOI and Grant Applications

Murry, V.M., & Umeukeje, E., (2025). RWJF LOI Grant Submission: Training Academic Health Professional for Health Disparities Leadership.

Richardson, A., Murry, V. M., Washburn, C. (2026). RWJF LOI Grant Submission: Community Health Workers as Protective System Infrastructure in Immigrant-Serving Safety-Net Clinics: Sustaining Equitable Care Under Policy Threat.

Murry, V.M., & Umeukeje, E., (2025). MacArthur 100 & Change Proposal: Amplifying community-led prevention to accelerate youth mental and behavioral health, in collaboration with Margaret Kuklinski, PhD, Lead PI, University of Washington.



Emerging Resources

Emerging Resources and Future Directions

PHER continues to develop resources that will strengthen the field of population health and engagement research.

Current initiatives include:

- **A comprehensive scoping review** examining definitions, theoretical frameworks, engagement strategies, implementation approaches, and research gaps within population health and engagement research.
- **Population Health and Engagement Research 101**, a series of ten micro-learning modules (anticipated Fall 2026) designed to establish a shared language and foundational knowledge in population health, community engagement, implementation science, ethics, health-related social and structural factors, partnership development, and translation of research into practice.
- **A Landscape Analysis Survey**, developed in REDCap with guidance from the CA²B, to create a searchable directory of investigators and community organizations engaged in population health and engagement research across VUMC and partner institutions, facilitating future collaborations and multidisciplinary team science.

Emerging Resources

Manuscript

Scoping Review

Drafted Title: Scoping Review Evaluating frameworks for population health and engagement research

Overall Goal:

- Identify the prevailing definitions, terminology, and theoretical frameworks that inform population health and engagement research.
- Describe how population health engagement strategies are conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated in population health research, and what gaps exist in advancing equitable population health outcomes

Potential Journals



Emerging Resources

Microlearning Series Modules

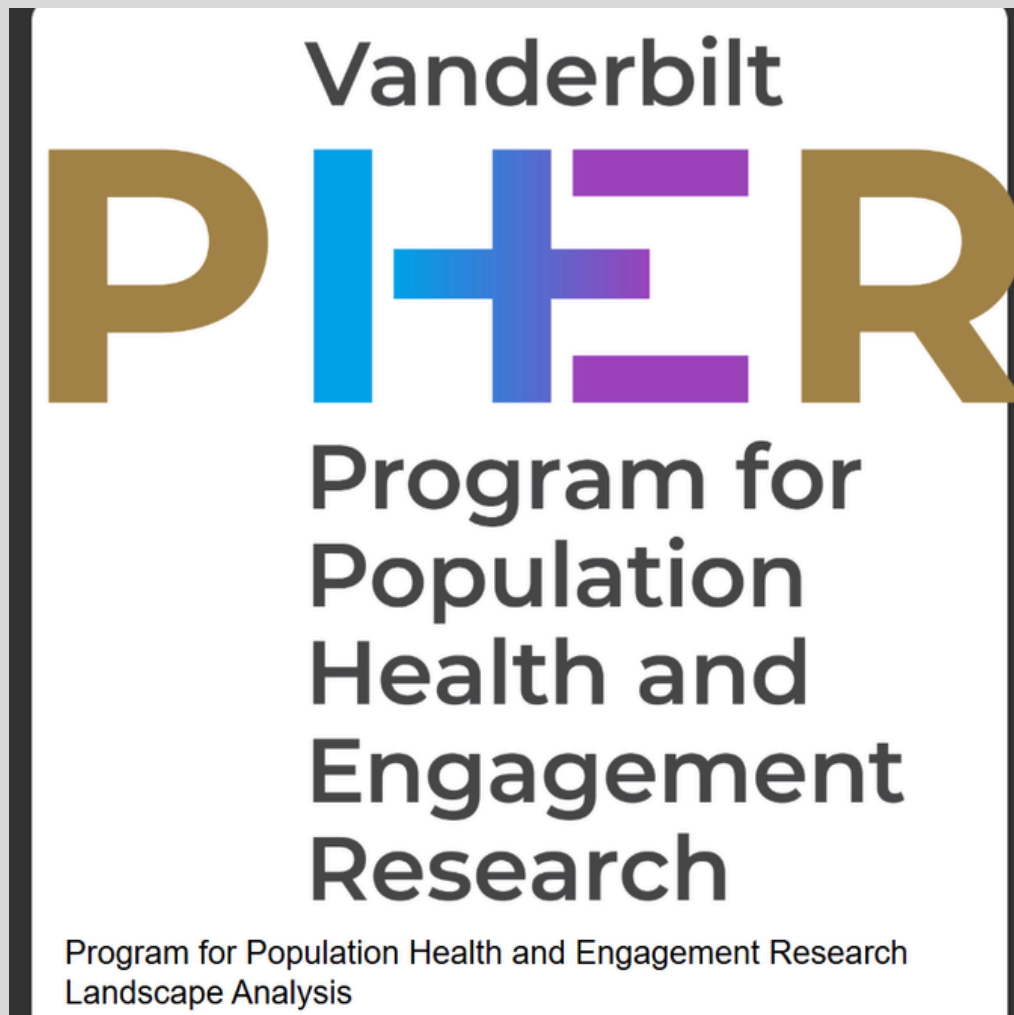
Population Health and Engagement Research 101

Purpose: To advance understanding of population health and engagement research.

Dissemination Goals: PHER hopes to share the modules with faculty, staff, students, and community partners via our website and through relevant newsletters.

1. **The Foundations of Population Health & Engagement**
2. **Exploring the Population Health Ecosystem**
3. **Identifying Health Challenges**
4. **Driving Better Outcomes**
5. **Implementing Research in Practice**
6. **Applying Ethical Principles**
7. **Addressing Health Related Social and Structural Factors**
8. **Building Community Research Partnerships**
9. **Learning from Missed Opportunities**
10. **Turning Research Into Action**

JOIN US!



If you are interested in working with PHER or you know of an individual or organization, reach out to our Program Managers, Jasmine Bell, MPH (jasmine.bell@vumc.org) or Kayla Somerville, MPH (kayla.n.somerville.1@vumc.org).

Emerging Resources Website

<https://www.vumc.org/hsr/person/program-population-health-and-engagement-research>

Vanderbilt Center for Health Services Research

VANDERBILT INSTITUTE FOR POPULATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Home Research Resources Research Centers Education and Training Newsletters/Reports Events

Program for Population Health and Engagement Research



Attendees at PHER's 2024 Inaugural Event included keynote speaker Dr. Consuelo Wilkens (front center) who is flanked by Dr. Sunil Kripalani (left) and Dr. Russell Rothman, who are in turn flanked by

Contact PHER

For more information about the Program for Population Health and Engagement Research, please contact Jasmine Bell at jasmine.bell@vumc.org and/or Kayla Somerville at kayla.n.somerville.1@vumc.org.

[PHER Home](#)

[PHER Events](#)

Giving Careers Patient Care Referring Providers Price Transparency

Home Research Resources Research Centers Education and Training Newsletters/Reports Events

Program for Population Health and Engagement Research Events

PHER Inaugural Spring Event

Our Inaugural Spring Event was held June 11, 2024, at the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville. The keynote speaker was Dr. Consuelo Wilkins, and Dr. Jazz, a band comprised of Vanderbilt Health clinicians and staff, including Dr. Joseph Schlesinger, and Vanderbilt University students and friends, provided musical entertainment.



Past Events

PHER Inaugural Spring Event, June 11, 2024, Tennessee State Museum in Nashville.
Keynote by Dr. Consuelo Wilkins.

Contact PHER

For more information about the Program for Population Health and Engagement Research, please contact Jasmine Bell at jasmine.bell@vumc.org and/or Kayla Somerville at kayla.n.somerville.1@vumc.org.

[PHER Home](#)

[PHER Events](#)

Looking Ahead

PHER is uniquely positioned to serve as Vanderbilt's collaborative home for population health and engagement research. By fostering interdisciplinary scholarship, strengthening community partnerships, supporting innovative research, and cultivating the next generation of investigators, PHER is building the infrastructure necessary to accelerate discoveries that translate into meaningful improvements in health outcomes. As PHER continues to grow, it will remain committed to advancing rigorous, community-engaged, and implementation-focused research that transforms policy, informs practice, and achieves optimal health across populations.

Learn More

PHER's website, hosted through the Vanderbilt Center for Health Services Research, serves as the program's central hub for news, events, funding opportunities, educational resources, and collaboration opportunities.



<https://www.vumc.org/hsr/person/program-population-health-and-engagement-research>
