

Informing Pennsylvania's COVID-19 Health Equity Response

Statement of Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has not impacted all Americans equally. Many vulnerable and marginalized populations are at higher risk of exposure, severe illness, and death from the disease, as well as from indirect harms such as food insecurity and loss of health insurance coverage. PolicyLab experts have raised concerns related to the pandemic's [disparate effects](#) on racial and ethnic minorities, immigrant families, [children living in rural areas](#), the economically challenged, and those with [mental health](#) and [substance use disorders](#), among others. Policy and systems changes are urgently needed to address immediate disparities related to COVID-19, as well as the underlying issues that have created them.

Description

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Identified concerns related to:



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Our Health Equity Portfolio is working with Pennsylvania's Department of Health to develop recommendations for addressing health disparities related to COVID-19.

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The Pennsylvania Department of Health convened a COVID-19 Health Equity Response Team in April 2020. Diverse stakeholders from across the Commonwealth participated in subcommittees to develop recommendations for addressing health disparities. PolicyLab facilitated a subcommittee on economically-challenged individuals, low-wage workers and un- and underinsured populations. PolicyLab experts also joined a range of other subcommittees, including those related to pregnant women and parents of extremely young

children, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, those with limited English proficiency, and rural Pennsylvanians. In addition to writing recommendations for the committee it facilitated, PolicyLab also drafted a recommendation that COVID-19 data collection should include metrics on preferred language.

All recommendations were finalized in June 2020 and were shared with Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine, the Lieutenant Governor's COVID-19 Task Force on Health Disparity and other key stakeholders. In addition to addressing concerns specific to COVID-19, many of the Health Equity Response Team's suggestions strive to address longer-term, underlying issues related to insurance coverage, access to health care and social determinants of health.

In November 2020, PolicyLab drafted a [white paper](#) sharing results of a survey that was conducted through this process among Pennsylvania stakeholders working with immigrant and limited English proficient populations. The white paper findings were summarized in a [blog post](#) in English, Spanish and French, as well as a [policy brief](#) that was shared widely with local, state, and national stakeholders who serve immigrant, refugee, and limited-English proficient populations.

Next Steps

PolicyLab experts have continued their involvement with the Pennsylvania Department of Health in helping to implement the initial recommendations as well as informing its COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans.

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PolicyLab Leads

Rebecka Rosenquist MSc

Deputy Director of Policy & Strategy

Ms. Rosenquist has extensive experience working in health policy, advocacy, and related work. Prior to joining CHOP, she was the director of state engagement for Shatterproof ATLAS, a quality measurement system for addiction treatment programs, where she led Shatterproof's partnerships with state agencies and stakeholders in ATLAS pilot states.

Prior to that, Ms. Rosenquist was the associate director for health policy at the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn LDI). She has also worked for Action for Global

Health, a cross-European coalition of non-profits funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Thomson Reuters Foundation, both in London, UK. She started her career in state and local politics, working for the political action committee EMILY's List.

Ms. Rosenquist is a graduate of the College Scholars Program at Cornell University and received her master's degree in global politics from the London School of Economics & Political Science. She lives in Narberth with her husband and two children.



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Katherine Yun

MD, MHS

Faculty Member

Katherine Yun's primary interest is refugee and immigrant health, specifically the well-being of children in immigrant families in the United States. Her work has focused on the prevalence of chronic, non-communicable conditions and insurance coverage among refugees in the US, differences in primary and dental care utilization by children in different types of immigrant families, and evaluation of health care navigation and related programs for refugee communities. Current projects seek to address language barriers in behavioral health care and blunt the impact of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) on refugees and migrants.

Dr. Yun received her medical degree from Harvard Medical School in 2006 and completed her residency in pediatrics at Yale University in 2009. Between 2009-2011, she was a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar and earned her Masters in Health Sciences Research from the Yale University School of Medicine. While at Yale, she was the supervising physician in the Yale-New Haven Hospital Pediatric Refugee Clinic, a co-recipient of Connecticut's Myra M. Oliver Award for going "above the call of duty" to support refugees and immigrants. CHOP's Refugee Health Program, led by Dr. Mary Fabio, is a recipient of the Gold Door Award from [HIAS-PA](#), "Honoring those who lead the way in support of immigrants and refugees."

Dr. Yun has also worked in Europe, where she supported research on the health impact of human trafficking, and Central Asia, where she taught middle school. From 2014-2018, Dr. Yun served on the Executive Committee of the Section on International Child Health at the American Academy of Pediatrics. She currently serves on the [Research, Evaluation, and Ethics Committee](#) for the Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers. Dr. Yun and her husband live in Philadelphia, PA.



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Team

Diana Montoya-Williams MD, MSHP

Faculty Member

Diana Montoya-Williams (she/her/ella) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania and an attending neonatologist in CHOP's division of Neonatology.

Dr. Montoya-Williams has long been interested in the drivers of racial and ethnic disparities in infant health outcomes such as preterm birth, low birth weight and infant mortality. Her recent work has explored the impact of paid family leave and prenatal risk screening on such adverse birth outcomes. She aims to continue to study drivers of poor birth outcomes among minority women, while also exploring factors that may make some women resilient to them. Finally, she has a special interest in immigration policy and how it affects Hispanic women's perinatal and infant health outcomes.

Dr. Montoya-Williams received her medical degree from Columbia University's College of Physicians & Surgeons and completed her residency in pediatrics and her fellowship in neonatology at the University of Florida. While at the University of Florida, she founded the Immigrant Families Mobile Outreach Clinic which brought together numerous local stakeholders and resources to offer mobile health care to immigrant and migrant working families in the Alachua County area. She received the Audrey Lincourt Schiebler Award for Excellence in Child Advocacy for her work in the community. Dr. Montoya-Williams is also in the Immigrant Special Interest Group of the American Academy of Pediatrics and engages in legislative advocacy frequently to further the interests and health of all children in this country.



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Wanjik? F.M. Njoroge

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Wanjik? F.M. Njoroge (she/her) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine and medical director of the Young Child Clinic at CHOP. Dr. Njoroge is also the program director for the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Fellowship Training Program in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at CHOP. She received her bachelor's at Columbia University and her MD from Baylor College of Medicine. She completed her adult psychiatry residency training at the University of Pennsylvania and child psychiatry fellowship at the Yale Child Study Center (YCSC).

During her time at YCSC, Dr. Njoroge completed postgraduate training programs with the Harris Infant Psychiatry fellowship and a postdoctoral National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) research fellowship. In addition, she was also a post-doctoral fellow at Yale University's Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy and a Solnit fellow in the ZERO TO THREE program based in Washington, D.C. Dr. Njoroge successfully received multiple research development awards from the NIMH and Eunice Shriver National Institute of Child and Human Development, and teaching awards most recently from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

Her research interests to date have included prevention, promotion and early intervention for young children. In particular, she has a specific focus on investigating the impact of culture on early infant/childhood development, the impact of screening and brief interventions on infant and parent psychosocial domains, and the intersection of culture, race and ethnicity on parenting practices. Her current area of research continues to have a particular focus on infants, very young children and their parents with the goals of identifying parenting stressors, parental attitudes and beliefs, cultural norms, and impact of trauma that may derail optimal development in vulnerable and disenfranchised populations.



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Kate Wallis

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Faculty Member

Kate Wallis (she/her) is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), an attending physician in CHOP's Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, an assistant professor of

Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania, and a senior fellow in Penn's Center for Public Health Initiatives.

Dr. Wallis has long been interested in health equity. Her work to date has focused on improving the identification of and care for youth with autism spectrum disorder, specifically improving equity in care and outcomes among children from underserved backgrounds. Her recent work has explored screening for autism and other developmental disorders in primary care, identifying and addressing depression and suicidality among autistic adolescents, and improving scientific research practices to ensure that all children can benefit from research participation and study findings. She continues to focus on improving care for children with developmental disorders and autism to help all children—regardless of their family background—succeed.

Dr. Wallis earned her undergraduate degree in Health and Societies with a minor in Hispanic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She attended medical school at Stony Brook University School of Medicine, where she also earned a Masters in Public Health degree. She completed pediatrics residency at NYU School of Medicine/Bellevue Hospital, followed by fellowship in Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at CHOP.

Dr. Wallis received the 2024 Early Career Award from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Council on Children with Disabilities (COCWD). She serves as co-chair of the Research Committee of the Society for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. She is on the Board of the PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Her list of publications can be found: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/myncbi/kate.wallis.1/bibliography/public/>.



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Tyra Bryant-Stephens

MD

Faculty Member

Tyra Bryant-Stephens is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), senior director of the Center for Health Equity at CHOP and the medical director of the Community Asthma Prevention Program (CAPP). Her research focuses on the use of community-based interventions to improve child asthma outcomes for underserved populations.

Dr. Bryant-Stephens founded CAPP in 1997. As medical director of the program, she leads a staff of 12 that includes registered nurse clinical and educational coordinators as well as lay home visitors. CAPP was designed to improve the health and well-being of children with asthma by providing free asthma classes in the community for parents and their children with asthma. The project also supported a new way of providing education in the homes of children with asthma where parents learned about the types of environmental

changes that could be made to improve their child's asthma. In offering home visits and free asthma education, CAPP satisfied a strong need in the West Philadelphia community and received tremendously positive feedback from families and class participants.

In 2000 and 2001, CAPP's success in providing asthma education in the home and community was expanded when Dr. Bryant-Stephens received grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Through the NIH-funded "Community Partnerships for Asthma Prevention" CAPP was able to continue to offer free home visits to the West Philadelphia community. Free asthma education classes continued to be offered through a grant from the Pew foundation.

Also in 2001, CAPP received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to expand its work into the North Philadelphia area. In this project, CAPP has worked with a collaborative of partners to implement four main interventions: community asthma education classes, home visits, primary care provider training and education for school's personnel. In 2005 CAPP also began to offer free asthma education classes to children in Philadelphia public and charter schools. In another new project, as part of the Merck Company Foundation's Merck Childhood Asthma Initiative, CAPP is expanding home visiting and community classes to areas of the city that were not previously served—neighborhoods in South, Northwest and Northeast Philadelphia.

Dr. Bryant-Stephens completed her MD at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Wakeforest University and her residency in pediatrics at the Medical College of Georgia.



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Jennifer Whittaker **PhD, MUP**

Research Scientist

Jennifer Whittaker (she/her) is a research scientist at PolicyLab and the senior manager of qualitative methods training and program development with the Qualitative Research Core at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Dr. Whittaker has over a decade of experience conducting qualitative and mixed-method research, with a particular focus on community-engaged research. As a member of the Qualitative Research Core, she develops and leads training in qualitative research methods and provides research design and conceptual support to research teams across CHOP. At PolicyLab, Dr. Whittaker is a member of the maternal health research team where her work focuses on the role of place and public systems in supporting maternal and child health. She serves as the staff lead for the Family and Community Health Portfolio and is an advisory board member for the Community Partnerships in Research program. She is also a member of CHOP's Qualitative Methods Research Affinity Group, a fellow at University at Pennsylvania's Center for Public Health Initiatives and a board member for the Pennsylvania Rural Health Association.

An alumnus of Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Research Scholars Leadership Development Program, Dr. Whittaker is trained in interdisciplinary, applied and policy-oriented scholarship. She completed her PhD in city planning at the University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design, where her research led to [Our Rural Pennsylvania](#), an atlas created by mothers and caregivers to record the everyday places that influence their health. She completed her master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University at Buffalo and her bachelor's degree in geography at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Prior to coming to Philadelphia, Dr. Whittaker was a research associate at the Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab where she conducted research on the role of local government policy and planning in facilitating healthy communities.



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Related Tools & Publications

- [Addressing the Unique Needs of Immigrant and Limited-English-Proficient Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
[Policy Briefs](#)
Feb 2021
- [Supporting Immigrant Communities and Those with Limited English Proficiency During the Pandemic: Stakeholder Perspectives from Pennsylvania](#)
[Tools and Memos](#)
Nov 2020
- [FAQ: Support for Children with Special Educational Needs Amid COVID-19](#)
[Tools and Memos](#)
Aug 2020
- [Ensuring Support Services for Youth With Disabilities & Special Health Care Needs Amid COVID-19](#)
[Webinars](#)
Jul 2020

-

[COVID-19 and Pennsylvania's Rural Kids](#)

[Blog Post](#)

Apr 27, 2020

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[COVID-19 and Mothers with Substance Use Disorders](#)

[Blog Post](#)

May 18, 2020

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[COVID-19: How Missing Milestones is Impacting Teen Mental Health](#)

[Blog Post](#)

May 05, 2020

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[COVID-19 Disparities and Impacts on Emotional Health & Well-being of Diverse Children](#)

[Blog Post](#)

May 13, 2020

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[Are Pediatricians Ready to Care for Immigrant Families in a Time of Crisis?](#)

[Blog Post](#)

Apr 16, 2020

-

[Are Refugee Essential Workers at a Higher Risk of Contracting COVID-19?](#)

[Blog Post](#)

Mar 04, 2021

-

[Thawing the Chill From Public Charge Will Take Time and Investment](#)

[Blog Post](#)

Apr 13, 2021

-

[Pressing Issues Facing Children and Families: Reflections One Year into the Pandemic](#)

[Blog Post](#)

Apr 29, 2021

-

[Utilizing Rapid Qualitative Assessment and Thematic Analysis Methods to Identify and Share Promising Case Investigation and Contact Tracing Practices with People in Refugee, Immigrant, and Migrant Communities During COVID-19](#)

[Article](#)

Jul 2024

Related Projects

[Responding to COVID-19](#)
[Population Health Sciences](#)