



CENTER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES IMPACT REPORT 2025-2026





OUR VISION

To become a leader in community-based, multi-disciplinary research that engages a broad range of community, academic, and health partners to improve health and promote health equity.

OUR MISSION

To build connections between researchers and the Inland Empire communities through service, education, and research that addresses our communities' needs and promotes health equity.

MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



Dear Inland Empire Community,

The period spanning July 2025 through June 2026 marked a pivotal moment for the Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) as we began to experience a heightened awareness of shifting dynamics within the Inland Empire's health equity landscape. Across our region, communities demonstrated an increased urgency to understand, navigate, and advocate within a rapidly changing healthcare and social service environment.

We saw this awareness reflected in meaningful and measurable ways. More community members than ever before attended CHC-facilitated workshops focused on understanding their healthcare rights, accessing services, and strengthening self-advocacy. In parallel, our community partners increasingly requested engagement from CHC's Speakers Bureau to provide trusted health and social service expertise on topics such as

mental and emotional well-being during times of uncertainty, and navigating health coverage systems including Medi-Cal and Medicare.

These engagements reaffirm a core truth that continues to guide our work: when self-advocacy education is paired with intentional, sustained community engagement, it strengthens the collective voice of underrepresented populations and advances more responsive, culturally aligned systems of care. CHC's participation across these spaces reflects our enduring commitment to building community capacity, advancing health equity, and fostering collaborative leadership throughout the Inland Empire.

Through all our efforts in service, education, and research, CHC has continued to lean into the needs of the community by listening first, responding with intention, and connecting individuals and families to critical resources and services. In doing so, we are not only addressing immediate needs but also strengthening long-term community capacity, resilience, and trust.

As we reflect on this year's work, we remain grounded in the belief that health equity is not achieved in isolation, but through sustained partnership, shared accountability, and collective action. The Center for Healthy Communities will continue to stand alongside our community, amplifying voices, bridging resources, and advancing systems that honor dignity, access, and health justice for all.

With gratitude,

Michelle Burroughs, DHA, MPH
Director, Center for Healthy Communities
UCR School of Medicine

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MPH STUDENTS



“My practicum experience with the Center for Healthy Communities deepened my understanding that meaningful community engagement is not simply about providing resources, but about building trust, listening intentionally, and allowing communities to shape the solutions meant to serve them. Working on initiatives focused on health equity, outreach, and culturally responsive programming exemplified how public health can bridge gaps between institutions and underserved communities by centering cultural humility, accessibility, and long-term partnership. This experience strengthened my commitment to becoming a physician who not only cares for patients individually, but also works to address the broader community conditions that shape their health.”

- Leilani Tull



“My practicum with the Center for Healthy Communities was by far one of my favorite public health experiences as it showed me what community engagement looks like in practice, not just in the classroom. At participating community locations, I witnessed volunteers give their time, energy, and personal resources to prepare meals, provide clothing and hygiene supplies, and support unhoused individuals with consistency and compassion. Through outreach, I was also able to build trust with unhoused community members, provide supplies, and engage in meaningful conversations about their experiences and needs. These conversations helped me better understand the limitations of my own service ideas, hear directly why certain approaches may not work in their community, and learn how to make public health solutions more accessible, practical, and meaningful. This experience made me want to help even more by supporting partner organizations, strengthening what they are able to provide, and continuing to pursue community-centered public health work guided by trust, humility, and lived experiences.”

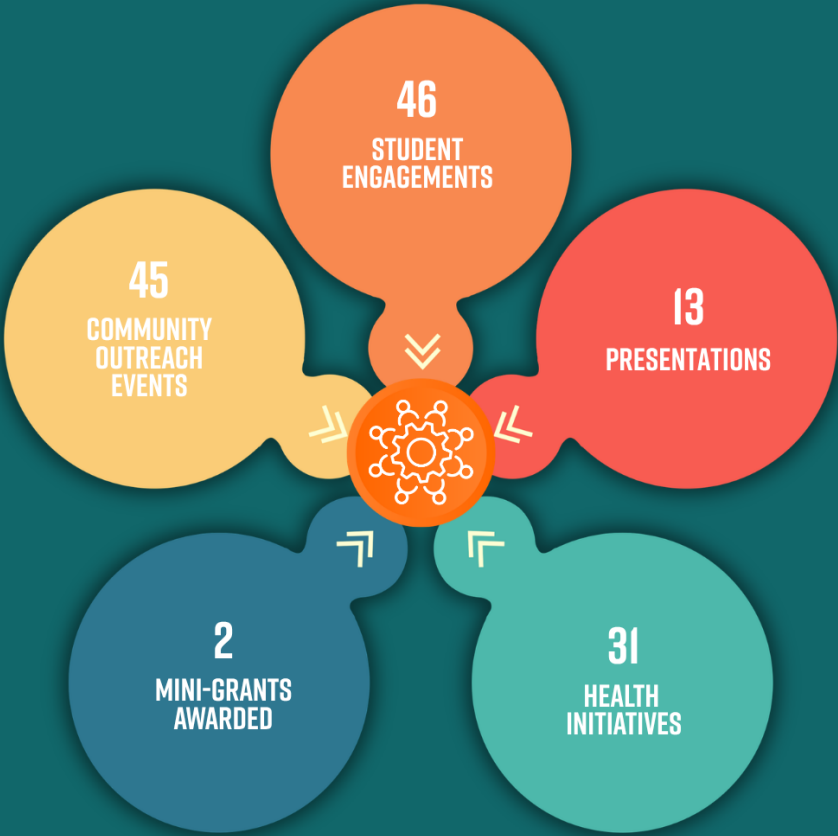
- Kenneth Chiu



“My practicum experience with the Center for Healthy Communities showed me that meaningful public health work starts with building trust and meeting people where they are. Working directly with community members helped me better understand the value of listening to people’s experiences and involving them in conversations about the services and resources that affect their daily lives.”

- Jorge Delos Santos

IMPACT AT A GLANCE





LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We at UCR would like to respectfully acknowledge and recognize our responsibility to the original and current caretakers of this land, water, and air: the Cahuilla, Tongva, Luiseño, and Serrano peoples and all of their ancestors and descendants, past, present, and future. Today this meeting place is home to many Indigenous peoples from all over the world, including UCR faculty, students, and staff, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on these homelands.

THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE

CHC serves the Inland Southern California communities, which include Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

The markers on the map indicate areas where CHC has carried out community engagement activities in service, education, and research, including the following:

-  Workshop - Interactive, informative sessions that guide participants through a process to achieve improved outcomes.
-  Speakers Bureau - A collection of expert speakers organized by CHC to talk at community events.
-  Outreach - When CHC team members connect with people face-to-face to provide direct health and wellness services.
-  Research - Community-engaged research conducted in partnership with community members, ensuring meaningful involvement and equitable engagement at every step.
-  Mini-Grants - Awarded to support community engagement activities serving the Inland Empire communities based on submitted proposals.
-  Collaborations - Partnerships with other community-based organizations that share our mission to improve the social determinants of health in the Inland Empire.

SERVICE

TO SERVE MEANS TO BE ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE, TO BE A RESOURCE AND TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY. AS SUCH, CHC IS EMBEDDED IN OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY AND BELOW ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF A FEW COMMUNITY SERVICE ENGAGEMENT EVENTS THAT CHC WAS A PART OF THROUGHOUT 2025 AND 2026.

INLAND EMPIRE STATE OF LATINO HEALTH – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT

The Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) actively contributed to the Inland Empire State of Latino Health, hosted by the Latino Health Collaborative, an organization dedicated to empowering Latino/Hispanic communities through holistic health and wellness initiatives that advance equity, access, and community well-being.

As part of this regional convening, Michelle Burroughs, DHA, MPH was invited to serve as a featured panelist on the “**Breaking Barriers: Leading with Purpose for Community Well-being**” panel. This session brought together cross-sector leaders to explore strategies for advancing health equity and strengthening community-driven solutions across the Inland Empire.

Drawing on her extensive experience in community health leadership, Burroughs emphasized that servant leadership is foundational to advancing equity-focused initiatives. She highlighted that

meaningful and sustainable impact requires leaders to listen first, build trust, and intentionally create space for community voices to inform priorities and solutions. She underscored that equity is not something delivered to communities, but rather co-created through authentic partnerships, shared decision making, and sustained engagement.

In addressing the most urgent actions needed to improve the health and well-being of Latino communities, Burroughs identified **healthcare self-advocacy** as a critical priority. She emphasized the importance of equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to effectively navigate healthcare systems, communicate confidently with providers, understand their rights, and make informed decisions about their care.

This approach helps to mitigate systemic barriers, language challenges, and cultural misunderstandings that often contribute to health disparities.



8TH ANNUAL ULTIMATE BIOMED RETREAT

The Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) Speakers Bureau Program continues to create meaningful opportunities for dialogue and learning by connecting dynamic speakers with diverse audiences. This year, CHC’s community influencer Tomi the Encourager delivered an engaging and impactful presentation at a Biomedical Retreat, reaching both faculty members and students.

During the session, Tomi the Encourager led a thoughtful discussion centered on the importance of mental health, overall wellness, and health equity. Drawing from both lived experience and professional insight, the presentation emphasized the critical role that self-awareness, resilience, and community support play in both personal and professional success, particularly within high-demand academic and healthcare environments.

Attendees were encouraged to reflect on how mental health intersects with their work and how prioritizing wellness can enhance not only individual well-being but also quality of care and research outcomes. The session also highlighted health equity, underscoring the importance of addressing disparities and fostering inclusive practices within biomedical and healthcare spaces.

This event exemplifies the mission of the CHC Speakers Bureau Program: to bring relevant, community-centered discussions to the forefront and to equip audiences with knowledge and tools that promote healthier, more equitable communities.



PRIME SCHOLARS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



CHC continues to advance its commitment to community engagement and workforce pipeline development by providing meaningful, hands-on experiences for students in the UCR School of Medicine (SOM) PRIME Program. Through this initiative, PRIME medical scholars participated in a dynamic **Community Engagement Experience** designed to inspire and educate youth in the Inland Empire.

PRIME scholars visited Landmark Middle School, where they engaged 116 students in an interactive and impactful session focused on health, education, and career exploration. During the visit, the scholars shared their personal journeys to medical school, offering candid reflections on their motivations, challenges, and the perseverance required to pursue careers in medicine. This dialogue created a relatable and encouraging environment, helping middle school students envision pathways into health professions.

To deepen engagement, the PRIME scholars facilitated two interactive role-playing scenarios: “**The Restless Student**” and “**The Dizzy Basketball Player.**” These activities introduced students to real-world health situations, encouraging them to think critically, practice communication skills, and gain insight into how healthcare professionals assess and respond to patient needs. Through experiential learning, students were able to actively participate in problem-solving while building foundational health literacy skills.

The event proved to be both educational and inspiring, fostering curiosity, confidence, and enthusiasm among participants about future opportunities in health and medicine. The experience also reinforced practical health behaviors among students.

UNSHELTERED OUTREACH PROGRAM

This year, we are excited to expand the reach and impact of our Unsheltered Outreach Program through the development of three new community partnerships. CHC has teamed up with Kansas Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church, Allen Chapel AME Church, and TruEvolution to better serve individuals experiencing homelessness across the Inland Empire.

These collaborations strengthen our ability to provide consistent, community-based support by connecting individuals to essential resources such as healthcare services, hygiene supplies, food assistance, clothing, showers, vaccines, social services, and housing referrals. By working alongside trusted community organizations, we are able to meet individuals where they are and respond to their immediate and long-term needs with dignity and compassion.

Through these partnerships, the program continues to grow its presence and deepen its impact, creating more accessible pathways to care while fostering trust within the communities we serve. This expansion reflects CHC’s ongoing commitment to advancing health equity and addressing the social determinants of health that disproportionately affect the unhoused population.



“It was very heartbreaking to see the need in our community for trust. This made me realize how important it is to create a relationship with the community before they are able to open themselves to us.”

- CMSP student Ariel Galindo Escobar



“One of the most memorable moments during outreach was connecting with an unhoused community member over our shared roots in Nayarit, Mexico. That sense of familiarity created an immediate bond and reminded me how deeply personal this work is. It reinforced my passion for serving underserved communities and highlighted how housing insecurity can impact people from all backgrounds, including those who share my own story.”

- CMSP student Kevin De La Torre



“This experience transformed the way I view street medicine and the challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness. It gave me a deeper understanding that it’s not just about providing resources, it’s about showing people they are seen, heard, and valued. It’s about connection, dignity, and trust. Many of the people we met carried heavy burdens, yet they still welcomed us with grace, gratitude, and strength to the best of their ability and comfort level.”

- CMSP student Lisbeth Ortiz-Carrillo



“During this experience I was exposed to another side of what public health and service looks like. The emphasis on the unhoused really stuck with me because we tend to group those in need all together. Some people may need food from a food distribution and others may need clothing, but it was amazing to see the effort that went into renovating a whole new space, so those who need it could take showers and relax at their own convenience.”

- Community-based Learning Experience (CBE) MS3 Onyinye Onwuzulike



“I recognize the value of human connection and plan to engage more intentionally in the future. What struck me most was how impactful small acts, like a private shower or clean socks, can be. Health extends far beyond prescriptions and lab results; it encompasses dignity, community, and meeting people where they are. The line between being housed and unhoused can be thin, often defined by a single diagnosis or financial setback. As future physicians, understanding available community resources allows us to better support not only our patients but also their families and neighbors.”

- Community-based Learning Experience (CBE) MS3 Chelsea Logo



“One of the most impactful moments came during a community service event hosted in partnership with the Kansas St. Seventh-day Adventist Church. Alongside fellow volunteers and community leaders, we organized essential resources, including food, clothing, hygiene kits, and showers for Riverside’s unhoused residents. I left feeling grounded and hopeful, reminded that service with structure and compassion is what truly creates impact.”

- Community-based Learning Experience (CBE) MS3 Arturo Chavez



“Ultimately, preparing students to care for unhoused and marginalized populations requires medical education to cultivate humility, curiosity, and a commitment to justice. By integrating community engagement, structural awareness, and advocacy into training, medical schools can graduate physicians who are not only clinically competent, but also equipped to care for those most often excluded from traditional healthcare systems.”

- Community-based Learning Experience (CBE) MS3 Sabika Rehman

COMMUNITY MEDICINE AND POPULATION HEALTH MINI-GRANT PROGRAM

CHC advances its mission of health equity and community impact through the **Mini-Grant Program**, an initiative designed to empower medical students, graduate students, residents, and fellows at UCR to develop and lead innovative, service-driven projects that address pressing health needs across the Inland Empire.

This program serves as a critical platform for cultivating the next generation of health leaders by supporting community-engaged work that directly benefits underserved populations.

CHC was able to fund one mini-grant directly during the 2025–2026 cycle. The program’s impact was extended through the generous support of Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP), which recognized the importance of this work and sponsored an additional project. This partnership highlights the value of cross-sector collaboration in advancing community health and innovation.

MILO AND THE CALM CREW: A STORYBOOK FOR GROWING CALM MINDS



This innovative project introduces Milo and the Calm Crew, a bilingual children’s picture book designed to promote early emotional wellness through accessible, evidence-based strategies. The book integrates techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding, visualization, and self-soothing touch into an engaging, child-friendly narrative. By equipping children with practical coping tools, the project supports the development of emotional regulation skills at an early age. Initially implemented at the Coachella Valley Free Clinic, this initiative aims to expand its reach to additional clinic sites, broadening access for children and families across the region.



NDD CIRCLE: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

The NDD Circle project addresses the complex challenges faced by parents and caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs). Recognizing the significant emotional and logistical burden that often follows a new diagnosis, this intervention creates supportive, community-based learning environments where participants can share experiences, exchange resources, and build critical self-advocacy skills. By fostering connection and knowledge sharing, the NDD Circle strengthens caregiver capacity, promotes resilience, and enhances the ability of families to effectively navigate systems of care and support their children’s developmental needs.



EDUCATION

CHC OFFERS TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE COMMUNITIES' KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND HEALTH EQUITY. OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO EQUIP COMMUNITY MEMBERS WITH THE SKILLS TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD AND FACILITATE REAL TRANSFORMATION.

ADVANCING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

CHC was invited to participate in UCR School of Medicine (SOM) Chairs Retreat to share CHC's community engagement expertise and explore opportunities to strengthen partnerships across the SOM.

CHC facilitated an interactive planning session where department chairs identified ideas related to departmental collaboration, student engagement, and research/community partnerships using a color-coded brainstorming activity followed by group voting to prioritize the most impactful opportunities.

The discussion generated valuable ideas focused on expanding community-engaged education, strengthening academic-community partnerships, and increasing opportunities for students to engage directly with Inland Empire communities.

CHC is now partnering with Strategic Initiatives to turn these priorities into actionable goals that will help advance community engagement throughout the SOM and further support healthier, more connected communities across the region.



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SUMMER STEAM ACADEMY

CHC partnered with the School of Education to support their summer STEAM Academy, a program designed to expose middle and high school students to careers in health and science. Through this collaboration, CHC connected students with graduate-level scholars and future healthcare professionals who shared their educational journeys, personal experiences, and passion for serving their communities.

As part of the program, Master of Public Health professional Stephanie Sandoval and medical students Arturo Chavez (MS3) and Kimberly Najera (MS2) participated in Lunch & Learn sessions with students from Riverside County, Moreno Valley, and Jurupa Valley. During these sessions, presenters spoke openly about their paths into public health and medicine, the challenges they overcame, and the importance of representation within healthcare professions.

The sessions created meaningful dialogue for students, many from communities historically underrepresented in medicine and public health, to see themselves reflected in careers they may not have previously considered attainable. By engaging directly with students who shared similar

backgrounds and lived experiences, presenters helped foster inspiration, confidence, and a greater understanding of educational pathways into healthcare careers.

Elizabeth Benitez, School of Education Initiative Coordinator, reflected on the impact the presenters had on students and staff alike. Arturo Chavez's presentation was described as "inspiring and incredibly engaging," with students remaining fully invested even after the session had officially ended. Stephanie Sandoval's story left a "lasting impact" on students as she shared her personal journey into public health. Kimberly Najera's presentation also resonated deeply with students, particularly young women who appreciated seeing strong female representation in medicine.

Through partnerships like STEAM Academy, CHC continues to advance its mission of promoting health equity through education, mentorship, and community engagement. By investing in youth and creating opportunities for mentorship and representation, CHC helps empower the next generation of public health and medical professionals.





PRIME EXHIBITION: HOPE, HEALTH, AND HEALING

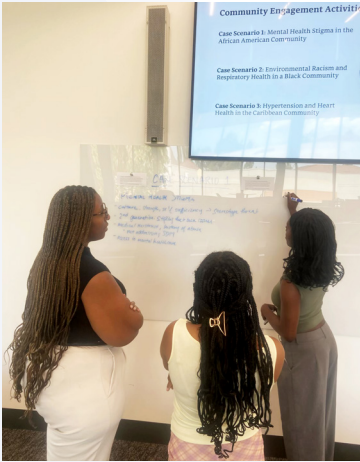
The UCR School of Medicine Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) proudly launched the PRIME Exhibition: Hope, Health, and Healing at the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California. The exhibition highlighted the journeys, experiences, and voices of PRIME students who are committed to advancing healthcare equity within the African, Black, and Caribbean (ABC) communities. CHC was grateful for the support of Inland Empire Health Plan (IEHP), whose sponsorship helped make the exhibition possible and further demonstrated a shared commitment to health equity and community engagement.

The exhibition provided community members, students, faculty, and partners with an opportunity to engage with stories centered on resilience, representation, and service. Through student storyboards, personal quotes, historical reflections, and visual displays, attendees gained insight into the importance of culturally responsive healthcare and the impact of representation in medicine.

In addition to showcasing student experiences, the exhibition honored the legacy of leaders and community advocates who have worked to address healthcare disparities and improve access to care for underserved populations.

The PRIME Exhibition served as both a celebration and a call to action, encouraging future healthcare providers to lead with compassion, cultural humility, and a deep understanding of the communities they serve. It also provided inspiration and representation for individuals aspiring to pursue careers in medicine, demonstrating that their goals and dreams are achievable.

SKILLS IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP



Each year CHC provides a lecture for the PRIME scholars focused on developing the foundational skills needed to build meaningful and respectful community partnerships.

The session emphasized key concepts including understanding community context, building trust, practicing cultural humility, achieving effective cross-cultural communication, and empowering communities through collaboration. Scholars also explored the importance of advocacy, inclusive research practices, and the engagement of communities as equal partners in improving health outcomes.

Through this lecture, PRIME scholars strengthened their ability to work alongside diverse communities in ways that promote trust, equity, and community-centered healthcare.

GUBERNATORIAL HEALTH MATTERS WATCH PARTY



UCR SOM's CHC continued its commitment to community education and civic engagement by hosting the Health Matters Forum Watch Party. Community members, students, faculty, and local leaders gathered to hear directly from four California gubernatorial candidates about the future of healthcare across the state while ensuring Inland Empire voices were included in these important statewide conversations.

The event created an opportunity for residents to engage in meaningful discussions about healthcare issues that directly impact the region, which reflects the rich diversity of California. The statewide forum, streamed live from the UC Riverside Highlander Union Building by NBC4/Telemundo 52, featured

Xavier Becerra, former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services; Betty Yee, former California State Controller; Tony Thurmond, California Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Antonio Villaraigosa, former Los Angeles Mayor and former Speaker of the California State Assembly.

Participants identified several key concerns affecting Inland Southern California, including healthcare access, affordability, and the need for greater representation within healthcare systems and leadership.

MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICUM PROJECTS

CHC developed and facilitated the MPH Practicum experience for the inaugural cohort of Master of Public Health (MPH) students, providing hands-on, community-based learning opportunities centered on health equity and underserved populations. Serving as preceptor for three students, CHC guided projects that addressed important community needs, including the pilot implementation of Spanish-language self-advocacy workshops, “Mejorando Tu Camino en el Cuidado de la Salud (Empowering Your Healthcare Journey);” an evaluation of SB 1152 implementation for unhoused patient discharge planning in partnership with a local hospital and community-based organizations; and a pilot HOUSED BEDS: A tool for taking a history on an individual experiencing homelessness, to assess needs and make appropriate medical and social referrals.

The practicum gave students meaningful opportunities to apply public health knowledge in real-world community settings while supporting initiatives focused on improving healthcare access, patient advocacy, and coordinated support services for vulnerable populations throughout Inland Southern California.



RESEARCH

THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS, CHC CAN COLLABORATIVELY DESIGN RESEARCH FOR EASY TRANSLATION TO REAL-WORLD HEALTH SETTINGS AND SITUATIONS. AS A RESULT, CHC IS ABLE TO IMPROVE CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE-APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS THAT CREATE BETTER SERVICES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CITIZENS PANEL HIGHLIGHTS COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HEALTH PRIORITIES

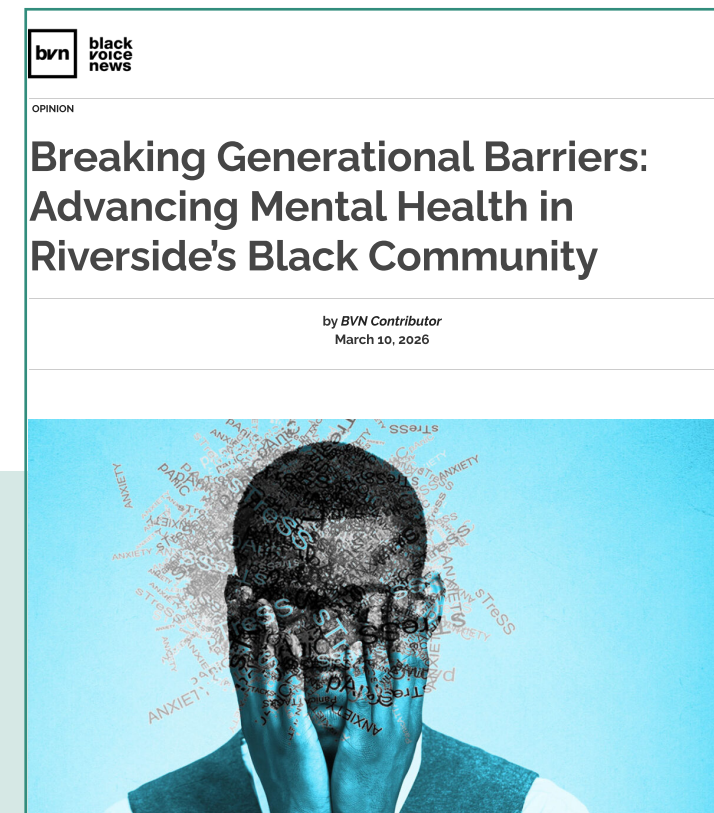
In partnership with Michelle Burroughs, DHA, MPH, Andrew Subica, PHD, and Aerika Loyd PHD, graduate student researchers (GSRs) Leilani Tull and Ashley Trinidad, and PhD candidate Chelsea McElwee, CHC hosted an African American Citizens Panel focused on understanding the health priorities and lived experiences of African American residents in Riverside.

The discussion created a space for community members and leaders to openly share concerns surrounding environmental, social, and systemic inequities that continue to impact health outcomes within African American communities. Through meaningful dialogue and reflection, participants identified key barriers to health and wellness while also discussing opportunities for change and community-driven solutions.

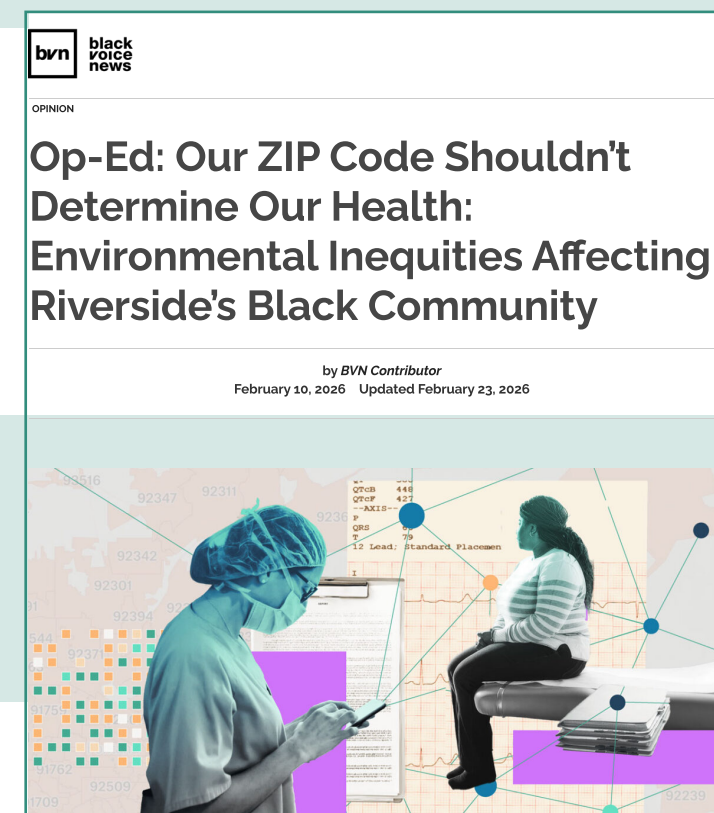
Three major priorities consistently emerged across all discussion groups:

- Mental health
- Racism in healthcare
- Environmental health disparities

The Citizens Panel reinforced the importance of engaging community voices in research and decision-making processes. Insights gathered from the discussion will help inform future research, partnerships, and community-centered strategies aimed at advancing health equity in Riverside and beyond.



SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE

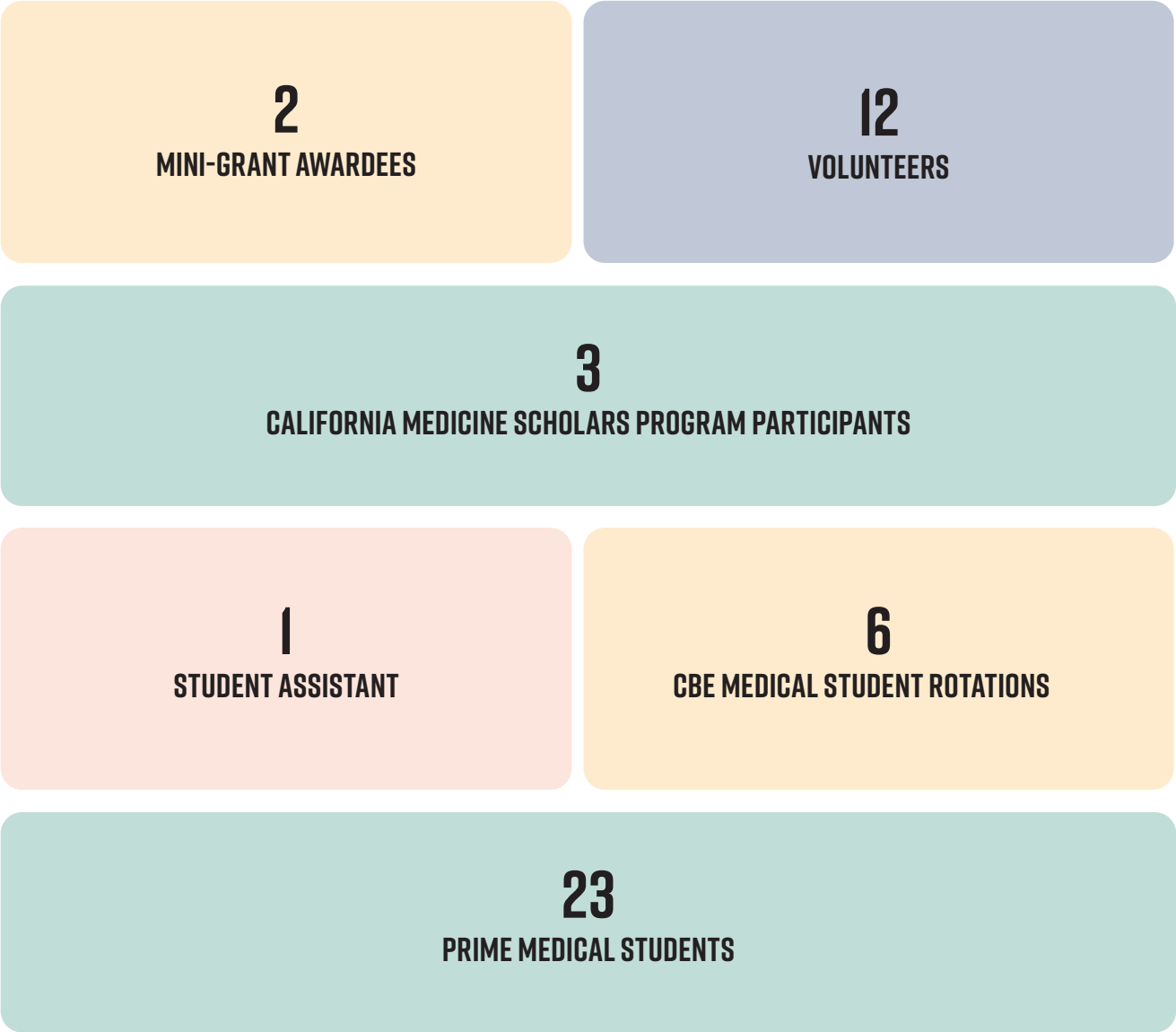


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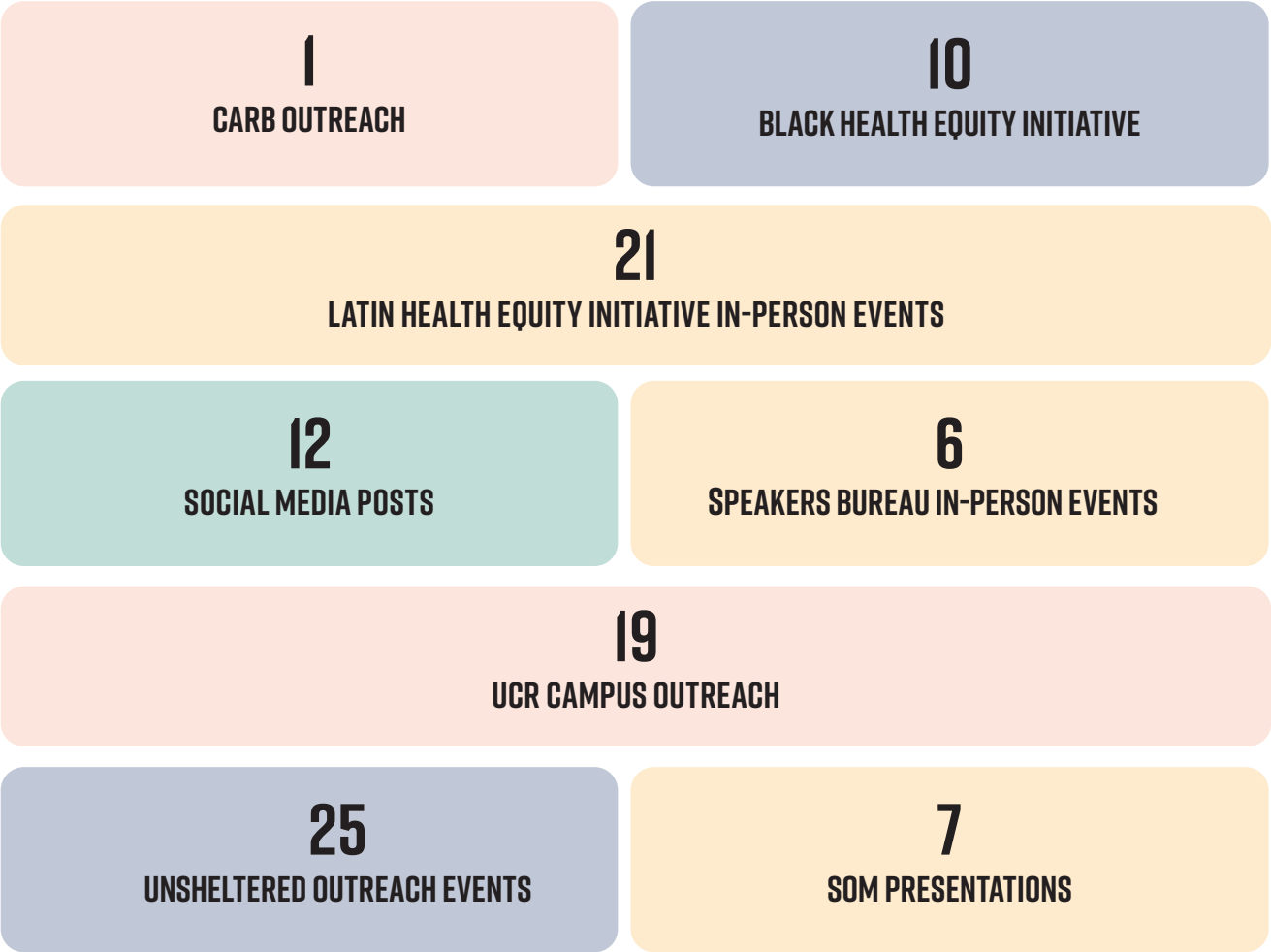
GOALS ACHIEVED

At CHC, our long-term goal is to create synergies with UCR’s campus community and community partners to improve the health outcomes of the Inland Empire California region and move the needle in advancing health equity for all.

CONTRIBUTE TO TRAINING AND RETAINING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE TO PROMOTE HEALTH EQUITY



CONTRIBUTE TO BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE HEALTH EQUITY



CONTRIBUTE TO TRAINING AND RETAINING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE TO PROMOTE HEALTH EQUITY



THANK YOU

To our community, who has welcomed and partnered with CHC, and joined our calls to action for social transformation. Your support and dedication to improving the health outcomes of our communities inspires hope and creates opportunities for a better tomorrow.



UC RIVERSIDE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE CENTER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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