Bridging the Digital Divide on Health Information in Public Housing Communities

Tess Wilson / *All of Us* **Community Engagement Coordinator**
Network of the National Library of Medicine / Middle Atlantic Region

tesswilson@pitt.edu

Background

Network of the National Library of Medicine

The goal of the Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) is to advance the progress of medicine and improve public health by providing U.S. health professionals with equal access to biomedical information and improving individuals' access to information to enable them to make informed decisions about their health.

NNLM Middle Atlantic Region (NNLM MAR), serves Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Health Programming in Public Libraries Award

NNLM offers funding for projects that improve access to health information, increase engagement with research and data, expand professional knowledge, and support outreach that promotes awareness and use of NLM resources in local communities.

The purpose of the Health Programming in Public Libraries Award is to fund health programs for public library patrons that incorporate NLM resources and information about the *All of Us* Research Program.

Implementation

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) has more than 20,000 residents in its 2,700 public housing units in Pittsburgh. To maximize impact and reach, the HACP developed the Mobile Computing Lab. This is an extension of the Computer Education and Training Program. The lab is staffed by information technology staff and equipped with laptops, hotspots, and printers.

NNLM funding allowed HACP to expand the program in these ways:

• A part-time technology services intern was promoted to a full-time Digital Literacy Specialist position, increasing the availability of staff for one-on-one learning sessions.

• Technology was purchased to reach more residents with each visit, and to ensure the devices and software used for teaching purposes remain current and relevant.

• HACP staff attended workshops hosted by NNLM MAR staff to gain familiarity with NLM/NIH health information resources. Both teams worked together to integrate these resources into mobile lab services.

Photo Credit: Nathan Williams, HACP

"Every day we have class centered on digital literacy to help our residents become self-sufficient by adding these skills to their everyday lifestyle. Residents were also introduced to Medline Plus. This resource gives health information to senior residents who were the most interested in this because of the factual information provided on the website; other residents loved the healthy recipes provided.

Overall, connecting and improving digital and health literacy in public housing has been a great experience."

Jordan Owens
Digital Literacy Specialist

Results

Goal: Give away 50 tablets to residents.
After distributing 50 tablets, HACP acquired 50 more. They distributed 40 of these before COVID-19 halted in-person events. Altogether, 90 tablets were distributed to residents.

Goal: Increase digital literacy.
Residents were introduced to new technologies and tools in a familiar environment. Several seniors are now video chatting, which they didn't do before participating in the program.

Goal: Increase health literacy.
When distributed, tablets were pre-loaded with easily accessible health websites as links, including MedlinePlus. Residents were introduced to this resource during digital literacy workshops.

Replicability

In an increasingly connected world, digital literacy is an essential stepping-stone on the path to health literacy. Integrating health information resources into digital literacy programming is a natural and necessary pairing and can be done as easily as adding links to reliable resources to mobile devices or landing pages.

If your organization has programs that could benefit underrepresented communities by incorporating health information resources, consider partnering with a local public library or community-based organization and applying for NNLM funding.