

CONNECTING PIPELINES TO PATHWAYS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

The Urban Health Program (UHP): Graduating Underrepresented Minority Professionals across the Healthcare Disciplines

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

KEY POINTS

The Urban Health Program successfully utilizes a comprehensive pathway approach to implement a variety of programs and services for students at every educational level, including:

- ✓ Engaging community and student oversight and involvement as integral components of the program - it was the collective voices of the community members seeking healthcare services and the students seeking educational opportunities that led to the creation of the program
- ✓ Providing academic enrichment and career awareness activities
- ✓ Developing K-12, undergraduate, and graduate level components in partnership with entities both on and off campus
- ✓ Expanding from the College of Medicine to an interdisciplinary program with all of the university's health sciences training programs



ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Meeting a need for healthcare and healthcare providers to address health disparities in communities of color

The Urban Health Program (UHP) was formed at the University of Illinois at Chicago as mandated by the Illinois State Legislature in response to healthcare disparities that adversely affected residents of the state's mostly minority communities. Issues included: a lack of healthcare providers and services in Chicago's communities of color; health disparities in Chicago communities of color; and a low number of underrepresented minority students from Chicago pursuing health careers.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO APPROACH

Building a comprehensive pathway approach to implement programs and services to partner with the community and engage students at all levels, especially early outreach efforts to cultivate student interest beginning at the grade school level.

Since 1979, the University of Illinois at Chicago has graduated more than 8,000 underrepresented minority professionals across the healthcare disciplines, making it one of the nation's foremost institutions for minority healthcare graduates. This achievement is due in part to the University's Urban Health Program.

Created in 1978, the Urban Health Program (UHP) was formed at the University of Illinois at Chicago as mandated by the Illinois State Legislature in response to healthcare disparities that adversely affected residents of the state's mostly minority communities. The mission of the program is to attract, support, and graduate students from traditionally underrepresented populations into health careers with the belief they would return to practice in their underserved communities.

Comprehensive Pathway Approach

The UHP utilizes a comprehensive pathway approach to implement a variety of programs and services for students at every educational level, starting at grades K-12 and extending to graduate school.



The program partners with Chicago public schools, Chicago city colleges, and other education institutions and organizations. UHP identifies potential students for admissions, supports and participates in community health initiatives and programs, holds conferences and seminars for students on important health related issues, provides career planning and counseling, and offers a host of resources and services for potential and current students.

In 1978, the first cohort of students were recruited to participate in the Program. The students were primarily pre-med students interested in the College of Medicine. Forty-two years later, the UHP is now an interdisciplinary program with participation in each of the UIC Health Science Colleges (applied health science, dentistry, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, public health, and social work) and graduate college.

Today, there is a UHP director and office in each of seven health science colleges, graduate college, Office of Diversity, and Office of the Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs. There are also UHP offices and staff at the University of Illinois Chicago campuses in Rockford and Peoria.

Importance of Early Outreach Efforts

The success of the UHP is due in part to early outreach efforts as well as inclusion of community and student oversight and partnerships. UHP is premised on the realization that engaging interest in a health career and planning for higher education must be encouraged long before the final years



of high school—preferably, when students are still in grade school. The cultivation of youth has been instrumental in the success of the UHP Early Outreach Programming.

The UHP Early Outreach Programs exposes Chicago public- and private-school students to careers in the health sciences, often beginning as early as kindergarten. A primary focus of the program is to identify students who have an interest in health careers and assist them with preparation for college. The UHP Early Outreach Programming consists of dozens of programs and activities that are implemented during both the school year and the summer months. The programs promote science, mathematics, health literacy, and English language proficiency and mastery. Students also experience everything from hands-on activities in science and clinical simulation labs to touring healthcare and research facilities.

In addition to the Early Outreach Program, UHP's success can be attributed to the oversight provided by both the UHP Community Advisory Council (CAC) and the UHP Student Advisory Council (SAC).

Collaborative Program Oversight and Participation

Oversight of UHP is provided by the local community through the CAC. The CAC is comprised of community and healthcare leaders, many of whom are alums, who advise, support, and advocate for UHP. The CAC members often serve as mentors to students in the UHP programs. Over the past 40

years, in addition to representatives from Chicago's communities of color, the Council's membership has included: federal, state, and local elected officials; Chicago public school administrators; and members of Chicago's healthcare and financial institutions.

Multiple student organizations are supported by the UHP and enhance both the educational and professional development of UHP students. Representatives from the UHP student organizations serve on the UHP Student Advisory Committee. The committee provides oversight, feedback, and input to the UHP Program.

Overall, the UHP provides a comprehensive array of pipeline and pathways programs for K-12, undergraduate pre-health, graduate, and health professions students. In addition to the early outreach efforts, other endeavors include: MCAT, DAT, PCAT, and GRE test preparation; summer research experiences; conferences; open houses; pre-matriculation programs; post baccalaureate programs; mentoring; academic and personal advising; and much more.

Challenges to Program's Success

UHP, like any other large-scale program, has its share of challenges. Funding is an ongoing concern, and state funding has been stagnant. There is also a high rate of high school dropout in the schools serving the communities of color in Chicago. However, UHP and its partners both on and off campus have sustained a model that serves as a valuable asset for the state.

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

- Since its inception in 1978, UIC has graduated more than 8000 Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Indigenous students from the Health Science Colleges.
- According to the American Association of Medical Colleges, between 1980 and 2012 UIC ranked third behind Howard University and Meharry Medical College, two Historically Black Colleges, for the highest number of African American physician graduates.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RELATED MATERIALS ABOUT THE UHP

- University of Illinois at Chicago Urban Health Program website: <https://uhp.uic.edu>
- American Association of Medical Colleges: *At a Glance: Black and African American Physicians in the Workforce* <https://news.aamc.org/diversity/article/black-history-month-facts-and-figures/>

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