

Cherishing Our Hearts and Souls Coalition (COHS)

Cherishing Our Hearts and Souls Coalition is a collaborative effort to improve the health and wellness of African-Americans and underserved residents in Roxbury neighborhoods. COHS recognizes that experiences with racism are significant sources of stress and ill health among African Americans. COHS began its planning efforts in October of 2000 with seven initial partners, and have since then, grown to over 200 members, representing residents, community based organizations, community health centers, human and social services agencies, local government, and elected officials, respectively.

Improving the population's health requires strategies both to reduce customary risk factors (hypertension, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, obesity and smoking) and also specific efforts to address racism and other social and environmental injustices. COHS focuses on building social capital within the community, and community based problem-solving regarding the impact of racism on health in general and on disparities in health (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, breast and cervical cancer, prostate cancer, and violence) in particular.

The Coalition consists of four clusters: (1) Anti-Racism; (2) Clinical Care and Research; (3) Health Promotion; and (4) Youth. Coalition members view each of these clusters as significant areas in improving the health and healthcare experiences of residents and healthcare professionals serving Roxbury.

Anti-Racism Cluster's mission is to raise awareness of racism as a contributing factor to poor health and to reduce its impact, and to expand training opportunities for community residents, patients, and healthcare staff and clinical providers.

Clinical Care and Research Cluster's mission is to improve Roxbury residents' access to community based research opportunities and information about quality clinical care, increase the number of people of color who participate in clinical trials and pursue careers in healthcare, and to ensure that community perspectives are represented in emerging health policy, health disparities research and training opportunities.

Health Promotion Cluster's mission is to increase the level of community attention to healthy life style practices, disseminate culturally appropriate health promotion and disease prevention information, and inform and promote solutions to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health and healthcare practices.

Youth Cluster's mission is to develop the leadership and engagement of youth in public health-related topics such as violence prevention, childhood obesity, and substance abuse issues in Roxbury and Greater Boston.

The Program to Eliminate Health Disparities at the Harvard School of Public Health provides assistance to each cluster, ensures coordination and integration of overall COHS-related goals and activities, maintains COHS data base, sets bi-monthly COHS coalition meetings, serves as the COHS point of contact, leverages coalition building resources in the pursuit of private foundation or federal funding opportunities, and coordinates community trainings and information dissemination activities.

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