COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE AAMC

Highlights from 2021

July 2020-June 2021
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Introduction

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) leads and serves the academic medicine community to improve the health of people everywhere. This includes the neighborhood and communities surrounding our headquarters at 655 K Street NW in the heart of the Mt. Vernon Triangle neighborhood of Washington, DC.

Throughout the ongoing global pandemic and our nation’s reckoning with systemic racism, the AAMC has actively engaged with community partners, government, and local residents to make a greater social impact in the District of Columbia through its philanthropic efforts, employee volunteerism, and innovative programming. Our vision is for a healthier future through learning, discovery, healthcare, and community collaborations. In a changed world, our commitment to community did not change, only some of our methods for collaboration.

This report highlights some of that work that took place from July 2020 through June 2021 and amplifies the voices of AAMC partners and staff on the influence of community engagement.
Preparing McKinley Technology High School Students for Science Fairs and Publications

McKinley Technology High School has been an AAMC local school partner since 2018. In 2020, high school leadership requested assistance in providing guidance to students interested in submitting papers to research journals. Several students expressed an interest in submitting their research papers to the Journal of Emerging Investigators, a science journal and mentorship program that publishes research by middle and high school scientists. Over a period of several months, AAMC staff developed and presented a series of workshops aimed at preparing 120 students at the McKinley Tech Academy of Biotechnology for the D.C. STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) Fair and Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair and at helping them submit their research for publication.

Toni Gallo, educational resources and scholarship lead and senior editor for academic medicine, and Liza Karlin, senior staff editor for academic medicine, walked students through developing their skills in writing arguments, correctly providing citations, and constructing figures and tables to summarize their experimental results. Dr. Karey Sutton, director
of research at the AAMC Center for Health Justice, and Dr. Antonio Bush, director of research, diversity, and inclusion for the AAMC, engaged students with a presentation on the fundamentals of research. Later, three McKinley students were selected by their teachers to present their research projects and participate in a question-and-answer session during a special virtual brown bag lunch that was open to all AAMC staff.

**Introducing Students from Across the District to Careers in STEM**

In collaboration with community partners, the AAMC hosted two virtual evening programs to introduce D.C. high school students to education and career pathways in STEM. The first evening program, led by Cynthia Myrick, manager of AAMC’s Information Technology Service Desk, was dedicated to exploring education and career pathways in information technology (IT). The second event allowed students to hear from a dental student and a medical student from the East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine.

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“The students at McKinley Tech were engaged in my workshop, asked thoughtful questions, and shared insightful feedback about writing up their research for publication. I was inspired by their creativity and hard work, and it made me realize the impact the AAMC can have on younger students who are interested in pursuing STEM careers.”

**Toni Gallo**

Educational Resources and Scholarship Lead and Senior Editor, Academic Medicine
Association of American Medical Colleges

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and the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, respectively. Both panelists addressed their successes as learners while highlighting the many challenges they have faced. Each program was attended by students from local college preparatory programs: College Bound, College Success Foundation–District of Columbia, and Capital Partners for Education. The three programs serve public, charter, and parochial high schools in every area of the District.

April Williams, PhD, manager of data governance and standards in IT Data and Analytics, participated in McKinley Technology High School’s virtual Career Day. April delivered a presentation on the different career fields and pathways in IT to 10 students. She discussed her current role within the AAMC and gave sound advice to those aspiring to join the IT field.

**Helping Students SWEAT with STEAM Night**

Through its ongoing partnership with Walker-Jones Education Campus, the AAMC coordinated a virtual health and fitness session with Coach G, fitness coach and founder of SWEAT DC, for participants of SWEAT DC’s annual STEAM Night family event. The AAMC has been a proud partner in the annual STEAM Night since 2018. The event focuses on getting students more excited about STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math). Coach G talked about the human body and the importance of maintaining good health through exercise. He demonstrated a routine that students and families could do together at home. The AAMC provided the school with 10 science kits, which were awarded to students for their STEAM presentations given throughout STEAM week.

"Because of AAMC support (volunteer, programming, or financial), we have been able to expose biotechnology students to practical and meaningful academic writing techniques to increase their chances of publishing research writing as high school students. The AAMC provided skilled and experienced STEM professionals to share their expertise with our students through a series of well-designed, student-friendly presentations. AAMC staff also serve as biotechnology judges for our McKinley Technology High School Annual STEM Fairs. We are grateful for the role the AAMC plays in preparing our world’s future biotechnicians."

Sherry Richardson
Director, Biotechnology Academy
McKinley Technology High School
Exploring Homelessness in a Health Podcast Series

The AAMC produced the “Beyond the White Coat: Making the Rounds” limited series podcast as an opportunity to facilitate substantive conversations on issues related to health inequities, social determinants of health, and other public health concerns in the District of Columbia. The first installment of episodes focused on housing as health and the strength and resiliency of community-based nonprofit organizations that work with people who experience homelessness and housing insecurity while grappling with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community health.

In episode one, Lara Pukatch, director of advocacy at Miriam’s Kitchen, discussed the relationship between housing, health, and health care and ways that academic medicine can lend its strengths to the fight against homelessness. In the following episode, Sandeep Sharma, MD, talked about what it means to meet the medical needs of his clientele at
“I continue to engage because after each event I am reminded of what it means to have and be part of a community. I am reminded that I have something to learn from our community, just as they are learning from me. I am reminded that I am in the position that I am because someone took the time to engage in similar events which impacted me. And each time, without fail, I leave more knowledgeable, energized, and fulfilled. In those moments, I am both reminded of my purpose and reinvigorated to do the work to live it in both my career and personal life.”

Antonio A. Bush, PhD
Director of Research, Diversity and Inclusion Organizational Inclusion and Development Association of American Medical Colleges

So Others Might Eat (SOME), an interfaith community-based organization that helps people in poverty and people experiencing homelessness. The episode explored how the pandemic has affected access to much-needed health care. The final episode of the series featured an interview with Liz Fehrenbach, program director at Joseph’s House, who discussed what it means to persevere during the COVID-19 pandemic. Joseph’s House provides hospice and respite care for individuals experiencing homelessness.

The series received more than 1,000 downloads across distribution platforms. Miriam’s Kitchen, SOME, and Joseph’s House have long-established relationships with the AAMC. All three have been previous AAMC community grant recipients and have often hosted AAMC staff for volunteer opportunities.

Providing Winter Essentials
In lieu of the annual giving tree activity, AAMC staff participated in an online clothing drive to support So Others Might Eat (SOME), an organization that helps D.C. residents experiencing homelessness and poverty. The AAMC collected 505 winter essentials, such as gloves, hats, socks, and undergarments, and distributed them to the nonprofit organization. SOME identified those items as of highest priority during winter.

Sharing Moments of Gratitude
The Homeless Children’s Playtime Project is an AAMC community partner that cultivates resilience in children experiencing family homelessness by providing and expanding access to transformative play experiences. The project created an activity sheet with holistic wellness yoga poses that reduce stress for children and youth. The activity sheet, which was shared through the AAMC employee newsletter and intranet site, was intended to spark conversations between staff members and their children about the challenges faced by youth and families experiencing homelessness through an engaging and reflective activity.
Continuing Our Culture of Service

Participating in the Inaugural 655 K Street Cares 5K

AAMC employees were encouraged to walk, jog, or run 5K (3.1 miles) in the inaugural 655 K Street Cares Virtual 5K. More than 100 AAMC employees walked, ran, jogged, or biked 475.5 miles in support of one of three local community partners, which received a $25 donation in their honor. The three beneficiaries were Young Doctors DC, Joseph’s House, and the United Way of the National Capital Area, whose missions align with AAMC’s three community focus areas. AAMC community engagement focus areas are providing youth education opportunities, addressing homelessness, and building a culture of service. Participants were also awarded a virtual 655 K Street Cares 5K medal.
Celebrating Our People and Our Culture of Service

The AAMC is committed to playing a greater social role in Washington, D.C., and to advancing a culture of service within our organization by providing employees opportunities for meaningful engagement. Celebrating Our People is an annual event during which the AAMC honors our colleagues’ years of service and announces the recipients of the Kat Turner Spirit of Excellence Award. Length of Service Awardees were offered the option of making a charitable donation to a local nonprofit organization of their choice in lieu of selecting a gift. As a result of the recipients’ generosity, the amount donated to organizations providing health services and programs for our neighbors nearly doubled over the previous year.

Hosting a Public Speaking Workshop for High School Students

College Bound is a nonprofit that serves more than 200 students from more than 50 public schools in the Washington, D.C., area. The organization offers public and public charter school students in grades 8 to 12 academic enrichment and resources to prepare for and succeed in college. College Bound is a past AAMC community grants recipient and volunteer program partner. At College Bound’s request, the AAMC Toastmasters hosted a virtual public speaking workshop for student members of the College Bound program. The workshop offered tips to participants on how to become powerful, confident speakers and great communicators. Participants learned the fundamentals of public speaking (eye contact, articulation, tone, hand gestures, and confidence); received guidance through the speechmaking process; and delivered table topic speeches. This workshop was one in a series of personal and professional development activities that College Bound organized for rising seniors.

“Because of AAMC support we have been able to impact over 800 health science students within the D.C. Career and Technical Education (DC CTE) Network. We continue to work with the AAMC because of their genuine desire to support students’ academic and professional development.”

Mary Okowi
Work-Based Learning Coordinator
D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education
Advocating and Collaborating for Community Health

Hosting the D.C. Health Equity Roundtable
In July 2020, the AAMC hosted the Community Roundtable: Health Equity in Academic Medicine, a virtual convening of academic medical institution administrators and educators along with community organizations in the metropolitan Washington area. The event was designed to foster collaboration across the academic medical community in the region to catalyze community-informed solutions that address health and health care inequities in education, policy, and practice. The Community Roundtable included six sessions: Medical Education, Diversity and Inclusion, Community Engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility, Advocacy and Policy, Research, and Clinical Care and Quality Improvement.

As a follow up in March 2021, the AAMC organized a virtual convening of local members and community partners with C. Anneta Arno, PhD, MPH, director of the Office of Health Equity at the District of Columbia Department of Health (DC Health). Dr. Arno provided an overview of findings from the most recent DC Health Equity Report before opening a conversation about ways to further engage our local academic medical community and partners in identifying potential academic or community-based partnerships that could be developed or leveraged to address health inequities in the District.
Advocating and Collaborating for Community Health

The Health Equity in Academic Medicine: Recommendations From an AAMC Community Roundtable in Washington, D.C. report describes several promising practices, critical challenges, and points for future collaboration among the academic medical community and local organizations addressing health inequities in the region.

Addressing Racism as a Public Health Crisis
The AAMC submitted a comment in support of PR23-0990, the D.C. Council's proposed resolution titled Sense of the Council to Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis in the District of Columbia Resolution of 2020. Several aspects from the proposal related to addressing health inequities were closely aligned with the AAMC’s recently released framework outlining concrete steps that the AAMC will take to address structural racism across all fronts, including within our medical and public health institutions. The AAMC supports the D.C. Council’s efforts to declare racism a public health crisis, shore up funding, improve data collection, increase accountability, and push through bold new proposals to address the alarming inequities that influence health outcomes in the District of Columbia.

Supporting Police Reform
During the summer of 2020, the D.C. Council established the D.C. Police Reform Commission. The commission was directed to work with Impact Justice to conduct research, to hold a series of convenings and listening sessions, and to create a report that would be used to help the D.C. Council better understand how to improve or find alternatives to policing in the District of Columbia. The commission requested insight and information from AAMC staff on the impacts and consequences of exposure to violence as a victim, witness, perpetrator, or resident of a neighborhood or community with an elevated rate of violence. It also sought information about promising practices in trauma-informed care. Articles and resources gathered from across AAMC units were synthesized into a single memo by the Office of Community Engagement and submitted to the D.C. Police Reform Commission in early 2021. The findings assisted the commission in its preparation of “Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety: A Report of the DC Police Reform Commission,” a report that was submitted to the D.C. Council on April 1, 2021.

Convening Community Partners to Share Information About COVID-19 Vaccines
The AAMC hosted a virtual event about the COVID-19 vaccine, convening community-based health care organizations across Washington, D.C. The forum provided a space for organizations to engage in information sharing about the vaccine, including discussions about challenges and opportunities regarding availability, dissemination, and engagement with community members. Representatives from Community of Hope, Mary's Center, Whitman-Walker Health, and Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Inc., participated in the forum. Dr. Amber Summers, a senior program officer at the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs, moderated the virtual event, which touched on a range of topics, such as ensuring equitable distribution of the vaccine and building vaccine confidence in health care workers.

Later, an episode of the AAMC’s podcast “Beyond the White Coat” featured a participant from the virtual event, Aaron Gerstenmaier, MD, associate chief medical officer of Community of Hope. Along with Giselle Corbie-Smith, MD, Kenan distinguished professor of the Departments of Social Medicine and Medicine and director of the UNC Center for Health Equity Research at the University of North Carolina’s Chapel Hill School of Medicine, Dr. Gerstenmaier discussed the racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 vaccination rates and explored strategies to promote equity in vaccine access. Dr. Gerstenmaier highlighted issues affecting vaccine access, such as lack of human and financial resources, lack of access to accurate information and barriers to technology, time constraints, and transportation difficulties.
Over the past 15 years, the AAMC has invested more than $2.8 million in the D.C. nonprofit community through a competitive community grant process. Annually, the AAMC invites nonprofits serving the D.C. community whose efforts directly or indirectly align with the AAMC’s mission to “improve the health of people everywhere” to participate in the funding competition. The awarded community grants have reflected the diversity of the applicant pool in size, scope, scale, age, funded activities, and location of the population served. This year, the AAMC awarded $300,000 in general operating and project-based grants to 17 nonprofit organizations. The grants will help those organizations continue to advance educational opportunities, promote health equity, and respond to the demonstrated needs of our neighbors.

The employee-driven AAMC Community Grants Committee, led by co-conveners Adrianne Fielding, director of grants, and Dr. Karey Sutton, solicits applications from D.C.-based nonprofits, reviews them, and recommends awards based on the merit and potential impact of the applicants’ programs. The 2021 Community Grants Committee members are Adrien Barrios, Amy Beers, Diana Bourke, Asinia Crawford, Sarah Hampton, Laura Pincus, Abigail Sakyi, Michelle Shader, Hannah Turner, Lauren Vergara, and Chris Wagner. Clarence J. Fluker, Director of community engagement, serves as a counsel to the group.
Organization and project summaries for 2021 awardees are as follows:

**Food & Friends**
Food & Friends’ mission is to improve the lives and health of people with HIV/AIDS, cancer, and other serious illnesses that limit their ability to provide nourishment for themselves. The organization prepares and delivers medically tailored meals and groceries, provides nutrition counseling, and reduces social isolation. Since 1988, daily home delivery of medically tailored meals, prepared in Food & Friends’ kitchen, has functioned as a safety net through recovery from a serious illness. Food & Friends plans to enhance and improve this shipping pilot service through increased collaborative partnerships, which will allow more clients to be reached and more meals to be provided.

**HIPS**
Since 1993, HIPS has provided compassionate harm reduction services to people engaging in drug use and sex work in Washington D.C., equipping them with skills to prevent the spread of HIV and the hepatitis C virus, to reduce violence, and to improve their health and prosperity. AAMC grant funds will be used to support the organization’s mobile outreach service, which provides trauma-informed micro-counseling, sterile needles, safer injection supplies, safer sex supplies, and naloxone to community members across all eight wards of the District of Columbia. AAMC grant funds will also support incentives for peer educators to staff outreach shifts and provide critical supplies for program participants.

**Joseph’s House**
Founded in 1990, Joseph’s House welcomes and provides residential healing care for homeless adults living with advanced HIV/AIDS or with terminal illnesses, as well as medical and nonmedical services for former residents, supporting them on their life’s journey. AAMC grant funds will be used for upgrades to the kitchen and meal prep areas for residents.

**La Clínica del Pueblo**
La Clínica del Pueblo is a nonprofit community-based health center committed to delivering high-quality health services to low-income Latino immigrants in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. La Clínica provides comprehensive primary care, mental health, and substance use services; medical interpretation; and community health education. AAMC grant funds will be used to meet the health care needs of low-income Latino families in the District of Columbia by providing comprehensive primary care and mental health services, in addition to wraparound services, community outreach, and health education.

**Latin American Youth Center**
Latin American Youth Center is a nationally recognized, community-based, multicultural, and multilingual youth development center with the mission of empowering a diverse population of youth to achieve a successful transition to adulthood. Counseling, Testing, Referral, and Linkages (CTRL) is a preventive care outreach program that provides free confidential health services by offering HIV, sexually transmitted infection, and pregnancy testing; risk reduction education; and resource and referral links. AAMC grant funds will be used to enhance ongoing outreach and education efforts to 1,000 youth with the support of 2 peer educators.

**Calvary Women’s Services**
Calvary Women’s Services empowers homeless women in Washington, D.C., to transform their lives through housing, health, education, and employment programs. The programs at Calvary have been designed to address the needs of women who are struggling with mental illness, substance addiction, and histories of violence and trauma. General operating funds will support work to provide safe housing and health services for women experiencing homelessness during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
**Christ House**

Founded in 1985, Christ House is a 33-bed residential medical facility providing 24-hour nursing and medical care for people experiencing homelessness who have acute medical needs. AAMC funding will allow Christ House to rewire the building to improve the phone system and enable telemedicine for patients and medical professionals. This project will improve call quality for important discussions with case managers, doctors, nurses, and administrative staff members and will facilitate calls between patients and their families. It will also allow Christ House to install an intercom system that alerts patients when they receive a phone call or a visitor.

**Community of Hope**

For 40 years, Community of Hope (COH) has served under-resourced families in D.C. COH is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that provides medical, dental, and behavioral health services at three health centers, located in Wards 1, 5, and 8. A satellite site in Ward 8 offers homelessness prevention, behavioral health, and other support. COH provides mental health services at three high-need elementary schools. For families experiencing homelessness, COH offers housing services across the continuum of care. AAMC support will help ensure that COH can continue to provide high-quality services during this challenging time.

**Covenant House Greater Washington**

Covenant House Greater Washington (CHGW) is one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the city that serves youth, ages 18-24, who are experiencing homelessness, disconnection, and exploitation. CHGW is at the forefront of efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable among us remain safe and secure. In the midst of this pandemic, in a single month, an average of more than 70 youth found safety each night at CHGW. Unfortunately, Covenant House has not been spared from outbreaks of COVID-19 among its staff and youth. AAMC funds will be used to mitigate COVID-19 with additional personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and virtual program tools.
**District Alliance for Safe Housing, Inc**
The District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH) is the largest provider of safe housing and trauma-informed services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence and children in D.C. The COVID-19 crisis has severely increased cases of domestic violence in our community, and the need for housing has skyrocketed since restrictions were lifted. DASH has seen an alarming increase in housing and service requests for survivors and families—four times the regular volume. To continue providing vital services and adapt them to the new demands created by COVID-19, DASH will use AAMC funds for personnel-related costs.

**Pathways to Housing DC**
Since 2004, Pathways to Housing DC has delivered innovative and effective housing and services to permanently combat chronic homelessness. Today, Pathways is D.C.’s largest Housing First provider, while also deploying the largest homeless street outreach effort. With a focus on serving those with a chronic health condition, Pathways provides the essential health care services that are integral to its clients’ success and recovery. The AAMC grant will ensure that Pathways can continue to play a key role in our community’s plan to end homelessness and to protect our most vulnerable neighbors in lifesaving ways.

**Bright Beginnings, Inc.**
Bright Beginnings, Inc., is a two-generation nonprofit in Washington, D.C., that supports children and families that are experiencing homelessness by providing early childhood education and complete wraparound services. The organization’s two-generation approach supports families as they move from crisis to self-sufficiency with health and wellness, therapeutic, family and home visiting, and workforce and adult education services to end chronic homelessness and intergenerational poverty. The Bright Beginnings Fatherhood Initiative personalizes services to address the unique needs of fathers. The AAMC grant will support the program in its entirety, which includes weekly sessions and activities.

**Bread for the City**
Bread for the City’s mission is to help Washington, D.C., residents living with low incomes to develop the power to determine the future of their own communities. Bread for the City provides food, clothing, medical care, and legal and social services to reduce the burden of poverty. The organization also seeks to uproot racism, which is a major cause of poverty, through community organization and advocacy. General operating support from the AAMC will allow Bread for the City to continue its proactive response to COVID-19, including free testing and grocery delivery, and to maintain comprehensive safety-net assistance programs.

“My favorite thing about being involved with AAMC community engagement is learning about all of the wonderful organizations in the Washington, D.C., area that are working toward social justice in various forms.”

Mikhaila Richards
Senior Digital Content Specialist
Association of American Medical Colleges

**College Success Foundation**
College Success Foundation - DC’s mission is to support low-income students of color through college and into their professional careers. The organization integrates STEM learning into its year-round programs to support students’ college and career aspirations. AAMC grant funds were used to support 200 students in a STEM Learning Ecosystem Summer Experience. The program required unique adaptations because of COVID-19 social distancing requirements. The academic schedule was appropriate for both younger and advanced learners, and it included both instructional and co-curricular experiences offered Monday through Friday.
Calvin Coolidge High School Academy of Health Sciences
The Calvin Coolidge High School NAF Academy of Health Sciences (AOHS) is a four-year career education program that provides students with rigorous health science coursework, college and career exposure, academic support, and mentorship. The Impact project is designed to prepare students for college, career, and life by providing them with the skills and experiences necessary to pursue exciting postsecondary pathways. AAMC grant funds will be used to address the critical achievement gap among minorities in STEAM fields, while improving the health of their communities through strategic pipeline development and community-based activities.

House of Ruth
For 44 years, House of Ruth has provided housing and supportive services to more than 13,000 women and children recovering from homelessness and abuse in D.C. House of Ruth serves 1,000 individuals annually. AAMC funding will support the purchase of outdoor play equipment, strollers, and high-quality toys and supplies for a new Kidspace building. Kidspace provides free childcare, an enriching learning environment, and onsite speech and occupational therapy for children overcoming the trauma of homelessness. Parents are supported in positively engaging in their child’s development.

Mary’s Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.
Founded in 1988, Mary’s Center is an award-winning community health center that annually provides services to more than 60,000 participants from all parts of the D.C. metropolitan region. Individuals receiving services from Mary’s Center represent nearly 50 countries. Since 1991, Mary’s Center’s Teen Afterschool Program has provided a safe haven for first-generation immigrant youth and helped them navigate the transition from high school to college. AAMC funding will provide continued support to implement and build on the success of this program by providing 50 to 70 teen participants with the tools and resources they need to set them on the path to a brighter future.