

**“Bradford Community Immunization Access: Bridging the Gap”**

University of Pittsburgh at Bradford  
Dr. Steve Hardin  
Dean of Academic Affairs  
300 Campus Drive  
Bradford, PA 16701  
814-362-7510

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Dr. Tammy Haley  
Director of Nursing and Radiological  
Science  
Associate Professor, Nursing  
University of Pittsburgh at Bradford  
814-362-7640  
[tmh24@pitt.edu](mailto:tmh24@pitt.edu)

Dr. Lisa Fiorentino  
Director, Center for Rural Health Practice  
Associate Professor, Nursing  
University of Pittsburgh at Bradford  
814-362-7640  
[lmf1@pitt.edu](mailto:lmf1@pitt.edu)

## **Project focus**

In an effort to innovate, partner, and invest in building community capacity in Appalachia, the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford will extend the work of the 2016 Appalachian Teaching Project. The 2016-2017 project began the important work of assessing the feasibility of a Vaccine Access Network for the Bradford Community. In the analysis of data collected, it was identified that while we do have support from the community to move forward, the voices of mid-level providers, viewed as key stakeholders were omitted in our initial efforts. We further recognized that a more comprehensive assessment of current resources was needed. With the incorporation of mid-level providers and other key stakeholders, collaborative efforts in 2017-2018 will focus on the cataloguing of current resources, the development of strategies for the creation of a community resource network [Vaccine Access Network (VAN)], and the development of strategies for community and provider education to enhance identified assets and reduce identified barriers to immunization within the Bradford, PA community.

## **Project details**

**Course (s):** NUR 1401: Nursing Research; NUR 1404: Community Health Nursing

**Instructor(s):** Dr. Lisa Fiorentino; Dr. Tammy Haley

## **Community Partner:**

The McKean County Collaborative Board [MCCB] is a community-improvement partnership comprised of parents, citizens, elected officials, and representatives from the health, business, human service, faith-based, and education sectors. While the McKean county Collaborative Board is identified as a single community partner, the composition of the Board is such that input will be gained from a wide variety of community agencies and the impact will be broad reaching as the results are disseminated by the member participants. In addition to providing ingress to many community service agencies, MCCB members will interact with students in the classroom and community setting to provide collaborative input in the identification of key components for inclusion in the data collection process and cataloguing of community resources. Feedback and assistance will be sought from the full board to assist with moving the project forward during formal student presentations at the MCCB Annual Meeting.

## **Need:**

The overall health of a community can typically be linked to the economic health of the area. With an estimated 32.7% of Bradford city residents living at or below the poverty level, the potential risks for poor health are much greater than those of McKean County, PA (16.6% poverty) or the state of Pennsylvania overall (13.6%)<sup>1</sup>. Within the top ten leading causes of death, in 2013, 56,979 deaths nationally were attributed to flu and pneumonia<sup>2</sup>. Following poverty trends, the rate of death from flu and pneumonia are noted to be higher in McKean County than in Pennsylvania overall<sup>3, 4</sup>. Lost work, health

impairment, or death due to vaccine preventable illnesses such as flu or pneumonia can have a dramatic impact on impoverished rural communities such as Bradford.

Immunizations are a key public health measure to help assure healthier communities. With changes in healthcare coverage due to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), most vaccines recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) are now covered without cost sharing by in-network providers, but the new regulations do not guarantee adequacy of payment for providers. Medicare and Medicaid will also provide for most ACIP recommended immunizations. However, as supported by our ATP research in 2016, coverage does not guarantee easy access to immunization or provider services. Providers can choose the types of coverage to accept, and they are not required to maintain vaccines for administration in the office setting. External agencies such as pharmacies may be used to administer vaccines, but many are considered out-of-network, thereby limiting access and reimbursement. This may lead to confusion on the part of the consumer and may translate to gaps in vaccination coverage and missed opportunities to maintain vaccination status.

Current ACIP guidelines provide recommendations for adult immunizations.<sup>5</sup> In McKean County; the 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment identified that access to adult immunizations as a top community health need identified by the community survey respondents.

Underscoring the urgency of this need, closure of a community clinic providing services to many lower income residents at the end of 2014<sup>6</sup> coupled with additional limitations in the Pennsylvania Department of Health services<sup>7</sup> have further reduced access to HPV and Hepatitis A & B vaccination as well as other previously available immunization services. For many small rural medical practices, the cost and associated maintenance required to properly maintain vaccine supplies may be prohibitive. In the Bradford community, no local provider currently carries all recommended vaccinations and some local providers do not carry any vaccinations, potentially making the process of accessing immunization services seem more cumbersome than beneficial for those in need.

The identified community resources, needs, assets, and barriers uncovered by the 2016 ATP group, will provide the foundation for the development of a deeper understanding of the issue of immunization access in the rural, northern Appalachian community of Bradford, PA, helping to further expand our investigation and refine the focus of this project.

### **Number and description of planned meeting with the community partner.**

**August 2017:** At least once during the month of August, project faculty will meet with the McKean County Collaborative Board to discuss assessment goals, set priorities, and finalize fall meeting dates and expectations.

**September 2017:** ATP student project team leaders will be identified, and small group meetings will be held with team leaders and project faculty to review roles, obligations, and expectations. Additional September activities include: 1) Skype meeting with Kostas Skordas to discuss ARC role and mission. 2) All student participants/ATP project team leaders, community partner members will meet at least once to review planned assessment, timeline, roles/responsibilities, and goals of the ARC and the intersection of the goals of the project. Revisions will be identified and integrated as needed based on the discussions with the full project team.

**October 2017:** Preliminary project findings and network drafts will be reviewed by community partners and the ATP project team in preparation for presentation of preliminary findings at Penn-York Undergraduate Research Conference. Feedback will be sought from the community partner for improvement in the project presentation. The project findings will be presented to the community civic organization.

**November 2017:** Community partner representatives and ATP project team will meet to discuss lessons learned from Penn-York and review plans for ATP Conference presentation. Project updates will be provided and feedback generated about the process thus far and next steps will be discussed.

**December 2017:** Students will develop a poster and conference presentation for the ATP meetings in Washington, D.C., December, 2017.

**Concise overview of the project, including its central focus:**

With the evolution of healthcare, many changes have occurred that have caused confusion for consumers. The ability of individuals to maintain currency with recommended immunizations is important for the health of the community. With recent local and regional changes in vaccine clinic availability, this strategic, collaborative, project with clearly defined outcomes to achieve optimum impact within the region, seeks to expand upon the data gathered in 2016 which assessed the available community assets for the provision of recommended immunizations, the community needs for immunization, and barriers which limit access or availability of recommended immunizations within the Bradford community. Armed with this information, and in collaboration with the McKean County Collaborative Board, key stakeholders omitted from earlier efforts along with previously identified stakeholders will be consulted in taking the next steps toward the creation of a Vaccine Access Network [VAN] in the Bradford community. Accountability will be assured through the inclusion and expansion of identified key stakeholders in the cataloging of current resources and the development of formative strategies for community/provider education. See Logic Model (Appendix A).

Utilizing Community Based Participatory Research methods, students from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford will continue working with the McKean County Collaborative Board to capitalize on identified community resources to meet current national immunization recommendations with a focus on addressing current needs,

while focusing on strengths, and available assets of the Bradford community. Incorporating identified assets, we will expand our investigation to include key stakeholders in community education efforts and further the investigation of the potential for creating a community VAN to strengthen local healthcare capacity and infrastructure.

### **Course Guidelines and Project Goals:**

*The ARC 2016-2020 Five-year Strategic Plan for Capitalizing on Appalachia's Opportunities* identifies Goal 2: Increase the education, knowledge, skills, and health of residents to work and succeed in Appalachia. Action Objective no. 6 [Use proven public health practices and establish sustainable clinical services to address health conditions that affect the Region's economic competitiveness] and no. 7 [Develop and support sustainable programs that remove barriers to participating in the workforce] are directly impacted by this project.

Further, Goal 5: Build the capacity and skills of current and next-generation leaders and organizations to innovate, collaborate, and advance community and economic development. Action Objective no. 2 [Empower and support next-generation leaders and encourage authentic engagement in local and regional economic and community development]; no. 3 [Strengthen the capacity of community organizations and institutions to articulate and implement a vision for sustainable, transformative community change], and no. 5 [Develop and support networks, partnerships, and other models of collaboration that catalyze public, private, and nonprofit action for community impact] will be addressed through the use of University, community, and student collaboration to achieve the project goals.

- Catalog current community resources for the provision of immunizations for adults.
- Incorporation of, and collaboration with, mid-level providers and key community stakeholders in the development of strategies for the creation of a community Vaccine Access Network for increasing immunization access and reducing provider burden focusing on the relationship between competing provider interests.
- Incorporation of, and collaboration with, mid-level providers and key community stakeholders in the development of strategies for the expanded use of the PA Statewide Immunization Information System [PA SIIS] by vaccine providers in the Bradford community.
- Incorporation of, and collaboration with, mid-level providers and key community stakeholders to further identify educational needs and develop strategies for community education to enhance existing assets which facilitate access to immunization within the Bradford community.
- Incorporation of, and collaboration with, mid-level providers and key community stakeholders to further identify educational needs and develop strategies for community education to reduce existing barriers which prohibit or limit access to immunization.

- Students will present the project findings to the community partner to solicit feedback and refine the presentation strategy, October, 2017.
- Students will present the project findings to a civic organization (ie: Rotary, Kiwanis; dependent on fall schedule) prior to the Penn-York Undergraduate Research Conference.
- Students will present a poster at the Penn-York Undergraduate Research Conference in November 2017.
- Students will develop a poster and conference presentation for the ATP meetings in Washington, D.C., December, 2017.
- Students will present their work at the 2018 Appalachian Studies Association Conference, April 5-8, 2018 in Cincinnati, OH.

**Project Impact:**

- Students will develop an understanding and demonstrate skills necessary for the conducting of community based research.
- Students will develop the skills required to conduct a community assessment and investigate and identify community resources for individuals seeking recommended healthcare services.
- Students will gain an appreciation for engagement in professional networking with healthcare providers, public health officials, and non-profit organizations to enhance available services and build local capacity and infrastructure.
- Through the data collection process, community collaboration, and presentations of the project findings at the local, regional, and national level, skills will be introduced and refined to build confidence, public speaking and leadership among student participants.
- Partnerships between the University and the McKean County Collaborative Board, which includes key constituents within the Bradford community, will be strengthened.
- Awareness of the specific nature of the health issues within Appalachia with regard to immunization status and risk will be highlighted within the Bradford community.
- Through completion of this project, the McKean County Collaborative Board will be provided the data and strategies to address the identified priority issue of access to adult immunizations to benefit the local community. This information may be included in the annual *McKean County Community Resource Directory* published by the agency.

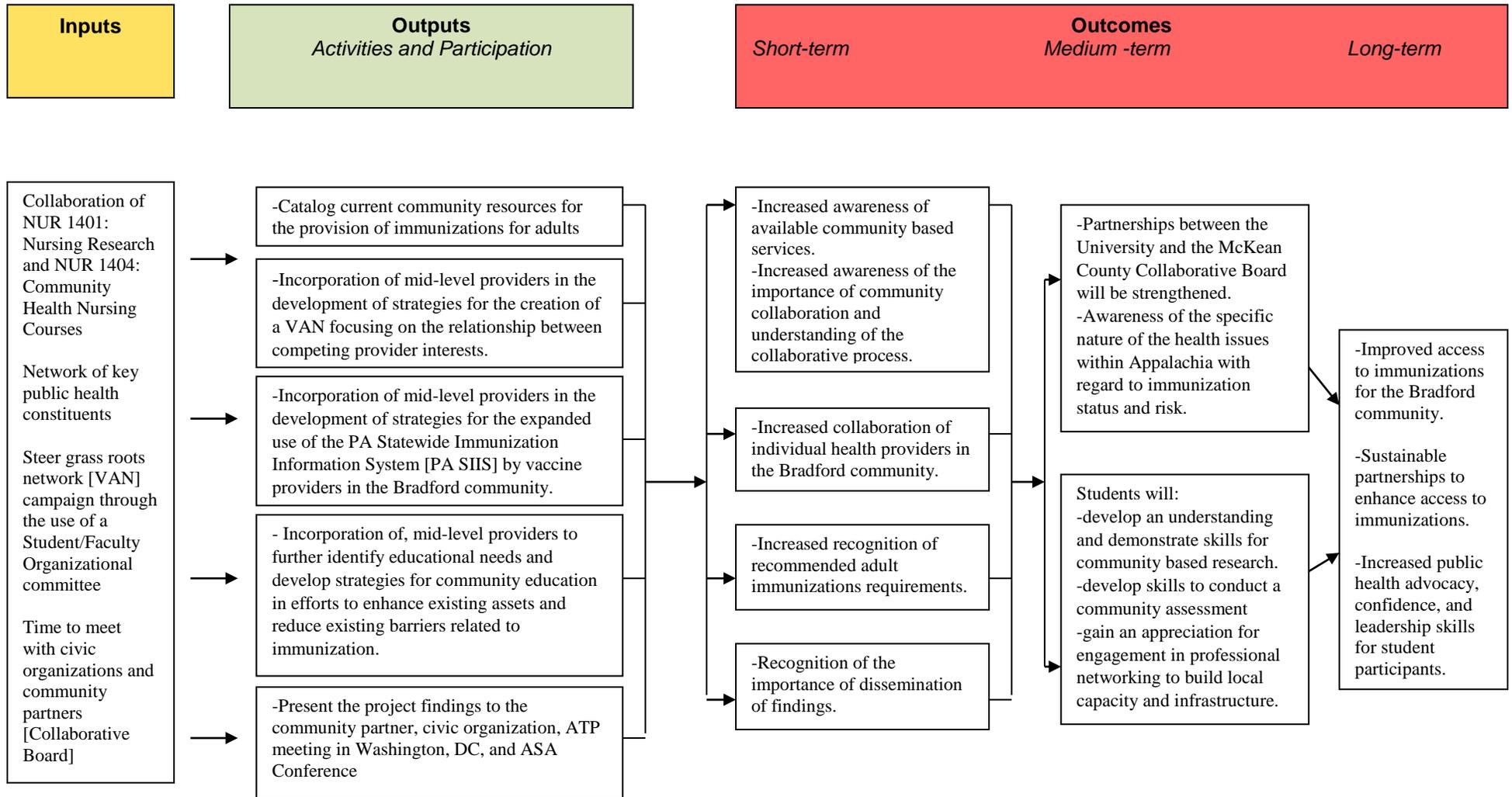
## References

- <sup>1</sup>United States Census Bureau QuickFacts: Persons in poverty, percent. Retrieved 03/07/2016 from <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>
- <sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Number of deaths for leading causes of death, Retrieved 03/07/2016 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>.
- <sup>3</sup>Pennsylvania Department of Health Epidemiological Query and Mapping System [EpiQMS], Deaths: Influenza and pneumonia. Retrieved 03/07/2016 from: [https://apps.health.pa.gov/EpiQMS/asp/SelectParams\\_Tbl.asp](https://apps.health.pa.gov/EpiQMS/asp/SelectParams_Tbl.asp)
- <sup>4</sup>Bradford Regional Medical Center 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment (2015). Retrieved 06/02/16 from: <https://www.brmc.com/files/chna-and-data-supplement.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup>Vaccine recommendations of the ACIP. Retrieved 06/09/16 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/>
- <sup>6</sup>Adagio Health closes offices in Bradford, St. Marys. Retrieved 07/28/17 from: [http://www.bradfordera.com/news/adagio-health-closes-offices-in-bradford-st-marys/article\\_8b34f606-45db-11e4-a238-4b88dff01d39.html](http://www.bradfordera.com/news/adagio-health-closes-offices-in-bradford-st-marys/article_8b34f606-45db-11e4-a238-4b88dff01d39.html)
- <sup>7</sup>Questions answered on vaccines purchased with 317 funds. Retrieved 07/28/17 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/guides-pubs/qa-317-funds.html>

## Appendix A

### Program: Bradford, PA Community Immunization Access Logic Model

**Situation: High rates of poverty; uncertain access to recommended immunizations**



**Assumptions**

Low rates of vaccine preventable illness are desirable.  
Increasing vaccine access will increase immunization.  
Increased rates of immunization will reduce the burden of disease in the community.

**External Factors**

High rates of poverty [32.7%] in the Bradford community.  
Current regulations do not guarantee adequacy of payment for providers.  
Recent reductions in vaccine access points due to clinic closures and Pennsylvania Department of Health limits.