

AT A GLANCE

Healthy Savannah and its partners have created a true coalition. Healthy Savannah has not only paved the way for meaningful work under the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant but have created connections between its stakeholders. The organization's ability to form partnerships among people and organizations dedicated to building a culture of health in Savannah has enabled Healthy Savannah and its partners to sustain their individual and united goals through the current turbulent times, particularly those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world in 2020. The first shelter in place orders were put in place in Savannah, Georgia on March 24, 2020, halting the work and activities of several organizations in the city. As of August 2022, 71,760 COVID-19 cases and 920 COVID-related deaths were reported in Chatham County, Georgia. The virus itself was not the only disruptive and destructive force. The chaos and fear surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts caused great harm.

COVID-19 exacerbated existing public health challenges. Barriers to physical activity, food and nutrition insecurity, disconnection to critical services due to closures, and disproportionate exposure to chronic diseases persisted and intensified during the onset of the pandemic. There was still a need to address and resolve these concerns while navigating through the pandemic. Healthy Savannah and its partners were eager to help.

“[Social distancing] provided more space to be more personal with folks and get more connected and build stronger relationships with many of my community partners and residents out in Savannah. I’ve considered it a true gift to be able to both offer and receive comfort and assistance and see it happen among others through this really challenging time. It’s opportunities to just be there for each other.”

-Nick Deffley

APPROACH

Support from the REACH grant was key to organizations' ability to continue working and serving the priority population in innovative ways. Executive Director of Healthy Savannah and Project Lead for the REACH grant, Paula Kreissler, created several safe spaces in the three years of the pandemic for Healthy Savannah and its partners to connect, reflect, work together, and maneuver in the new world. Notable occasions included stakeholder meetings in 2020, 2021, and 2022 with facilitators asking attendees to discuss their work. The 2020 stakeholder meetings culminated in a well-attended special session, Silver Linings Stories in early 2021. Silver Linings Stories was an opportunity for all the partners to share the ways they emerged successfully from the pandemic. Evaluation and grant writing workshops provided by Healthy Savannah and two of its stakeholders, Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition and Georgia Southern University, were professional settings that allowed partners to gain new skills. A tea party to celebrate Healthy Savannah's 15-year anniversary in 2022 was a necessary break from all the hard work. Maintaining connections during this challenging time reminded these organizations of their shared mission to create a culture of health in Savannah and motivated them to continue to serve vulnerable population.

RESULTS

The success of Healthy Savannah's stakeholder engagement is not only evident in the relationship between Healthy Savannah and its REACH partners, but in the relationships between the partners themselves. The gatherings hosted during the pandemic became venues for partners to connect, discover new ways to work together, and use their unique strategies, resources, and funding streams to better serve the priority population. Healthy Savannah has witnessed this process on several occasions and continues to encourage this collaboration.

The partners have expressed much interest in events. Attendance at stakeholder meetings and social gatherings grows with each subsequent event. The energy is positive and always ends with Healthy Savannah and its partners recommitting to each other and agreeing that the effectiveness of their work would not be possible without collaboration.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Healthy Savannah will continue to foster current relationships with stakeholders and create spaces for partners to engage with each other. Funding from the REACH grant and additional sources will provide opportunities to create partnerships and find new methods to promote health equity and alleviate health disparities in the community. The presence of over 50 stakeholders at Healthy Savannah's most recent meeting on August 19, 2022 is indicative of the organization's successful approach to coalition building. The discussion ended in each partner sharing their dedication to undertaking an action that will forward the shared vision towards an equitable and healthy Savannah which will positively impact the community for years to come.

FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about the Healthy Savannah coalition and the organization's partners, visit healthysavannah.org/about/partners.

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CONTACT

Paula Kreissler
REACH Project Lead
1602 Drayton St.
Savannah, GA 31401
P: 912.272.9494
Email: paula@healthysavannah.org

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<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

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