



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA MEDICAL CENTER

# Office of Community Engagement

2021

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# from the leadership

**The University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) Office of Community Engagement's mission is to build mutually beneficial relationships and collaborations between faculty, staff and students and the communities it serves.**

To do that, we:

- Bridge the scientific expertise of UNMC with the needs of our communities for the benefit of all.
- Connect UNMC students with community engagement opportunities both on and off campus.
- Assist faculty with the development of co-curriculum community engagement opportunities.
- Enrich faculty scholarship and research and enhance student learning.
- Educate citizens and equip them with an increased sense of civic responsibility.
- Increase UNMC's and the public's awareness of social issues and the impact of community engagement programs.
- Manage on-going community engagement statistical data and partnership opportunities.

## About this report

The University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) and its clinical partner, Nebraska Medicine, are dedicated to addressing the health needs of Nebraska through shared goals and collaborations with our communities. This report focuses on some of the partnerships established with our North and South Omaha communities. Our work aligns with the priorities outlined in the latest Community Health Needs Assessment. Still, there is much to do to achieve the best health possible for all. UNMC will continue to align its initiatives around community-identified needs, build upon the work that has been done and further strengthen our community partnerships to create meaningful impact that transforms lives.



UNMC's mission — to transform lives to create a healthy future for all individuals and communities — is echoed in the mission of the Office of Community Engagement (OCE). As the state's public academic health science center, UNMC has a distinct role in helping build partnerships with the communities we serve. These alliances, whether based on common goals or identified needs, address potential health disparities, which, in turn, help us address community health needs. Working together, we have — and will continue to — make our communities stronger for all.

**JEFFREY P. GOLD, MD** | CHANCELLOR, UNMC



I am proud of how UNMC faculty, students and staff are actively engaged in making the communities we serve better, whether by serving on boards, volunteering at food shelters, assisting non-profits, speaking against health disparities or increasing access to health care. This inaugural community engagement report provides a snapshot of how UNMC is actively engaged in working with our community partners, friends and neighbors across North and South Omaha to impact lives every day. We're proud of the work that's been done, while acknowledging there is much more to do to jointly transform lives and create a healthy future for all.

**H. DELE DAVIES, MD** | SENIOR VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS, UNMC



At UNMC, it is our mission to create "a healthy future for all individuals and communities." To achieve that, we know we need to be "of" the community and not merely "in" the community. We take seriously our critical role of listening to community members and responding to their envisioned opportunities as well as their challenges. We do this in several ways. We provide pathways for youth to become health professionals, seek community immersion experiences for UNMC students, provide student patient care experiences that are site-based in the community, and align our faculty expertise to address community needs and aspirations. Together, with our community partners, we seek to reduce workforce shortages, end health disparities, improve the diversity of the health care workforce and increase access to patient care. We thank our partners who provide us with the opportunities to do so.

**BOB BARTEE** | VICE CHANCELLOR FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS, UNMC



UNMC is committed to forming authentic and positive collaborations to elevate health in partnership with our rural and urban communities across the state. Through mutually beneficial relationships, we have built bridges, transformed lives, built stronger economies and enhanced access to health care. In recent years, UNMC has taken intentional steps in-house to help elevate issues of importance to the community. This has included investing in both our Office of Community Engagement and pipeline programs that help address workforce shortages, appointing campuswide directors for inclusion and equity, and creating a stronger culture of diversity, equity and inclusion within and across all of our colleges and institutes. In 2015, UNMC was designated as a Community Engaged Campus by the Carnegie Foundation, the only health professions university in the nation to receive such a designation. Today, we remain passionate and committed to doing all we can to help elevate health within all of Nebraska's communities.

**HEIDI KEELER, PHD** | DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Spencer Burton, DDS, cares for a pediatric patient while participating in a telehealth conference at the Charles Drew Health Center. >>

from pg 2

All 10 of the pediatrics residents rotate through the federally qualified health center to help with the telehealth program.

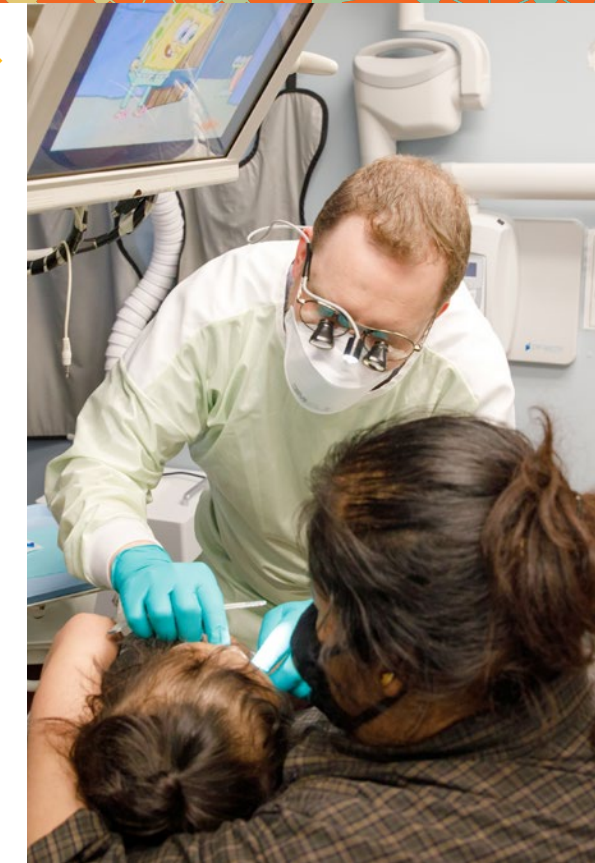
“Once it is determined a patient, who has seen the dentist at Charles Drew, has advanced needs requiring treatment under general anesthesia, then they are referred to the pediatric dentistry program,” said Jill Wallen, BDS, assistant dean of extramural activities and outreach and chair of the department of growth and development at the UNMC College of Dentistry.

The pediatric residents are assigned twice a month to see these patients at Charles Drew where they perform an exam, devise a treatment plan, discuss the need with the family, obtain consent for treatment and schedule the surgery all through a telehealth consultation with the pediatric faculty at Children’s Hospital and Medical Center.

“This eliminates the need for the patient and their family to visit Children’s ahead of the surgery date, missing time from work and school. It also allows us access to the interpreters at Charles Drew who assist with any translation services when that is needed,” Dr. Wallen said.

In Santiago’s case, it was determined that he had several cavities and an infection just beginning in one tooth and because of his fear and anxiety, the family was advised it would be best for his care to be done under general anesthesia.

“They were very thorough and really great at explaining everything to us,” Juan said. “We weren’t aware of the potential issues that could arise in the future, or how bad his teeth really were since the cavities were so small. I was really scared about the whole procedure, but everything went so smoothly.” ●



## Collaboration helps pediatric patients

*Like any 4-year-old, Santiago Juan Iñiguez loves sweets.*

“We may have indulged him a bit more than we should have, but we make sure to provide plenty of other healthy snacks,” said Nicanor Juan, Santiago’s father.

Along with his wife, Alysia Iñiguez, Juan makes sure Santiago brushes his teeth, gets plenty of exercise and time spent together as a family.

The doting parents were surprised then when Santiago began complaining last fall about a pain in his mouth.

“It wasn’t all the time, but when he would eat ice cream or drink something cold, he would say his teeth hurt him, and after this happened a few times, we asked the dentist at Charles Drew to have his teeth looked at,” Juan said.

After a squirmy examination it was determined Santiago needed specialty care and the family was

referred for consultation to the UNMC College of Dentistry pediatric resident on site.

The collaboration between the UNMC College of Dentistry and Charles Drew Health Center, Inc., started in 2016.

“Unfortunately, there are many all-too-familiar stories just like Santiago’s that could be told for our pediatric patients here at Charles Drew,” said Aaron McCoy, DDS, associate dental director, Charles Drew Health Center, Inc. “Since it began, more than 250 kids have completed their care through this collaboration.”

The convenience of having the telehealth consultation on site for families who might have transportation issues that make it difficult for them to get to other parts of the city, is an added bonus, Dr. McCoy said.

cont. pg 3

## New clinic increases access

*In North Omaha, the Autism Care for Toddlers in Omaha North (ACTION) Clinic is designed to reach an underserved community.*

Sponsored by an anonymous private donation, the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute clinic aims to reach underrepresented populations and other families in Omaha who may face barriers accessing autism services.

“We’re going into a new community, and we want to make sure we can best serve that population,” said Elizabeth Preas, PhD, who will be the director of the new ACTION Clinic. “Understanding the needs of the North Omaha community and how we can best connect with the families that need support requires us to collaborate with community partners who have established relationships with the families we’re going to be serving.”

Among the clinic’s collaborators will be Avenue Scholars, a nonprofit organization committed to providing career opportunities to students through education and supportive relationships. The clinic will provide shadowing experiences and other opportunities for Avenue Scholars’ students, potentially creating a pipeline for future employment opportunities as registered behavior technicians, who assist in delivering applied behavior analysis service, and who could go on to become behavioral health professionals.

Understanding the needs of the North Omaha community and how we can best connect with the families that need support requires us to collaborate with community partners who have established relationships with the families we’re going to be serving.

*Elizabeth Preas, PhD, director of the ACTION clinic*

cont. pg 4

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS PROVIDE VALUED PARTNERSHIPS

UNMC has longstanding partnerships with both OneWorld Community Health Centers and Charles Drew Community Health Center. Among the highlights:

- The UNMC Department of Psychiatry partners with Charles Drew to provide clinical services to the North Omaha community and to integrate behavioral health services to serve at-risk youth at the Douglas County Youth Center. The department also sends an addiction medicine fellow to work with OneWorld providers to provide critical substance use services to the South Omaha community.
- UNMC partners with OneWorld annually on Binational Health Week, which is focused on bringing free, bilingual health screenings and services to community members in need.
- Clinical UNMC pharmacy faculty help manage the OneWorld pharmacy and provide patient consultations.
- UNMC provides additional infectious disease training to OneWorld physicians specializing in the care of LGBT+ patients.
- Through a partnership with Charles Drew Health Center, Inc., UNMC College of Nursing faculty and students provide direct services to patients and assist with development and staffing of new programs.
- The UNMC Department of Family Medicine's Urban Underserved Residency Track is based at OneWorld, where medical students encounter rotations in community health, pediatrics and school health. Rotations enable students to hone their clinical skills and gain valuable hands-on experience
- OneWorld also is a residency rotation site for nurse practitioner and pharmacy students.



from pg 3

Jamar Dorsey, EdD, community engagement director for Avenue Scholars, said he was pleased with the two-part collaboration, which includes not only workforce development, but also wellness education for Avenue Scholars employees, so they can safely continue to work with teens and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"MMI has been easy to work with," Dr. Dorsey said. "They're organized, and they have a vision of what they want the ACTION Clinic to be. They've been very responsive to the community — there is an effort to engage the community on how that clinic can best serve not just the children ages 0-5 who will receive services, but as a workforce development piece as well."

MMI leaders first met with North Omaha community stakeholders in August 2019 about the goals for the

clinic. The meeting, held in North Omaha, explored community reaction to the proposed project, including possible locations, and solicited suggestions about services, outreach activities and other topics. Community meetings continued throughout the planning process. As the clinic opens, Dr. Preas is setting up new meetings with community members, including nonprofits and educators at area schools.

"At the meetings, we started to build relationships with the community," said Regina Carroll, PhD, director of MMI's Autism Care for Toddlers Clinics. "We hope to continue that conversation as we go forward with this project, so that the clinic is a trusted part of the community where families receive the same opportunity and level of care available elsewhere." ●

## Connecting older patients with community resources

### April Recher knows how to make connections.

As a geriatric primary care liaison, it's her job to connect older discharged patients with community resources in an effort to reduce hospital readmissions.

Since June 2020, Recher has reached out to 835 unique patients through her position with the Home Instead Center for Successful Aging on the UNMC and Nebraska Medicine campus.

One of them was Mildred Moffatt, who needed a medical grade bed and mattress, as well as blankets and a winter coat. Recher also helped arrange for Moffatt to receive a daily warm cooked meal through Meals on Wheels.

"They've been calling to see how I'm doing," Moffatt said. "They were so good to me. It's like having friends. They've been perfect angels in helping me."

Recher's position — the first at the medical center — was created after UNMC was awarded a five-year, \$3.7 million grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to expand the access of primary care professionals to resources that assist them in addressing the unique and complex health issues of older patients.

The grant provides education to teams in primary care using a medical home (PCMH) model. PCMHs use a team of health care providers — including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, mental health professionals and social workers — to care for patients as a team when they're sick, but also keep them well.

The grant also provides:

- education and support for caregivers of persons with dementia;
- addresses the social determinants of health; and



- educates patients beginning to use opioids on the risks, benefits, and alternatives of these medications.

In her role, Recher reaches out to patients who are referred or discharged to see what obstacles they face and what community resources they might need. "I'm not directly associated with their providers so they often share their frustrations and what they need."

Needs vary, she said, but arranging transportation to and from medical appointments is a common request. She said not all of the 835 unique patients required community services, but she is available to listen and guide them if they do.

The job is similar to that of a social worker, she said, except Recher's focus is solely on the needs of older patients. "Being able to connect with patients like Mildred and others is rewarding," she said. "This position allows them to have better relations with their own providers and take the initiative for preventive care."

Moffatt is a fan. "The clinic has been wonderful and the people have been wonderful," she said. "They have been a lot of help." ●

## IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR REFUGEES

Bridge to Care, part of the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) Legacy Project, is an interdisciplinary student organization at UNMC that focuses on improving the health outcomes for recently resettled refugees in the Omaha area. It aims to discern group-specific needs, aid in acculturation and health care education and improve cultural awareness among health care providers and students.

Through three volunteer programs, the Bridge to Care team works with refugee populations to provide:

- Health education sessions that provide refugees with a baseline understanding on navigating the health care system;
- Youth mentoring, in partnership with Omaha Public Schools; and
- Health fairs that provide refugee populations with a one-stop shop for health care twice a year.



UNMC's tobacco prevention program gave Gloria Estrada, left, the information needed to advocate for smoke-free housing. Here, she is shown with Natalia Trinidad, right, an outreach project associate, with UNMC's Center for Reducing Health Disparities.

## Tobacco prevention programs educate community

When Sussire Hernandez joined the *Latinas, Tabaco, y Cáncer (LTC)* group and got involved with the *Metro Omaha Tobacco Coalition (MOTAC)* in 2015 she was surprised to learn just how wide-ranging the impact of tobacco was on human health, the community and even the environment.

The LTC group was founded in in 2005 by faculty in the Center for Reducing Health Disparities in the UNMC College of Public Health and is an ongoing community-based holistic health promotion program focused on Spanish-speaking women.

MOTAC was formed in 1992 to strengthen tobacco prevention and control efforts in the Omaha metro area through public policy, education and community action. UNMC has been a community partner since its inception.

Hernandez said she has always known nicotine and smoking are harmful and cause cancer, but her surprise came when she learned about the harm secondhand smoke causes, as well as the biohazard cigarette butts pose to the environment.

"Birds will ingest the cigarette butts that people throw on the ground and get sick or a small child playing in a park might pick them up, they can cause great harm," Hernandez said.

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Gloria Estrada knows first-hand the devastating impacts second-hand smoke can have on a person's health. When she and her adult daughter Luisa Trujillo moved into the apartments near 96th and L streets in Omaha, Neb., they were glad to be settled in a new home but within a year were dealing with second-hand smoke seeping into their apartment from neighbors who lived next door.

Within weeks of their new neighbor's moving into the apartment complex, Estrada's daughter, Luisa, who suffers with asthma, began having complications.

"She just got worse and worse, so much so that the doctor had to increase her asthma medication," Estrada said.

Both women said that since their own

personal experiences with tobacco, and through the information they learned about the detrimental impacts of tobacco through LTC, they have become advocates for smoke-free housing, parks and public spaces.

They have the courage to speak up because of the encouragement they receive from the women they've met through LTC and MOTAC.

"Just being a part of the group and being able to share what I've learned makes me feel valued," Estrada said.

Said Hernandez: "There is always a focus in these groups on helping people get connected to resources, become involved in their community and help each other. I really like that." ●

## BHECN PARTNERS WITH COMMUNITY TO INCREASE ACCESS TO TREATMENT

Since 2018, BHECN has partnered with OneWorld Community Health Center and Charles Drew Health Center — two federally qualified health centers in Nebraska — to improve access to quality medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder and substance use disorder. This year, both sites offered a yearlong, \$10,000 paid practicum with a total of 500 hours in three integrated behavioral health and primary care sites for experiential rotations. The practicum was supported by federal funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration.

The program focused on individuals who already were provisionally licensed alcohol and drug counselors (PLADC). BHECN's goal is to increase the number of licensed alcohol and drug counselors (LADC) by 10 per year in Nebraska and help them receive the hours and experience they need for LADC licensure. In total, 46 individuals have participated.

The training benefits patients and further contributes to workforce development.

Sussire Hernandez joined both the *Latinas, Tabaco, y Cáncer* and *Metro Omaha Tobacco Coalition* in 2015 and said the groups provide invaluable resources to the Hispanic and Latino community in Omaha.

# injury & violence prevention

## Violence prevention program helps youths at risk

How can an academic medical center connect with youths on the dangers of violence and risk for injury?

In truth that kind of trust, at least initially, only comes through credible messengers, said Charity Evans, MD, associate professor of surgery: “somebody who has lived that life,” and cares to use that experience to create change.

Dusk to Dawn (D2D): A Hospital Based Youth Violence Prevention Program, which UNMC and Nebraska Medicine conduct

in partnership with YouTurn, the Omaha Police Department (OPD) and Boys & Girls Clubs of the Midlands, has a credible messenger in Roberto Gonzalez.

Gonzalez was humble, but troubled, his mother Raquel Salinas said. “He was very forgiving. He was kind of like the glue of the home.”

He died too soon, at age 20, in 2015, shot on a Thursday morning at 24th and P streets.

He was taken to the same hospital where he was born, The Nebraska Medical Center. There, doctors and others desperately tried to save his life. They couldn’t.

At every Dusk to Dawn meeting, Dr. Evans stands in the emergency trauma bay where Roberto died, and tells participants, youths at risk of violence themselves, the story of Roberto’s life. And, of his death. She illustrates what the bullets did to his body, and all of the medical procedures that were tried, but were not enough.

At every D2D, Roberto’s mom, Raquel Salinas, listens to it all over again. The pain is still fresh, six years later. But she is there, each time.

“If my son could save at least one child, one of those kids,” she said, “I would do it all day long.”

She is there to tell them that this is real, that Roberto mattered. That he still matters, if he can help one of them.

The trauma bay is only the beginning of the program. From there, the kids are met by other credible messengers, who lead discussions that hopefully can change lives. Roberto’s mom, Raquel, always attends these, too.

“I look around to see who the kids were, the ages. You can kind of pick them out, the kids who are troubled,” she said, “they don’t want to let us in.”

cont. pg 9

◀ Charity Evans, MD, left, with Raquel Salinas, who shares the story of her son, Roberto Gonzalez, with at risk youths in the Dusk to Dawn program.



▲ In 2019, Charity Evans, MD, left, and Dele Davies, MD, center, received the Corporate Partner Award from Ivan Gilreath, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of the Midlands.

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“Most conversations with youth have that sense of security that has to be established,” agreed Jermaine Jones, chief career navigation officer at Boys & Girls Club of the Midlands.

“As the conversation goes on, the youth have that sense of, OK this is a secure place, a place I can have that kind of conversation.”

Jones has seen the impact those conversations can have.

“It can be life changing,” he said. “It’s an opportunity for youth to have a platform to get feelings off their chest of their own personal experiences and connect with folks that have had similar experiences.”

He continued: “They can talk about issues that they are thinking and feeling, questions. Questions about police relations, questions about community relations. Questions and thoughts around gangs, drug use and violence.

“A lot of these conversations do not go on in the schools,” Jones said.

To date, 765 kids have gone through the program; 66 percent have lost a friend or family member to violence; 48 percent would like to talk more about their experiences, and how they can better handle them.

Some of these kids are going through things much of Omaha knows nothing about.

But the credible messengers do.

Jones has seen the kids that he works with take something from the sessions, and want more.

“A lot of our kids that have gone through it the first time have requested to go back and do it again,” he said.

“I wish this program was here when he was alive,” Roberto’s mom said. “I see my son in a lot of them. Troubled. Sometimes thinking they don’t have anybody they can trust. It’s scary and it’s sad at the same time.”

Dr. Evans, with Ashley Farrens, trauma program coordinator, created Dusk to Dawn in 2017. But it has been the community partners, and the credible messengers, including Gonzalez and his mother, that have made it work. Stewart Giddings of YouTurn, Ken Kanger, Beto Gonzales and Terrance Mackey, of OPD, play key roles.

Jones, of the Boys & Girls Club, marvels that D2D has become “a bridge between a lot of programs.”

“She put those puzzles together,” Jones said of Dr. Evans. “She figured out a way to see from her professional side of things, how it connects to the community.”

Roberto’s mom, Raquel Salinas, agreed: “Whatever journey she wants to take, I would follow.” ●

## ADDITIONAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION OUTREACH EFFORTS INCLUDE:

🕒 **North Omaha Change Initiative**  
A broad group of community leaders and stakeholders working in partnership with UNMC and the University of Nebraska at Omaha to find solutions to issues, including violence prevention.

🕒 **EncOMpass Omaha**  
A hospital-based violence intervention program that uses the hospital as an entry point. It seizes the teachable moment – you are in the hospital – and uses a culturally competent case manager to follow up. Another example of UNMC partnering with credible messengers to establish trust and provide services.

🕒 **EMPOWER**  
A student-led, inter-professional initiative founded at UNMC focused on awareness and education of domestic and sexual violence. Through community outreach events, the group provides opportunities for students, health care providers and community members to become involved in efforts to minimize domestic and sexual violence in our community and beyond.

# role of social determinants in health

## Clinics help reduce disparities in vaccination administration

North Omaha clinics serve critical need



Community member Gene Macapinlac receives his vaccine from Kena Kirksey, a Nebraska Medicine patient care tech.

Girl's Inc.'s Carolyn "CT" Williamson was moved by the reaction of people when they left the COVID-19 vaccine clinic in North Omaha.

Williamson was one of dozens of volunteers staffing the first clinic at Girl's Inc. — a partnership with Douglas County that was spearheaded and organized by Andrea Jones, MD, an assistant professor at UNMC and family medicine physician at Nebraska Medicine.

"Their spirit was just happy," said Williamson, director of transitional living and health access for Girl's Inc. "It was just outstanding to watch people come in and be so excited about getting their shot. Some were coming out afterwards crying and saying, 'Thank you.' It was amazing."

Based on her own experience, she

understood their emotions. "By the time I got my second shot my thought was 'now I'm covered.' I did get COVID and back then there was nothing you could do to protect yourself — nothing," she said. "I thank the Lord I didn't get to the point of being hospitalized, but they were some of the worst days of my life. I'm thankful to be able to protect myself. People see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Gene Macapinlac and his daughter were two of 879 people who received their COVID-19 vaccines at the first clinic in late March.

"Getting a vaccine is a personal responsibility for all of us," Macapinlac said. "The more who get the vaccine, the closer we get to a sense of normalcy."

Pastor Bobby Waters is part of an effort to help community members understand the pandemic and the benefits of the vaccine.

He said he was happy to get his vaccine and get it close to home. "It's wonderful to have a place in the community to get the vaccine," he said.

Dr. Jones, too, was gratified with the turnout. "We saw a need and desire to get access to the vaccine," she said. "To help with barriers of transportation, we needed to be locally here in the community. COVID has disproportionately hit our community and so we really need to make the effort to get the vaccines for protection. There's mistrust among Black Americans due to our history in this country, which I completely understand."

Also in March, UNMC students, staff and faculty staffed a COVID-19 vaccine clinic, in partnership with the North Omaha Area Health (NOAH) clinic, at Clair Memorial United Methodist Church.

"Participating in the vaccine clinic at Clair Memorial United Methodist Church was a wonderful and memorable experience," said UNMC College of Nursing student Oliver Ramirez-Gutierrez. "It was nice to not only be a part of what can be considered a historic moment in time, but to also do so with other health professionals, volunteers and members of the North Omaha community."

Kati Bravo, PhD, program director of BSN programs and assistant professor UNMC College of Nursing, agreed: "We want our nursing students to recognize and appreciate that nurses provide care wherever it is needed. This means taking care to diverse settings and learning from the community while participating in delivering nursing services."

Later, UNMC's Munroe-Meyer Institute, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, announced a series of statewide COVID-19 vaccination clinics for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families and caregivers — making Nebraska the first state in the U.S. to provide priority access to this population. ●



## STUDENTS ASSIST COMMUNITY WITH MASKS, FOOD, HYGIENE PRODUCTS

UNMC students engaged with the community in numerous ways during the pandemic.

When masks were in short supply, students organized a citywide mask-making and distribution project with hundreds of volunteers. The effort generated 45,000 cloth masks as well as multi-language COVID-19 educational materials.

Students distributed most of the masks to families receiving meal assistance through the Omaha Public Schools. They also were provided to Nebraska Sen. Tony Vargas, who helped distribute them to his South Omaha constituents. His father died of COVID-19 in spring 2020.

"It was a great community benefit — to be able to get free, cloth masks that were sterilized at UNMC," said Tammy Yarmon, director of nutrition services for OPS. "It demonstrated that people cared; it said, 'we care about you and your safety.'"

During spring 2020, in response to community needs, UNMC medical student Stacie Skaff and her fellow students

organized a drive to raise money to purchase personal hygiene products for women living in shelters and those living in poverty.

The students, along with the American Medical Women's Association, raised \$1,200 and purchased 14,000 menstrual products to share with Embrace the Nations, which serves refugee populations, the Women's Center for Advancement and the Siena Francis House.

"When we get product donations from the community, we're overwhelmed," said Jory Johnston, annual fund associate at the Women's Center for Advancement. "We are excited and so are our clients who need them."

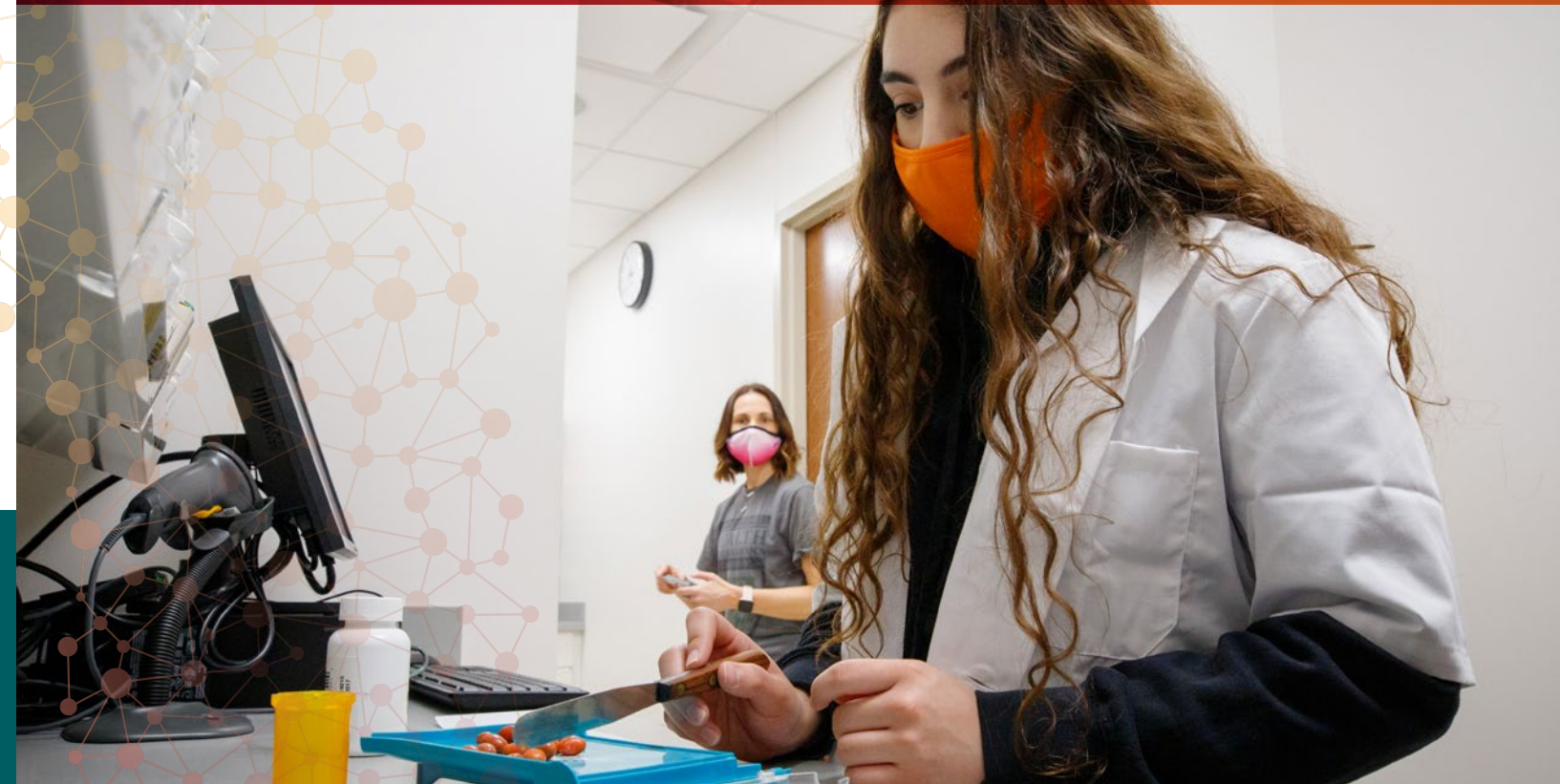
Elsewhere, UNMC students - led by medical student Seif Nasir - distributed boxes of donated food and toiletry staples to refugee and immigrant populations in Nebraska through the MUNA Box Project. MUNA stands for "Medical students United with Neighbors across America," but Nasir, who is Palestinian-American, noted that, in Arabic, the word "muna" means pantry, adding a second layer of meaning to the name. ●

Volunteers with the MUNA Box Project are, from left, Seif Nasir, David Fu and Alexander Tu, all third-year medical students at UNMC.



« From left, UNMC College of Nursing instructor Annette Kasselmann, nursing students Therese O'Malley and Oliver Ramirez-Gutierrez and instructor Kelly Buchanan assist at the COVID-19 vaccine clinic at Clair Memorial United Methodist Church.

## workforce



# Responding to the community

Personal protective equipment (PPE) was gathered by UNMC students and distributed to various organizations including long-term care facilities and the Moriah Heritage Center.

Through this effort, long-term care facilities received **2,000 N95 masks, 500 KN95 masks, 1,300 face shields and 3,600 gloves.**

The Moriah Heritage Center, representing 55 churches in North Omaha, helped to distribute **3,990 KN95 masks, 1,000 gloves, eight liters of hand sanitizer, 260 items of protective apparel and 5,500 gloves.**

“The personal protective equipment the Nebraska Health Care Association received through the efforts of UNMC students came at a most pivotal time. Supplies were at critically low levels and it was vital these items quickly get to Nebraska’s skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities, especially as these facilities worked — and continue to work — tirelessly to protect their residents and team members from COVID-19. When we asked these health care providers to share their gratitude for the PPE, this one stood out: ‘It’s such a blessing to see how businesses and folks in the community have gone above and beyond to help those in need.’ The resonating theme in their messages was a deep appreciation for the help in the fight.”

*Tracy Rathe, senior vice president of organizational performance and development, Nebraska Health Care Association representing long-term care facilities*

“On behalf of churches in North Omaha, the Moriah Heritage Center was pleased to serve as a distribution center to provide families with personal protective equipment as a result of our various city and state partnerships. Mitigating COVID-19 requires partnerships. Having the donated equipment provided additional assurance that protective gear would be available throughout the pandemic as we strive to make houses of worship safe for their respective re-openings and for the community.”

*Doris Lassiter, health ministry director, Moriah Heritage Center*

## Helping to train the workforce of tomorrow

During school hours, Naomi Reynoso donned a lab coat, stood behind the pharmacy counter and greeted the mock patient who had arrived for his medication.

Thanks to a unique cooperative agreement with UNMC, the Benson High Magnet School student is taking steps to become a pharmacy technician while finishing her senior year.

“I want to pursue pharmacy fulltime as a job,” she said.

Reynoso is among a handful of students in Benson High’s Health Professions Career Academy who are getting a head start toward becoming certified pharmacy technicians through a unique cooperative course from the UNMC’s College of Pharmacy.

The program is another way UNMC is working to address the health care workforce needs of the state, said Judy Neville, director of the College of

Pharmacy’s pharmacy technician program.

Reynoso, who also is a certified nursing assistant, discovered an interest in pharmacy work while job shadowing a hospital pharmacist at Nebraska Medicine. She didn’t hesitate when the cooperative course was offered to her.

“It allows me to get an initial start into pharmacy,” she said.

Certified pharmacy technicians work in all types of pharmacy settings, including hospitals, compounding and home infusion, veterinary, long-term care facilities, mail-order operations and community pharmacies.

⚡ Benson High Magnet School students take steps to become a pharmacy technician through a unique cooperative course with UNMC’s College of Pharmacy.

cont. pg 14



"This course opens up a new door for these students, where they may not have seen themselves before. And that is life changing," said Angela Johaneck, a career academy specialist at Benson High.

Though certified pharmacy technicians must be 18 or older and have earned a high school diploma or GED, the students can work toward certification while still in high school, Neville said, ideally completing the final steps to earn official pharmacy technician certification upon high school graduation.

The students take part in the College of Pharmacy's regular online pharmacy

technician curriculum, under the supervision of Benson faculty. The students also participate in several hands-on training labs at the UNMC College of Pharmacy.

It's exactly what Benson's Health Professions Career Academy was looking for, Johaneck said. "We work to align all specialty course curriculum with the professional community, and advisory members like UNMC, to make sure that the skills and units of study match what the adult world expects of our students from technical terminology to work-based experience," she said.

"It's a great partnership," Benson science teacher Elijah Dacy said. "Students can step out of the program and into a rewarding career or job that's both in high demand and part of the community."

"They become the face that's seen at the pharmacy."

That's a win-win for these students and their future employers, Neville said. "We're opening a new employment stream to the pharmacies in Omaha and in the greater Nebraska area." ●

## Developing local talent through a community-based program



Students who took part in the Step-Up Omaha! graduation ceremony in 2019 are joined by Willie Barney, left, CEO of the Empowerment Network, Aileen Warren, second from left, assistant vice chancellor for human resources, and Evelyn Grixby, right, coordinator of the UNMC Step-Up program.

"UNMC is a very important strategic partner with Step-Up Omaha!" said Willie Barney, founder, president and facilitator of the Empowerment Network. "We are incredibly appreciative of the partnership with UNMC and the opportunities they have created for our Step-Up participants."

Barney praised UNMC's Aileen Warren and Evelyn Grixby saying they "go above and beyond to make this a valuable and worthwhile experience for the interns and for departments leaders."

"From the interview process, one-on-one meetings, structured jobs, exposure to career fields, hands-on learning, assessments with Strengthfinders, HBDI (Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument) and more, UNMC provides a well-rounded approach, which enhances the learning experience and helps students to better understand their interests, talents and possibilities for their career and life." ●

### Since summer 2016, UNMC has partnered with Step-Up Omaha! to help develop local talent and increase the diversity of its workforce.

A community-based initiative of the Empowerment Network funded in part by the City of Omaha and Charles E. Lakin Foundation, the Step-Up Omaha! program recruits, trains and places prepared Omaha youth and young adults — ages 14 to 21 — in mutually beneficial paid summer jobs and work experience opportunities. For nine weeks, participants are paid by the Step-Up program and take part in career exploration, on-the-job training or career-oriented internships.

In the past four summers (excluding 2020, postponed for safety due to the pandemic), UNMC hosted 30 interns on campus in departments ranging from the chancellor's office and human resources to anesthesiology and otolaryngology. One Step-Up participant found her summer lab experience in regional pathology so interesting that she took a position in the department when the summer position ended.

## UNMC founded, supports North Omaha Community Care Council

More than 20 years ago, UNMC founded the North Omaha Community Care Council (NOCCC) to establish a mechanism for collaboration and communication with the North Omaha community.

Since then, UNMC faculty and staff have provided support in a variety of ways, including administratively, financially and through membership.

Recently, BHECN partnered with the NOCCC to support their annual Teen Health Summit with BHECN Ambassador Career Engagement Awards in 2018 and 2019 with commitments to fund future youth summits.

"We appreciate the support BHECN has provided through the \$5,000 grant they give us to host the Metro Area Teen Health Summit," said Rev. Portia Cavitt, past president and acting treasurer of the NOCCC and pastor at Clair Memorial

United Methodist Church. "This important annual event exposes young people from minority communities who otherwise don't have the opportunity to hear about the various aspects of the different health professions beyond medical doctors and nurses and this is one program that I can see growing in the years to come."

Rev. Cavitt, affectionately known as Pastor P in the community, said that she also commends UNMC and Nebraska Medicine for keeping an office for the Center for Reducing Health Disparities in North Omaha and expanding the Nebraska Medicine Fontenelle Clinic. More needs to be done to continue to address the

health disparities "whole heartedly, not just through a grant here or there but actually addressing and accomplishing things that change the trajectory of the burden of disease among the residents of North Omaha."

In addition, the UNMC College of Public Health, Department of Health Promotion has sponsored a scholarship fund for NOCCC annually since 2019. As a result, NOCCC has been able to provide seven scholarships to college students attending universities in Nebraska. The scholarship will be offered again for the fall 2021 academic year. ●

## Experiential learning activities make science fun for Omaha students

Since 2019, UNMC's iEXCEL team has served community needs for pre-health and STEM career exploration by engaging thousands of Omaha-area students through experiential learning activities.

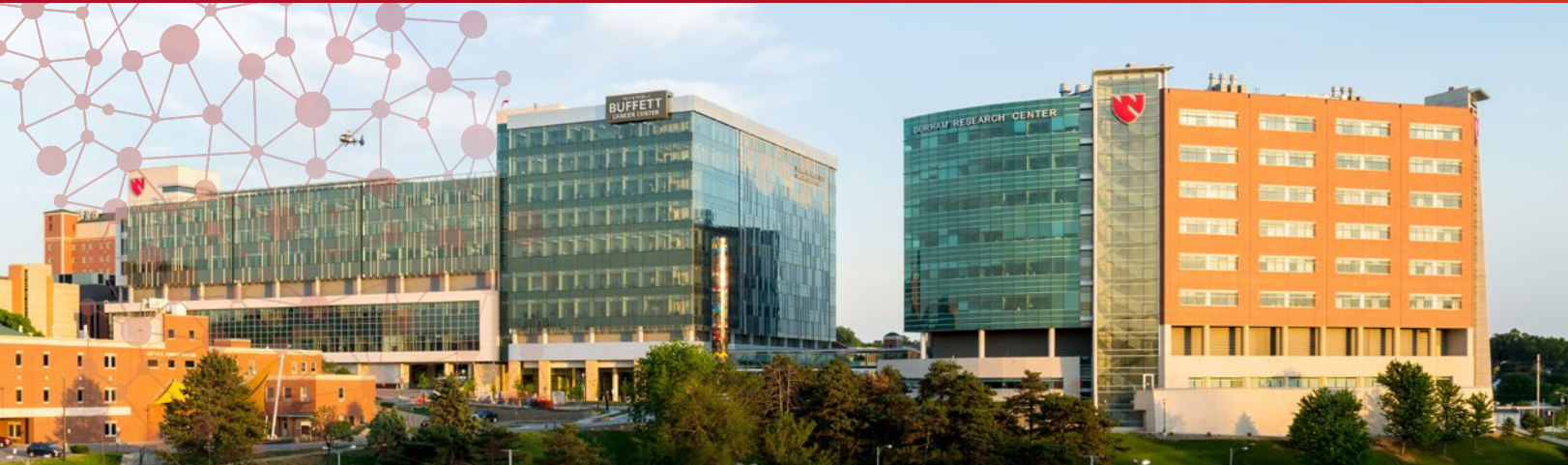
iEXCEL is a UNMC program utilizing technology, such as virtual reality, to design and to transform health professions education and offer opportunities for research and development. Through ongoing partnerships with Do Space, Omaha STEM Ecosystem, Girls, Inc., Omaha Public Schools, Imagine Science Omaha, and Urban League of Nebraska, among others, the iEXCEL team visited and hosted events at Do Space, King Science Center Middle School, Bryan High School and more. Students had opportunities to interact with iEXCEL's

state-of-the-art technologies and world-class experts to immerse themselves in simulation training, while learning about future career opportunities in health care and technology.

During the pandemic, iEXCEL continued engaging with these communities through live and pre-recorded virtual events, along with additional learning resources. Working with community partners, iEXCEL created interactive virtual workshops on a variety of topics including 3-D content creation, STEM career exploration and anatomical



dissections allow students to explore human anatomy with iEXCEL



## UNMC office to explore needs of communities, reduce incidence of cancer

In an effort to better understand the barriers, incidence and impact of cancer on underserved populations in the state of Nebraska, the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center has established a Community Outreach and Engagement Office (COEO), which will be partially funded by the Cancer Center’s National Cancer Institute Cancer Center Support Grant.

Ken Cowan, MD, PhD, director of the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center and the Eppley Institute, is the principal investigator of the Cancer Center Support Grant.

Through the work of this office, the team will better understand the unique needs of the diverse racial, ethnic and rural vs. urban populations in Nebraska related to cancer incidence and mortality.

Shinobu Watanabe-Galloway, PhD, associate director of the COEO, said community advisory boards have been established with stakeholders to glean insight on the impact of cancer on their communities.

The goals of establishing these advisory boards include:

- Understand, measure and monitor the cancer incidence, mortality, determinants, community needs and disparities in Nebraska over time;

- Facilitate and enable the conduct of research directly relevant to the needs in Nebraska and improve access to clinical trials across the state;
- Engage Nebraskans and implement evidence-based actions that can reduce the burden of risk factors and cancers at a population level; and
- Promote translation of research at the Buffett Cancer Center with support from strong community partnerships to inform state cancer policies.

Along with the advisory boards, the COEO works with external groups — including the Nebraska Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the statewide Nebraska Cancer Coalition — to align and prioritize strategies and approaches to address state-level needs.

“It is through these efforts that we hope to reduce the incidence of cancer among all Nebraskans,” Dr. Watanabe-Galloway said. ●



Each community faces different barriers to cancer screening, prevention and treatment.

Shinobu Watanabe-Galloway, PhD, associate director of the Community Outreach and Engagement Office

## Looking Ahead: Grant designed to transform health delivery, outcomes

In 2016, UNMC landed its largest grant ever — a five-year research grant from the National Institutes of Health totaling nearly \$20 million.

From that, the Great Plains IDeA Clinical Translation Research (CTR) Network was created to reach medically underserved populations and transform health delivery and outcomes in the Great Plains region.

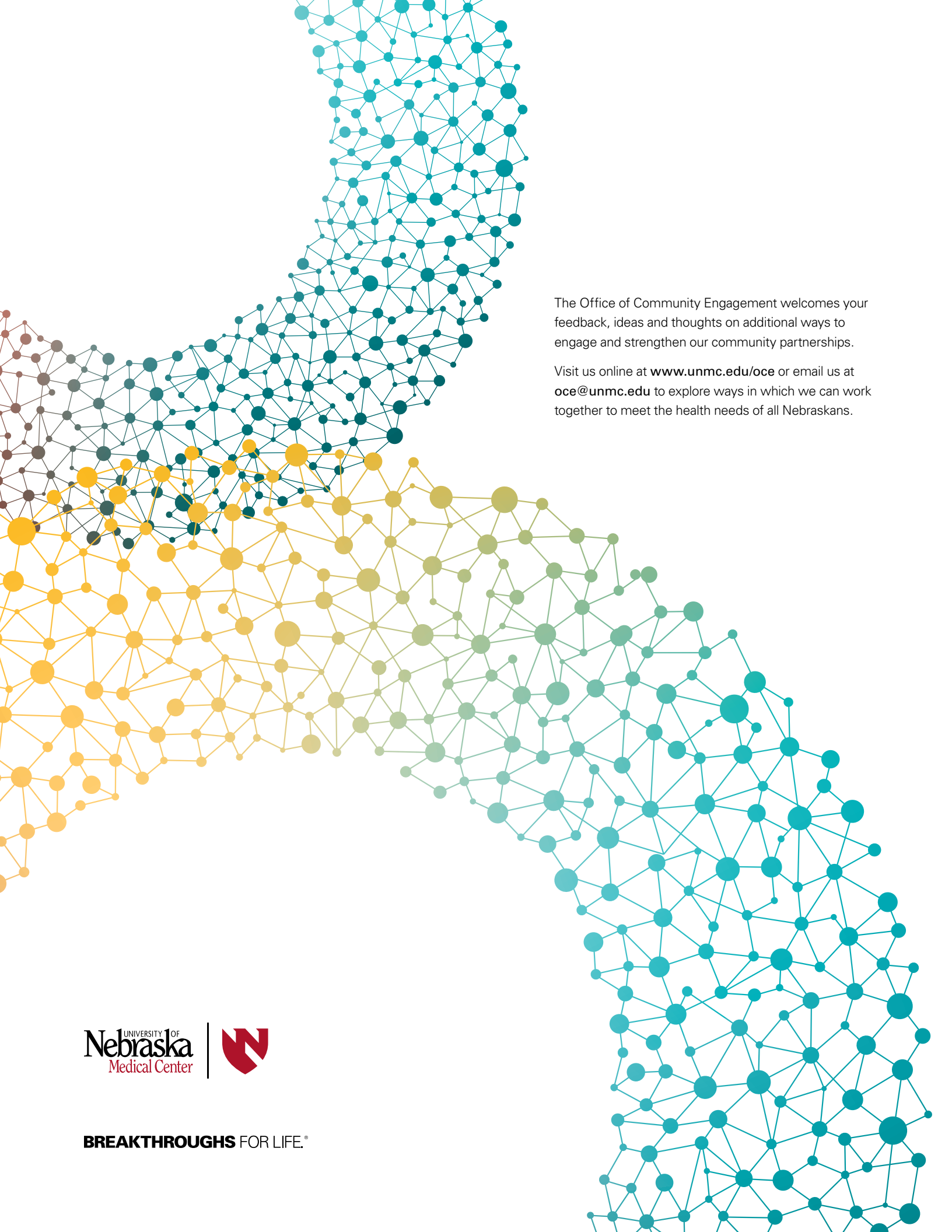
Administered through a National Institutes of Health/National Institute of General Medical Sciences grant, the collaboration involves nine institutions in four states – Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Kansas. It also includes a Community Engagement & Outreach core committed to ensuring that community-engagement occurs and that the research focus is relevant and filling the needs of the region’s rural and underserved areas.

The grant also is making a difference through research support taking place in African American and Latinx communities. Examples of this work include a pilot project that examined the feasibility of embedding a mental health intervention for African American fathers in an existing fatherhood program based at Charles Drew Health Center, Inc, a federally qualified health center (FQHC).

“Even though it wasn’t feasible to embed this mental health intervention into an existing program at this FQHC due to federal policies that proved insurmountable, there were real world outcomes that showed the mental health intervention did help address some of the mild to moderate mental health concerns,” said Keyonna King, DrPH, assistant professor in the Center for Reducing Health Disparities at the UNMC College of Public Health. “Fathers in the intervention were better equipped to manage their mental health, pursue work opportunities and improve relationships.” ●



Keyonna King, DrPH



The Office of Community Engagement welcomes your feedback, ideas and thoughts on additional ways to engage and strengthen our community partnerships.

Visit us online at [www.unmc.edu/oce](http://www.unmc.edu/oce) or email us at [oce@unmc.edu](mailto:oce@unmc.edu) to explore ways in which we can work together to meet the health needs of all Nebraskans.

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