# Handbook of Community-based Participatory Research

edited by

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EDITED BY STEVEN S. COUGHLIN
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### Preface

As a collaborative approach to research, community-based participatory research (CBPR) equitably includes all partners in the research process and often involves partnerships between academic and community organizations with the goal of increasing the value of the research product for all partners. In the past, social scientists and researchers who focused on disease prevention tended to conduct studies of social phenomena and community problems with an "outsider's approach" which distanced the research from the participants' daily lives. This approach was questioned by theorists such as Kurt Lewin and Paulo Freire, who proposed more participatory and inclusive methods. As detailed in chapter 1 by Steven Coughlin, Selina Smith, and Maria Fernandez, and in several other chapters in this volume, current perspectives seek to address the complexity of the human experience and the differential power that sometimes exists between academic researchers and research participants.

Community-based participatory research is linked to other social justice—informed methodologies to research (e.g., action research, participatory action research, and participatory learning and action) that attempt to empower communities to address the root causes of inequality and identify their own problems and appropriate solutions. Community-based participatory research strives to acknowledge and implement the participants' needs, behaviors, and beliefs concerning their well-being. Community-based participatory research takes into account the strengths and insights that community and academic partners bring to framing health problems and developing solutions. Not all research that is conducted in communities (community-placed research) is participatory in nature. Rather, CBPR and related approaches to community-engaged research occur across a continuum, as discussed in chapter 2 by Steven Coughlin and Wonsuk Yoo. In its purest form, CBPR involves true partnerships between academic researchers and community members.

This book on CBPR is an important addition to Oxford University Press's outstanding line of books on public health and related topics because of

widespread interest in CBPR; health disparities; public health research involving racial and ethnic minority communities; the health of immigrants; women's health; maternal and child health; infant mortality; cancer screening; prevention of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes; cigarette smoking, physical activity, and diet; HIV/AIDS prevention; faith-based health interventions; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender health; mental health; substance abuse; sexual assault and violence; urban health; rural health; environmental health and environmental justice; global health; research ethics; and public health ethics. This volume complements and explicates closely related developments such as community-based evaluative research, community-engaged research, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical and Translational Science Awards.

This book is likely to be a useful resource for public health researchers, practitioners, and members of communities who are challenged by health disparities. This book will be of interest to practicing public health professionals from various public health disciplines (epidemiology, behavioral science, health communications, community engagement, nutrition, environmental health, health disparities, and global health) and to members of nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and members of community coalitions and health advocacy organizations. Many contributors to this book are nationally and internationally recognized for their work. The chapters were contributed by experts from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Notably, several of the authors who contributed to this volume are members of community-based organizations, community coalitions, and nonprofit organizations in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Switzerland. While editing this book with his coeditors, Steven Coughlin served as a member of both the Connect-to-Protect community coalition on HIV/ AIDS among young people in Memphis, Tennessee, and the Mayor's Health Task Force Healthy Active Living Working Group in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Maria Fernandez was founder of Latinos in a Network for Cancer Control (LINCC)

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Public Health (M.E.F.). Selina Smith was supported by a grant awarded to the Augusta University Institute of Public and Preventive Health by the National Cancer Institute (R01CA166785).

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## Overview of Community-Based Participatory Research

STEVEN S. COUGHLIN, PHD, SELINA A. SMITH, PHD, MDIV,

AND MARIA E. FERNANDEZ, PHD

This chapter provides an introduction to community-based participatory research (CBPR), a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners, including community members affected by the health topic being addressed, organizational representatives, and academic researchers, in the research process. This approach includes partnerships between academic and community organizations with the goal of increasing the value of the research product for all partners and sustaining its impact on population health. Community-based participatory research addresses health disparities and inequities in diverse communities including groups that are socially disadvantaged, marginalized, stigmatized, or that have suffered historical injustices. It takes into account the strengths and insights that community and academic partners bring to framing health problems and developing solutions. As illustrated throughout this volume, CBPR approaches have been used to address a wide variety of health topics, including environmental hazards, HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, cigarette smoking, substance abuse, and mental health. The combination of experiences of community members with public health science provides a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena, thereby providing more relevant interventions and increasing the likelihood that the interventions will be effective and that they will be adopted, implemented, and sustained in real-world settings. The CBPR research paradigm represents a fundamental shift in academic researchers' views of community residents, from patients and research subjects who may benefit from medical advances to essential partners who can energize their communities to develop and implement effective, sustainable interventions to improve health and eliminate health disparities.

# What Is Community-Based Participatory Research?

Community-based participatory research is a collaborative approach to research in which the research process is driven by an equitable partnership that is formed between relevant community members, organizational representatives, and academic researchers; the CBPR framework uses this partnership with the aim of increasing the value of the research product for all partners. Community-based participatory research takes advantage of the unique strengths and insights that community and academic partners each bring to framing health problems and developing solutions. Community members, organizational representatives, and academic researchers participate in and share control over all phases of the research process from assessment—discovering the community's health needs—to dissemination—developing strategies to increase the adoption, implementation, and maintenance of evidence-based interventions (EBIs) in communities and healthcare settings. Community-based participatory research approaches facilitate and accelerate research translation so that research produces pragmatic results capable of leading to positive and sustainable community change.

In the past, social scientists and researchers who focused on disease prevention tended to engage in studies of social phenomena and community problems with an "outsider's approach," which distanced the research from the participants' daily lives. Lewin¹ and Freire² questioned the "outsider's approach" and proposed more participatory and inclusive approaches to research. Current perspectives seek to address the complexity of the human experience and the differential power that sometimes exists between academic researchers, representatives of community groups, and research participants.

"The CBPR research paradigm represents a fundamental shift in academic researcher's views of community residents, from patients and research subjects who may benefit from medical advances to essential partners who can energize their communities to develop effective, sustainable interventions to improve health and eliminate health disparities."

Rather than focusing solely on health problems or other concerns, the CBPR framework highlights community resilience, resources, and opportunities for positive growth. It places emphasis on shared decision-making, co-learning, reciprocal transfer of expertise between partners, and mutual ownership of research products. Partners also strive to acknowledge and act on participants' needs, behaviors, and beliefs concerning their own well-being. Community-based participatory research is linked to other social-justice-informed approaches to research, such as action research and participatory action research, that empower communities to address the root causes of inequity and identify their own problems and appropriate solutions; thus CBPR efforts typically do not focus on the individual only. Instead, CBPR fits within an ecological perspective about the determinants

of adverse health outcomes and includes consideration of individual-level risk factors, multiple social determinants of health, and structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, homophobia/transphobia, racism, and lack of access to primary healthcare.

### PROCESS

The starting point for a CBPR project typically includes a health needs assessment, a focused literature review, and a review of published and unpublished data to identify priority health concerns. Epidemiologic data about the geographic and social distribution and determinants of health concerns in a community are also useful for planning purposes. For example, such data may include age-adjusted morbidity and mortality rates at the zip code or county level broken down by race, ethnicity, or other factors, or geospatial information about educational attainment, household income, or the availability of primary healthcare and public transportation. The needs assessment process should be carried out using the same principles of CBPR as all other phases of the research effort. Gathering community member feedback can be done through a variety of methods, such as obtaining information through in-depth interviews of key informants or soliciting feedback during community advisory board meetings. Including community representatives as integral members of the planning group, however, helps ensure participation throughout the planning process. Planning groups including community partners should explore existing sources of data and the need for new data collection and should participate collaboratively in the interpretation of findings. 6 The CBPR approach requires academic researchers to listen to the voices of community residents before a shared decision is made about which health topics to address first. Thus, although seat belt use may be an important public health concern in a community, and an academic researcher may wish to compete for funding for a study of the effectiveness of an intervention to increase seat belt use, community residents and representatives of community organizations may give priority to projects that address breast cancer screening and survival among African American women or disparities in infant mortality by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

The importance of addressing community priorities is emphasized in a definition of CBPR provided by the Kellogg Foundation Community Health Scholars Program. According to this definition, CBPR "equitably involves all partners with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of contributing knowledge and action for social change to improve community health and eliminate health disparities."

Several principles of CBPR have been identified: the need to ensure openness, trust, and power sharing among partners; the need for a genuine partnership approach; capacity-building of community partners; and the importance of shared decision-making, colearning, shared ownership of research products, applying