

Diversity Matters

Key Findings Report

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**Report developed by:
Creative Marketing Resources, Inc.**

Executive Summary

The following report outlines the key findings and implications from primary and secondary research conducted on behalf of the Diversity Matters project. Individual research reports for each methodology (focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews) were previously compiled and submitted to Diversity Matters project personnel. This report summarizes that research; additional primary research conducted by Diversity Matters (college student and public health worker surveys) and provides implications for the next stage of the project – the development of a Marketing Outreach Plan.

Introduction

Lack of Diversity in Public Health

Health disparities in Wisconsin are prevalent and severe. In a recent report from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, no age group in Wisconsin received a health disparities grade higher than a “C” (Booske, 2010). While there are a myriad of complex causes, one major factor is access to health care. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) notes that “increasing the number of health professionals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups is viewed as an integral part of the solution to improving access to care” and that “strategies to increase the numbers of underrepresented minority physicians and other health professionals are likely to increase access to care by underserved minority populations” (USDHHS, 2001).

Additionally, the USDHHS has identified the following reasons why increasing the number of underrepresented minorities entering health professions programs to diversify the public health workforce (a Healthy People 2020 emerging issue) is important: “Minority Americans working in health care can help end disparities in health status. A diverse health workforce is important in assuring the delivery of culturally competent health care and preventive services. Minority health professionals can serve as role models in our diverse communities. Minorities are an increasing proportion of the U.S. population, and are five times more likely to treat other underrepresented minorities in underserved areas.” The Sullivan Commission on Diversity (2004), one of the leading sources on diversity in the public health workforce, also points to a diverse workforce as a means to address current and future health disparities. Based on these findings, one can conclude a focused and deliberate effort to increase the number of minority individuals in public health professions can eventually lead to net positive health gains.

Minorities comprise a significant portion of Wisconsin’s population – 6.1% Hispanic/Latino and 6.5% African American/Black, yet despite these demographics, less than 10% of local governmental public health employees are minorities (WDHS, 2011). In fact, among both African American and Hispanic populations in Wisconsin, the proportion of clients seeking local health department services is approximately three times the proportion of African American and Hispanic local public health department workers. Increasing diversity in the public health workforce will have far-reaching benefits in the state of Wisconsin, including: increasing cultural competence among public health workers, providing increase access to healthcare, and advancing medical/public health research.

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Diversity Matters Project

Established in 2011, Diversity Matters is a five-year partnership initiative among the Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA), Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) and Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) with the primary goal of increasing the diversity of Wisconsin's public health workforce. This goal will be accomplished most effectively by targeting the *future* public health workforce. Therefore, this project focuses on targeting African American and Hispanic high school and college students within communities with substantial African American and Hispanic populations.

Diversity Matters objectives include: (1) discovering existing barriers to entry into the public health field among target audiences; (2) identifying modern marketing tactics that will effectively address these barriers to entry; (3) developing a comprehensive and culturally-relevant marketing campaign that successfully communicates the advantages of a career in public health; (4) creating and utilize lasting partnerships with key educational and community organizations for the purpose of developing institutional approaches to diversifying the public health workforce; and (5) evaluating the success of such efforts in increasing the diversity of the public health workforce.

Overview of Secondary Research Findings

Knowledge / Perceptions

Values and desires are often at the core of the behaviors, attitudes and beliefs of a target audience. Secondary research performed for the Diversity Matters projects provides insight into the audience's general career values and desires, as well as the values and desires of those interested in or involved with the public health workforce. Multiple sources conclude that one of the main desires among these audiences is to give back to and help the community in which they live. While this provides insight into the current values and desires, primary research will need to dictate other values and desires held by the target audiences, which will enable us to understand the motivators of selecting public health careers.

Career Behaviors

The healthcare industry is the largest employment sector in the state of Wisconsin, yet minorities remain significantly underrepresented. This begs the question – if Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American individuals are not proportionately represented in public health and health care careers, what career paths do these audiences take? Secondary research provides some insight into this answer. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011, Hispanics accounted for 15% of total employment, but were over-represented in several occupational categories, including: agricultural workers (50%), roofers (47%), packers/packageers (46%). African Americans made up 11% of all employed workers but accounted for about one-quarter more of those in several specific occupations, including nursing, psychiatric, and health home aides (33%), security guards (27%) and taxi drivers (27%).

Barriers and Benefits

Existing Barriers to Desired Behavior

Secondary research identifies many of the target audience's barriers for pursuing careers in the public health field. To better understand each of these barriers, they have been organized below by subject area (social, academic, financial, etc.):

- Social: lack of visible minority role models and mentors to provide social support and encouragement.
- Educational/Academic:
 - o Mismatch problem – academic credentials are significantly different than the average student in their class
 - o Lack of proper advising programs – students have less frequent access to career advising programs than non-minority students
 - o Weak/insufficient education: lack of STEM programs during K-12 education and lack of access to advanced placement programs and college courses
 - o Lack of literacy encouragement at a young age at home – particularly a problem among Hispanics who speak English as a second language
- Institutional:
 - o Over-reliance on standardized testing by universities – lack of access to proper test preparation hinders ability of students to pursue opportunities in public health workforce
 - o Uncommitted leadership – leadership at schools is not demonstrating a commitment to diversity
 - o Discouragement/Racism – minority students are frequently discouraged from entering into the public health field and college education in general due to being viewed as “less capable to succeed” because of their race
- Psychological: many minority students feel excluded and out of place in public and STEM college programs due to unsupportive campus cultures.
- Financial: due to the lack of funding/financial aid and the rising cost of college, many minority students perceive the financial sacrifices required of the public health field to be a barrier to entry.

Perceived Benefits/Sacrifices to Adopting Behavior

Along with audience values, secondary research indicates that the primary perceived benefit of entering the public health workforce is the ability for one to return to and help the well-being of his/her community. At the same time, this research identifies significant financial burden as the main impediment to pursuing a career in public health, with many audiences believing that minorities in the public health workforce will carry a significant amount of debt for a long period of time.

Behavioral Influences

Secondary research provides several general recommendations for influencers to behavior changes (policy initiatives, institutional changes, marketing outreach efforts, etc.). These include:

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- Increasing faculty diversity at colleges/universities to provide more visible role models for public health field students
- Increasing the opportunities for minority students in academic enrichment in the sciences
- Directly involving institutional leaders – college presidents, deans, and other stakeholders – in diversity efforts
- Financial support – public and private funding coalitions and increased support from business and foundations for diversifying the public health workforce
- Increased exposure to healthcare professions for K-12 audiences
- The development of outreach campaigns that increase visibility of health professions in communities where underrepresented minorities reside
- Better engagement with surrounding communities, specifically community organizations that provide cultural competence and support systems

Gap Analysis

Secondary Research Gaps

While secondary research is instrumental in providing insight into the factors that contribute to disparities in public health workforce and into the specific audiences who may need to be addressed, there were significant knowledge gaps that needed to be addressed by primary research.

Key Investigative Questions

The following sections outline the gaps in secondary research and the questions that primary research is intended to address.

Audience Segmentation

- What does each target audience segment currently know, believe and do as it relates to their involvement in the public health workforce?

Current Behavior

- What are the current behaviors (main career paths)?
- What factors determine these current career decisions?
- What is the most realistic behavior change for the target audiences to adopt?
- Should audiences be influenced to do one behavior or multiple?

Benefits, Barriers & Perceptions

- What does the target audience value?
- What will the audience like/value about the new behavior?
- What are the consequences of change?
- What might keep the audience from adopting the new behavior?
- What makes the audience's current behavior easy/desirable?

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- Does the audience believe they can do the desired behavior?
- What will the audience need to give up to adopt desired behavior?
- What costs does the audience perceive in adopting new behavior?
- What are the perceived benefits (to the audience) of adopting the desired behavior?
- What barriers exist for influencers?

Behavioral Influence

- Where does the audience get information about the target behavior?
- Does the audience trust these sources?
- What does the audience value in their lives? What are their hopes and dreams? What do they want out of life?
- Who/what would be a credible source of information to the audience about the desired behavior?
- What is the best way to motivate the target audience to adopt and maintain the desired behavior?
- Where does the audience spend time?
- What types of communication outlets do the audiences trust most when considering career opportunities?

Existing Outreach

- Does the audience know about or utilize any current outreach programs for public health or STEM?

Competing Careers

- Why does the audience prefer the competing behavior?
- Does the target audience's environment support the desired behavior or the competition?

Primary Research Methodology

Overview

In order to address the knowledge gaps uncovered through secondary research, the research team engaged in a number of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The methodology focused on (5) research objectives:

- Knowledge/Perceptions of public health and public health careers
- Current Behaviors related to career selection
- Benefits of / Barriers to a career in public health
- Behavioral Influence / Career Competitors

Focus Groups

Primary research was conducted among African American and Hispanic high school students, ranging in grade level from freshman to senior. Three focus groups were conducted with

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students from schools within school districts with substantial African American and Hispanic populations. These included the Milwaukee Public School District (MPS) and the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD).

Parent Surveys

Primary research was conducted among parents and guardians in order to better understand how these audiences influence African American and Hispanic youth. As the *influencers*, parents and guardians can provide insight into the perceptions, barriers and behavioral influence of youth as it relates to public health careers.

The research team distributed surveys to parents and guardians via community organizations in Milwaukee. Surveys were distributed to 120 individuals among four community organizations including: Jack & Jill of America, Inc. (Milwaukee Chapter), YWCA, MLK Heritage Health Center (WIC Clinic) and the Sixteenth Street Community Health Centers.

Key Informant Interviews

The research team conducted in-depth interviews with 10 professionals of color (African American and Hispanic) who work in the public health arena (in Southeast Wisconsin) to provide insight on the benefits, barriers and influences of pursuing a career in public health.

College Student Surveys

The college student survey was distributed to undergraduate and graduate public health program directors in Wisconsin. Program directors then forwarded the information on to students to gauge interests.

Public Health Worker Surveys

The public health worker survey was distributed to public health professionals in Wisconsin.

Primary Research Findings

Knowledge / Perceptions

- Overwhelmingly, students associate public health and public health careers with helping and caring for others.
- Students are aware that there are low percentages of African Americans in the public health care field.
- 100% of the key informants agreed that there is a high need for diversity in the public health field and would recommend that minority youth pursue careers in the public health field.
- 57% of parents strongly agreed that public health is a good career path for youth to pursue.
- The majority of public health workers believe that the work that they do is fulfilling and they enjoy serving the clients/community that they work with.

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- College students feel that the public health field offers a sense of gratification.
- Almost all (90%) of the key informants interviewed strongly agree that attending college offers students the best path towards pursuing a career in public health.

Behaviors

- All focus groups participants want to attend college.
- Students have primarily visited colleges within the state of Wisconsin, however many would like to attend a school in another state or study abroad to experience a new environment.
- Students find math to be difficult because parents could not help and often teachers do not seem interested in helping them understand the material.
- Most students do not enjoy math courses but show interest in life sciences (biology) because of the hands-on aspect.

Barriers

- The most common deterrent to public health careers seem to be the medical aspects, such as: contracting diseases, handling needles, and bodily fluids (i.e. blood).
- All students agreed that a career in public health sounds interesting because of the opportunity to help others.
- Parents view the financial cost / tuition (69%) as the greatest barrier for youth to pursue a college degree.
- Lack of mentorship / parental involvement (43%) was the second greatest barrier.
- College students believe that institutional/political agendas could be barriers.
- Personal issues/problems keep youth from pursuing higher education.
- While most of the students don't believe that race will affect their college experience, they did cite concerns about going to a campus with little or no diversity.
- The majority of public health workers believe that many career barriers are still present today, including racial discrimination, lack of advisory support in educational pursuit and degree completion / educational requirements.
- Parents were divided on rather or not race/ethnicity affects a child's career decisions and success.
- 90% of current public health workers experienced barriers in pursuit of a career; 40% of which was racial discrimination.

Behavioral Influence

- Family is the highest motivator for students to attend college. Students believe going to college will make them successful, which will be key in helping their families.
- Students have received information from colleges/universities but not regarding specific areas of study.
- Parents provide insight and opinions, but ultimately, the student will decide where they attend college.
- Students prefer personal contact from colleges and universities, such as email and phone calls, rather than solely receiving generic information by mail or email.

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- College students indicate that personal experience, volunteer work, and support from professors and mentors influence their decision to study public health.
- Current public health workers said that they were influenced / encouraged by parents, family and school staff.
- 95% of respondents agreed that parents have the greatest influence on a young person's career choice.
- 80% of public health workers feel that their career path was determined by their interest in related subjects.
- Parents encourage youth to pursue a career based on the child's interest in a related subject (55%) and the child's ability to succeed in that career path (45%).

Existing Outreach

- Most of the students were not involved in STEM programs because they were not aware of the opportunities.
- College students feel that certain programs are not available unless the students come together to form them.

Competing Careers

- Parents believe that the top career paths that African American and Hispanic youth often seek are: Food Preparation & Service Related, Healthcare Support, and Personal Care & Services.
- One of the biggest competitors to college is the armed forces. Students indicate receiving a lot of personal contact from the armed forces, specifically the Army and Navy.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Knowledge / Perceptions

Helping others is a motivator: Overwhelmingly, students associate public health and public health careers with helping and caring for others.

Need for diversity: All research participants are aware of the low percentages of ethnic minorities employed in the public health care field and agree that this problem should be addressed.

Good career path: 57% of parents strongly agreed that public health is a good career path for youth to pursue.

Fulfilling work: The majority of public health workers believe that the work they do makes a difference in their communities.

College is a MUST: The majority of public health workers interviewed (90%) strongly believe that attending college offers students the best path towards pursuing a career in public health; particularly for youth of color.

Behaviors

Math is a deterrent: Students found math to be difficult because parents could not help and often teachers do not seem interested in helping them understand the material.

Desire to pursue higher education: All students expressed a desire to attend college and see it as a way to help their families.

Hands-on experiences spark interest: Most students do not enjoy math courses but show interest in life sciences (biology) because of the hands-on aspect.

Lack of awareness of STEM programs: Most of the students were not involved in STEM programs because they were not aware of the opportunities.

Barriers

Misconceptions of the field: The most common deterrent to public health careers seem to be the misconception that all public health careers deal with some aspect of the medical profession, such as: contracting diseases, handling needles, and bodily fluids (i.e. blood).

Lack of diversity: While most of the students do not believe that race will affect their college experience, they did cite concerns about going to a campus with little or no diversity.

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Financial burden of college: Parents view the financial cost / tuition as the greatest barrier for youth to pursue a college degree.

Lack of mentorship: Parents, college students and public health workers all cite a lack of mentorship, both in pursuit of higher education and while in their careers, as one the greatest barriers in public health careers.

Racial discrimination: The barrier of racial discrimination was met with some skepticism by parents, with about 33% indicating that this is not a barrier for students. Public health workers strongly agree that racial discrimination still exists as a barrier, but believe it is surmountable.

Degree requirements: Public health workers believe that the requirements needed to obtain a bachelor's and graduate level degree are very challenging and can be seen as a barrier or deterrent for students.

Behavioral Influence

Perceived ability: Parents encourage youth to pursue a career based on two factors – the child's interest in a related subject (55%) and the child's ability to succeed in that career path (45%).

Level of interest: 80% of public health workers feel that their career path was determined by their interest in related subjects.

Giving back to family: Family is the highest motivator for students to attend college. Students believe going to college will make them successful, which will be key in helping their families.

Personal contact: Students prefer personal contact from colleges and universities, such as email and phone calls, rather than solely receiving generic information by mail or email. College students indicate that support from professors and mentors influence their decision to study public health.

Parents are the key influencers: 95% of respondents agree that parents have the greatest influence on a young person's career choice.

Competing Careers

Perception of selected careers: Parents believe that the top career paths that African American and Hispanic youth often seek are: Food Preparation & Service Related, Healthcare Support, and Personal Care & Services.

Armed Forces: One of the biggest competitors to college is the armed forces. Students indicate receiving a lot of personal contact from the armed forces, specifically the Army and Navy.

Further Implications on Marketing Outreach

Research findings reveal three key areas that marketing outreach will address, namely: awareness, exposure and intervention.

Awareness

Overall awareness seems to be lacking among parents and youth. When asked if they would be interested in enrolling in STEM programs, overwhelming, students indicate that they would be very interested. Unfortunately, parents and students are seemingly unaware of programs that can increase student participation in math and science, therefore, they fail to enroll in such programs.

Exposure

Exposure and awareness go hand-in-hand. Parents are cited as the greatest influencers of youth in pursuing a college degree, and in making career selection. If parents are unaware of public health programs that will benefit youth in their area of study or careers, this will directly affect a student's likelihood to consider public health careers. Furthermore, competing career paths such as the Armed Forces generate greater exposure among youth by making a personal connection such as phone calls, emails and even text messages. These personal connections will be vital in getting youth engaged in public health.

Intervention

Students indicate that math is a subject that they find especially challenging, and parents are unable to provide the same assistance as they may in other subjects such as English or History. As a result, students often fall behind in these classes or do not score as high as they could. Because parents influence the career path of youth based on their interest and perceived ability in school subjects, it quite possible that students are being influenced not to pursue STEM careers due to a perceived inability to perform well or due to the parents' lack of knowledge. As a result, infiltrating the schools with programs that start students off at an early age with exposure to public health is key.

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