

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Social Justice: Inequities and Leadership

2025 SOMOS Inc. Puerto Rico Conference

Panel:

SRJ in New York State and the Caribbean: Reclaiming Health, Power, and Resilience through Research and Policy

Diana Romero, PhD & Danielle Greene, DrPH

Presentation Outline

- **Part 1**
 - Sexual and Reproductive Justice, Health and Inequity in NY and Hispanic/Latiné Communities
- **Part 2**
 - CUNY SPH and NYS Leadership in Reproductive and Social Justice: The SRJ Hub

Part 1:

Sexual and Reproductive Justice, Health and Inequity in NY and Hispanic/Latiné Communities

Reproductive Justice



The right to have a child



The right to not have a child



The right to parent the children one has in safe and sustainable communities

- Reproductive Justice is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. (*SisterSong*)

"Scope" of Reproductive Justice



Social Determinants of Health: MCRSH



47%
Latiné households
report **difficulty**
paying for
housing/utilities
(compared to 11% White)



55.4%
of Latiné are on
WIC during
pregnancy
(compared to 19.2% White)



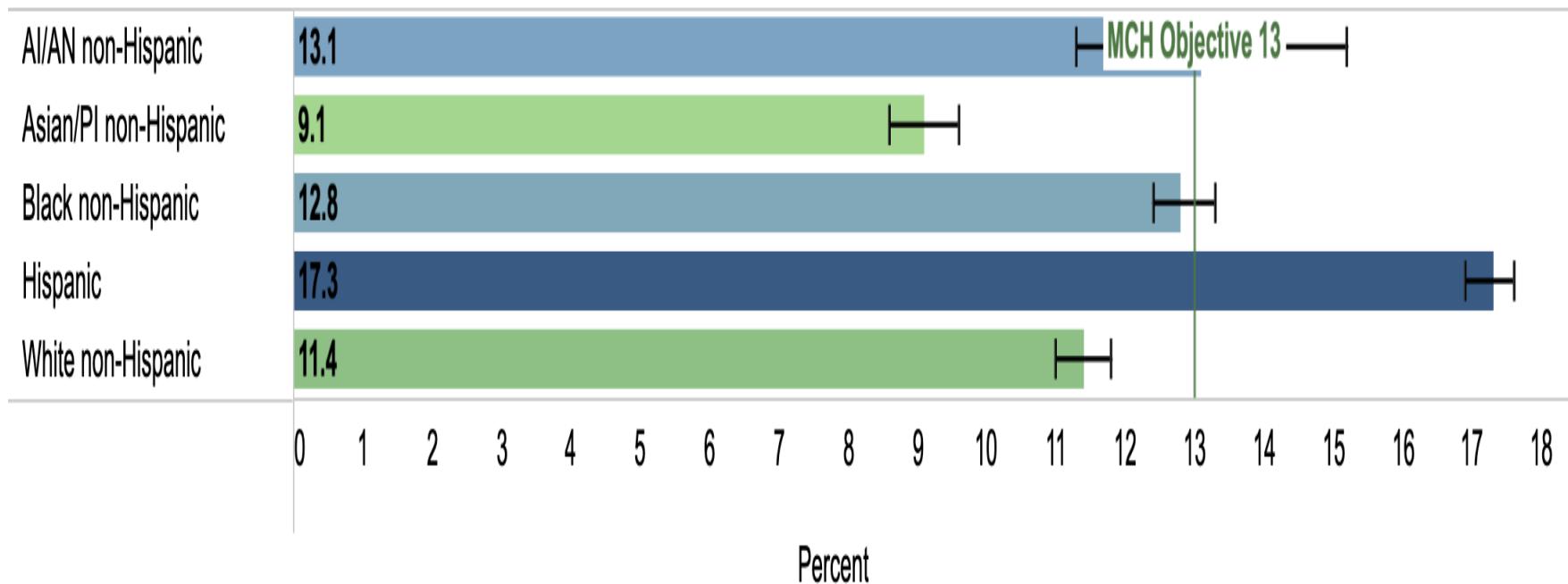
43%
Latiné families in
NYC face **child**
welfare
investigations
(compared to 19% White)



28%
of **incarcerated**
women in NYS
are Latina
(compared to 19% White)

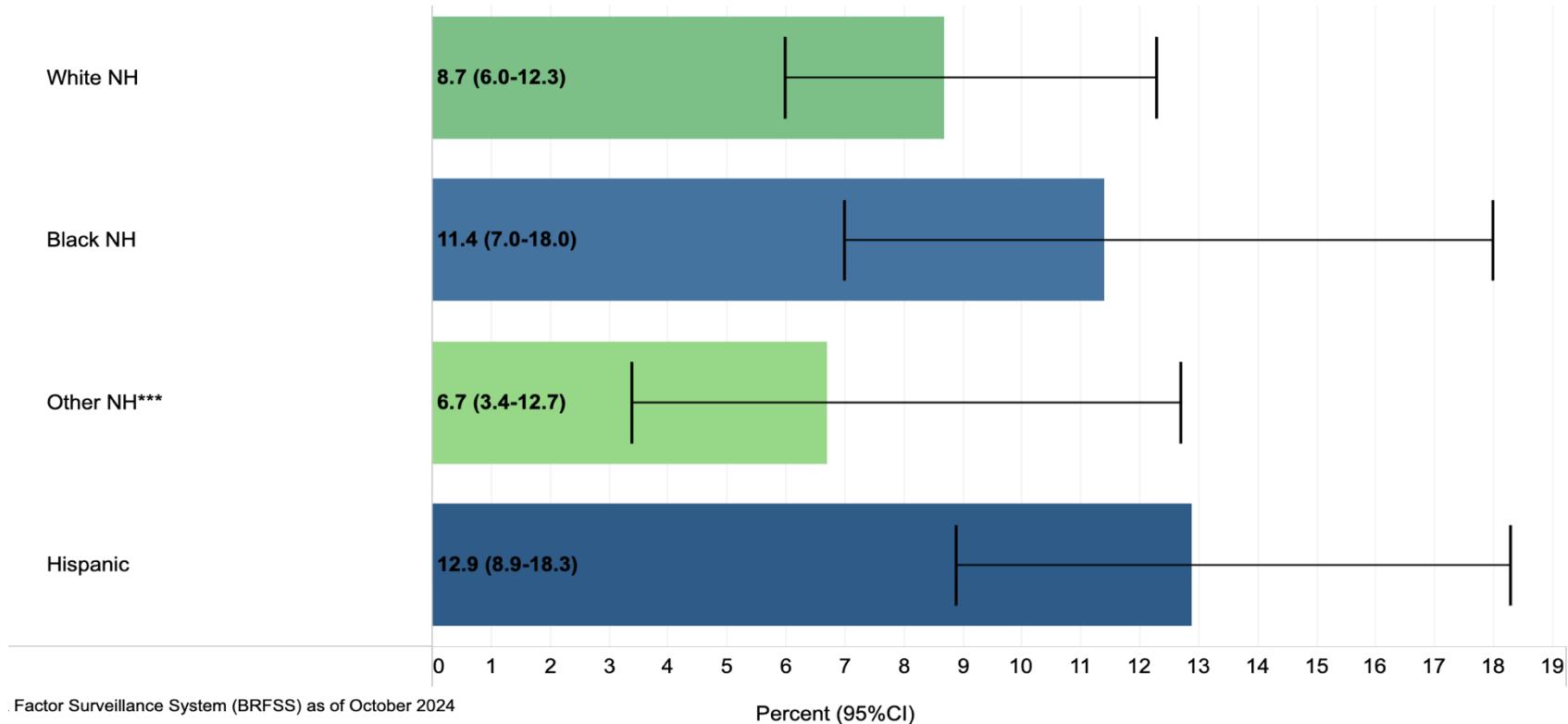
Child Health I: Obesity

- **17.3% of Hispanic children (2-4 yrs) in WIC obese (2020, NYS)**



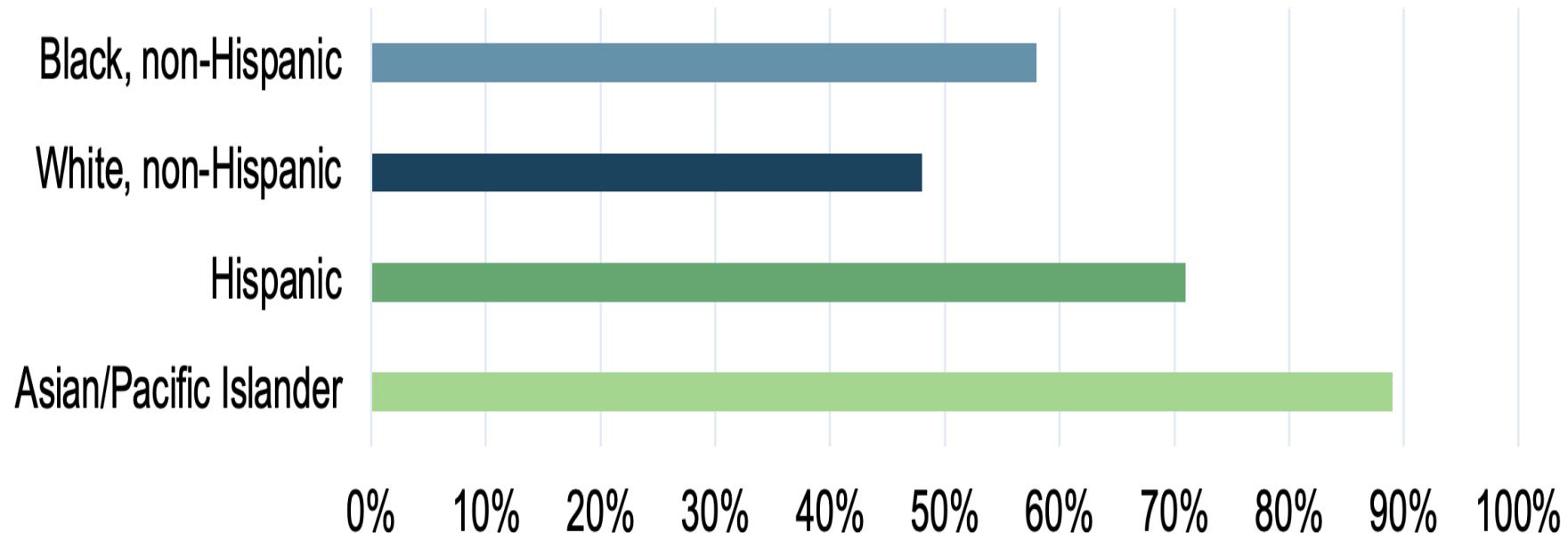
Child Health 2: Asthma

- Hispanic children 0-17 yrs had *highest* reported rates of lifetime asthma prevalence at 12.9% (2021)



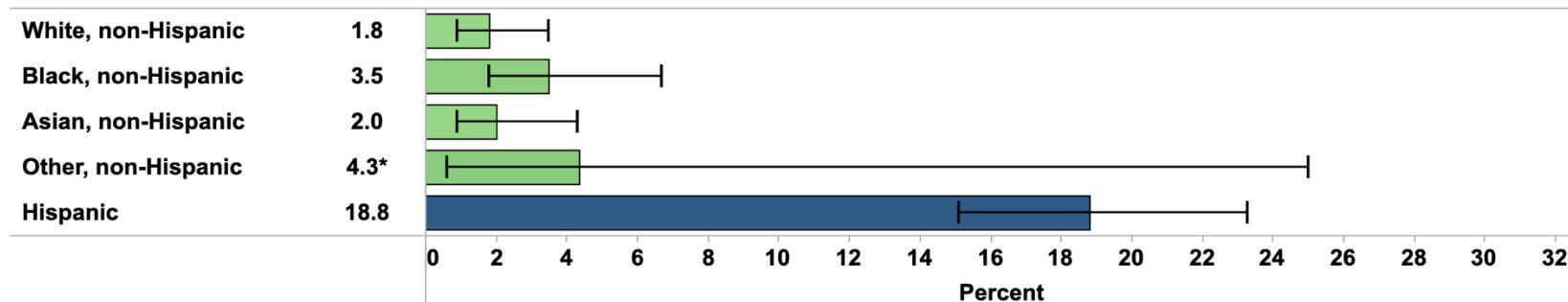
Child Health 3: Vaccinations

- **71% of Hispanic children (24-35 mos) received all doses of the combined 7-vaccine series (NYC, 2025)**

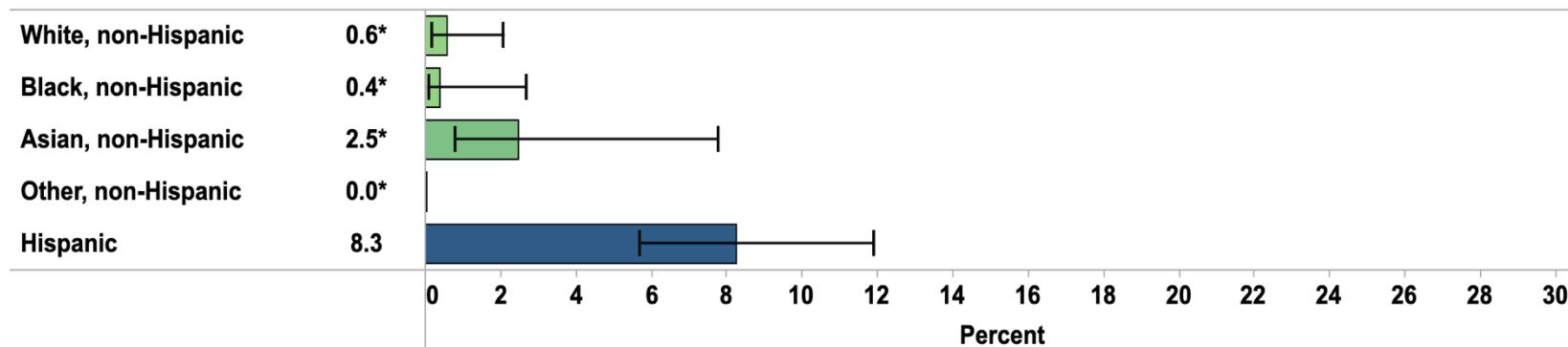


Pregnancy-related Health Inequities: Healthcare Access

- Hispanic women were most likely to report uninsurance (18.8%) in the month *prior* to getting pregnant (NYS, 2022)

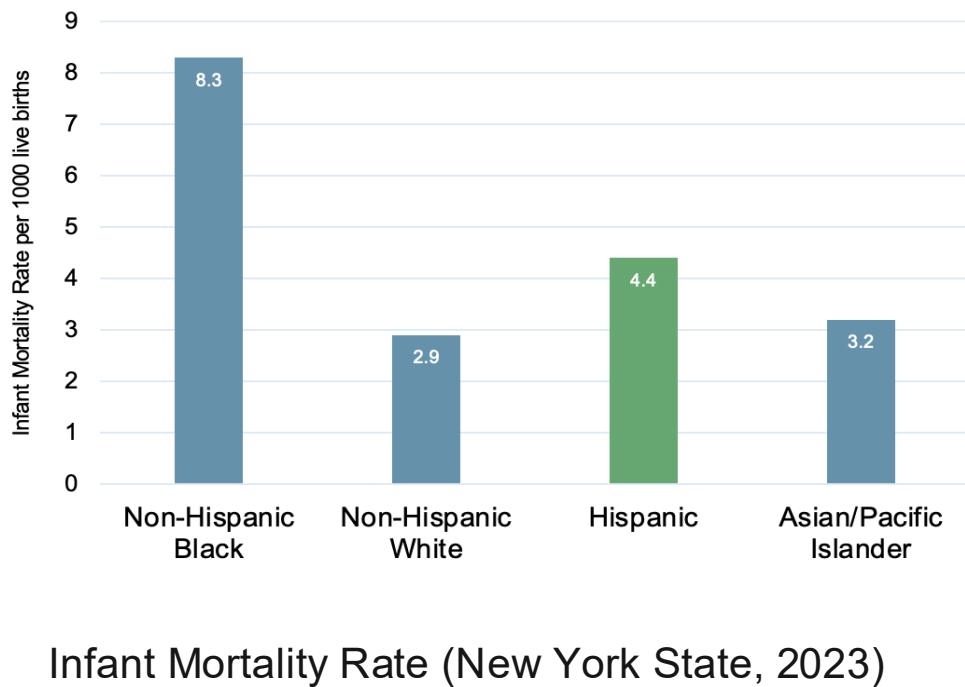


- Hispanic women also most likely to report uninsurance (8.3%) in the month *after* delivery (NYS, 2022)



Pregnancy-related Health Inequities: *Clinical Outcomes*

- Hispanic infants had the second highest infant mortality rate (4.4/1,000)



During 2020-2022 in New York, **preterm birth rates** were second highest for Hispanic infants (**10.4%**)

Pregnancy-related Health Inequities: *Latina Healthcare Experiences*



16%
reported **mistreatment**
by care providers in
childbirth

(vs. 18% White patients)



31%
reported
medical mistrust

(vs. 17% White
patients)

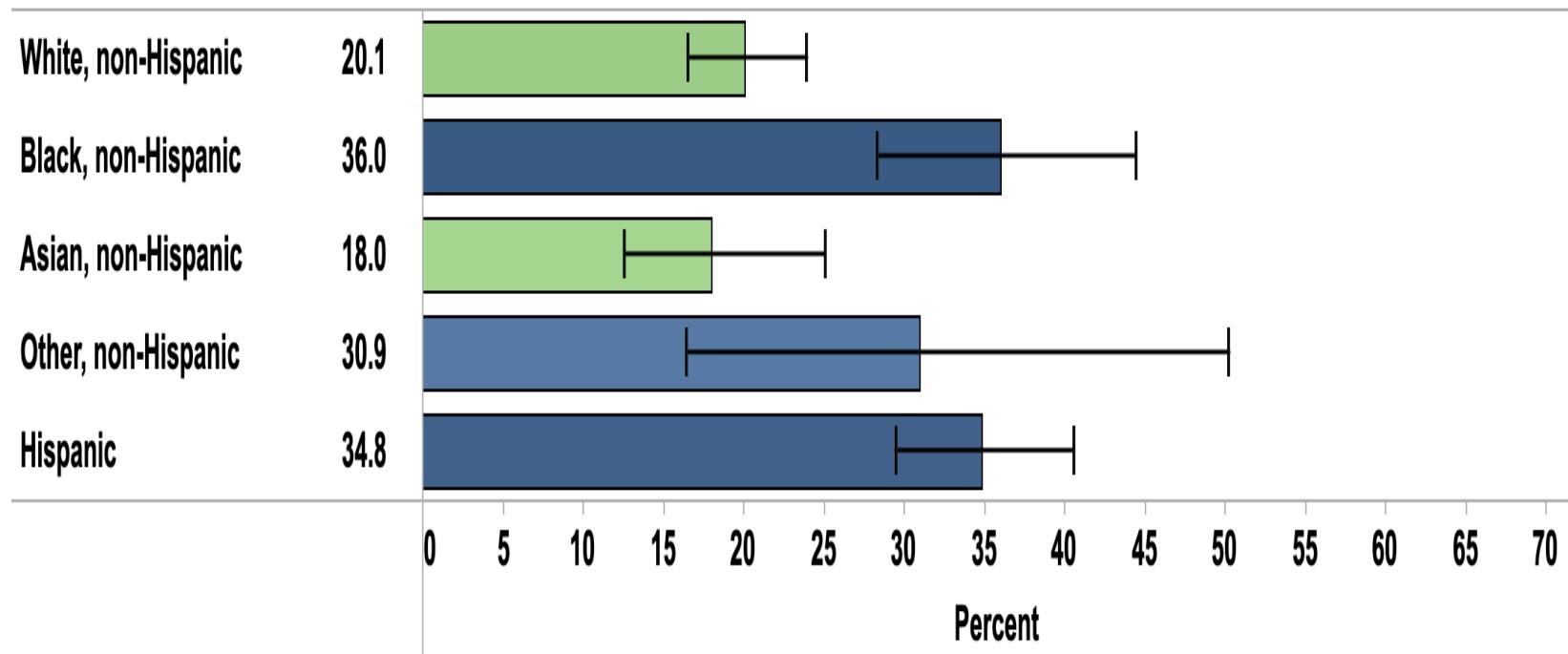


56.2%
given a **breast
pump** by the
hospital

(vs. 38.5% White patients)

Pregnancy: *Intendedness*

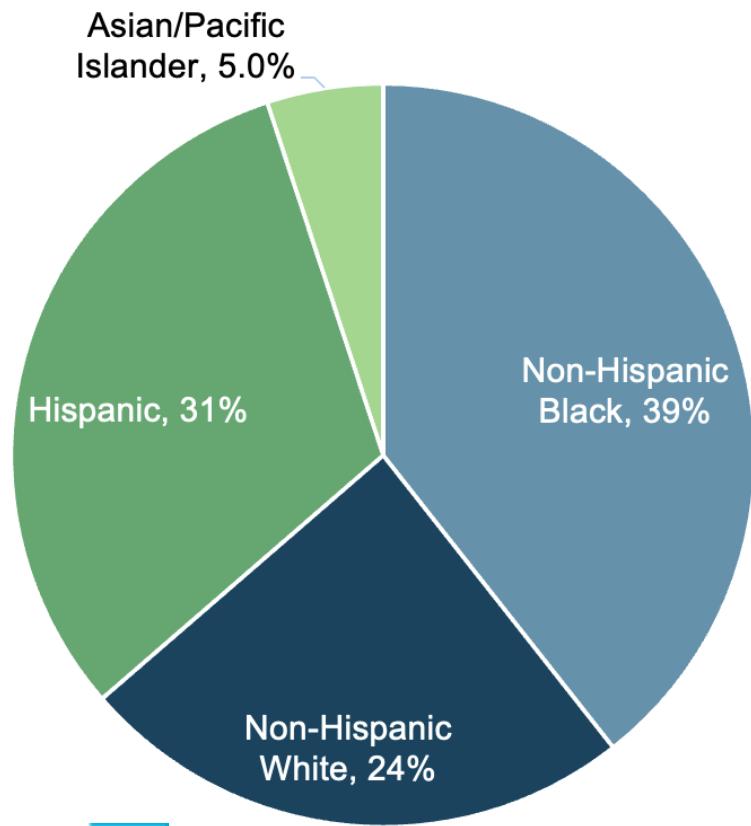
- 34.8% of Hispanic mothers had live births from unintended pregnancies (comparable to NH-Black mothers; NYS, 2022)



STIs: Chlamydia & HIV by Race/Ethnicity (NYS, 2023)

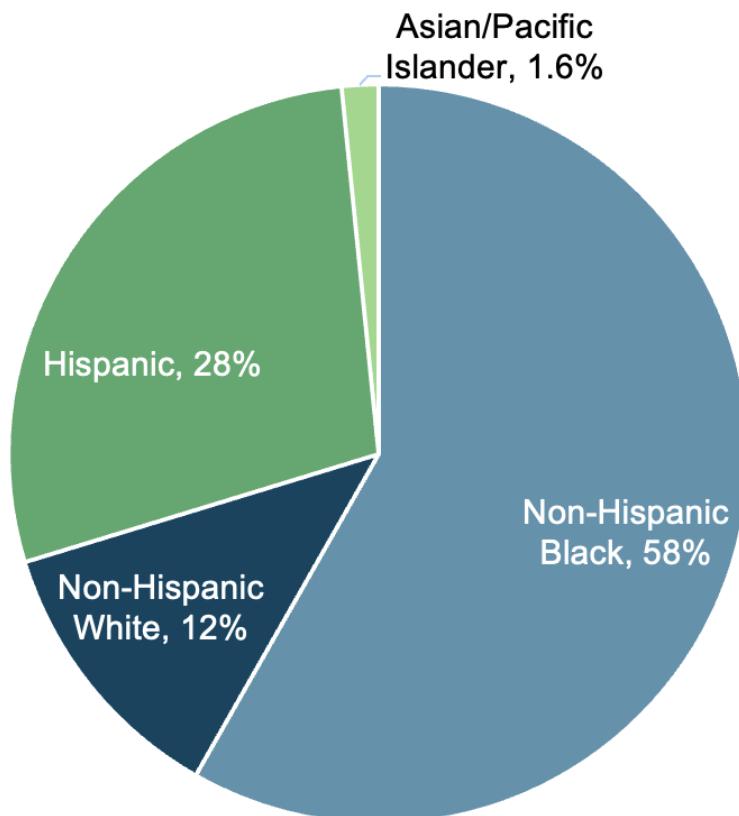
- Chlamydia

Hispanic individuals account for 31% of cases



- HIV

28% of HIV cases among the Hispanic population



Part 2:

CUNY SPH and NYS Leadership in Reproductive and Social Justice: The SRJ Hub

Sexual and Reproductive Justice Hub

CUNY SPH is New York's hub for sexual and reproductive justice scholarship and advocacy — preparing the next generation of public health leaders to stand up for and advance the human right to health.



Multidisciplinary approach

Producing training and research to bridge disciplinary divides and engage communities.

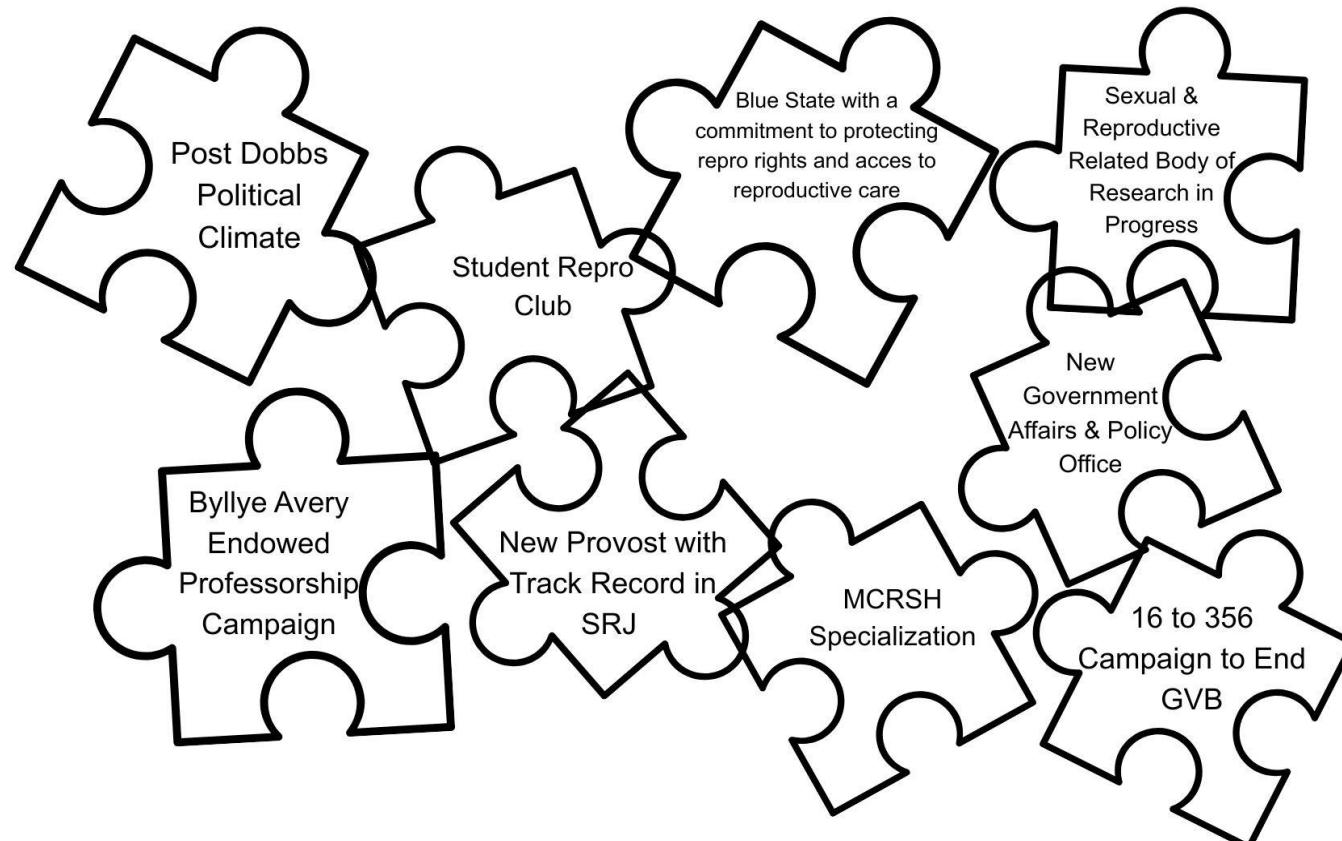
Skill-building in the next generation

Equipping students with critical thinking and solutions-oriented skills for sustainable research and data-informed advocacy.

Interrogate and address upstream inequities impacting outcomes

The combination of our approach and skill building strategies allows us to address root inequities impacting health outcomes.

Components of a Strong SRJ Program



Preparing to Advocate

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE

SRJ Expertise

CUNY SPH holds considerable expertise in SRJ among its faculty and leadership. The development of the SRJ Hub is co-led by Terry McGovern, Senior Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, and Dr. Lynn Roberts, Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Alumni Relations, Assistant Professor of Community Health and Social Sciences.

Terry McGovern

Senior Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs

Prior to joining CUNY SPH in 2023, Terry McGovern was the Hornet and Robert H. Heilbrunn Professor and chair of the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. At Columbia, McGovern led domestic and global research related to sexual and reproductive justice and human rights. Prior to joining Columbia in 2002, McGovern served as senior program officer in the Gender, Rights, and Equality Unit of the Ford Foundation, where she oversaw global and domestic programming relating to HIV, gender, LGBT, and human rights.

Dr. Lynn Roberts

Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Alumni Relations, Assistant Professor of Community Health and Social Sciences

Dr. Lynn Roberts, a national leader in the reproductive justice movement for over 20 years, is an emeritus board member of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. She is co-editor and contributing author of *Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice Critique* (Feminist Press, 2017). Dr. Roberts' current activism and scholarship examine the intersections of race, class and gender in adolescent dating relationships, juvenile justice, and reproductive health policies, as well as the impact of models of collaborative inquiry and teaching on civic and political engagement. For decades Dr. Roberts has taught the *Community Organizing to Advance Health and Social Justice* course in our MPH program, with the highest student evaluation accolades.

Dr. Diana Romero

Professor of Community Health and Social Sciences

Dr. Diana Romero has over 20 years of experience in research and evidence-based advocacy related to reproductive, maternal and child health experiences affected by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic, and related structural factors such as factors affecting contraceptive decision-making and the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on pregnant persons in NYS. Dr. Romero serves on the NYC DOHMH Advisory Board for the CDC Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey.



SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE

The Sexual and Reproductive Justice Hub at CUNY SPH

LEAD OFFICE	Dean's Office, Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Sexual Health Specialization
FUNDING	New request
BUDGET ASK	\$500,000

Since the overturn of *Rob v. Wade*, we are seeing the erosion of reproductive autonomy and the rise of reproductive health injustices disproportionately impacting Black, Brown, and marginalized populations. While safeguarding reproductive freedom is critical, the goal of reproductive justice extend far beyond the right to choose, encompassing an intersectional analysis of how policies and institutions influence health outcomes. The core mission of CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (CUNY SPH) - to advocate for sound policies that promote sexual and reproductive justice and improve health outcomes for all - uniquely positions the school to become New York's first hub for sexual and reproductive justice training, scholarship and advocacy.

What is Sexual and Reproductive Justice?

Sexual and Reproductive Justice (SRJ) is a framework that embodies a holistic view of health and strives for the "complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social and economic well-being of women and girls" through advocating for and upholding the human rights of all, especially marginalized women and people who do not conform to norms. Empowering people to maintain autonomy over their sexual and reproductive lives leads to better overall health outcomes for all.

The SRJ framework recognizes that reproductive autonomy is intrinsically linked to a wide range of factors that affect health and equity, including access to quality healthcare, adequate housing, educational opportunities, clean and safe environments,

nourishing food, affordable childcare, employment and livable wages. Without equitable access to these resources, reproductive autonomy cannot be realized. Repeated discrimination creates a ripple effect of negative health outcomes that are particularly bleak for Black women and people of color, reinforcing structural racism, and prevents the achievement of health justice.

Why create an SRJ Hub at CUNY SPH?

We are witnessing a steady decline of the right to bodily autonomy across the U.S. The disintegration of these rights is manifested in the form of restrictions on reproductive sexual and reproductive health education, limitations on gender-affirming care, removal of medical autonomy for normal menstruation and mortality care, and exacerbating the maternal mortality and mortality crisis.

There are currently no coordinated efforts in New York State to support SRJ, either at the state level or through a centralized academic unit that emphasizes not only scholarly, but also advocacy. The CUNY SPH Sexual and Reproductive Justice Hub will serve as a central hub for SRJ advocacy through solutions-oriented scholarship, training, and advocacy that centers the lived experiences of women of color and elevates and funds their and other marginalized people's work.

What will the SRJ Hub do?

Byllye Avery SRJ Professorship

CUNY SPH has launched the *Byllye Avery Sexual and Reproductive Justice Professorship*, the school's first and only endowed professorship addressing this area of public health. Named for the esteemed Byllye Avery, a pioneer in women's health, foremother of the reproductive justice movement, and founder of the Black

UNFPA Partnership: 16 Days Campaign

CUNY SPH has partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the Global 16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, an initiative to bring global awareness to the widespread issue of gender-based violence, a persistent public health threat. For over 20 years this civil society-led campaign has brought together local and global feminist activists and movements to raise awareness of the many forms of gender-based violence, its causes and impact, and pathways to prevention and accountability. This campaign, which culminates off each year on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and runs for 16 days through December 10, Human Rights Day, will be transformed under CUNY SPH's guidance into a year-round initiative.

1 <https://www.law.bu.edu/~hpho/program/courses/fmhc.htm#mrcsh>

2 <https://rowmanandlittlefield.com/rowmanpress/updated/2017/12/ACRJ-A-New-Vision.pdf>

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND JUSTICE

SRJ Curriculum

CUNY SPH offers the Maternal, Child, Reproductive, and Sexual Health (MCRSH) specialization, which

provides graduate students with an understanding of the socio-historical and political contexts that have and continue to shape reproductive health outcomes, as well as a foundation for research and programmatic activities in maternal, child, reproductive, and sexual health. The curriculum emphasizes a holistic approach to sexual and reproductive health within an SRJ framework that recognizes the diversity of human sexual expression, relationships, and family structures; promotes health equity, healthy, respectful, and responsible choices, rights, freedom, and supports increased access to elective preventive, screening, treatment, and support services.

The MCRSH specialization currently

offers two core courses – MCRSH: A Life Course Perspective and MCRSH in Contact: Electives in the program include:

- Social Inequity and Reproductive and Sexual Health, Policy, and Rights
- The Health of Young People
- Sexual Health Promotion
- Special Victims Unit: Child Maltreatment and Its Effects on Child and Family Mental Health
- Adolescent Health
- Advancing an Equity MCRSH Agenda in Health Departments

New course topics under consideration include:

- The nexus of environmental justice and reproductive justice
- Championing policy across the U.S.
- Policy, legislation, and government programs related to MCRSH and SRJ
- Financing and insurance in MCRSH
- The history of bodily autonomy and race



The SRJ Hub will build on current scholarship and research by CUNY SPH faculty and graduate students, including:

Audit of existing federal funding (NIH, EPA) available to study the role of environmental exposures in Black maternal and infant mortality to establish the need for additional targeted funding

Analysis of maternal meconium samples to establish the role of metal mixtures associated with adverse child outcomes to inform prevention strategies

Advocacy in city land uses processes to require more accurate environmental impact statements and a showing of no harm prior to approving industrial sites in overburdened neighborhoods

Investigation of the impact of the Dobbs decision on medical integrity

Comprehensive review exposing migrants' lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services

Assessment of safety-net health care utilization among uninsured immigrants in New York City

Qualitative study of East Harlem adolescents and their life goals in the context of personal relationships, risk of pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

State and national analyses of welfare family-cap policies and violation of reproductive and human rights principles

CUNY SPH

Support research that identifies the contribution of environmental pollution to neuro-developmental and other health outcomes in children

Large-scale mixed-methods evaluation of a physician training program for advocacy around abortion and other reproductive health issues

Study of the intersectionality of racial and gender discrimination among teens exposed to dating violence

Study of the role of COVID-19, race and social factors in pregnancy experiences, delays to contraception, abortion, and miscarriage care during the pandemic

Evaluation of a multi-center NYC-based Doula program

Randomized controlled trial to identify the efficacy of a model socialization and sexuality education approach for adolescents and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Studies exploring needed supports from faculty, administration, and staff for pregnant and parenting students at CUNY

Advocating for the SRJ Hub



Celebrating Success



SRJ Hub: The First Year



Opinion: New York's maternal health crisis continues to disproportionately harm Black mothers

The state must expand culturally competent health services for Black mothers who face much higher pregnancy-related mortality rates.

By Lea Webb, Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn and Lynn Roberts

April 15, 2025

Advocating Again

2024
SOMOS PR
WORKSHOP

**Intersections for Sex
Positivity and
Reproductive Justice:
NY and PR Experiences**

Legislative Sponsors

Senator Kristen Gonzalez
District 59

Assemblywoman Amy Paulin
District 88
Chair, Health Committee

Moderator

Anthony Feliciano
Vice President
Advocacy
Housing Works

PANELIST

Rafael Tormello, PhD
Executive Director
Intercombiene Puerto Rico

Diane Romero, PhD, MA
CUNY Graduate School of Public
Health and Health Policy

Jessie Loach, MPH
CUNY Graduate School of Public
Health and Health Policy

Ray Mota, MPA
Director of Health Policy
Latino Commission on AIDS

Charles King, JD, MDiv
Founder Actio
Housing Works

Key Discussions & Insights

Understanding Intersectionality

Stumbling Blocks, Struggles & Solutions

Social & Political Determinants of Health & Hope

Taking Action to Change Systems & Narratives

Thursday, November 7th 2024
10:30 am to 11:45 am
GUAYACAN @ Caribe Hilton Hotel
(Conference Host Hotel)

For more information
Anthony Feliciano
VP Advocacy @ Housing Works
646-325-5317
a.feliciano@housingworks.org





MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH in

Sexual and Reproductive Justice & Health

CUNY
SPH

CUNYSPH SRJ HUB

SRJ VOICES

Upholding Rights, Ensuring Justice

A conversation with Dean Terry McGovern and Assemblymember Jessica González Rojas

September 17, 2025 | 5pm - 6:30pm | Virtual



Terry McGovern
Senior Associate Dean
CUNYSPH

Jessica González-Rojas
Assemblymember
New York State Legislature

cunyph.meeveevoices.sept2023

Byllye Avery Endowed Professorship



Thank you!

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