

Aligning Summer Training Programs With Catchment Priorities: An Example From an Urban Cancer Center

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1. Background

The University of Illinois Cancer Center (UICC) defines its catchment area as Cook County, Illinois. Within the catchment area, UICC has identified a 20-zip-code Special Geographies Area (SGA)—located primarily within the City of Chicago—where the cancer center focuses its outreach and programming. The SGA is home to 1.3 million residents, of which 83 percent identify as minority race or ethnicity. SGA residents experience markedly elevated adverse social determinants of health, environmental exposures, risk behaviors, and cancer outcomes.

2. Goals

In collaboration with the Data Integration Shared Resource (DISR), the Cancer Research Training and Education Coordination (CRTEC) office sought to determine whether recruits, applicants, and enrollees in two summer training programs were representative of the SGA.

3. Solutions and Methods

In 2024, UICC hosted the 8-week Cancer Health Equity Summer Scholars (CHESS) program for underrepresented minority high school students interested in careers focused on cancer research and other health professions. In addition, the University of Illinois Diversity in Cancer Research (DICR) program provided research-intensive immersion for diverse undergraduate students pursuing careers in biomedical fields, cancer research, and other health professions. Recruitment events for UICC summer training programs are held annually at similar (and some identical) locations. CRTEC did not routinely collect zip codes from attendees at these events until recruitment for summer 2024 programs was complete. Therefore, we utilized recruitment data for 2025 summer programs as a surrogate for 2024 summer programs, assuming they were representative of the latter. Residential zip codes were obtained from attendees at recruitment events via electronic surveys, and for summer program applicants and enrollees from information captured from their application form. Only residents in the UICC catchment area were included in this analysis. ArcGIS—a software system that helps users create, analyze, manage, and map data—was used to display geographic data.

4. Outcomes

There were 91 attendees at recruitment events, as well as 81 applicants and 20 enrollees in the 2024 UICC CHESS and DICR summer training programs combined. Fifty-six percent, 21 percent, and 45 percent of UICC summer program recruits, applicants, and enrollees, respectively, reported residing in the UICC SGA. Among these groups, 70 percent, 50 percent, and 25 percent of the 20 SGA zip codes were represented.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Results showed that recruitment, application, and selection efforts were somewhat successful at engaging students from the UICC SGA. These results will directly inform the expansion of recruitment efforts for summer training programs into all SGA zip codes, in collaboration with the UICC Community Outreach and Engagement (COE) and Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) offices. Future efforts include

continued collection of zip codes and the addition of attendee sex, race, and ethnicity at recruitment events for summer training programs.

Figure

