

# UConn HEALTH

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HEALTH DISPARITIES  
INSTITUTE

## PROGRESS REPORT

Health Disparities Institute

2023-2024

# HDI'S NEW DIRECTOR



Linda Sprague Martinez, PhD

Under the leadership of Interim Director, Dr. Linda Barry, MDH, MPH, FACS, and a search chaired by Dr. Anton Alerte, MD, *the Health Disparities Institute (HDI) welcomed a new Director, Dr. Linda Sprague Martinez, PhD in October 2023.* In her new role, Dr. Sprague Martinez has undertaken several administrative and programmatic initiatives, including staffing changes, infrastructure development, strategic planning, partnership development, and identifying new grant funded research opportunities for the institute. This report describes HDI activities since Dr. Sprague Martinez's arrival.

## HDI's YEAR BY THE NUMBERS



**4** Full-Time Staff  
Hired



**16** Grants &  
Contracts  
Submitted



**11** Newly  
Established  
Partnerships



**5** Student  
Fellows  
Trained

# STRATEGIC PLANNING

The HDI team launched a strategic planning process in October 2023. This process involved one-on-ones with community partners, meetings with different stakeholders at UConn Health, and attending a strategic planning workshop sponsored by InCHIP. Strengths and the opportunities were explored in the context of the larger health equity landscape in Connecticut.

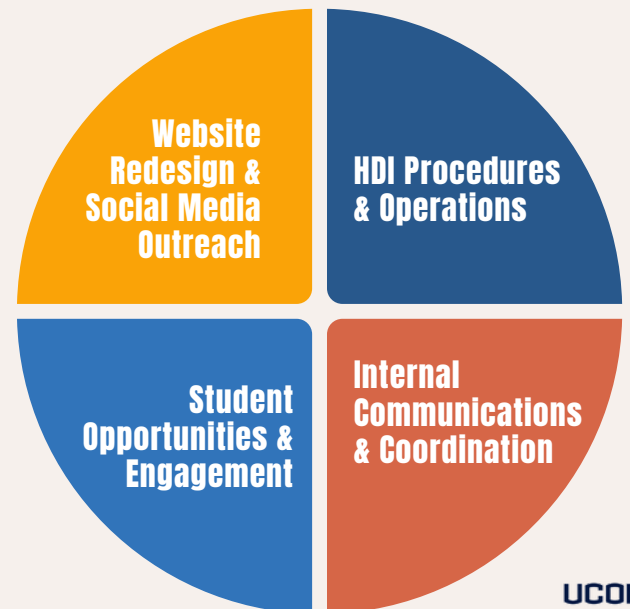
As a team, HDI crafted a revised mission and vision. This was followed by the selection of key values and the development of strategic goals and objectives.

## HDI's Strategic Goals for 2024-2027:

- 1** Establish HDI as the primary hub for initiating and supporting community-driven health equity research and action in Connecticut.
- 2** Catalyze systemic change at the organizational, municipal, and state levels to confront and dismantle racism.
- 3** Deliver applied educational experiences that advance health equity and enhance critical consciousness among learners at all levels.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

As part of the strategic planning process, the HDI team assessed the institute's infrastructure, procedures, and organizational capacity. From this assessment, the team identified four areas of our work that required specialized focus and development to ensure that HDI can meet its strategic goals: (1) website redesign & social media outreach; (2) HDI policies and operations; (3) internal communications and coordination processes; and (4) student opportunities and onboarding.



# STAFF

As part of the strategic planning process, Dr. Sprague Martinez conducted one-on-ones with current HDI staff. This led to the **reclassification of two positions** based on misalignment between position descriptions and actual duties.

## Emy Flores

from Administrative Program Coordinator to **Business Services Manager**.



## Valen Diaz, MPH MCHES

from Research Associate I to **Projects Director/ Research Associate II**.



HDI also **hired and onboarded four new staff members** in 2023-2024.

## Melanie Rocco, MSW, MPH

Administrative Director



## Peter Zapata, MPH, MCHES

Bilingual Research Assistant II



## Denise Patterson Moss-Solomon

Administrative Program Coordinator



## Gillian Betz, MPH

Special Payroll Research Associate I



# STUDENTS

In 2023-2024, HDI hosted **five interns and fellows** across various HDI projects and initiatives.

**Jennifer Gasparino** UConn MPH/MD Student, HDI Research Fellow

**Matt Chen** UConn MA in Communications Student, HDI Fellow

**Cindy Pan** UConn MPH Student, HDI Research Fellow

**Shay-voya Anderson** University of Saint Josephs MPH Student, HDI Intern

**Gaurvi Jawaharlal Loungani** UConn BS in Mathematics Student, HDI Intern

# PARTNERS

In 2023-2024, HDI focused on reconnecting with longtime partners and establishing relationships with new partners by attending community-based events, hosting educational initiatives, drafting research grants, and building practice partnerships internal to UConn Health.

During the 2023-2024 year, the HDI team hosted and/or participated in:

- **2024 Health Equity Week**
- **Puerto Rican and Hispanic Health Policy Summit**
- **Waterbury Black Family Wellness Event**
- **Waterbury WishFest**

## Newly Established Partnerships:



# GRANT-FUNDED RESEARCH AND STATE CONTRACTS

HDI has significantly increased its externally funded grants and contracts application submissions. To date, Dr. Sprague Martinez has submitted **sixteen grants and contracts** since her arrival at HDI. Of these grants, **HDI is listed as prime on nine and subcontractor on seven**. These grants include our partners mentioned in the Partners section of this report, as well as with other department and schools from UConn Health, UConn, Cornell School of Medicine, University of Massachusetts and Boston University. All sixteen grants and contracts are designed to advance health equity by improving health and economic opportunity.



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