



July 28, 2020

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Back on the Bull Community Health Ambassador Program

Overview and Purpose

The novel SARS-COV-2 coronavirus has caused the greatest threat to public health in the US and world since the 1918 influenza outbreak. Over 147,000 Americans have died and over 4,300,000 have tested positive as of late July. The pandemic has disrupted our daily lives and affected our health and the economy. COVID-19 has not been an equal opportunity killer. In the US, Black Americans have died at [2.5 times the rate of White Americans](#) and Latinx individuals also have disproportionately higher mortality rates. According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, these disparities also exist in our state where 42% of Coronavirus deaths are among Latinx individuals and 24% are among Black residents. Fortunately, public health measures have the potential to significantly reduce the spread of the coronavirus, which will help reduce the toll of this deadly virus, as well as help local businesses and promote economic recovery.

In previous pandemics in the United States and around the world, one of the most effective public health interventions has been the employment of community health workers trained in the best public health practices who travel the community to educate people about how to slow the spread of the virus. We propose this same intervention here in Durham through the deployment of trained Community Health Ambassadors to keep our community safe.

The Back on the Bull Community Health Ambassadors program (hereafter referred to as “Ambassadors”) is intended to provide additional in-person support to Durham businesses and essential workers to make it easier for them to comply with local orders and public health practices, such as wearing face coverings, which can reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission. The program will employ community health workers to engage local businesses and visit them in person to provide support and help them increase compliance with local policies.

The goals of the program are:

1. To conduct formative interviews and surveys with Durham businesses and essential workers along with in-person observation of businesses to identify barriers and opportunities to implementing public health interventions to reduce the impact of COVID-19.
2. To develop a *Back on the Bull Community Health Ambassador Program* whereby community health workers conduct outreach at Durham businesses (e.g., restaurants, bars, grocery stores, tiendas, construction sites, hair salons) to promote wearing of facial coverings and other practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

How it would work

A team of Ambassadors will spend their days visiting businesses to listen and understand the needs and challenges facing businesses and essential workers, to observe current practices, and to partner with establishment owners/managers to identify and remove barriers to compliance that can reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission among employees and customers. To support a more uniform experience for establishments interacting with the program, all ambassadors would start off using the same well-designed, evidence-based checklist of things to look for as they walk through an establishment and speak with the manager. Ambassadors will wear Back on the Bull t-shirts that include their title as Community Health Ambassadors.

For businesses that have already completed the Back on the Bull health and safety checklist, Ambassadors will check to see if they are, in fact, doing the things they committed to do. Where ambassadors find room for improvement, especially clear deficiencies that place employees and customers at increased risk, they will make recommendations to the owner or leader of the establishment. They will then offer to provide support in helping the establishment comply with best practices and recommendations, including:

- Helping them complete the Back on the Bull checklist while on site
- Printing signage for them while on site using a portable color printer
- Providing a starter kit of disposable face coverings
- Providing helpful checklists for daily operations and steps managers and staff can take to mitigate risk
- Providing specific suggestions for actions they can take that are specific to the physical layout of their space

Given the need to visit and communicate with a wide range of businesses and individuals, we will hire an Ambassador team that is racially and ethnically diverse. Because of the especially high rate of infection among our Latinx population, at least four of the Ambassadors will be native Spanish speakers or fluent in Spanish, and culturally competent in the Latinx community. Our team will regularly coordinate and seek input from El Centro Hispano, Latin 19, the Community Health Coalition, and other community-rooted partners and individuals that promote health equity. We will also stay in regular contact with Durham County Public Health and other health agencies to maximize our efforts in locations where the program is needed most.

Record keeping and laying the groundwork for accountability

- Ambassadors will share at the outset that their work is a matter of public record and that they are there to help business build consumer confidence by complying with the best public health guidance. Following Back on the Bull guidelines is the best way to protect the owner's interests, including mitigating risk of employee or customer illness, encouraging consumer confidence, and lowering risk of lawsuits.
- Ambassadors will record the names of establishments they visit, the date on which the visit occurred, the items on the checklist where the business was not in compliance when they arrived, any areas where they were not in compliance when they left, and any recommendations they gave to the establishment.
- Ambassadors will follow up with the establishment on any recommendations not enacted by the end of their visit in one week to check on compliance.
- The UNC team will prepare monthly reports of the number of visits, activities, and key findings.

Addressing Non-Compliance

It is not within the role or responsibilities for Ambassadors to force businesses to participate. Ambassadors operate under the assumption when they visit a business that non-compliance is unintentional. However, if the owner of an establishment is unwilling to work with an ambassador or to comply with their recommendations, the ambassador will let the owner know that their unwillingness to work with the program will be noted in public record and shared with the Public Health department. Ambassadors will remind the business that the program goal is to support businesses in creating safer spaces to avoid any potential punitive enforcement.

How to identify businesses and establishments

The UNC team will work with Durham agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce to identify a list of bars, restaurants, convenience stores, tiendas, grocery stores, personal service businesses, and others for the ambassadors to visit. We do not have data on the exact number of eligible businesses, but a goal would be to visit all businesses on the list as soon as possible and hopefully multiple times. Businesses that were experiencing challenges will be prioritized for a second visit. Ambassadors will select businesses to visit using the following methods:

- In response to a complaint was received about an establishment's non-compliance
- In follow up to a business completing the Back on the Bull checklist
- By random daily assignments either of specific establishments or of specific census block tracts or areas where the ambassador would drive and walk through
- In response to hot spots or data from public health suggesting some business types to be at higher risk for clusters and outbreaks

Gilling School of Global Public Health

This program will be housed at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, which is currently ranked the number two School of Public Health in the nation, tied with Harvard. The School's 200+ full-time faculty members are nationally and internationally recognized for their research, publications, and public health service. With over \$150 million in annual grant funding, the

pursuit of excellence is the byword for the School, as it strives to fulfill its mission: improve public health, promote individual well-being, and eliminate health disparities across North Carolina and around the world. The School has over 1700 students enrolled from over 50 countries.

The UNC Department of Health Behavior is one of seven departments in the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. Founded in 1943, the Department develops and disseminates knowledge and interventions that promote the health of individuals and communities. The Department's 35 faculty members, including Dr. Ribisl, have backgrounds in behavioral science, health education, social and cognitive psychology, public policy, international health, medicine, medical sociology, and communications, and are united by their commitment to the disciplines of public health together with the social and behavioral sciences. The departmental faculty are supported by eight staff members, including a business manager, two additional staff focused on grants management, an accounting manager, and a departmental administrative assistant.

COVID-19 Expertise at UNC-Chapel Hill

Carolina is the highest ranked U.S. university for coronavirus publications, according to a [Microsoft Academic rating system](#). In the worldwide rankings, UNC placed ninth globally. For saliency of research, the university has the 2nd highest ranking among US universities, surpassed only by Harvard. The FDA-approved treatment for COVID-19, Remdesivir, was developed in a partnership between UNC public health researchers and biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, Inc. Over 100 Gillings faculty, students, and staff are working on coronavirus-related projects.

Program Scale & Staffing

Our ambitious target at the peak of the project is for the ambassadors to visit 100-150 establishments per week. This program scale would require 6-10 ambassadors working part-time or full-time and visiting one establishment on average every 90 minutes. More than half of the ambassadors will be Durham residents recruited through community-rooted partners.

In the first month after receiving funding, we will start hiring staff, preparing visit protocols, developing a training program, ordering personal protective equipment and shirts. In the second month, we will make pilot visits to businesses and refine our visit procedures. The first official visits by Ambassadors will be made in month 2 and we should be operating at full scale by months 3-4.