

Training Future Cancer Prevention and Implementation Science Scholars



CPCRN scholars and mentors pictured together.

The [Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network \(CPCRN\) Scholars Program](#) is an innovative training initiative focused on public health, community engagement, and health equity. [CPCRN](#) is a funded [Thematic Research Network](#) supported by the CDC Prevention Research Centers (PRC). The CPCRN Scholars Program aims to educate and train researchers, students, and practitioners in dissemination and implementation (D&I) science, particularly in cancer prevention and control. D&I science is the study of how to put proven health interventions into practice in different settings. Launched in 2021 by Emory CPCRN, University of North Carolina CPCRN, and University of South Carolina CPCRN, the program emphasizes collaboration and mentorship to build a diverse and skilled workforce capable of reducing cancer-related health disparities.

THE CHALLENGE

Effective cancer prevention and control require translating scientific research into real-world practices. Training opportunities that prepare researchers, students, and practitioners to apply these strategies effectively are lacking, especially in underserved communities.¹ In addition, building a diverse workforce in D&I science is crucial for addressing health equity.

THE APPROACH

The CPCRN Scholars Program was developed using a collaborative workgroup model. The planning workgroup was led by the [University of North Carolina CPCRN Coordinating Center](#) staff, along with lead investigators and project directors at [Emory University](#) and the [University of South Carolina](#), and collaborators from several universities and federal agencies.





Working on the project, especially with Dr. Friedman, was such an exemplary experience of how to both provide support and how to create independence. Although I felt that I was a novice with qualitative research (had never done it before), the support and encouragement in a safe environment helped me build an understanding of how my research labs should be run in the future.”

Rowena Tam, CPCRN Scholar

Scholars receive online materials they can study on their own, attend live webinars and virtual learning sessions, and participate in small-group discussions. The curriculum included CPCRN’s [Putting Public Health Evidence into Action](#) training and the National Cancer Institute’s [Training Institute for Dissemination and Implementation in Cancer](#) modules. Each scholar completes a 1-year project related to D&I scientific frameworks, strategies, and methods, with resources hosted on a virtual platform.

Upon completion, scholars often continue their engagement with the CPCRN network. Alumni frequently collaborate with CPCRN workgroups and investigators, applying the skills learned during the program to their research and professional practices. Many alumni also take on mentorship roles for new scholars, helping to guide the next generation. Scholars are encouraged to recruit future cohorts, serve as mentors, and participate in panels, webinars, and conference presentations. Continued collaboration on projects through national workgroups keeps scholars engaged with their mentors and collaborators, supporting their career growth and enhancing academic and community engagement opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1. Inclusive recruitment strategies are crucial** for attracting a diverse range of scholars.
- 2. Teamwork among multiple institutions and federal agencies is vital** for program development and implementation.
- 3. Personalized and network mentorship is essential** for scholars’ professional growth and project success.
- 4. Asynchronous and synchronous learning methods can be combined** to accommodate different learning styles and schedules.

SUCCESS

The program has been highly successful, attracting scholars from diverse backgrounds. In its first 3 years, the program saw significant growth:

- **Year 1:** 20 scholars (24 applicants) and 30 mentors.
- **Year 2:** 17 scholars (19 applicants) and 15 mentors, including an international scholar from Switzerland.
- **Year 3:** 25 scholars (47 applicants) and 38 mentors, including an international scholar from Switzerland.

A 95% increase in applications from Year 1 to Year 3 demonstrates the program’s growing reputation and appeal. In 3 years, scholars came from 21 colleges and organizations, focusing on public health, health sciences, and social sciences.



The program provided a well-planned curriculum for different tracks and included multiple modules and activities to reinforce the information. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to join CPRN as a doctoral student, as the program also provided unique opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary discussions, learn and collaborate with experts in the field, and be involved in projects to expand my understanding of D&I.

Malesa Pereira, CPRN Scholar

EXAMPLES OF SCHOLAR PROJECTS

Examining Provider Perceptions and Practices for Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment among Cancer Survivors

(Scholars: Tara K. Torres and Rowena M. Tam from Cohort 3):

This project investigated the implementation of Comprehensive Geriatric Assessments (CGAs) in cancer care for older adults. Through qualitative interviews with primary and oncology care providers, the study identified key facilitators and barriers to carrying out CGAs. The findings aimed to guide improvements in CGA use, enhancing care for the growing population of older cancer survivors.²

Perspectives of Adult Survivors of Pediatric Cancer Who Experienced Healthcare Transition and Financial Toxicity

(Scholar: Malesa Pereira Cohort 2):

This project explored the financial challenges adult survivors of pediatric cancer (ASPC) face as they transition from pediatric to adult care. The study used qualitative methods to gather insights into the economic burdens survivors encounter, including medical expenses and income loss. By focusing on the unique health care transition period, the project sought to highlight the impact of these burdens on ASPC and inform strategies to reduce the challenges.

NEXT STEPS

To sustain and build on the program's momentum, the following steps are planned:

- **Engagement with alumni:** Maintain connections with program alumni through recruitment efforts, mentorship roles, and participation in events.
- **Continued evaluation:** Regularly evaluate the program's effectiveness through surveys and feedback from scholars, alumni, and mentors.
- **Continued participation with workgroups:** Encourage participation with the CPRN network and ongoing collaboration through national workgroups to support scholars' career development and project opportunities.

The CPRN Scholars Program serves as a model for other training programs, demonstrating the impact of a well-structured collaborative approach to capacity building in public health and cancer prevention. By continuing to engage and support its scholars, the program aims to promote a sustained and enthusiastic community dedicated to improving health outcomes and reducing disparities.

References

¹ Harrop JP, Nelson DE, Kuratani DG, Mullen PD, Paskett ED. Translating cancer prevention and control research into the community setting: workforce implications. *J Canc Educ*. 2012;27(2 Suppl):S157–S164. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-012-0329-0>

² Seaman AT, Rowland JH, Werts SJ, et al. Examining provider perceptions and practices for comprehensive geriatric assessment among cancer survivors: a qualitative study with an implementation science focus. *Front Aging*. 2023;4:1305922. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fragi.2023.1305922/articles/10.3389/>

Learn more! CPRN is one of CDC's [Thematic Research Networks](#) of the CDC Prevention Research Centers Program. Visit the [CPRN website](#) to learn more about their work.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CDC PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTERS AND ONGOING PROJECTS

Visit www.cdc.gov/prevention-research-centers/ and explore the [Pathway to Practice \(P2P\) Resource Center](#) for details on past and current projects.