

## Recruitment and Engagement Strategies for Equitable Maternal Health and Child Development Research

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### Abstract

The Illinois Kids Development Study (IKIDS) has long contributed to the greater development of environmental-based maternal health outcomes and awareness. This is accomplished through longitudinal Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) cohorts which survey mothers and their children from pregnancy through age seven, with research interests in observing related environmental health and cognitive development markers. Although these findings can have impacts on public health policy and future clinical practices, for the first six years of the IKIDS study, the demographics of the state of Illinois were underrepresented in the Champaign cohort for both race diversity and education level. In 2023, the University of Illinois' School of Social Work began in-person recruitment for IKIDS at local public health centers, like Promise Healthcare and Champaign Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD), to allow prospective participants already seeking pregnancy services at these locations the opportunity to ask questions and increase the humanness of the research. After 6 months of in-person recruitment, the initially underrepresented racial groups, now comprise a majority of the participants recruited during that in-person period. This recruitment strategy will continue, along with the maintenance of Perinatal Connect, an initiative that aims to foster connections amongst families, clinicians, researchers, and community members alike.

*Keywords:* maternal health, research equity, environmental health

**About the Author:** *Emma is a senior in the Brain and Cognitive Sciences department, with an interest in the intersection of maternal and mental health outcomes. Her research activities support social work recruitment and engagement strategies for ongoing child development research and a perinatal health promotion program.*



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## BACKGROUND

- Perinatal depression affects nearly 1 in 7 mothers or and 1 in 10 fathers<sup>1</sup>
- Impacts of depressive symptoms can extend beyond the individual, affecting the well-being and development of both parent and child, parenting experiences, and family dynamics
- The etiology of perinatal depression involves a complex interaction between psychological, biological, social, and environmental factors

## IKIDS

- IKIDS at the University of Illinois aims to investigate the impact of prenatal exposure to phthalates, BPA, and other endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs)

### Our Markers

- Physical and brain developments from birth to 5 years of age
- Maternal health outcomes and child bonding

### Our Methods

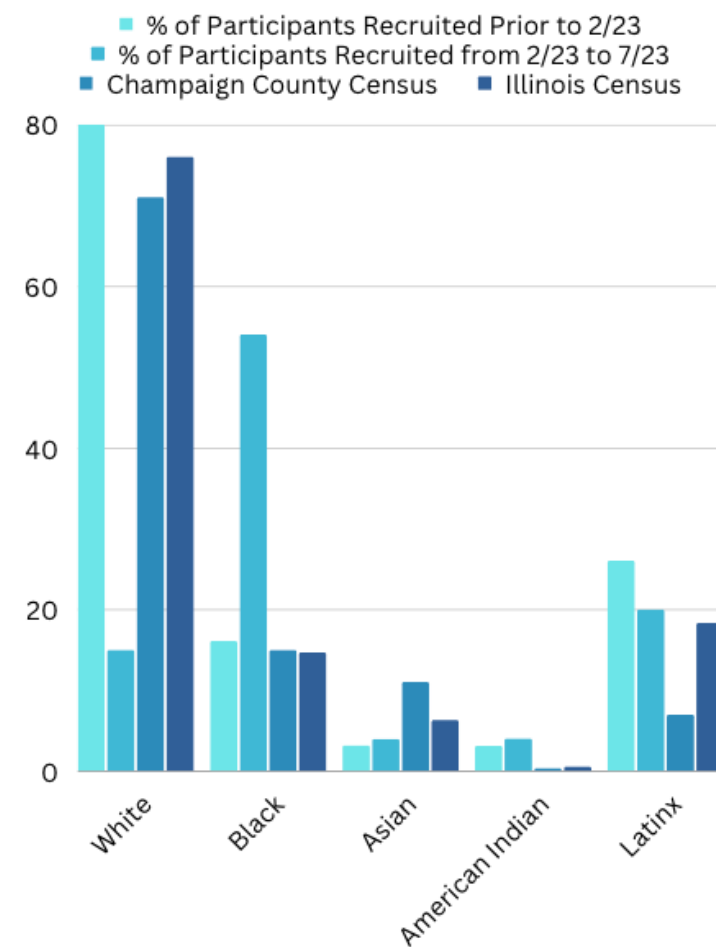
- Enroll expectant mothers during pregnancy
- Conduct visits during 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester, at birth, and periodically during first 7 years of life
- Obtain metrics to measure presence of EDCs: cord blood, fingernail clippings, weight and height records

Our recruitment fliers, which were provided to interested participants in both English and Spanish, included an overview of the study and its components

## IKIDS RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

- Prior to February 2023, recruitment was done at Carle Foundation Hospital, but our participants were largely white, college-educated women, and was not representative of Champaign County nor the state of Illinois
- Recruitment was conducted at the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD) from February 2023 through the end of July, and at Promise Healthcare, a federally-qualified clinic, from February 2023 to June 2023
- The purpose of inter-community recruitment was to meet our potential participants in a familiar space where they were already seeking services related to pregnancy

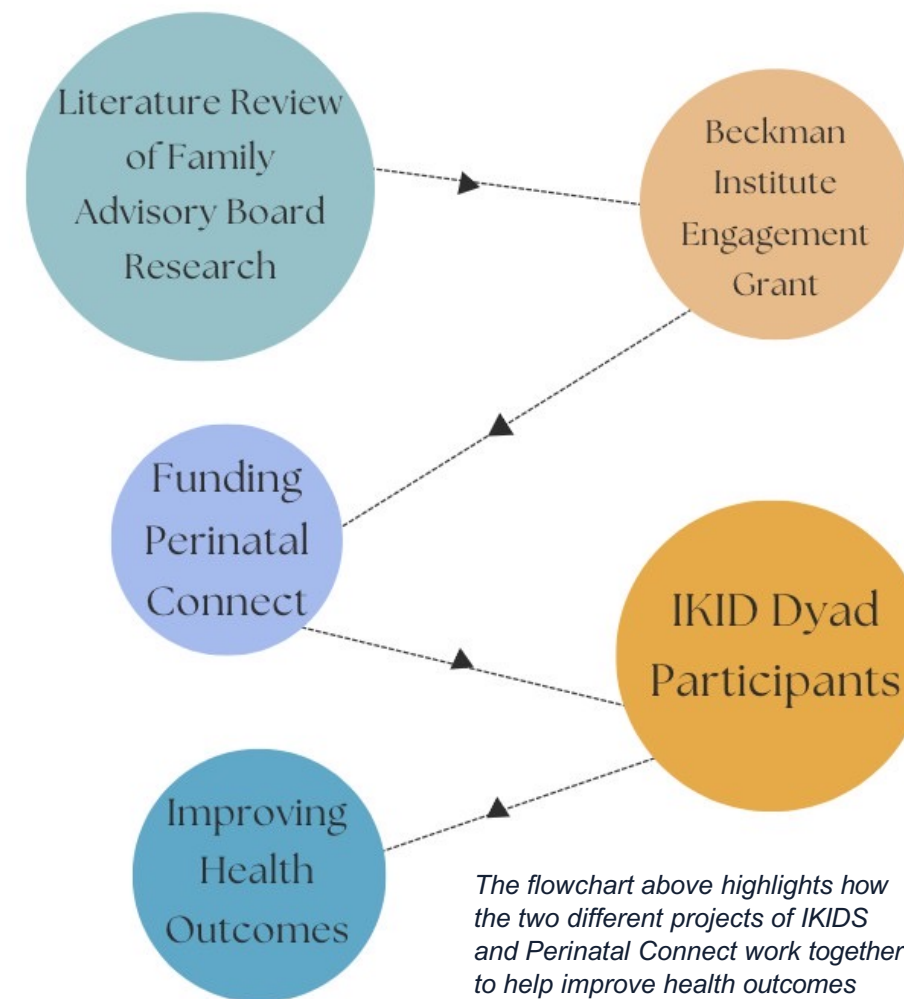
A team of researchers and students from the School of Social Work recruited eligible expectant mothers at CUPHD



The demographics of IKIDS participants during different phases of recruitment, compared to those of the communities we aim to represent

## FAMILY STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND PERINATAL CONNECT

- Community advisory board interventions aimed to increase rapport amongst care team and patients' families were found to be influential in health outcomes studies<sup>2</sup>
- Perinatal Connect aims to help build the necessary community and clinical infrastructure to increase patient engagement and promote collaborative care
- We achieve this by interacting with community members to better understand their lived experiences as parents, providers, and researchers
- Our goal is to integrate the feedback from our community advisory board parents to inform how we recruit participants for IKIDS, and to continue investing in the families of Champaign and promote positive mental health outcomes



The flowchart above highlights how the two different projects of IKIDS and Perinatal Connect work together to help improve health outcomes

### References:

1. Niel, M. (2020). Perinatal Depression: A review. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, 87 (5) 273-277.
2. Sharma, A. (2017). The impact of patient advisors on healthcare outcomes: a systematic review. *BMC Health Serv Res*, 17(1), 1-10.
3. Gerwig, G. (Director). (2023). *Barbie* [Film]. Mattel Studios.

## IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- For the next seven years of funding, the IKIDS and Perinatal Connect consortium will continue to source improvements in our research and recruitment tactics directly from prospective and active participants
- An application for an engagement grant from the Beckman Institute is currently being proposed, which will help support the logistics necessary to conduct parental focus groups and to continue to make our study accessible

2023 Perinatal Connect Community Event at Hessel Park in Champaign



## NEXT STEPS

- Recruitment for the IKIDS project was paused until January 2024 to allow for processing from the previous cohort
- The IKIDS team continues to adapt recruitment strategies to find new locations and build new partnerships in the community
- Perinatal Connect community meetings resumed in the fall of 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## References

Niel, M. (2020). Perinatal Depression: A review. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, 87 (5) 273-277.

Sharma, A. (2017). The impact of patient advisors on healthcare outcomes: a systematic review. *BMC Health Serv Res*.

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