

Report to the Community

July-September 2024

Advancing Equity Through Research

The work of the **Institute for H.O.P.E.™** is informed and fine-tuned by research conducted by a team of nationally recognized researchers led by **Ashwini Sehgal, MD**, a nephrologist and researcher with the MetroHealth Population Health and Equity Research Institute (PHERI).

“We conduct original research to identify the areas where our community faces the greatest challenges to good health,” said Dr. Sehgal, Director of Research and Evaluation for the Institute. “We also evaluate the Institute for H.O.P.E.’s activities and initiatives to ensure that we are making the greatest impact where help is needed the most.”

The team’s research has made the Institute for H.O.P.E. a leading voice in the national conversation about social drivers of health (SDOH). They have developed a guide to help other health systems evaluate their own programs to screen patients for SDOH and refer them on to community organizations for assistance. This research was published in the 2021 article [“A Framework for Evaluating Social Determinants of Health Screening and Referrals for Assistance”](#) in the *Journal of Primary Care and Community Health*.

Dr. Sehgal is the Duncan Neuhauser Professor of Community Health Improvement at Case Western Reserve University and Professor of Medicine, Bioethics, and Population and Quantitative Health Sciences.

He and his team with MetroHealth PHERI also are nationally recognized for their work in addressing the impact of the environment and climate change on public health, particularly in underserved communities.

Their leadership in this area is one reason why the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded MetroHealth a \$17.2 million grant to lead a program aimed at improving air quality in the homes of people with asthma in Greater Cleveland.

The MetroHealth “Asthma, Indoor Pollution and Greenhouse Gases” project was among the first round of 21 projects throughout the nation to be funded through the federal Community Change Grant. The \$17.2 million award, announced this summer, is one of the largest of the \$325 million allocation.

In Cleveland, one in five people have asthma. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America ranks Cleveland as one of the most challenging places to live with the condition because of high levels of air pollution.



From Left to Right: MetroHealth’s Nabil Chehade, MD, Sherri Bolen, MD, and Ashwini Sehgal, MD, attended a recent EPA-sponsored event announcing a \$17.2 million indoor air quality grant award to MetroHealth and Community Housing Solutions.

Research shows a clear connection between asthma flares and the use of gas ranges. MetroHealth will use the EPA grant funds to work with seven community partners to replace gas ranges with electric ones in 1,200 homes, where at least one resident has a respiratory condition. The work also will include upgrades to improve homes’ electrical systems and ventilation and the installation of electric vehicle chargers.

MetroHealth’s community partner organizations in the project are Community Housing Solutions, Rebuilding Together Northeast Ohio, Metro West Community Development Organization, Tremont West Development Corporation, Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation, Slavic Village Development and Ohio City Incorporated.

Households in Cleveland, Akron, Canton, East Cleveland, Euclid, Garfield Heights, Maple Heights, Newburgh Heights and Warrensville Heights are eligible to participate. To learn more, contact Dr. Sehgal by phone: 216-778-7728 or email: aseghal@metrohealth.org.

Circular Risks of Smoking and Food Insecurity

Research by renowned scientific investigators like **Jin Kim-Mozeleski, PhD**, is building on our understanding of the factors that affect our patients' – and our community's – ability to live their healthiest lives. Dr. Kim-Mozeleski's recent research, conducted in partnership with the Institute for H.O.P.E. and published in the April 2024 issue of *Journal of Primary Care and Community Health*, examines the connection between the high prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults with low-income and food insecurity.

[The study](#) started with an understanding of the circular, mutually reinforcing relationship between smoking and food insecurity. For example: Nicotine suppresses appetite, and some people who smoke report using this as a strategy for dealing with stress and ignoring hunger when experiencing food hardship. And food insecurity can negatively impact cognitive resources, making it harder to quit.

To confront this dilemma, the study developed and tested what is believed to be the first intervention strategy to address both health risks simultaneously.

The pilot program Food for SucCess (Food Security for Successful Smoking Cessation) aimed to reduce the burden of food insecurity for people trying to quit smoking and examine its effects on cessation-related outcomes. The study found that, after three months, participants in the program (compared to control condition) reported a longer length of abstinence from smoking and had a higher proportion of serious quit attempts.

"Dr. Kim-Mozeleski's study is a perfect example of the groundbreaking work our researchers are doing to quantify the importance of attending to social needs as a strategy to address specific health risks," said Institute President Srinivas Merugu, MD.



Jin Kim-Mozeleski, PhD

Thriving In Place: Supporting Seniors' Independent Living

At MetroHealth, we recognize the importance of providing essential services to improve the health of our patients. We rely on Unite Ohio, a comprehensive and searchable network of more than 300 Cleveland-area community organizations, to achieve this.



Community Housing Solutions



UNITE US

This quarter, **1,708 referrals** by MetroHealth staff have helped connect **1,032 MetroHealth patients** with essential resources, like fresh food, digital access, utility assistance and transportation.

Community Housing Solutions (CHS), a Unite Ohio referral organization and a key community partner in our Aging in Place program, provides low-cost, high-impact home modifications and occupational therapy assessments that address fall risks, allowing MetroHealth patients to age in place for as long as possible.

Thanks to generous funding from **Fifth Third Bank**, the Institute for H.O.P.E.'s Aging in Place program provides free home repair services to seniors in Cleveland's Buckeye neighborhood, including safety rail installation, porch repairs and occupational therapy services. CHS is also an essential partner in our EPA-funded gas stove replacement project.

Program Updates

- In June, the **MetroHealth Opportunity Center at Via Sana** opened its doors in Cleveland's Clark-Fulton neighborhood. This community space provides a wide range of opportunities, including education, training, cooking demos, financial literacy workshops, support groups and a permanent location for Tri-C Access Center to offer workforce and educational classes. Via Sana will be officially open to the public on October 29. To discover more about the opportunities available, [click here](#).
- In 2023, the Institute launched the **Blooms of HOPE** program, a flower delivery service dedicated to bringing joy to seniors at risk for social isolation, in partnership with Spry Senior, a joint venture of MetroHealth, and BigHearted Blooms. This collaboration was celebrated at the Bloomfest, an annual fundraising event to support the efforts of BigHearted Blooms, in September. The Institute's **Angelia Vannoy**, Program Manager, and **Karen Cook**, Healthy Families & Thriving Communities Director, were invited to speak about the Blooms of HOPE program's success. To learn more about BigHearted Blooms, [click here](#).

COMMUNITY OUTREACH, RESEARCH & EVALUATION

This quarter, we participated in **30 community events** and shared our program findings in **one publication** and at **three national and regional conferences**.

Highlights include:

- Health systems often screen patients for social needs and refer them to community organizations for help. However, few studies have examined how these social needs change among the same individuals over time. [A recent study](#) by **Kevin Chagin**, Director of Population Health Data and Analytics, and **Ash Sehgal, MD**, Director of Research and Evaluation for the Institute for H.O.P.E., explored this change in patients screened for food insecurity.
- Vanessa Maier, MD**, recently was inducted into the Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame at Cleveland Heights-University Heights High School (CH-UHHS). Aside from her work at the MetroHealth Beachwood Health Center, she serves as the Institute's School Health Program Medical Director and provides care at CH-UHHS's [Heights Wellness Center](#). Dr. Maier provides leadership for our School Health Program and is involved in research to understand best practices in school-based health. She is currently a co-investigator on a study to evaluate factors associated with absenteeism in students with asthma.