



# Engaging the Community to Identify Research Priorities for the HS/EHS Program in the US Virgin Islands

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## ABSTRACT

This poster presentation highlights the establishment of a Human Services Research Partnership in the US Virgin Islands, the work in which the Partnership engaged, and the processes used by the Partnership to identify research priorities for the Territory's Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) Program. The foundation of the Partnership's work was the completion of an environmental scan of the Territory's HS/EHS Program. Partners engaged in an iterative process of reviewing findings to identify priority research foci.

## BACKGROUND

- Territory's Human Services Research Partnership – anchored in the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach
- Established a university-community Research Partnership.
- Research Design - concurrent, mixed method design
- Data Collection
  - Qualitative – key informant interviews; focus group discussions; *Conversation Hours* (parents); document review
  - Quantitative – demographic surveys; 2010 Census data; HS/EHS program (PIR) data
- Data Analysis – coding of qualitative data by research team members



## SPECIFIC AIMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN STUDY

- 1) Describe HS/EHS services and programs.
- 2) Assess data processes currently ongoing within HS/EHS.
- 3) Identify critical issues related to data utilization for HS/EHS.
- 4) Identify priority programmatic issues to help formulate HS/EHS research studies.

## PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

- Key stakeholders invited to serve a minimum of three years on Human Service Research Partnership
- Quarterly partnership meetings co-chaired by DHS and CERC
- Developed charter, guiding principles and identity as *A RICH-VI: Alliance for Responsive Investment in Children's Health*
- Partners engaged in
  - ✓ Workgroups that supported environmental scan activities, i.e., identification of data sources and review of draft report
  - ✓ Training on CBPR, HIPAA and Data Utilization

## PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

- Partners engaged in
  - ✓ Nominal Group Technique to identify priority issues
  - ✓ Dissemination, as participants on a panel discussion at CERC Eighth Annual Health Disparities Institute



## FINDINGS

### ➤ Description of HS/EHS Program in the USVI

- The USVI Head Start Program serves an average of 894 children annually, while the Early Head Start Program serves an average of 110 children annually, but only on the island of St. Croix.
- All HS/EHS teachers meet the minimum education qualifications; majority of assistant teachers hold AA degrees or CDA certification.
- HS/EHS children received timely health screening, yet, HS children had gaps in dental screening and in the receipt of medical attention.
- Notable gaps between HS children screened needing medical treatment and those receiving treatment. fewer than 40% of HS children had a dental home (for three of seven years).

### ➤ Data Processes and Data Utilization

- The HS/EHS program uses electronic data management systems to capture program data, with HS utilizing COPA and EHS utilizing CAP60.
- Data systems capture compliance-related data, including program information, educational data, health, medical, and dental information.
- The USVI HS/EHS programs collect data primarily to meet compliance requirements.
- For SY2014 – SY2016, HS children performed lowest in the areas of language and literacy and mathematics and science. HS children in the St. Thomas-St. John district performed consistently below their counterparts on St. Croix in all areas, for all three years.
- HS/EHS collect and electronically store health, medical, and dental information on children admitted to the programs.

## FINDINGS

### ➤ Priority Programmatic Issues

The top three HS/EHS programmatic priorities identified by Partners were:

- 1) how to better engage parents;
- 2) increase the number of service providers, specifically pediatric dentistry;
- 3) a better understanding of persons not served by HS/EHS.

Priorities identified by Partners were further refined into researchable questions with assistance from the project's HS/EHS consultant. Three HS/EHS studies were identified to be undertaken by the research team.

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

- Building research capacity in the USVI human services system
- Academic-agency and community partnership guided by CBPR principles
- Partners' participation in environmental scan
- Partners engaged in the generation of priority issues to conduct research based on findings of the environmental scan presented at quarterly Partnership meetings and special meetings called to focus specifically on in-depth review of key findings and engagement in issue prioritization.
- Translation of prioritized issues to researchable questions
- Solidifying Partner engagement/participation/contributions in research
- CBPR framework effective for achieving partnership goal to increase research capacity focused on examining human services programs in the USVI.

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