



The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

Healthy Community Center Impact Report

Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1 - June 30)



**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER



History: How we got here

The Healthy Community Center was born from the vision of taking practical health resources directly into neighborhoods.

- **2018-2020:** Community conversations and health data revealed a need for local access to wellness, nutrition and preventive health services on Columbus' Near East Side.
- **2021:** Planning began between The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and local leaders, eventually expanding to include local commissions and neighborhood residents as well. The former Columbus Metropolitan Library Martin Luther King Jr. branch was selected as the future site.
- **2022-2023:** Renovation of the space took place. A commercial teaching kitchen, café, garden area, innovation room and community meeting rooms were built to support hands-on, accessible programs.
- **Spring 2024:** The Healthy Community Center officially opened its doors to the public.
- **Today:** We host weekly cooking classes, wellness programs and community events, and operate a café vendor incubator – all aimed toward a goal of empowering people to lead healthier lives.

“I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.





“On a personal note, stewarding this project has been a profound honor. Like so many others, this community helped shape who I am. This was a place of early learning, shared experiences and belonging. To now help carry forward its legacy – reimagined as a center for health and wellness – is both humbling and motivating”.

—Joshua J. Joseph, MD, MPH

In our first year alone, the Healthy Community Center welcomed thousands of participants through cooking and nutrition education, fitness and wellness classes, youth and senior programming, mental health workshops, chronic disease education, financial literacy sessions and community-led initiatives. From line dancing and yoga to Culinary Medicine and Cooking Matters for Diabetes, the center has become a place where evidence-based health education meets lived experience, cultural tradition and joy. We’re proud not only of the number of people served, but of the trust built, the partnerships strengthened and the consistency with which the center shows up for the community.

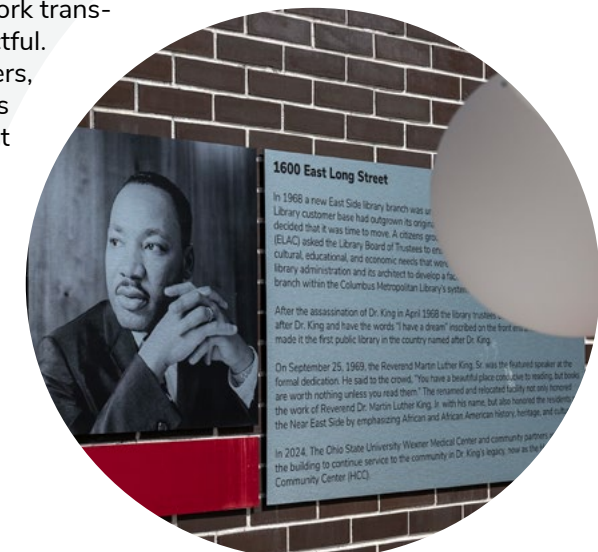
This work would not be possible without an extraordinary collective effort. I am deeply grateful to the community members who shared their voices, time and expertise throughout years of engagement sessions, planning meetings and program development. Their leadership ensured that the Healthy Community Center reflects the Near East Side’s history, resilience and future.

I extend my sincere thanks to our dedicated staff and instructors, whose passion, creativity and commitment bring the center to life each day. Your work transforms ideas into action and makes this space welcoming and impactful. I’m equally thankful to our academic colleagues, government partners, industry sponsors and philanthropic supporters who believed in this vision and invested in its success. Together, you demonstrated what is possible when institutions align resources with community priorities.

This first annual Impact Report marks an important milestone, but it is only the beginning. The Healthy Community Center stands as a testament to what can be achieved through partnership, shared vision and audacious belief. I’m proud of what we have built together, grateful for everyone who made it possible and inspired by what lies ahead as we continue advancing health, dignity and opportunity – together.

With gratitude and pride,

Joshua J. Joseph, MD, MPH
 Medical Director, Healthy Community Center
 The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center



When I walk through the doors of the Healthy Community Center, I often think about what once stood here and what it meant. This building has long been a place of learning, connection and possibility. For generations, it served as the Martin Luther King Jr. Branch Library, the first public library in the nation to bear Dr. King’s name. It was a space where knowledge was shared, curiosity was nurtured and community was built. Today, that same spirit lives on, transformed but deeply rooted in a new form that’s dedicated to health, wellness and opportunity.

The Healthy Community Center was born from a simple but powerful idea: health does not begin in hospitals alone, but in neighborhoods, kitchens, classrooms, gardens and shared spaces. Beginning in 2018, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center partnered with Near East Side residents, community leaders and local organizations to listen, learn and co-design a center that reflected the priorities, strengths and aspirations of the community itself. This was not a project built for the community – it was built with the community.

Our approach was guided by a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech – words that have shaped both our decisions and our sense of responsibility: “I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.” His vision challenged us to think expansively about health – not as the absence of disease, but as nourishment of the whole person. It also called us to action: to create a place where those ideals could be practiced every day.

Through a deliberate academic–community–government–industry partnership model, we transformed this historic space into a vibrant, nearly 9,000-square-foot center that now includes a teaching kitchen, a healthy café and vendor incubator, wellness studios, community meeting rooms, a garden and innovation spaces. Every element of the building – and every program within it – reflects community input and shared ownership.



Executive summary

- The Healthy Community Center's nearly 8,900 square feet of space is focused on practical health education, wellness and community connection. Located on Columbus' Near East Side, the center brings together local residents and partners to provide cooking and nutrition classes, fitness and wellness programs and small business incubator.
- We're committed to building a healthier, more connected community for years to come. This report outlines our work in our first year, showing what we offered, how many people participated and what we achieved. It also provides a look ahead at our future plans.
- Since opening, the center has welcomed thousands of people for hands-on classes, events and health-related programs. From learning to cook meals that support diabetes management, to attending monthly health talks or supporting a café owner through our business incubator, every activity is built to meet everyday needs.
- The Healthy Community Center is proud to continue growing and supporting the community with useful and engaging programs.

Meet the Healthy Community Center team



Joshua Joseph, MD, MPH
Medical director

Dr. Joseph is recognized nationally for his work on academic, community, government and industry partnerships to advance health through community-based interventions. He uses his scientific and community engagement expertise to lead the Healthy Community Center. The work of Dr. Joseph and his ACCELERATE Research Group in the Ohio State Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism within the Department of Internal Medicine has been featured nationally and internationally.



Laura Robertson-Boyd
Senior program coordinator

Chef Laura brings a wealth of experience in culinary and nutrition education to her role, where she leads the Demonstration Kitchen with passion and expertise. Each week, she hosts engaging Lunch and Learn sessions, providing practical cooking skills, nutrition tips and healthy recipes that inspire our community to eat well and live better.



Neale Davis
Senior program coordinator

Neale is fueled by a drive for transformative change. Overseeing wellness programming at the Healthy Community Center, he's honed expertise in offering programs to enhance mental, emotional and physical well-being. Neale is committed to elevating community health and wellness.



Tiffany Reeves
Operations administrator

Tiffany keeps the heartbeat of the Healthy Community Center running strong. She's the mastermind behind coordinating all the administrative and operational magic, overseeing and managing our reservation and registration system to keep everything flowing smoothly at the center.



CJ Shooner
Program specialist

CJ is a recent graduate of The Ohio State University. Formerly an AmeriCorps member, CJ runs the garden and sustainability programming at the center, maintaining a beautiful green space and engaging people's interest in local Ohio plants. They also offer a friendly face to everyone who enters and help members enroll in courses between sessions.

Directors



Tisha Reid
Director

As the new director, Tisha will help the center team continue to develop and expand a full range of services for better health and wellness on the Near East Side. Before coming to Ohio State in the winter of 2025, Tisha was the Associate Director of Health Transformation Initiatives for Purdue University's Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering. In this role, she served as the Principal Investigator on a 10-million-dollar CDC project and oversaw the daily organizational management of quality health initiatives for systems/policy change across the state of Indiana.



Javonte McDonald, MBA
Founding director

Starting in AmeriCorps and City Year, Javonte has a passion for community outreach and making health care more accessible. This passion for others continued when he came to Columbus with the goal of improving health issues with nutrition and fitness education, first at the Ward YMCA and then by working with Ohio State to open the Healthy Community Center. Javonte is now the director of Workforce Development for the state of Maryland, but his mark will forever remain on the Healthy Community Center.



Liza Paul, MSSA, LISW-S
Interim director

Transitioning from hospice social worker to clinical care coordinator, Liza knows hospitals inside and out. As senior director and administrative officer for the Office of Health Equity at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center, she's overseen a group of passionate people who've started initiatives such as free clinics, tree-planting activities in low-greenspace areas of Columbus and health screenings for at-risk populations. As interim director of the Healthy Community Center, Liza was instrumental for helping the center continue its positive momentum.

Ohio State Wexner Medical executive leadership

Andrew Thomas, MD, MBA, FACP

Robert F. Wolfe and Edgar T. Wolfe Foundation Chief Clinical Officer

Chyke Doubeni, MD, MPH

Chief Health Equity Officer

Year-one goals

Program participation and offerings

- Average six participants per class
- Reach 250 total registrations
- Offer at least 10 classes or programs per session
- Host two major community events (with 100+ attendees each)
- Hold two “Community Conversations”



Operations and systems

- Launch and test new registration software
- Track attendance rates, participant feedback and ZIP code engagement
- Reach residents in 43203 and 43205 ZIP codes

Health and engagement focus

- Implement wellness, nutrition, sustainability and mental health programs across sessions
 - Support the launch of the Healthy Café incubator
 - Establish and maintain the community garden



Measuring success

Total individual engagements for FY25: 14,210

109 community room reservations

4,321 special event participants

193 youth program attendees

115 senior program attendees

1,802 cooking class participants

5,657 fitness and physical wellness participants



Key focus areas



Senior programming

The Senior Series is a monthly workshop for people over the age of 45 to learn how to cope with different aspects of aging.

- Total workshops: **13**
- Total community participants: **115**
- Average attendance per class: approximately **8**

Educators from Ohio State University Extension included:

Jenny Lobb

- Healthy Living for Brain and Body
- Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's
- Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia

Loretta Sweeney

- Stroke Awareness
- Fraud Prevention

- Living with Arthritis
- Organizing Papers and Reports
- Clearing the Clutter
- Dealing with Stress and Depression During the Holidays
- WITS Workout
- Clearing the Clutter, Part Two

Kim Wilson-Lawson

Executive director of the African American Alzheimer's and Wellness Association

- Understanding Dementia
- Poison in Your Pantry

Golden Buckeye Center for Dementia Caregiving

- Healthy Living for Brain and Body

Youth programs

Total number of youth participants: **193**

- **150** in cooking classes
- **43** in fitness classes

Mansion Day collaboration – A healthy cooking class series for fourth and fifth grade students of Mansion Day School. Weekly dance classes for Mansion Day elementary-age students.

Open preteen and teen dance classes – Ohio State dance majors teach a variety of dance styles with age-appropriate difficulty, with one class for 12- to 14-year-olds, the other for 13- to 17-year-olds.

East High School cooking classes – Quarterly hands-on classes for the Tiger Wellness Club, as well as a cooking demonstration for health, science and technology students.

YMCA cooking classes – Weekly hands-on classes for youth summer camp participants.



Fitness and physical wellness

Total participants: **5,657**

Line dancing

- Total participants: **1,670**
- Average class size: **41**

Pilates

- Total participants: **1,334**
- Average class size: **18**

Additional classes offered:

- Cardio drumming
- Zumba
- Music and movement
- Yoga
- Fitness bootcamp
- Strong, active and fit
- Tai chi
- Island Pulse Soca



Wellness Wednesdays

Workshops and special programs to help people improve their health awareness.

Overall attendance for Wellness Wednesday events: **352**

Recent sessions included:

Healing Communities One Conversation at a Time

Speakers:

- Darreon Greer Sr., PhD, clinical therapist
- Jeremy Grant, PhD, psychology instructor
- Kassidie Harmon, MS, therapist

Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV Testing

- Presenters from Central Outreach Wellness Center

Breast Cancer Awareness

Speakers:

- Bridget Oppong, MD
- Nseobong Ntukidem, MD
- Rachel Crowder, MS, public advocate

Domestic Violence Awareness

Speakers:

- Chaunte Mills from Selah Retreat
- Officer Carney from the Columbus Division of Police, felony domestic violence

Diabetes Awareness

Speakers:

- Joshua Joseph, MD, MPH
- Christopher Westrick, PharmD, MPH, BCACP
- Jenny Shrodes, RD, LD, CDCES
- Jeremy Grant, PhD
- Nensah McCabe, RN
- Julia Shero, PhD
- Sayoko Moroi, MD, PhD

Organ Donation

Speaker: Chris Brown, MD

Advocacy in Health Care

Speakers:

- Anna Doubeni, MD
- Kamilah Dixon, MD
- Shawn Cox, RN
- LaTasha Parks, MSN, BSN, nurse manager
- Shawn Monk, RN
- Beverly Tate-Jackson, director of Patient Experience at Ohio State East Hospital

Successful Aging

Speakers:

- Liz Weinandy, MPH, RDN, LD, nutritionist
- Jeremy Grant, PhD, Ohio State Department of Psychology instructor
- Mary Curry, fitness trainer

Kidney Health

Speakers:

- Chris Brown, MD
- Kwame Lartey, clinical researcher

Blood Health

Speakers:

- Babatunde Oriowo, MBBS
- Chastity Washington, MPH, CHES, executive director of the Center for Cancer Health Equity at the OSUCCC – James
- Cameron Stauffer, RDN, LD

Mind Matters: A Mental Health Awareness Event

Speakers:

- Jeremy Grant, PhD, Ohio State Department of Psychology instructor
- Tony King, PhD, psychotherapist
- Shekyra DeCree, PhD, psychotherapist
- Jason Williams, LSW
- Kassidie Harmon, MS, therapist

First-Time Homeownership

Speaker: Shawn O’Flynn, mortgage sales manager



Culinary medicine

Total number of cooking class participants: **1,802**



Three key pillars:

Food is Medicine

- Weekly cooking and nutrition classes
- Focus on healthy cooking to prevent or manage diet-related disease
- Empowering community members to cook healthy meals at home on a budget

Health Meets Food

- Evidence-based curriculum for medical students, professionals and community members
- Developed in partnership with Columbus Public Health's Ryan White Program to deliver six weekly classes for the community
- Ohio State College of Medicine students developed a Culinary Medicine Advanced Competency and received approval to launch the program in July 2025

Cooking Matters for Diabetes

- Evidence-based curriculum for people living with diabetes
- Addresses food insecurity and food access to improve health



Mental wellness

Recognizing the connection between mental and physical health, the Healthy Community Center offers a range of classes and activities to build resiliency and boost mental wellness.

Mindfulness With Diane Strauser Meditation

This three-class series with no experience necessary explored meditation in a variety of ways – when seated in chairs, on the floor, while walking or reflecting on different readings – to help bring participants peace to their emotions and relationships.

Mind Matters: A Mental Health Awareness Event

This interactive session explored how mental health needs change over time and provided practical strategies to manage stress and emotional well-being to help people break the stigma, support one another and prioritize our mental health together.

Tai Chi — Balance with Andi Sie

This transformative tai chi class was designed to enhance inner strength, balance, flexibility and overall well-being. Offering options to practice seated or standing, each session builds on the previous.

Digging In: Community Garden Series

Monthly workshops held March through September promotes health, wellness and sustainability through gardening and farm-to-table practices. Utilizing raised garden bed at the Healthy Community Center, participants engage in hands-on activities and learn techniques suited to the region's growing season.

Dealing with Stress and Depression During the Holidays

Recognizing the inherent stress that can happen during the holidays, this class taught seniors effective strategies for managing the season and finding more joy.

Lunch and Learns, a center-led cooking series

- Weekly cooking demonstrations that teach how to prevent or manage diet-related chronic diseases with simple, affordable, healthy recipes and cooking techniques.
- Taught by Chef Laura Robertson-Boyd with assistance from student interns from The Ohio State University Masters in Dietetics and Nutrition program.
- 470 attendees, with 14 average per class.

Community-led nutrition programs

Dining in the Diaspora

- Six weekly classes taught by community leader and Bronzeville Growers Market founder Julialynne Walker.
- 133 total attendees, with 22 average per class.



Meal Prepping 101

- Three weekly, hands-on cooking classes taught by JD Flournoy
- Each week, community participants focused on different aspects of meal prep to build skills and confidence for planning and preparing budget-friendly, healthy meals at home.
- 40 total attendees, with 13 average per class.





Community feedback: What our guests are saying

Fitness class participants

“I always leave class feeling **positive** and **empowered**.”

“I feel **stronger**! I’m able to do things that I couldn’t do before class.”

“I lost ten pounds and **feel great!**”

Cooking class participants

“Love the classes and programs that are presented – keep **healing** our community.”

“These classes **motivate** me to give more thought to my grocery shopping and think **creatively** about my recipes and ingredients.”

“I showed off all the meals I have **learned to cook** to my family. It baffled them! **Thank you** so much.”

External partner programs

Health Literacy – Sponsored by Genentech

- **Health and Wellness: A Journey Through Time** – An expert panel and inclusive community conversation on the resiliency and health challenges that exist in Black and other communities; 50 attendees
- **Battle of the Bowls** – A cooking competition focused on building awareness of food allergies; 85 attendees

Financial Literacy – Sponsored by Fifth Third Bank

- **Wellness Wednesdays: First-time Home Buying** – The first of four financial literacy workshops; 24 attendees

Sarah Ross Soter Women’s Health Week

- **Navigating Menopause: Health, Wellness and You** – A community conversation in partnership with The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center; 30 attendees

The Healthy Community Center has been a partnership since the beginning

We're grateful to our local neighborhood residents, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, community sponsors and our staff and instructors.



Healthy Community Center instructors

- Andie Sie, Tai Chi
- Autumn Francisco, Period Flow Yoga
- Diane Strausser, Meditation
- JD Flournoy, chef
- Jasmine Jones, Pilates and Yoyalates
- Jo Goldman, chef
- Jovita Bowman, Zumba
- Julialynne Walker, Dining in the Diaspora
- Malik Willoughby, Yoga
- Mary Curry, Strong, Active and Fit
- Nancy Beasley, Music and Movement
- Patricia Slade, Line Dancing
- Pickett Sisters, Line Dancing
- Sunny B, chef
- Syreeta Skipper, Cardio Drumming
- Tim McDermott, Digging in: Community gardening series
- Wallisha Whipple, chef
- Carolyn Dimond, Youth cooking class instructor
- Julie Van De Mark, Youth cooking class instructor

The Ohio State University partners and student engagement

The Ohio State University College of Medicine

15 medical students contributed **270** volunteer hours.

The Ohio State University Extension AmeriCorps Public Health Program

Three AmeriCorps volunteers contributed **500+** hours.

The Ohio State University College of Nursing

Golden Buckeye Center for Dementia Caregiving

The Ohio State University Health and Rehabilitation Sciences

Ten interns from the Master in Dietetics and Nutrition Program contributed **1,200** intern hours.

The Ohio State University College of Arts and Sciences

The CHILL Lab

Columbus State Community College

Two interns from the Hospitality Management Department Dietetic Technician Program contributed **56** intern hours.

Community partners

Abbott Labs	Columbus Urban League	Local Matters	Transformation
African American Alzheimer Wellness Association	COSI—Center of Science and Industry	LSS Choices	Pressure MD
African American Male Wellness Agency	Donate Life America	Mahogany Media Group	Safe at Home
American Heart Association	East High School	Mansion Day School	See Brilliance
BHE Foundation	Eastgate Elementary School	MBUBE Institute	Selah Retreat
Black Health Lit	Ella	Metamorphosis, Counseling and Consulting	STAR - Stress, Trauma and Resilience
Bronzeville Food Co-Op	Faith Thomas Foundation	Mid-Ohio Food Collective	The Columbus Near East Area Commission
Bronzeville Growers Market	FoodLeads	Mount Carmel Healthy Living Center	The YMCA
Bronzeville Rising	Franklin County Board of Commissioners' Office Of Aging	National Center for Urban Solutions	Too Good Eats
CareSource	Franklin County Public Health	National Optometric Association	Urban Aging Residents Coalition
Central Outreach	Growing And Growth Collective	Novo Nordisk	Urban One TV
Charlie Health	Health Impact Ohio	Ohio Commission on Minority Health	Value City Furniture
City of Columbus Recreation and Parks	Healthy Families America	Ohio Domestic Violence Network	Versiti Blood Center of Ohio
Columbus City Schools	Legacy Pointe At Poindexter	OhioHealth SARNCO	VSP Vision Care
Columbus Metropolitan Library	Local Food Action Plan for City Of Columbus and Franklin County, Ohio	PACT - Partners Achieving Community	



Looking ahead

We're already planning new programs and partnerships to keep local residents engaged, involved and empowered.

Coming soon:

Cooking Matters for Diabetes – Hands-on classes focused on managing diabetes through food and meal planning

Culinary medicine series – Classes designed in partnership with health care professionals to combine nutrition education with clinical insights

Youth programming growth – More classes for kids and teens, including cooking, dance and wellness activities

New community partnerships – Collaborations with schools, health care providers and local organizations to increase reach and resources

Volunteer program launch – A new system to engage residents in supporting events, classes and garden upkeep



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