

# Partnership advances nutrition in maternal and child health

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*Photos of Tulane Maternal and Child Health Nutrition Trainees from Cohort 1: Jacqueline Futch, MPH, Miguel Angel Lopez, MPH, RD, Taryn Smith, MPH, Erin Morini, MPH and Photos of Trainees from Cohort 2 (from Left to Right, Top to Bottom): Avni Gupta, Brandi Stein, RD, Jaleh Kermani, Michaeline Anglemire, and Kamber LeBlanc*

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Nutrition is vital to the healthy development and well-being of infants, children, youth, and adults, including those with special health care needs. Partnerships between state Title V programs and academic institutions offer unique opportunities to draw from respective strengths and expertise to promote the nutritional well-being of maternal and child (MCH) populations across the lifespan. This is the story of the Title V program joining forces with the [Tulane Nutrition](#) Leadership Training

Program to advance nutrition outcomes in Louisiana.

In 2018, the Bureau of Family Health within the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) participated in the [Children's Healthy Weight Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network \(CHW-COIIIN\)](#) on a project to support further integration of innovative nutrition strategies into the state's Title V (MCH) block grant. While working on this project, OPH learned that Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine had recently established an HRSA funded [MCH Nutrition Training program](#) and could provide technical assistance and expertise to advance their project.

OPH launched an academic-practice partnership between Louisiana Title V and the Tulane Nutrition Leadership Training Program to develop a 20-hour immersive collaborative with two purposes:

1. Improve integration of nutrition concepts into Title V programming, and
2. Provide MCH Nutrition Trainees practical, real-life public health experience within the state Title V agency.

Listen to Marci Brewer, MPH, Neonatal Initiatives Manager, Colleen McCullough, and Title V Program Coordinator describe this partnership in their [poster presentation](#) for the 2021 Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) Annual Meeting. In addition, ASPHN developed an [infographic](#) explaining the Louisiana Innovative Nutrition Integration project.

## **Trainee Activities**

Since Fall 2020, two cohorts of MCH Nutrition Trainees have rotated through the program. As part of the Title V 5-year Statewide Needs Assessment, Cohort 1 trainees investigated nutrition's role in reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes within Title V's populations. They also explored opportunities to integrate nutrition-focused strategies into Title V programming.

The trainees in Cohort 2 initiated a Bureau-wide conversation about food security by assessing Louisiana Title V staff's existing knowledge of food security. Informed by the assessment findings, students delivered a 20-minute educational presentation to staff. Key findings included:

- Louisiana Title V staff have varying degrees of knowledge about food security.



- Louisiana Title V staff recognize the importance of food security to MCH. They are interested in learning more about how they can address food insecurity issues in the populations they serve.
- There is a need for consistent nutrition messaging within Title V and Bureau of Family Health programming.

## **Next Steps**

With supplemental financial support received through the Children's Healthy Weight COIIN, the Title V team will consult with two nationally recognized subject matter experts (SMEs) to bolster the integration of trainees into Title V and assist with future cohort project planning. During Summer 2021, the Title V team will work with the SMEs and partners from Tulane University to:

- Reflect upon the essential findings and recommendations from both cohorts
- Develop options for practical, actionable Title V nutrition integration strategies
- Facilitate a discussion with program leads and decision-makers to determine which strategies to implement
- Determine the scope and focus of future cohort projects

The third cohort of MCH Nutrition Trainees will begin their Title V practical rotation in Fall 2021.

## **Reflections**

An important aspect of this collaboration is recognizing and valuing the trainees' expertise as nutrition professionals. On the Louisiana Title V end, this required humility and honesty about the limitations of their nutrition experience.

Trainees from Cohort 1 expressed the following about their experience:

"The Bureau of Family Health allowed us as students to exercise our professional skills and empowered us to be confident in our nutrition knowledge. We truly felt heard, respected, and trusted while being given the space to showcase our public health education and experiences we have had with the New Orleans community."

The work of both cohorts has increased visibility and understanding of the relevance of food insecurity in Title V programming. However, creating meaningful experiences for trainees requires capacity and structure. Louisiana Title V and MCH Nutrition

Trainees are co-creating that structure and capacity, making this a unique learning experience on both sides.