



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MEL & ENID ZUCKERMAN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Zuckerman Family Center for Prevention and Health Promotion

2025 IMPACT REPORT

IMPACT

The Zuckerman Family Center for Prevention & Health Promotion (ZFCPHP) at the Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health (MEZCOPH) at the University of Arizona (UA) continues to serve the Southern Arizona community through educational programs, outreach, and training. Our team is committed to sharing high-quality public health education and resources with our community partners, university students, and beyond. Our 2025 annual report highlights our program progress and student success as they relate to our community impact.

IMPORTANCE

Embodying the UA values of compassion and inclusion, the ZFCPHP creates and implements health promotion initiatives to support underserved communities in Southern Arizona. Our programs provide opportunities for community members and youth to learn about the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices in an encouraging environment with the goal of improving well-being. Additionally, our staff recruit, train, and mentor MEZCOPH and UA students through service-based learning and community engagement. ZFCPHP is committed to adapting outreach and programmatic efforts to align with community needs and reach diverse stakeholders.



Make a Gift to the ZFCPHP Collaboration Fund

PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

SUPPORTING YOUTH & FAMILIES

HEALTHY 2B ME SUMMER CAMP



The Healthy 2B Me (H2BM) Summer Camp was held at three local Tucson locations for its 13th summer, reaching nearly **80 children** in our community. We welcomed MEZCOPH undergraduate interns and a wonderful group of youth to Dietz K-8 School, the Pasqua Yaqui Boys & Girls Club, and the John Valenzuela Youth Center. We enjoyed the summer program with the help of the ZFCPHP staff and UA professionals that shared their public health knowledge. The campers always look forward to learning from MEZCOPH students. This summer our

undergraduate/graduate interns included: Kharen Morgan, Amanda Lo, Ella Holderness, Lam Tran, Ashley Bassham, Unique Blanco, Kena Jones, and Indiya Mason. If you or someone you know is looking for an interactive, fun internship please see our website for more information on opportunities with our Center including H2BM.



Make a Gift to H2BM

CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION

We are incredibly grateful for the support of the Marcus Family Obesity Prevention Project Endowment, in honor of Edith, Frank, Janet and Samuel. Dr. Marcus' legacy continues to make an impact on the children and families in the Tucson community. Collective efforts have continued to expand from your generous student scholarships awards to achieve a greater reach.

The Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative (COPI) has been fundamental to sustaining Dr. Marcus' mission to prevent childhood obesity for families in our community. With your continued support the COPI has continued to expand its efforts to reach and impact more underserved communities in Pima County.



Make a Gift to COPI

HEALTHY HABITS TUCSON (HHT)



Healthy Habits Tucson (HHT) promotes direct wellness activities for adolescent youth, MEZCOPH student interns, and senior volunteers. The intergenerational program was implemented to teach practical skills and health strategies suitable for adolescent youth. This collaborative model has helped to foster a mutual understanding, intergenerational respect, and the breakdown of age-related stereotypes. Senior volunteers serve as positive

role models, emphasizing the importance of maintaining optimal health and wellness at any age. These interactions benefit not only the children but also reinforce the seniors' own commitment to healthy living. The program offers a unique opportunity for intergenerational engagement by promoting physical activity, nutritious eating habits, and mental wellness. It also provides



older adults with meaningful social connections and a sense of purpose while enriching the lives of youth participants.

Together they cultivate a shared foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing. Twenty-four interactive lessons were delivered at the Roy Drachman Boys & Girls Clubhouse in South Tucson on Thursday afternoons. The sessions, designed for children ages 7 to 11, included a variety of engaging topics such as nutrition education on hydration, portion distortion, facts on fats, physical activity games, and mental health and mindful wellness practices.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS TUCSON (HST)



The Healthy Schools Tucson (HST) Program concluded its sixth year at Saints Peter and Paul Middle School (SPPS). The program has reached **1,730 middle school students** and delivered seventy-two lessons on childhood obesity curriculum content. The MEZCOPH student interns lead the charge in tackling childhood obesity and empowering students with the tools they need to live healthier lives. At the heart of the program is a focus on nutrition, physical activity, and wellness education, delivered through fun, interactive lessons. The Student Wellness Questionnaire has shown measurable success – students consistently demonstrate meaningful gains in knowledge and healthy behavior changes. From swapping out sugary drinks for water to adding fruits and veggies to their lunches, students are making smarter choices that support their long-term health. Each year teachers have reported noticeable shifts in student habits, including increased physical activity and a growing enthusiasm for making individual

healthy choices. Even more encouraging is the ripple effect into the home. Families are noticing and supporting these changes, with many expressing appreciation for the positive influence the program has had on their children's well-being. Through firsthand learning and a supportive approach, the HST Program helps build a foundation for a lifetime of wellness.

WILDCAT MARATHONERS



Wildcat Marathoners Walking Wednesdays wrapped up a successful program year at SPPS. The program included 1st through 8th grade students as they walked or ran laps on the school's track, working toward the goal of completing a half marathon distance of 13.1 miles. Each participant received a lanyard to track their progress, earning colorful "foot" tokens for every three miles completed. With **147 students** joining each week, the energy and enthusiasm was remarkable! Eleven students successfully completed the half marathon distance and were awarded the UA Wildcat Marathoners coveted Red Cape in recognition of their achievement. Students who are near the finish line will have the opportunity to earn their capes in 2026. In addition, students are encouraged to keep going—with the option to aim for a full marathon distance of 26.2 miles. We are proud of every SPPS Wildcat Marathoner who participated and look forward to even more milestones in 2026!



ZEN DEN



ZFCPHP and Activate Tucson are excited to share the expansion of another Zen Den at Drexel Elementary School in the Sunnyside School District this fall. Research has highlighted a clear connection between daily stressors and the body's stress response, emphasizing the critical role of preventing oxidative stress in reducing the risk of various diseases, particularly obesity. The community continues to share with us that children are stressed and need a place to relax their minds. Stress continues to be a major factor in childhood obesity prevention and child health wellness. According to the Rivera Elementary School evaluation, the first Zen Den has had a significant positive impact on the children's mental health. The sessions include guided meditation and are utilized by mainstream Autism students with their escort to give them some time to decompress from the classroom routine and/or as a sensory break.

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

SERVICE-BASED LEARNING: PUBLIC HEALTH FOR COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Through service-based learning, students explored wellness through our partnerships and collaboration with community leaders to address public health goals and gain insights into health equity and community wellness. Students also established relationships, developed health education skills, engaged in community-based activities, and completed presentations, readings, and assessments.

ST. JOHNS AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM



We are proud to continue our partnership with the wonderful St. John's Afterschool Program in South Tucson. As part of the HPS 497/597E Community Health and Wellness course, MEZCOPH students are encouraged to design and deliver weekly health-focused lessons to approximately forty children. Each session features engaging topics in nutrition, physical activity games, and social-emotional learning art projects. The children warmly welcome the MEZCOPH students each week with hugs and smiles, eagerly participating in firsthand art projects, high-energy games, and enjoying nutritious

snacks—all with great enthusiasm and joy! The teachers and faculty have shared how meaningful our partnership has been with their students. In the spring semester, Independent Study student Austin, created a snack time cookbook for future UA interns and students to use as a resource and to share with St. Johns school community.



ZFCPHP at Lapan College and Career Club



In August 2024, our center proudly began our partnership with the Lapan College and Career Club (LC3) in South Tucson, creating opportunities for ZFCPHP interns to engage in meaningful service grounded in mentorship, empowerment and supporting youth. Throughout the academic year, three undergraduate interns explored health promotion efforts at the local level by supporting after-school programs in pet therapy, art, soccer and gardening (El Jardín) for middle and high school youth. With staff guidance,

interns created a comprehensive End-of-the-Semester Report during Fall 2024, incorporating data from Lapan staff to better understand LC3's impact and future goals. Building on the momentum from the fall 2024, interns brought in new projects for the spring 2025 semester.

Ella Skov developed two wellness videos on the topics of sleep hygiene and stress management to support the emotional and mental well-being of Lapan students, providing valuable tools that can be used well beyond the semester. Ella developed skills in health communication by learning how to appropriately craft clear messages tailored to effectively engage and educate youth with actionable steps.

Jordan Lund created a team-building activity manual with soccer drills designed to strengthen communication, build rapport, and help students develop both social and athletic skills. This was a great opportunity for Jordan to learn how to keep youth engaged through structured play while promoting health and teamwork.

Holly Neiss contributed her creative energy to help us put together the Spring 2025 newsletter, highlighting our center's updates and accomplishments. Holly also mentored a Lapan student who was initially shy and reserved, gradually building trust and gently encouraging participation in group activities. Through this experience, Holly strengthened her skills in patience, active listening, and inclusive engagement.

During the fall semester, interns received training in the Nurtured Heart Approach® to best support the youth at Lapan. With one intern sharing that by utilizing the Nurtured Heart Approach in the soccer field, it helped youth gain confidence in their performance which in turn created positive interactions with teammates. One Lapan parent even took the time to praise one of the interns for helping their child build their self-esteem, creating a rewarding experience.

Interns reported significant professional growth in mentorship, communication, advocacy, adaptability, self-confidence, cultural competency and patience, skills that will serve them in their future careers. Additionally, 100% of interns reported confidence in key public health practices,



including assessing needs and resources, planning and evaluating health promotion and wellness activities and outcomes and collaborating with community partners. The skills and experience gained through this internship have supported our interns in pursuing graduate studies in counseling and entering the medical sales workforce.

This partnership has demonstrated to be fruitful in advancing community health promotion, youth development and professional growth for ZFCPPH interns. As we enter a new academic year, we remain committed to building this strong foundation continuing to empower youth and interns to thrive academically, professionally, and personally.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND TRAINING

The Marcus Family Obesity Prevention Project Scholarship

Thank you for the generous Marcus Family Obesity Prevention Project Scholarship. Your contribution made a meaningful difference in the lives of UA MEZCOPH students, Alexa, Karla, and Ryan. Inspired by your support, they thrived in their work with dedication, creativity, and a powerful sense of purpose. Thanks to your impact, these students were empowered to deliver high-quality, engaging obesity prevention health education content to the children at Saints Peter and Paul School. Their commitment and passion not only enriched the program but also left a lasting impact on the students they served.



Our 2025 Marcus Family Obesity Prevention Program Scholarship Recipients!

Samantha Anderson

Program: Healthy Schools Tucson

Fun fact: A fun fact about me is that I have been to the Kentucky Derby 11 times!

Future Goals: My goal in public health is to make a lasting, positive impact on people's lives through healthcare. I plan to pursue my master's in nursing, where I hope to be a light for others and bring health, hope, and comfort during some of life's most vulnerable moments. I'm excited to apply everything I've learned at the University of Arizona and through the Zuckerman Family Center to become the best public health professional I can be.



Sara Jalali

Program: Healthy Schools Tucson

Fun fact: I know Farsi, Turkish, French, and some Spanish

Future Goals: My goal in public health is to work towards creating an equitable healthcare system that addresses the health needs of all people.

Caroline Smith

Program: ZFCPPH at LC3 - Soccer Club

Fun fact: I have read over 50 books this year and am an avid reader!

Future Goals: My goal in public health is to not only promote health and wellness in my community, but to also make a difference and make personal connections with the people I am working with and the community I am serving.



STUDENT TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES TO PROGRESS UNDERGRADUATE/GRADUATE PROFESSIONALS (STEP-UP) SUMMER RESEARCH PROGRAM (NCI 5R25CA275753-03)

Summer 2025 marked year 2 of The Student Transformative Research Experience to Progress Undergraduate/Graduate Professionals (STEP-UP) summer research program. Led by Dr. Jennifer Bea and Dr. David Garcia, STEP-UP aims to provide direct research experience in cancer prevention and control to upper-level undergraduate and master’s level graduate students. This program was adapted from the similarly named R25 funded by the NCI from 2017-2023 (R25CA217725) led by Drs. Bea and Thomson which trained eighty-eight students across the 5-year cycle. The new grant, funded in July of 2023, aims to recruit a total of one hundred students from institutions across the nation.

In 2024, STEP-UP welcomed nineteen students from five nationwide institutions to Tucson to participate in the summer mentored research program. In 2025, the cohort included twenty students from nine nationwide institutions (**Figure 1**) and three returning STEP-UP trainees from the 2024 cohort to serve as near-peer mentors.

- University of Arizona
- Arizona State University
- Institutions Outside of Arizona

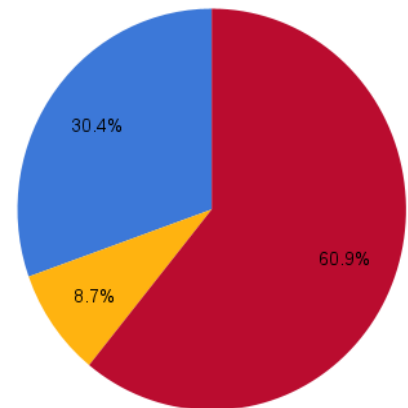


Figure 1. STEP-UP Trainee Home Institution

STEP-UP collaborates closely with students to prepare them for successful careers in cancer prevention and control (CPC) science, whether they want to work in a lab, at the bedside, or in the community. Prior to starting the program, students are matched with a mentor from nearly 40 STEP-UP mentors based on their research interests. During their 10-week experience, student trainees are invited to view CPC science through many lenses, including: participation in ongoing research studies through their mentor’s lab, weekly practice in literature review through a journal club, dissemination of scientific findings through abstracts and presentations, personal cancer prevention activities, community outreach, and career exploration with University of Arizona faculty working in cancer research. Evaluations show that the curriculum, meant to support student professional growth, has a positive impact on the students. As one student said:

“It was truly incredible- it built independent research abilities while being collaborative and encouraging interprofessional work.”

STEP-UP's expectation is that the integrated, innovative, multidisciplinary educational experience in CPC research also strengthens self-efficacy, skills retention, and intrinsic motivation to become a CPC scientist. Students provided feedback through formative and summative evaluations which were delightfully positive. In 2024, 94% rated being satisfied or very satisfied with the overall program.

"The program was structured really well, professional setting, but was fun at the same time."

For each of the following, $\geq 94\%$ of students increased confidence in understanding how to read a scientific paper, lead a journal club, and formulate research questions. The career exploration series, speaking with a variety of CPC Scientists, was rated as the most informative aspect of the summer experience, which is exemplified by the following quote:

"[I liked] listening to the scientists and hearing their stories and what they work on. This helped me a lot with making decisions [about] my future."

Lastly, on a scale of 1-10, the cohort reported a 9.4 for the likelihood that they would integrate learnings from the program into their future careers.

Highlights were being able to: draw their own conclusions from literature reviews, identify community resources, perform community outreach activities, integrate lifestyle behavior information into clinical practice, disseminate research findings via professional presentations. Similar evaluations have been recently completed for the Summer 2025 cohort and data are forthcoming.

Importantly, STEP-UP recently received the year 3 award and expects to continue mentoring the next generation of CPC scientists through 2028. The STEP-UP team meets with the Internal and External Advisory Committees semi-annually and annually, respectively, to discuss opportunities for continued enhancement of the program activities and outcomes. We look forward to our future cohorts and their academic and career success.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The ZFCPHP team is dedicated to supporting our community by offering wellness resources and adapting content as public health changes in our society. We offer many online resources for remote education, and our new website will highlight these resources and our work in the Tucson community.

Bear Down for Wellness



Lapan College & Career Club Yoga for Youth Field Trip

The ZFCPHP, Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine (AWCIM), Global Health Institute - Art for Health & Wellness Initiative, and Lapan College and Career Club came together for a day focused on movement and wellness. Lapan high school students started their day with a health and wellness talk with Dr. Stephen Dahmer from the AWCIM, learned about the medicinal properties of plants in the UA community garden, participated in yoga, enjoyed a chia seed pudding snack, toured the public health lab, connected with Dr. Garcia over lunch, and ended the day with a Q&A session with UA interns and Lapan UA students.



ARTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Yunjia Yang, PhD, is a dance artist and wellness scholar dedicated to exploring the role of dance and physical activities in health promotion and disease prevention across diverse populations. Her research focuses on healthy aging and dementia prevention. With over a decade of experience, Dr. Yang has been teaching dance, Tai Chi, and yoga since 2009 in universities, studios, and private settings. She currently teaches GHI 495/595 Creative Wellness: The Role of Arts in Public Health, a course that examines the intersection of the arts and well-being. Beyond her expertise in movement-based practices, Dr. Yang is also a skilled Chinese calligrapher.

Arts for Health and Wellness Initiatives integrate various forms of artistic expression, such as visual arts, music, theater, creative writing, and artistic movements—to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These programs recognize the therapeutic benefits of engaging with the arts, including reducing stress, improving mood, enhancing cognition, promoting physical function, and fostering social connections across the University of Arizona campus and the greater Tucson community.

OUR PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENTS

Public Health students are an integral part of the ZFCPHP, and we strive to create unique academic and training experiences for the next generation of public health professionals. Graduate level and Honor students currently working with ZFCPHP include:

- **Kharen Morgan**, MPH Epidemiology
- **Daniela Valdez**, MPH
- **Victoria Diaz**, MPH
- **Annika Giphart**, Honors Student

ZFCPHP Website

- **Website:** <https://zfcphp.arizona.edu/>

