



Brooklyn Communities Collaborative  
**2021 Annual Report**

# Letter from the Executive Director

## Message from Shari Suchoff, Executive Director:

I am happy to share BCC's first Annual Report, highlighting our work throughout this challenging yet rewarding year. BCC launched in 2019 as a community-led, anchor institution-supported effort to improve health and wealth in Brooklyn. Building on years of collaborative work, BCC is driven by community voice, guided by ongoing participatory action research that sets a stage for residents to drive change in their own communities. Two years later, we are thrilled to continue our work to improve health and wealth in Brooklyn alongside our growing network of partners: CBOs, health and social service providers, educators, activists, labor organizations, elected officials, and others.

In this report, you'll find a summary of our efforts to create a Brooklyn where all communities are healthy, sound, culturally vibrant, and civically engaged, including:

- Our first-ever 'Rapid PAR,' surveying more than 1,600 Brooklynites about COVID-19 in an effort to drive testing and vaccination efforts
- A commitment of \$4.1 million to 46 community-based projects meeting the complex resource, testing, and care needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic
- Formation of the Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub, a health-focused workforce and enterprise ecosystem driving investment in the physical, economic, social and cultural wellbeing of Brooklyn communities

The work outlined in this report would not be possible without our community partners, Board of Directors, committee members, and exceptional staff. I would like to personally thank you all for your commitment, dedication and support throughout the past year. I look forward to continuing our work together in 2022 and beyond.

In partnership,

Shari Suchoff

Executive Director, Brooklyn Communities Collaborative

# About Us

**B**rooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC) convenes and supports health, education, and labor organizations; community-based organizations (CBOs); economic development corporations; government; and advocacy groups to work together to improve health and wealth of Brooklyn residents.

Through these partnerships, BCC advances an anchor mission approach, calling on large institutions, such as universities and hospitals, to fully harness their economic power through hiring, purchasing, and investing to benefit the long-term health and wealth of the local communities in which they are rooted.

BCC's work is focused on four interrelated priorities that emerged from close collaboration with community members as well as a series of Participatory Action Research (PAR) efforts in neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn. These priorities include:

**Homes for Health** is a public-private effort to expand housing stability as the foundation for health and well-being. BCC helps coordinate major City and State investments in planned supportive and affordable housing.

**Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub** strengthens economic democracy and education to build health and wealth through workforce training, education programs, and incubation of worker-owned and Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE) to supply anchor institutions while building a citizen share.

**Caring Communities** provides coordinated care management to connect vulnerable Brooklynites to essential services.

**Strong Communities Fund** provides flexible funds and capacity building to strengthen CBOs, supporting community-driven interventions that address social determinants of health, thereby strengthening individuals and communities and improving economic conditions that make people especially vulnerable during times of crisis.

# Addressing COVID-19

Communities in Brooklyn continue to be severely affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Predominately Black and Brown neighborhoods in Brooklyn have experienced disproportionate health outcomes as a result of decades of systemic discrimination and under-investment in community infrastructure. Many of the social determinants of health, such as access to healthy food, a living wage, and adequate housing have long been neglected in Brooklyn's most vulnerable neighborhoods. In the case of COVID-19, long-running structural and institutional racism in healthcare led to community mistrust of COVID-19 vaccines, further complicating efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Immediately after the onset of the pandemic in 2020, BCC launched the Strong Communities Fund to provide needed financial resources directly to CBOs to support their crucial work serving community residents. BCC expanded this important work in 2021 through:

- COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Participatory Action Research (PAR), community research conducted by youth researchers and empowering them to learn more about the barriers Brooklynites faced to COVID-19 testing and vaccination, as well as providing much needed up-to-the minute data to healthcare leaders and others about community perceptions of the virus, testing and vaccination

- A Testing Provider Partnership with Community Care of Brooklyn (CCB) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH), which supported CBOs with long-standing relationships in Brooklyn to provide targeted COVID-19 testing and vaccination outreach
- The Strong Communities Fund, which supported CBOs in their crisis response to community needs through funding and strategic support

Each of these components is described next in further detail.

# COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination Participatory Action Research

To learn more about the barriers to COVID-19 testing and vaccination and the most effective way to disseminate information to the community, BCC activated our network of Wellness Empowerment for Brooklyn (WEB) Participatory Action Research (PAR) youth researchers.

From January 27 to February 1, 2021, 22 WEB researchers surveyed more than 1,600 Brooklynites aged 16 or older, asking about their experiences and perspectives relating to COVID-19 testing and vaccination. The seven-question survey was designed with input from the community, and researchers surveyed their social networks, peers, and family members living in Brooklyn. The majority of respondents were younger than 25 years old (58%), Black/African American (40%), and from the neighborhoods of Sunset Park, Flatbush, Flatlands, Borough Park, and Canarsie.



After analyzing the survey data, researchers found several consistent themes. First, most Brooklyn residents who had not been tested for COVID-19 had not done so because they had not felt sick, but planned to be vaccinated when eligible. Second, respondents who did not want to get the vaccine or were unsure about getting it, cited concerns about side effects as the primary cause of their hesitation. Third, the most trusted sources of information were doctors and medical professionals, followed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and NYC DOHMH.

The full COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination PAR Report can be found [HERE](#).

# Testing Provider Partnership



**B**uilding on the findings of the COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination PAR, BCC partnered with Community Care of Brooklyn on NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) Testing Provider Partnership (TPP) program to educate Brooklynites about COVID-19 testing and vaccination through trusted CBOs.

Funded partners include the Arab American Family Support Center, AIRnyc, Bay Ridge Center, BMS Family Health and Wellness Centers, Brooklyn Free Clinic, Brooklyn Perinatal Network, CAMBA, Code Foundation, Chinese-American Planning Council, Caribbean Women's Health Association, Elite Learners, Haitian-American Community Coalition, Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island, and New Heights. Over the course of the program, these organizations successfully:

- Conducted vaccine outreach to tens of thousands of Brooklynites
- Supported and sponsored over 100 community events (virtual and in-person) to encourage testing and vaccination
- Assisted over 1,000 Brooklynites in scheduling vaccine appointments

# Strong Communities Fund

*"Thanks to the support from BCC, we've been able to support even more students than we expected in Brooklyn this school year," said Hana Seligman, Chief Operating Officer and Co-Founder, First Tech Fund. "Students have received help on personal statements for college, enrichment programs, and have been accepted to prestigious scholarship programs, transforming the trajectory of their lives."*

The Strong Communities Fund (SCF) launched in April 2020 with an initial \$3 million investment to meet immediate needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing financial and technical support to 44 projects, SCF sponsored health and social services, youth services, digital resources, food security, and census work, positively affecting tens of thousands of Brooklyn residents and supporting organizations in shifting their operations to meet the changing needs of the pandemic.

Together, grantees:

- Distributed more than 500,000 pounds of food to over 20,000 Brooklyn households/families
- Supported enrichment and community events for more than 700 youth
- Provided over \$72,000 in emergency cash grants to families in need
- On November 18, 2021 BCC committed an additional \$1 million to 14 organizations to conduct pertinent COVID-19 outreach and to improve accessibility for testing and vaccination.

The full Strong Communities Fund Grant Impact Fund Report can be found [HERE](#).



# Partner Spotlight

## First Tech Fund (FTF)

First Tech Fund is a not-for-profit dedicated to closing the digital divide in New York City by supporting students from low income and underserved backgrounds. FTF runs a free fellowship program where student fellows are provided support and the tools they need to thrive—a personal computer to keep, a WiFi hotspot with unlimited data for the school year, weekly programming, dedicated mentorship, and a professional network. This network and FTF's community partnerships unlock opportunities and resources that empower and support fellows as they grow and build towards their goals during and after their cohort year. With the support of BCC's Strong Communities Fund, FTF was able to provide support to an additional 15 students for the 2021-2022 cohort.

## Adult Fitness Hub

East New York Restoration Local Development Corp. (ENY Restoration) is committed to promoting sustainable economic growth for East New York businesses, fostering prosperity for all community residents, and leading a Renaissance in East New York.

Every year, ENY Restoration hosts the largest 5K in East New York, promoting healthy living in partnership with other community groups and health facilities. ENY Restoration provides exercise programs to seniors and workshops on health topics such as diabetes and breast cancer. In October 2021, ENY Restoration, with support from partners including Maimonides Medical Center and BCC, completed the construction of an Adult Fitness Hub for seniors at the Pink Houses, a New York City Housing Authority development in East New York. In creating this fitness hub, ENY Restoration worked in partnership with the Pink Houses Tenants Association to ensure that the Hub meets community needs to promote awareness of this and other wellness opportunities that are accessible and free for tenants.



*Evelyn Chen, a senior from Brooklyn, was accepted to Princeton University and will receive a full scholarship as part of the Questbridge National Match program. Evelyn is an FTF fellow supported by BCC's Strong Communities Fund.*

*Colette Pean, executive director of ENY Restoration LDC, says, "Working together, we can make changes to live healthier lives. Let's kick off a year of wellness in 2022!"*

# Homes for Health

## *People Focused Research: Health and Housing in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville and East New York*

Over the course of 2020-2021, BCC and a team of five community youth researchers conducted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and East New York to answer the overarching research question: “What are the most effective ways to improve housing conditions, especially those that most affect health in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and East New York?”

The focus on health and housing grew out of more than five years of community engagement, the findings from four previous PAR studies, and the results of the [East Brooklyn Call to Action’s \(EBC2A\) 2019 balloting effort](#).

The full 2020 Health and Housing PAR report can be found [HERE](#).

City Limits interviewed our PAR team for a feature on the research, which can be found [HERE](#).

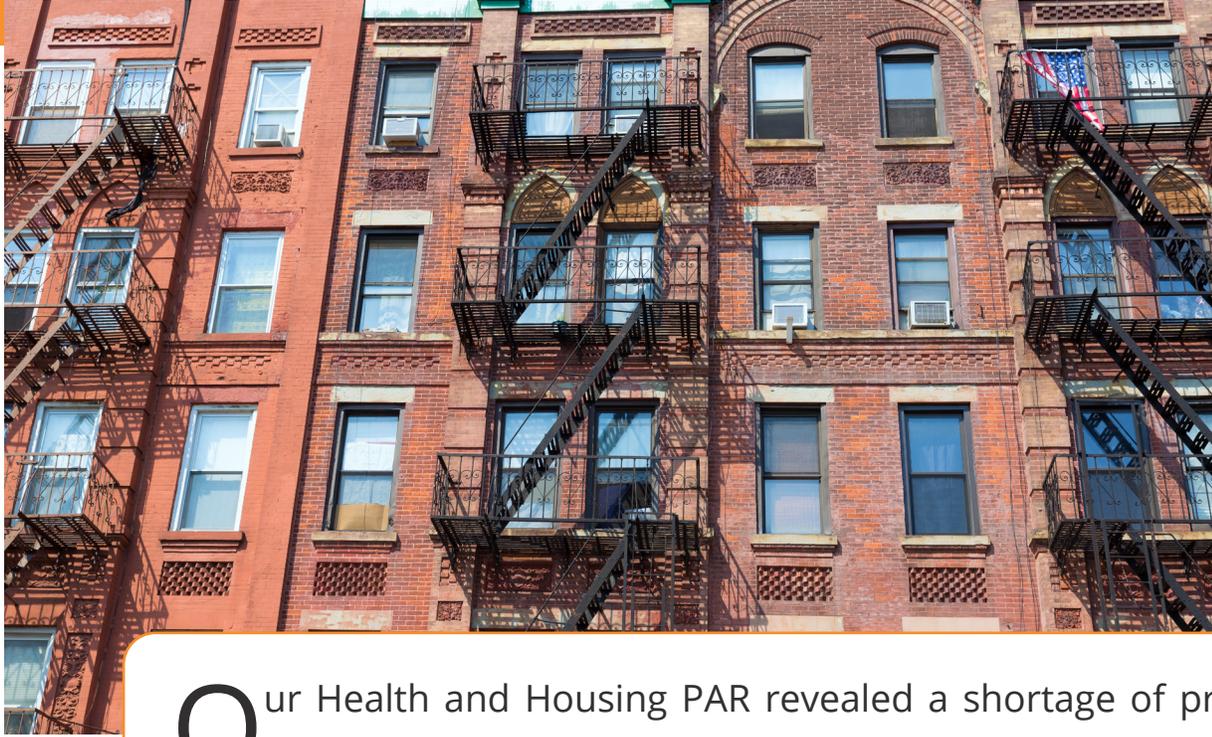
As the next step from the PAR research, BCC launched the Health, Housing and the Built Environment Campaign in Fall 2021 to generate

community interest, support and participation in implementing the recommendations that emerged from the study. BCC teamed up with East Brooklyn Call to Action (EBC2A) and other community-based organizations throughout Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and East New York to engage residents through community events and tenant association meetings. BCC and EBC2A held meetings with local elected officials and developers to share the findings of the report and identify opportunities for strategic collaboration on meeting the goal of affordable, health-promoting housing and neighborhood environments. The campaign will continue throughout 2022.



*Photo taken at the July 2021 groundbreaking of the Adult Fitness Hub described on page 7*

# Property Manager Training



Our Health and Housing PAR revealed a shortage of property managers in affordable housing – a problem identified by residents, elected officials and housing developers alike. Participants in the Property Manager Training series will be focused on health, housing and the built environment with a social determinants of health lens. Working with East New York Restoration and other community partners, we are developing a curriculum that encompasses traditional property management functions, leadership development and stewardship of the overall neighborhood environment, as well as green buildings, open spaces, and plentiful access to spaces for exercise.

# Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub

The Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub is a unique alignment of stakeholders dedicated to reshaping the local economy and beyond via a community-led ecosystem of health-focused enterprises and workforce development. The Hub is redirecting dollars spent by Brooklyn healthcare institutions for the benefit of the communities they serve. Currently, very few of these institutional dollars stay within communities in ways that would improve the economic prospects of residents who have been deeply affected by structural racial inequities. Descriptions of BCC's work to further the mission of the Hub through workforce training, enterprise development, fellowships and additional PAR efforts follow.

## ***Health-Focused Enterprise Development***

BCC aims to narrow the racial wealth gap in Brooklyn by dramatically increasing local minority- and women-owned business enterprises' (MWBE) share of procurement spending at key safety-net hospitals by 2025 and increasing the share tenfold by 2030. In 2021, we detailed a strategy to achieve those goals based on analysis of anchors' procurement data, direct engagement with procurement leads, and a landscape of NYC's existing small business services ecosystem. We identified \$600-700M in annual procurement from two large anchor partners alone, Maimonides Medical Center and One Brooklyn Health, that provide a major, untapped impact opportunity to address residents' [priorities](#) for increased economic opportunity. The work revealed promising opportunities in select professional services (e.g., advertising), building maintenance, IT, and food services.

To capitalize on these opportunities, we will pursue two workstreams:

(1) accelerating increases in equitable procurement with hands-on deal structuring and coordination, and (2) converting established enterprises to worker ownership.

# Workforce Development

BCC's workforce development activities focus on making opportunities available for historically and currently disadvantaged communities in an effort to close the racial health and wealth gap. A key focus for BCC in 2021 was building the foundation to support robust workforce development for community members for jobs within hospitals and with enterprises that meet hospital supply chain needs.

Specific activities included:

- Supporting health coach training in partnership with Kingsborough Community College
- Developing and launching an Economic Democracy Fellowship (EDF) in partnership with CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies. The fellowship, which is geared toward Brooklynites committed to building and participating in local cooperative economic initiatives, will root Brooklyn's local economy in economic democracy and racial equity. It begins with a graduate level, credit-bearing certificate program of seminars, training and fieldwork to provide participants with the background, frameworks and networks needed to develop enterprises, especially those able to serve Brooklyn's vibrant healthcare system.
- Funded four-course curriculum development and training for Medicaid Health Home care management supervisors, in partnership with Center for Urban and Community Services (CUCS) and the Brooklyn Health Home. At the close of 2021, 25 supervisors across the health home network of care management agencies had attended courses.

## ***Participatory Action Research for the Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub***

BCC, in partnership with Hunter College Urban Policy & Planning Professors Laura Wolf Powers and Sigmund Shipp, was awarded a three-year grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The funding will support a PAR effort to answer the question: "How can mission-driven anchor institutions be more effective in building capacity and social infrastructure among underrepresented entrepreneurs?"

The research, which will be carried out between January 2022 and December 2024, aims to generate new

knowledge about how anchor institutions can work with community stakeholders to build entrepreneurial ecosystems in historically underserved neighborhoods. Stakeholders will participate in all aspects of the research, from generating the questions asked to analyzing and publishing the data, to deciding on action steps. Researchers will track the development and implementation of the initiative, identify where it encounters successes and difficulties, and draw on them to create practice-oriented publications.

# Looking Ahead

As 2021 came to a close BCC assessed our impact, gathered survey responses from our network of community-based organizations, and engaged in strategic conversations with our Board of Directors to determine our priorities for the next year, including:

- Host the first Annual BCC Conference for our network of over 100 Brooklyn-based community-based organizations, local elected officials, and institutions to come together and envision a plan for a Brooklyn beyond COVID-19 and emergency response
- Grow the Brooklyn Health Enterprise Hub by expanding workforce development opportunities and increasing anchor spending in local MWBEs
- Expand BCC's network to include additional anchor institutions in Brooklyn

BCC looks forward to building on our existing partnerships to advance these efforts in 2022.

# Acknowledgements

## Brooklyn Communities Collaborative Board of Directors

David Berger, MD, Chief Executive Officer, University Hospital of Brooklyn at State University of New York (SUNY) Downstate Health Sciences University

Patricia Simino Boyce, PhD RN, University Dean of Health and Human Services, City University of New York (CUNY)

David Cohen, MD, Executive Vice President, Maimonides Medical Center

Marilyn Fraser, Chief Executive Officer, Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health

Colvin Grannum, President & Chief Executive Officer, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation

Dona Green, Senior Vice President, Strategy/Project Management, One Brooklyn Health System

Roger Green, Director of Public Policy, CUNY Law Community Economic Development Clinic

Karen Nelson, MD, Former Chief Medical Officer, Community Care of Brooklyn

Maurice Reid, Advisor, Alliance for Healthy Communities

Bruce Richard, Senior Advisor, 1199SEIU

## A Note to Our Funders

The achievements described throughout this report would not be possible without the generosity, involvement, and enthusiasm of our committed supporters:

Altman Foundation

Community Care of Brooklyn

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

Momentum Fund

Mother Cabrini Health Foundation

The New York Community Trust

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