



# HACE: Serving the Hispanic, Elderly Community of Northeastern Philadelphia

**Student Interns:** Wesley Perez-Cervantes, Drexel University College of Medicine  
Jessica Zbranak, Drexel University College of Medicine

**Academic Preceptor:** Dr. Charlene Chen, MD, Esperanza Health Center

**Community Preceptors:** Laura Cardona-Cruz, MT-BC, MSW, HACE  
Jeannette Cruz, MTh, HACE

## COMMUNITY PARTNER

**HACE** is a non-profit development organization focused on providing affordable housing and neighborhood development for the Latino community in Eastern North Philadelphia. Since 1982, HACE has redeveloped real estate and offered housing counseling for a mixed-income, diverse, elderly population. Spanning multiple sites throughout the city, HACE provides not only housing but a community that exemplifies the mission statement “**From Possibility to Actuality**” every day.

<https://www.hacecdc.org>



## TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gaps student interns assisted the resident service coordinators in offering social service assistance by planning educational and engaging activities for the senior residents. Activities included COVID-19 testing, smoking cessation counseling, nutrition classes, translating, and Bingo. Interns helped with food distribution and acted as community liaisons between the residents and the administration to promote programs such as the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Interns also performed health check-ups across all four senior HACE locations, assessing vital signs and creating a survey to assess the physical and mental health needs of the community.

## BACKGROUND

**Cost Burden by Race and Ethnicity in Philadelphia**  
Rates are higher for Black and Hispanic households



Access to safe and affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges many residents of Philadelphia face. Furthermore, marginalized populations like the Latinx community disproportionately bear the burden of housing insecurity both in Philadelphia and nationwide. In fact, an estimated half of all Hispanic households in Philadelphia are cost-burdened, defined by the HUD as when a household spends more than 30% of its income on housing costs, representing the burden of any major racial or ethnic group in the city.<sup>1</sup>

Access to affordable housing is of paramount importance, and HACE steps up to provide this for the Latinx community of Northeastern Philadelphia.

<sup>1</sup> Howell, O. The State of Housing Affordability in Philadelphia. *The PEW Charitable Trusts*. 2020.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Acted as a verbal and written communication link between the Spanish speaking residents and outside agencies
- Designed a survey inquiring about healthcare needs such as access to health and dental care and availability of translation services (Picture 1)
- Organized a multi-site health fair where residents' vital signs were checked and mental and physical health were assessed (Picture 2)
- Assisted at smoking cessation counseling events to provide residents with emotional support
- Connected residents with nutrition assistance resources
- Participated in bake sales to help raise funds for community building events
- Developed meaningful relationships with residents



**Picture 1.** Completing a health survey with a resident.



**Picture 2.** Assessing the vital signs of a resident.

## REFLECTION

**Wesley Perez-Cervantes:** “My time at HACE has given me a glimpse of the challenges that our elderly, Hispanic population faces daily and an opportunity to advocate for them. Seeing how this population can live below poverty lines knowing little-to-no English was inspiring and motivational. **Each resident that I met reinforced how important it will be, as a future physician, to be aware of how social determinants of health can influence health outcomes.** I am also grateful to have worked alongside social workers and community members who fight these challenges to bring resources for the betterment of the residents.”

**Jessica Zbranak:** “My internship at HACE helped me understand the importance of community. This was my first time working with a senior population, and never had I seen a group so full of life and kindness. **The more I got to know the residents, the more I grew to appreciate their resiliency and ability to persevere despite numerous obstacles.** Working alongside the resident service coordinators introduced me to the social work aspect of healthcare, and I learned about the purpose and function of numerous social services that I know will be extremely important in my future career as a physician. It is clear that both the residents and the staff at HACE love their community, and I was so grateful to be a part of it this summer.”