

Policy Implications on COVID-19 Testing in Low-Resourced & Socially Vulnerable Older Adults in Puerto Rico

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ABSTRACT

The Puerto Rico Community Action Research and Engagement (PR-CARE) initiative focuses on the elderly communities in PR who suffer from high levels of social vulnerability (i.e., homeless), who are geographically isolated (i.e., living in isolated or rural areas), living in poverty, and gender or sexual diverse (I.e., L.G.B.T.T.Q.I.A.+) to identify how multiple factors converge and impact COVID-19 testing and vaccine uptake.

Our well-established community partner network, using TEAM SCIENCE and CITIZEN SCIENCE through a mixed methods research strategy aims to:

- Assess federal and Puerto Rico Commonwealth policy implications on COVID-19 testing.
- Examine individual and social determinants of health that influence the uptake of the COVID-19 diagnostics.
- Combine results from the systematic policy review and key informants (Aim 1: qualitative) and elderly individuals (Aim 2: quantitative and qualitative) to identify challenges, barriers and effective strategies and language to support and improve COVID-19 testing and other related health outcomes.

Our strategies are guided by four theoretical frameworks: Community Engagement Continuum, Intersectionality-Informed Approach, Anderson's Behavioral Model of Health, and Historical Trauma.

METHOD

AIM 1 A systematic policy review of information publicly available on federal and territorial programs and policies enacted between Spring 2020 and Winter 2022 that facilitated access, delivery and utilization of COVID-19 testing in Puerto Rico was conducted. Additionally, 24 semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with end-users, implementers, and policy makers to examine policy and practices change efforts following the COVID-19.

RESULTS

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted including: 9 end-users (older adult), 10 implementers and 5 policy makers. **End users included:** 89% were women, 56% were 65 years old or older, 56% had education superior that high school, 67% live under poverty and 33% live in geographically isolated areas. **Implementers included:** 4 CBOs, 1 state agency, 1 municipal government, 3 private health organizations. **Policy Maker included:** Puerto Rico Department of Health (1), Puerto Rico Office of Socioeconomic Community Development (2) and Puerto Rico Legislature (1).

Preliminary result of the Systematic Policy Review yield that Puerto Rico's government issues 84 Administrative Orders, 75 Executive Orders and 10 laws between March 2020-December 2022 to address the issue of COVID-19. However, these have a focus on strategies to minimize the risk of infection to general population. Also, key informants perceive that although multiple efforts have been made by the local government and service providers to provide access to COVID-19 testing for older adults still elder still need to be maximized for those who live in geographically isolated communities, live alone, do not have transportation, or have a health condition that limits their mobility, among other things. They highlighted the need for public policy efforts to promote access to COVID-19 tests for older adults living in disadvantaged conditions be emphasized in public policy. Likewise, key informants emphasize the importance of geo-located data to identify location of older adults who cannot access testing sites. Home testing was identified as an alternative for this population. Raising awareness and educating older adults about management of COVID-19 home testing should be explored.

Key Informant Interviews

End-users (9)	Implementers (10)	Policy Maker (5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 89% mujeres (N=8) 44% (N=4) 55-64 años 44% (N=4) 75 años o más 12% (N=1) 65-74 años 56% (N=5) educación mayor de escuela superior 33% (N=3) 4to año o menos 11% no fue a la escuela 56% (N=5) criterio de pobreza federal CIFRA DE INGRESOS 2022 Individual: \$13,599 2 personas: \$18,310 3 personas: \$23,030 4 personas: \$27,750 33% (N=3) población aislada 67% (N=6) población bajo nivel socioeconómico 22% ninguna población 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalición de Coaliciones Pro-Personas sin Hogar de PR, Inc. Organización de Sistemas de Acueductos NON PRASA de Puerto Rico (OSAN) Departamento de Salud (2) Dra. Migdalia Rodríguez Chacón Instituto Psicopedagógico de Puerto Rico (IPPR) Brisas Health Municipio de Caguas Voces Coalición Inmunización y Promoción de la Salud Grupo Hospitalista Pediátrico 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departamento de Salud Oficina para el Desarrollo Socioeconómico y Comunitario de Puerto Rico (ODESC) San Juan Mayagüez Senado de Puerto Rico

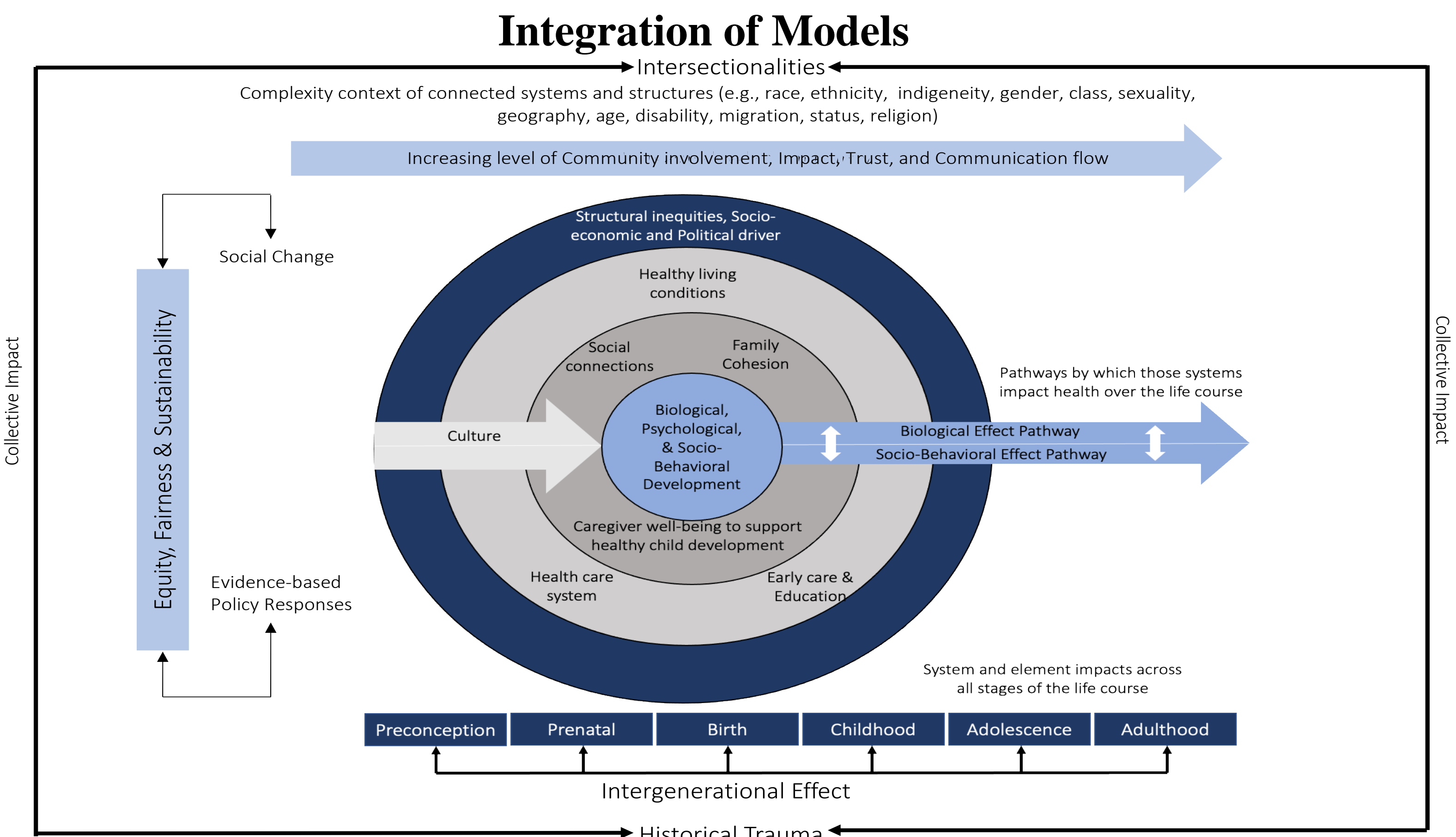


Figure 1. Adaptation for integration of models: National Academies of Sciences (2019), Community Engagement Continuum, Intersectionality and Historical Trauma (CTSAs, 2011)



CONCLUSION

Public policy efforts are needed to promote access to COVID-19 tests for older adults living in disadvantaged conditions: geo-located data to identify location of older adults who cannot access testing sites, and availability, awareness, and education for home testing.