

A Commitment to Health Equity Internally and Externally: Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Practitioners and Advocates Featured:

Lucy Rios

DIRECTOR OF PREVENTION & COMMUNICATIONS

[Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)



The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) is moving from theory to action as a leader in preventing domestic violence through a health equity lens. The coalition has created and implemented many efforts to internally and externally work against racism and other oppressions and commit to health equity – the notion that every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health and safety. From thinking about its hiring or internal staff meetings, to being deliberate about how the coalition distributes funds and what the coalition supports in its prevention work, health equity is a constant consideration in RICADV's work.

TAKING ACTION WITHIN THE COALITION: CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT HIRING, COMMUNICATIONS, POLICY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Lucy Rios, director of prevention and communications at the RICADV, says, "As advocates of color in this work we are also facing institutional racism in our own organizations and in our communities." She shares how RICADV leadership and staff are intentionally committed to unlearning racism and other forms of oppression, such as economic oppression. From quarterly conversations on unpacking "the -isms" to understanding how staff "show up" in society and their own institution, RICADV is working to shift practices within the coalition. The coalition keeps the topic of health equity present on meeting agendas to continually create space for reflection. This provides staff with the opportunity to affirm ways RICADV is living into its values, as well as identify when it might be working outside of its values, or with an organization that doesn't operate in the same way. In terms of human resource practices, RICADV is actively considering ways to retain staff of color and provide them with a supportive environment free from racism, and where all staff can share their passions, worries, and be their authentic whole selves.

The coalition also shows its commitment to health equity through its communications and policy work. For example, RICADV makes sure communities of color and organizations led by people of color are supported, have their voices amplified and are visible in outreach materials and public awareness campaigns. RICADV recognizes the need to advocate for state legislative bills such as paid leave or living wage policies that may not be as explicitly focused on domestic violence, but will improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders impacted by oppression who are at greater risk for experiencing domestic violence.



RICADV staff attended a racial justice training hosted by the YWCA in Rhode Island. Photo provided by: RICADV

A few years ago, the coalition made a strategic decision to create a community engagement department as a way to be in deeper connection with other organizations that serve and are led by people of color. The coalition understood that they needed to be more engaged with these communities to advance the work of preventing domestic violence in communities of color. RICADV has brought on five affiliate members and hopes that the community engagement department will open the door for ongoing conversations about ways to support the efforts of communities of color in Rhode Island.

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH THE COALITION'S PREVENTION WORK

Not only does RICADV internally support health equity, the coalition also imbeds health equity into its prevention work. For example, through an initiative called "Ten Men," focused on mobilizing men as allies in preventing domestic violence, RICADV uses empowerment evaluation to build community capacity to develop evaluation questions, make meaning out of the data and guide the direction of the program moving forward. Compared to more traditional evaluation methods, this is a more equitable process that elevates the wisdom of community members in preventing domestic violence – voices and lived experiences that might not otherwise be considered.

In addition, RICADV supports health equity by distributing grants from its Domestic Violence Prevention Fund to put resources into the hands of community members working in communities of color, who haven't traditionally been the recipients of the coalition's funding. For example, one of the grantees, the YWCA, focuses its efforts on young girls of color. YWCA staff has held racial justice trainings and developed specific support for youth workers interested in implementing Girls Circle, an evidence-based program for girls designed to increase position connections, strengths and competence in girls. Trainers gain facilitation skills, learn about institutional and structural racism and best practices for building resiliency in girls. Girls Circle can help shift factors like gender norms that increase the risk of teen dating abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of violence, and offers the opportunity for girls build relationships with each other and discuss racial justice. Another grant recipient, the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), participated in YWCA's trainings and has adapted the model to be culturally relevant for their population and applicable for all genders to take

part together. Both YWCA and ARISE's programs have had great success in retaining program participants.

RICADV also supports the Newport Health Equity Zone, a collective impact place-based project that focuses on two racially diverse parts of the state with a high concentration of poverty. With the goal to eliminate health disparities and reduce chronic diseases in the North End neighborhood, the project works with residents to implement community-driven strategies. While domestic violence has not come up directly as a priority in the needs assessment with residents, working on prioritized issues in

the community like increasing social cohesion can help reduce the risk of domestic violence. Through funding provided by RICADV in spring 2018, the Newport Health Equity Zone has begun to plan its approach to greening urban spaces. This involves seeking out and assessing open spaces in the neighborhood with the goal of increasing access and utilization. The project will mobilize community residents to 1) serve on planning boards and park commissions 2) advocate for a community benefit agreement which includes open space on any new developments in their neighborhood (e.g. Newport Bridge Realignment and bike paths), and 3) work on ordinances to prevent gentrification. Increasing access to green urban spaces through mobilization and civic engagement strategies will positively impact the health of those living in the zone by increasing social cohesion, collective efficacy, and improving the built environment. The Newport Health Equity Zone enables people to feel more connected and safe and creates a space for conversations about sexual and domestic violence prevention to come up in an organic way.

To be intentional about health equity requires an understanding that work needs to be done both externally and internally to transform the ways that things have typically been done. RICADV continues to prioritize health equity with a focus on racial equity across Rhode Island. Through its prevention work, the coalition has been able to support local initiatives that emphasize community-driven solutions and prioritize health equity as critical to preventing domestic violence.



The Newport Health Equity Zone is increasing usage of parks and open space and building stronger community cohesion, both of which are associated with lower rates of domestic violence. Photo provided by: RICADV

Lucy Rios, director of prevention and communications for the RICADV, has been in the movement to end domestic violence for over 15 years. Under her leadership, Rhode Island's strategic domestic violence primary prevention initiatives (e.g., Ten Men) have flourished. In addition to managing the RICADV's DELTA Impact grant from the CDC, Rios provides training and technical assistance to diverse community groups and organizations and she oversees the RICADV's public awareness campaigns and communications efforts.

Written by:

Abena Asare

PROGRAM ASSISTANT

[Prevention Institute](#)

Edited by:

Ashleigh Klein-Jimenez, MPA

PROJECT MANAGER

[CALCASA, PreventConnect](#)

Tori VandeLinde, MPH

TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SPECIALIST, PREVENTION

[CALCASA, PreventConnect](#)

RESOURCES

- [2016 PreventConnect web conference featuring Newport Health Equity Zone](#)
- [Rhode Island Coalition website](#)

DISCLAIMER: This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number U1V/ CE002204, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.