# University of Pennsylvania Nursing Professor Leads $5.5M Initiative to Support Philadelphia Residents with Chronic Illnesses



Carmen Alvarez, a nursing professor at the University of Pennsylvania, is co-leading an initiative to assist Philadelphia residents in managing their chronic illnesses, specifically focusing on cardiovascular health. This program has secured a $5.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health and engages a partnership involving Penn Nursing, Philadelphia’s Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity, and local grassroots organizations.

The initiative builds on previous efforts under the Philadelphia Community Engagement Alliance (Philly CEAL), which was originally developed to support communities affected by COVID-19. The current project extends these efforts to chronic conditions like hypertension, leveraging relationships forged during the pandemic.

The core of the project involves facilitating group support sessions, led by trained community health workers, aimed at helping participants navigate and overcome barriers to managing their conditions such as medication adherence and lifestyle changes. Each program comprises nine in-person sessions, where participants discuss blood pressure and cholesterol management among other health topics. The group setting is designed to provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation among individuals dealing with similar health challenges.

This four-year initiative not only focuses on education and problem-solving but also evaluates the effectiveness of community-based group support in managing chronic health issues.