Promoting Health Access Research in Southeastern NC
Request for Applications (RFA) – October 10, 2025

The **Research Advisory Council (RAC)** is an innovative, joint committee composed of research leaders from Novant Health, Novant Health New Hanover Regional Medical Center (NH-NHRMC), the University of North Carolina Health Care System (UNC Health), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine (UNC SOM).

The RAC was established according to the Academic and Clinical Affiliation Agreement (Affiliation Agreement) implemented in connection with the Novant-NHRMC Asset Purchase Agreement. Tasked with providing opportunities for collaborative research, the RAC is sponsoring an annual pilot award project to support clinical research in the defined region through a lens of access, value, and universal access to optimal health and wellness.

The RAC and its sub-committee, the **Health Access Research Advisory Committee (HARAC)** are focusing efforts on *Promoting Health Access through Research.* Projects should promote research to understand and improve relevant health challenges related to access to primary care, specialty care, community health, and optimal wellbeing. Awards will provide up to $50,000 in funding for a 12-month project period.

If you are interested in applying and have questions, particularly about how to connect with a Novant Health or UNC collaborator, email Natara Dulaney at Natara.Dulaney@novanthealth.org.

Note: Cancer investigators are particularly encouraged to develop collaborative projects in response to these RFAs. Cancer investigators interested in submitting a proposal should email Crystal.Walker@unchealth.unc.edu.

I. Purpose

All individuals deserve access to consistent, high-quality healthcare and the opportunities necessary to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Yet despite notable improvements gained because of technological advancements in medicine, there continues to be an alarming number of gaps in clinical outcomes and wellness, driven by barriers in access to care and other health opportunities. The purpose of this RFA is to facilitate research that promotes access to the highest quality of care for all. Access refers to the opportunity for all individuals to obtain the highest level of health and wellness. We are seeking projects that can be completed within 12 months and have strong potential to inform subsequent grant applications to the NIH or other external funding agencies.

Projects should: Promote research to understand and to improve access to healthcare for all populations; advance scientific understanding of the causes of inadequate health access and downstream gaps in health outcomes and wellness; develop and test multi-level interventions to improve access to healthcare, optimal health, and wellness; or create and

improve scientific methods, metrics, measures, and tools to study the causes of inadequate health access and develop solutions. We are particularly interested in applications that will provide preliminary data for intervention and implementation studies that will reduce gaps in overall wellness across all populations.

Applicants should clearly state how their proposed project is designed to further health access in the region. Engagement in research planning and conduct with the community is also an important component of health access research. Applicants should consider the NIMHD framework and/or other theoretical frameworks that center the perspectives of historically marginalized populations.

Examples of the types of projects appropriate for this RFA include, but are not limited to:

- Projects that address barriers and facilitators related to achieving the highest level of health for all groups, including but not limited to historically underrepresented populations.
- Projects that test interventions to address social drivers of health.
- Methods and strategies for increasing inclusion of all populations in research.
- Pilot efforts that will lead to developing, testing, and disseminating multilevel interventions to achieve the highest level of health and healthcare access.
- Pilot efforts to improve screening rates and preventive care.
- Projects that address methods to engage community in research.
- Develop and test community-level interventions to reduce gaps in health and wellness outcomes.
- Observational research to understand the role of the social and built environment in causing and sustaining gaps in health and wellness outcomes.

II. Key Dates

Proposals Due	October 10, 2025
Review and Award Decision	Within 12 weeks of application deadline

III. Funding and PI Eligibility

This funding opportunity is supported by the financial commitment set forth in the Affiliation Agreement and approved by the Affiliation Executive Council.

Applications must:

(1) come from a collaborative team from Novant Health and UNC Chapel Hill with a minimum of one Co- Principal Investigator (Co-PI) from UNC SOM and one Co-PI from NH-NHRMC Novant Health Medical Group Coastal Region, and

(2) include research to understand and improve community health challenges relevant to the coastal region, defined as the New Hanover Region and includes Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, and Pender counties.

Applications must identify one PI as the main contact PI with primary responsibility for the administrative aspects of the pilot award. Researchers eligible to serve as PI include permanent faculty whose appointments allow them to serve as PI on externally sponsored research projects and non-faculty such as research scientists and investigators who are eligible to apply for investigator- initiated awards and R01-level funding.

Study teams that involve residents, cross- disciplinary collaborations, and community partners are strongly encouraged. Consultation with a biostatistician in the project design and application process is recommended. No cost share ("match") is required.

IV. Review Criteria

Applications should be presented in a clear and logical fashion, make a convincing case for the significance of the work, and describe the proposed methods in sufficient detail so that an adequate evaluation of the application can be made.

Primary review criterion includes (1) the likelihood for the pilot work to have a sustainable impact on patients or clinical research conduct in the targeted area, and (2) the potential to lead directly to a fundable external proposal. Preliminary data are not required for the pilot proposal, but some specific evidence that the work has merit scientifically and that the proposed effort is feasible within the timeframe and funding level of the pilot program is required. It is strongly encouraged that the pilot proposal includes specific plans regarding sustainability or follow-on proposals for external funding following the pilot.

The following additional review criteria will also be considered:

1. Significance
2. Innovation
3. Existence of a genuine multidisciplinary team integral to the conduct of the research
4. Soundness of the proposed methods
5. Appropriateness of community/stakeholder engagement plan
6. Feasibility of accomplishing the stated project goals within the 12-month project period

V. Application Process

Applications must be submitted using the NC TraCS online grant portal. Once in the system scroll down to the section titled "Promoting Health Access Research in Southeastern NC" and click "Apply," or use the "quick search bar" at the top to search. Application sections (except the Abstract) will be uploaded as individual PDF files. The application sections are:

1. **Scientific Abstract:** A summary of the application for internal use (250 word maximum).
2. **Impact:** Briefly describe the likelihood for your project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved (50 word maximum).
3. **Research Plan:** The Research Plan should include Specific Aims, Significance, Innovation, and Approach. For studies enrolling human subjects, include engagement and recruitment plans either in this section or in the Human Subjects section (number 7 below). Include where applicable clear evidence of how the application meets the review criteria. 1.5 line spacing, font Arial 11 pt., and 1-inch margins all around. (5-page limit, including tables and figures. References do not count towards the page limit)
4. **Cited References:** (No page limit)
5. **Budget:** Use PHS 398 Form Page 4 (see Section VIII "Budget Guidelines" below for more details). The total budget should not exceed $50,000.
6. **Budget Justification**: Include sufficient detail for reviewers to assess whether appropriate resources have been requested (see "Budget Guidelines" below). (No page limit)

7. **Timeline:** covering the 12-month funding period.
8. **Human Subjects:** Although Institutional Review Board (IRB) is not required at time of submission, the application should briefly describe any human subject issues. If human subjects will be involved in the research, provide a description of their involvement and characteristics, study procedures, materials used in the research, potential risks to subjects, the process for recruitment and informed consent, and protection against risks. Provide assurance that the project will be reviewed and approved by an IRB, use a single IRB if the project is multicenter when possible, and comply with HIPAA. Consult with your local IRB in advance as an IRB reliance agreement may be needed to use a single IRB. Note that no funds will be released without the requisite approvals in place. (No page limit)
9. **NIH Biosketches or CVs:** for the key members of the research team.
10. **Letters of Collaboration:** A brief letter (or email) of support from the relevant Novant Health service line or institute leader indicating general agreement with the proposed project is required. Additional Letters of Collaboration may be included if they clearly state a commitment of resources required for the project's success, for example biobank samples being made available to the investigator. Generic or non-specific letters of support are not required or encouraged. (No page limit)
11. **Resubmission Summary** (if applicable): Resubmission applications should include a summary that details changes to the original application. *Applicants are limited to two submissions (an original submission and one resubmission) per application*. *The Resubmission Summary is limited* to 1-page, with 1.5 line spacing, 1-inch margins, and font no smaller than Arial 11.

VI. Budget Guidelines

1. The pilot grant budget covers expenditures of up to $50,000 for a 12-month period. The budget period will begin when applicable IRB documentation is provided, applicable contracts are fully executed (e.g. Data Use Agreement), and the PI indicates everything is in place for the project to begin. If the PI is not ready to start within 4 months of notification, the RAC reserves the right to withdraw the award.
2. All funds should be expended by the end of the grant period. A request for carryover may be granted if reasonable to meet project needs.
3. Projects of all budget sizes up to $50,000 are encouraged. Budget should be appropriately matched to the scope of the project and divided evenly across organizations as much as possible.
4. Pilot grant funds may be budgeted for (1) research support personnel, (2) travel necessary to perform the research, (3) equipment, research supplies and core lab costs, (4) other purposes deemed necessary for the successful execution of the proposed project.
5. Pilot grant funds **may not be budgeted for** (1) salary support for the PI, Co-PI or faculty collaborators, (2) office supplies or communication costs, (3) meals or travel, including to conferences, except as required to collect data, (4) IRB fees, (5) professional education or training, (6) manuscript preparation and submission, or (7) indirect costs.

VII. Other Guidelines

1. Prior to receiving funds, research involving human subjects must have appropriate approvals from the IRB of record. Either an IRB approval letter or an IRB response to a "Determination Whether Research or Similar Activities Require IRB Approval" must be

submitted to NC TraCS. Human subjects research must be reviewed in accordance with the organization's general assurances and HIPAA. In addition, if the research involves human subjects, all personnel named on the budget page must have certification of training in the protection of human subjects prior to the start of the grant period.

2. The HARAC will work closely with funded projects throughout the grant period to monitor progress and provide assistance where necessary. Three-month interim progress reports and a final progress report are required. The PI must report the outcomes achieved due to the pilot award over the lifetime of the work, e.g., subsequent external funding, publications, presentations, and patents.
3. If an awardee leaves their position, they should notify the HARAC for initiation of close out procedures.

VIII. Submission Instructions

Applications will be accepted only through the NC TraCS Institute online grant portal. Applications are due by 5:00pm on the due date. After submitting the application, applicants will receive email confirmation that the application was received. Applicants will be notified by email within 12 weeks of the deadline whether their application has been selected for funding. For further assistance with the online grant portal contact pilots@unc.edu.