

Subject: WATCH CDC Launches Waltham Community Referral Collaborative to Expand Access to Local Services

Contact Information:

Name: Brianna Polanco Smith

Email: brianna@watchcdc.org

Date: 5/2/25



For Immediate Release:

WATCH CDC Leads New Community Initiative to Improve Access to Local Programs

Commitment to a More Inclusive and Connected Waltham

WATCH CDC is leading a multi organization effort to improve how residents access local programs and resources through the Waltham Community Referral Collaborative (WCRC). This five year initiative funded by Boston Children's Hospital's Healthy Communities Initiative, brings together community organizations to address gaps in service access across the city. "All too often, organizations work in silos delivering direct services and programs that, while important, do not ultimately address the root cause of health inequities," says Shari Nethersole, MD, and Vice President for Community Health and Engagement at Boston Children's. "The collaborative groups funded under our Healthy Communities initiative will work together with residents to identify specific needs within their community and develop interventions intended to address those root causes and create sustainable change."

WCRC partners include WATCH CDC, the Waltham Boys & Girls Club, Africano Waltham, Jewish Family & Children's Services, and Waltham Partnership for Youth. Together, these organizations are working to reduce barriers to referrals and ensure that residents can more easily connect to programs offered at each site.

To guide the work, the WCRC developed a community survey in collaboration with a Resident Advisory Council (RAC), a group of 15 Waltham residents who have participated in programs across the partner organizations. The RAC helped shape the survey questions, and the group is now actively involved in analyzing results and discussing next steps.

The collaborative is also exploring policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes to address the barriers in the community. These conversations include both partner staff and RAC members, as they collectively brainstorm solutions to strengthen access to services in Waltham.

Nelson, the Community Engagement Specialist at WATCH CDC, plays a central role in coordinating this work. He serves as the main point of contact for the partner organizations, coordinates RAC and WCRC meetings, and engages directly with community members at the WATCH office. Fluent in Spanish and a lifelong resident of Waltham's Latino community, Nelson approaches every client interaction with cultural understanding and empathy. "I strive to bridge the gap for many of the individuals and families who walk through our doors seeking help," he said. "I work to connect them with the resources and support that best meet their needs."

WATCH CDC is committed to creating a more connected and inclusive Waltham through this collaborative effort.

###