

## Abstract

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### **The Experience of Three Faith-Based Communities in Support of Mental Health Programs in Underserved Communities of Dallas**

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**Issue:** Underserved populations are at high risk for mental health disorders due to adverse social, economic, and environmental circumstances, as well as lack of access to health care. In the implementation of community-based programs focused on mental health, faith communities have an important role.

**Description:** Well Together is a behavioral health initiative that creates access to free mental health education, counseling, and therapy for the underserved. Well Together partners with community-based organizations, including churches and faith communities, to raise mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and promote wellbeing. Participation of faith communities in the implementation of programs for underserved populations, particularly minority groups, can improve health outcomes. A thorough examination of three experiences in two under resourced areas of Dallas, will exemplify positive practices for interacting with faith communities to promote health equity.

**Lessons Learned:** Faith-based partners played an instrumental role by creating safe spaces for community members to receive counseling, connecting parishioners with promotora-led mental health education, and facilitating access to tele-counseling for residents of a church housing ministry. As crucial partners, faith communities can combat stigma associated with mental health, and serve as a bridge connecting individuals to needed resources.

**Recommendations:** Community-based organizations must be prepared to foster the relationship, accept recommendations, and engage long-term with faith communities.

