

# RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AT THE POPULATION HEALTH INNOVATION LAB

The [Population Health Innovation Lab](#) (PHIL), a program of the [Public Health Institute](#) (PHI), provides research and evaluation services, tools, and resources in support of multisector collaboratives (MSCs), health departments, PHI programs, communities, funders, policy makers, universities, and local, state, and federal government through **MERLIN: Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations**.

*The goal of PHIL's MERLIN team is to connect MSCs and diverse health partners with evidence to inform upstream, systems-level approaches that can eliminate health disparities and improve social well-being. Through translational research and evaluation, we aim to empower communities to take control of their health.*

## EQUITY FOCUS

The MERLIN team is committed to embedding equity into research and evaluation. Through a diverse team of researchers, MERLIN brings an array of perspectives and lived experiences to the research process. We advocate for centering communities in our work to ensure research and evaluation is conducted in a way that benefits and empowers them and does no harm. We recognize that equity is both a process and an outcome and therefore strive to continuously center equity in all we do.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

MERLIN produces accessible information that advances knowledge and theory related to improving population health, equity, and wellbeing for marginalized communities. We use rigorous, mixed methods, and community-engaged approaches to answer some of the most vexing questions challenging the advancement of population health, equity, and public good. For MERLIN, the research process does not stop with publication; we strive to develop products that are directed at end-users to ensure research is used to positively impact people and systems.

## SERVICE OFFERINGS

### Scientific Research

- Research design, implementation, & reporting

### Assessment & Evaluation

- Community health & needs assessments
- Participatory, formative, & summative evaluation using realist approaches

### Data Collection & Management

- Business process automation
- Surveys, interviews, focus groups, structured observations, & record review

### Data Analysis & Visualization

- Mixed methods approach
- Network analysis & mapping
- Advanced quantitative & qualitative techniques (e.g., structural equation modeling; process tracing)
- Interactive, web-based visualizations

### Training & Capacity Building

- Network science
- Program evaluation
- Evidence-based decision making
- Quality improvement methods & tools



**POPULATION HEALTH  
INNOVATION LAB**

A Program of the PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

MERLIN works to generate and apply evidence that empowers MSCs and diverse health partners to make data-informed, strategic decisions. Whether you are completing a community needs assessment, health system assessment, program evaluation, or initiative evaluation, MERLIN is experienced in a variety of participatory approaches that can guide your assessment and evaluation processes from initial planning and conduct all the way through putting your findings to work in practice.

- **Network Assessment & Evaluation:** MERLIN supports MSCs and other collaborative networks by conducting comprehensive network studies that can be used for strategic partnership development, improving collaboration dynamics, developing evidence-informed network interventions, or measuring systems change over time.
- **Community Health Needs Assessment:** MERLIN uses rigorous, scientific approaches to conduct community health needs assessments, while also focusing on the unique needs of communities and community stakeholders. We draw on multiple quantitative and qualitative sources to bring your community the information it needs to drive action.
- **Program Planning & Evaluation:** MERLIN works with population health programs and initiatives across the nation to plan quality programs and evaluate existing efforts. Whether you are just starting to develop program plans or seeking to measure program impact over time, MERLIN offers program planning and evaluation support that leverages multiple approaches (participatory, realist, formative, summative, etc.).

## PROJECT EXAMPLES

### [Advancing Equity: Adapting to Local Context and Confronting Power Dynamics. Lessons Learned from Accountable Communities of/for Health](#)

A study conducted with six Accountable Communities of/for Health (ACHs) in Washington and California that sought in-depth answers to the question: "How do local context and power dynamics influence an ACH's ability to make progress toward improved equity?"

### [Community Engagement in Biomedical and Health Sciences Research Study](#)

This study provides a deeper understanding of the motivations, facilitators, and barriers behind conducting and/or funding biomedical and health sciences research that directly engages underrepresented communities of color.

### [COVID-19 Contact Networks in Hispanic and Latino Communities: Analysis of Contact Tracing Data from a Large California Healthcare Provider Network](#)

This study advances understanding of the underlying factors contributing to higher COVID-19 transmission rates seen in Hispanic and Latino individuals in California. The study used Tracing Health contact tracing data, network analysis, and inferential statistics to better understand how factors like ethnicity, household size, and occupation influence a person's network size.



## OTHER PHIL SERVICES

- [Meeting Design and Facilitation](#)
- [Trainings and Learning Opportunities](#)
- [Multisector Collaborative Development and Support](#)
- [Technical Assistance](#)
- [Communications Support](#)

