



Call for Proposals
Break the Cycle of Children's Environmental Health Disparities:
Promoting Health Equity for All Children
21st Annual Program

Hosted by
Southeast Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit at Emory University and
Break the Cycle of Health Disparities, Inc.



Children's Health and Health Disparities

Children are uniquely sensitive to their environment because their organ systems and physiology are in the process of development, and their minds and emotions are in the process of maturation, as a result, their bodies and minds are readily and continuously influenced by their experiences and encounters, with potential lifelong consequences on their health, growth and development.

Children who grow up in a supportive and nurturing environment, in a safe setting with clean air, clean water, green space and nutritious food, and with opportunities for a good education and good health care, are more likely to grow up healthy with the promise of a positive future for themselves, their children and for society at large.

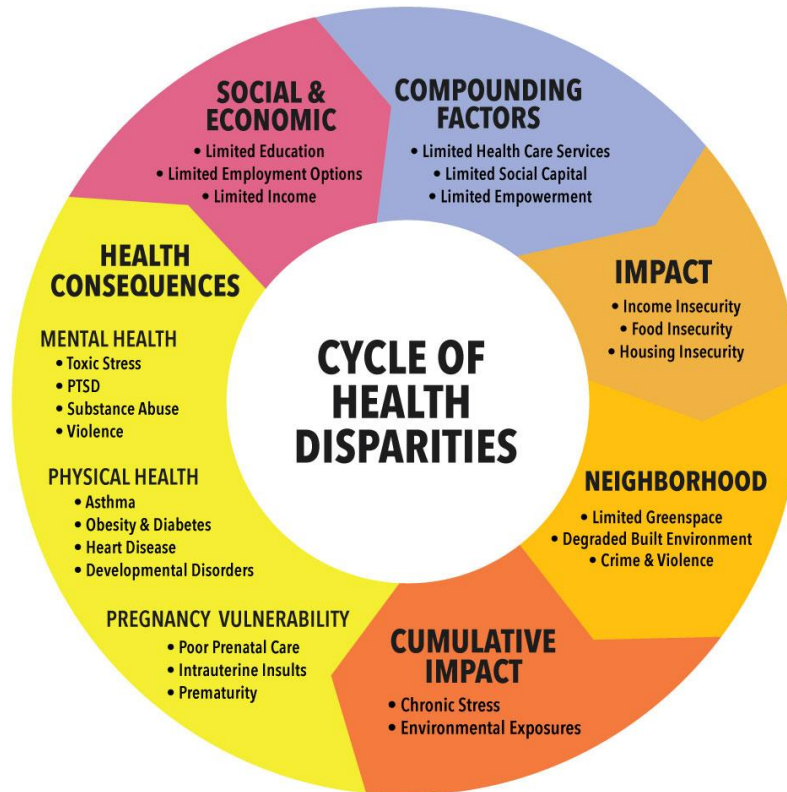
In contrast, children who grow up in an environment where their parents are stressed by poverty, job insecurity, income insecurity, housing insecurity, and food insecurity, and live in areas where the air they breathe is polluted, the food they eat is not nutritious, the houses and neighborhoods in which they live are likely to be neglected and crowded with limited access to greenspace, and their schools are old and their teachers are tired, so their education is less than optimal, they have limited access to quality healthcare, and are more likely to suffer from stress, which cumulatively adversely affects their physical and mental health and well-being, and dims their aspirations for a promising future for themselves and for their children. This latter scenario can be conceptualized in an intergenerational *Cycle of Health Disparities* (see diagram below).

BREAK THE CYCLE FACULTY

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Break the Cycle of Children's Environmental Health Disparities

Break the Cycle of Children's Environmental Health Disparities is an annual, collaborative interdisciplinary research and training program for university students to explore the impact of adverse social, economic, and environmental factors on children's health, growth, development and potential as active contributing members of society. Each participating student is invited to engage in a creative project that focuses on improving the health, growth and development of children who live in disadvantaged communities where social and economic factors are compounded by exposure to adverse environmental factors.

What makes this program unique is that each student must view his or her project in the ecological framework of breaking the *Cycle of Health Disparities*. This adds dimension and perspective to the project and provides the student with a world view that is multifaceted and more comprehensive.

During the process, the students work on their projects with their university faculty mentors and report their progress on a regular basis in group sessions to the Break the Cycle faculty. As part of the review sessions, students are presented with a curriculum of in-depth relevant topics to illustrate and support the concepts embedded in the *Cycle of Health Disparities*, such as social determinants of health, environmental justice, community engagement, health literacy, and health communication. At the completion of their projects, the students are expected to present the findings of their projects at a national conference and then write up their projects for publication in an international journal.

The goal of working with the students is twofold:

- *Quantitative*: to support the students in the completion of their projects, help them to prepare their completed work for presentation at the annual conference and assist them in writing a manuscript of their work for publication.
- *Qualitative*: to enable the students to appreciate the ecological context of children's environmental health that encompasses the historical, political, economic, social and environmental determinants of health, and how they can make a significant difference in improving children's health and empower the students to become future leaders in promoting health equity for all children and improving societal health in the present and for the future.

It is anticipated that participating students will inspire their peers in academic, professional, and social settings, and that the interdisciplinary nature of the program with participation of students from a variety of universities, disciplines and perspectives, offers a forum for enhanced understanding of the complexities of children's health disparities and how they can play a productive and transformative role. Through cultivating the natural curiosity and talents of the students and providing them with the necessary information, insights and strategies along with a sense of purpose and mission, the students will become productive and contributing members in our society and our future leaders.

Since its inception in 2004, *Break the Cycle* has partnered with over 80 university departments across 24 States in the US, as well as from 6 countries in Latin America and 2 countries in Africa, and has supported research for over 200 trainees. Annual *Break the Cycle* trainee projects are published in international journals and a book series on public health. Alumni of the *Break the Cycle* program rate their mentored research experiences highly and many pursue careers related to their *Break the Cycle* projects.



We invite university and college students in the US and around the world from a variety of academic disciplines to participate in our **21st Annual *Break the Cycle of Children's Environmental Health Disparities* program** for 2025-2026 and present their work at our Annual *Break the Cycle* conference will be held in Atlanta, Georgia on **April 26-28, 2026**.

Application for 21st Annual Break the Cycle Program

Interested students should submit a proposal by Friday **October 31, 2025**, the application forms and program details can be found on our website:

<https://www.breakthecycleprogram.org/btc21conference>

Proposals are competitive and are reviewed and scored by the *Break the Cycle* faculty and decisions on selection of students for participation will be communicated by Monday **November 10, 2025**. Questions on project ideas or program details can be directed to our *Break the Cycle* Coordinator, Ximena Guillen at contact@breakthecycleprogram.org or to *Break the Cycle* Director, Leslie Rubin MD at lrubi01@emory.edu. Also, see below for more details on the projects and program.

Leslie Rubin

Leslie Rubin, MD

Director, Break the Cycle Program, Southeast PEHSU, Emory University

Founder, Break the Cycle of Health Disparities, Inc.

Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Morehouse School of Medicine

Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Emory University

Project Guidelines

- University students from all disciplines are invited to develop projects that creatively address **social, economic, and environmental factors that adversely affect the health of vulnerable children.**
- Students must identify a mentor within their University to supervise, guide and monitor their research project throughout the process.
- Candidates and mentors must have their own funding to conduct their project. BTC awardees will receive a \$200 stipend to offset project expenses.
- Team projects are permitted and encouraged.
- All applications are evaluated based on relevance to the *Cycle of Health Disparities*, the quality of the proposal, novelty, feasibility, potential for sustainability, and ability to complete the project in the allotted time.
- There are a limited number of projects selected for the full program, however, there is an option to participate in a poster session.
- During the project period, trainees will participate in monthly conference calls with *Break the Cycle* faculty to monitor and support their progress, share ideas, and enhance their learning in the spirit of *Breaking the Cycle*.
- Students are expected to present their projects at the Annual National Conference in Atlanta, Georgia April 26-28, 2026.
- After their presentations at the conference, students are required to submit manuscripts of their projects for publication in an international journal.
- Applications and more details are available on our website:
<https://www.breakthecycleprogram.org/btc21conference>

Desired Outcomes

- To inspire students from a variety of academic disciplines to explore the impact of adverse social, economic, and environmental factors on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children and to generate creative strategies to *Break the Cycle of Children's Environmental Health Disparities*.
- To collaborate with an interdisciplinary team of academic leaders examining the broader landscape of children's environmental health disparities.
- To promote leadership among University students in addressing *Children's Environmental Health Disparities*.
- To encourage faculty at university partners to promote awareness and academic interest in *Children's Environmental Health Disparities*.