Applied Methods to Improve Data and Health Equity

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Improving the completeness and accuracy of race/ethnicity in administrative datasets
Administrative data have been the backbone of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet as of April 21, 2021, racial/ethnic group was missing for 39% of COVID cases and 17% of deaths in national data being used to drive policy and decision making. Improving race/ethnicity data quality represents an opportunity to innovate on inclusive research and healthcare practices. To improve the quality of primary data collection, we recommend a synthesized published way to collect race/ethnicity information in relevant public surveys to develop a refined standardized question.

Utilizing innovative methods to address economic and health disparities
Across NYC neighborhoods, Asian restaurants, food retail stores, and produce vendors had higher closures and slower re-opening rates than non-Asian restaurants and compared to higher- and lower-resourced neighborhoods in the Manhattan and Brooklyn boroughs.

The composition of food outlets and closures differed across six New York neighborhoods. A greater percentage of food outlet closures were in ethnic minority neighborhoods. There were greater fruit and vegetable vendor closures, compared to other areas. Specifically, there was a 40% reduction of produce vendors. As a result, it is estimated that there would be a 20% reduction in fruit and vegetable consumption due to the COVID-19 pandemic in those neighborhoods. Given the well-known link between low fruit and vegetable consumption and the risk of severe diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer, coupled with stress related to increased anti-Asian violence against Asian Americans, and food insecurity documented for residents in that neighborhood, these effects will likely lead to an increase in the incidence of long-term chronic disease and poor mental health outcomes among residents in Chinatown.

Recommendations:
Dr. Stella Yi and her research team developed a way to capture changes to the food retail environment following the peak of the pandemic in NYC through administrative datasets and ground truthing. Their methods may be readily replicable in other areas of the country interested in understanding place-based impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, small business owners and/or health behaviors. In addition, we recommend continued research in which there is:
- Coordination with researchers engaged in national and global research pertaining to xenophobia related discrimination at the individual, neighborhood, and systems levels.
- Additional research should work directly with community partners to continue to advocate for the well-being of community members.