

SENATOR WALTER RAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

CELEBRATING
25 YEARS OF
RESEARCH,
PARTNERSHIPS,
AND COMMUNITY
IMPACT



RUTGERS-CAMDEN
**Senator Walter Rand
Institute for Public Affairs**





**A YEAR OF
GROWTH,
IMPACT, AND
VISION**

Dear supporters, partners, and friends:

2025 was a tremendous year of growth and impact for the Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI). Across South Jersey, WRI advanced research tackling today’s most pressing social challenges, including transportation access, public health needs, and food security. Through innovative and dynamic partnerships at the State and local levels, we delivered insights that shaped policy and strengthened local systems for lasting impact. And we didn’t stop at research; we convened policymakers, community members, service providers, and nonprofit leaders to turn research into action and drive solutions that have the power to shape the future of South Jersey. This year, WRI also proudly celebrated its 25th anniversary, reflecting decades of commitment to research-driven community solutions. Over the past 25 years, the Walter Rand Institute has made significant strides, shaping its role and strengthening its impact on both the university and the broader South Jersey community.

As this report demonstrates, we have accomplished so much and taken crucial steps toward realizing WRI’s strategic plan, and I extend my sincere thanks to Rutgers leadership, the WRI Advisory Board, and our wonderful staff for their steadfast dedication to our mission and their support in carrying it out.

Looking ahead, I look forward to building on the progress of this year, launching new initiatives that support the region and the university, and expanding our impact further than it’s ever gone before. Thank you for being part of our journey.



Mavis Asiedu-Frimpong

DIRECTOR
SENATOR WALTER RAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-CAMDEN

ABOUT THE SENATOR WALTER RAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs (WRI) at Rutgers–Camden has been a long-standing and trusted regional community partner for over 25 years. WRI honors former Senator Rand’s dedication to Southern New Jersey and exists to produce and highlight community-focused research and evaluation leading to sound public policy and practice in the region. With that as a foundation, WRI convenes and engages stakeholders in making the connections across research, policy, and practice in support of Camden City and Southern New Jersey residents. Using social science research methods, WRI specializes in transforming data into actionable information across a variety of areas, including workforce development, education, transportation, and public/population health. WRI reinforces and amplifies Rutgers’ research, teaching, and service goals by connecting the multidisciplinary expertise of faculty to regional problems, developing research and professional skills in students, and linking the resources of higher education to communities in Southern New Jersey.

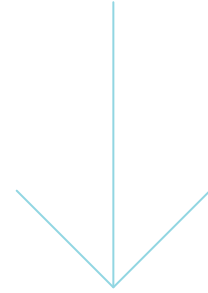


My experience working with WRI has reinforced my belief in the power of research-driven public service. WRI plays a vital role in helping RU-Camden achieve its strategic goals by transforming academic expertise into actionable solutions that address the most pressing challenges facing Camden City and Southern New Jersey.”

—TOM RISCH, Vice Chancellor for Research, Rutgers–Camden

Walter Rand Institute Strategic Plan

[WRI's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#) serves as the foundational roadmap for advancing our mission, aligning priorities, and guiding decision-making across programs and initiatives. By focusing on key priorities, the plan ensures that our work remains purposeful and responsive to emerging challenges.



RESEARCH PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

Enhancing WRI's community-facing research portfolio to produce timely policy and practice-relevant research that highlights issues and solutions across Southern New Jersey.



LINKING THE UNIVERSITY TO REGIONAL ISSUES

Creating dynamic pathways for faculty and the university to both engage in impactful South Jersey-based research and offer coursework in community-focused research.



STRATEGIC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Fostering a variety of research engagement opportunities for government officials, State and local agencies, community providers and members of the public that effectively support Camden City and all Southern New Jersey counties in sound policy and practice decision-making.



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Expand an already robust set of offerings to create a learning laboratory for students that teaches and trains the next generation of professionals and leaders in community-facing research practices, writing for public audiences, and furthers students' professional research goals and interests.

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

2025 By the Numbers

14 RESEARCH PROJECTS REFLECTING \$3,384,785

12

PUBLICATIONS

8

COUNTIES SERVED

9

PARTNERSHIPS

10

MEDIA APPEARANCES

11

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS
AND CONVENINGS



TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Research Spotlight: Health

WRI completed and amplified multiple projects related to public and population health in South Jersey:

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

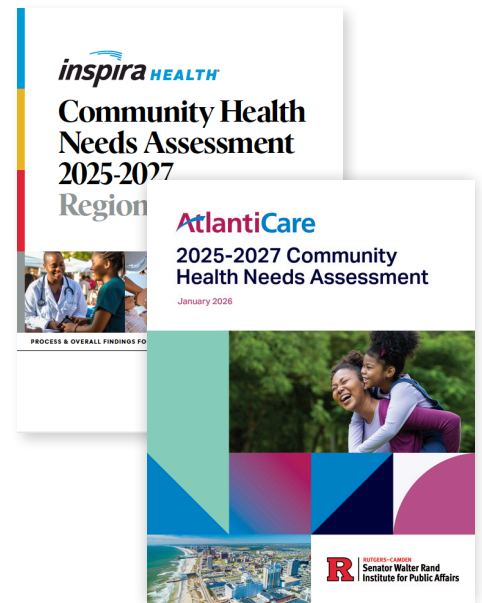
Community health needs assessments are critical tools for taking community-centered actions to address needs. They are a blueprint for sparking innovative approaches, maintaining successful initiatives, and decision-making around resource allocation. We have collaborated with health systems in South Jersey over the years for multiple rounds of assessment.

In April, we released our Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) for [Inspira Health](#)'s service region of Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties. WRI's strengths in community-centered outreach and stakeholder engagement were on full display. We hosted three in-person and hybrid presentations across the region during National Public Health Week, creating space for residents to share their voices and closing the feedback loop on critical public health concerns by sharing the findings with community members. WRI also piloted virtual drop-in sessions that drew participation from NJ Legislative District 4, the NJ Department of Health, county and municipal health departments, and housing and community development networks—demonstrating strong interest and influence among decision-makers.

We also wrapped up [AtlantiCare](#)'s [Community Health Needs Assessment](#) for their service area of Atlantic County. Findings include six key priorities: improving access to care, expanding specialists and culturally responsive services, enhancing quality and compassionate care, addressing housing challenges, fostering clean and safe communities, and promoting holistic health. WRI centers on community-driven solutions in the report, ensuring that recommendations amplify the voices and lived experiences of community members in the region—a key piece of WRI's mission.

“It's been really affirming to see the fruit of our collective work. By conducting this kind of research, we've been able to highlight our success at the state and, in some cases, the national level. Opportunities to showcase this work at the national level speak to the importance of the work and the value of our partnership. I really appreciate the WRI team and their willingness to help us dig in and uncover the measurable outcomes from the work we're doing.”

—DONALD NOBLETT, Inspira Health



TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Research Spotlight: Health *(Continued)*

FACILITATING LIFE-SAVING PREVENTATIVE CARE

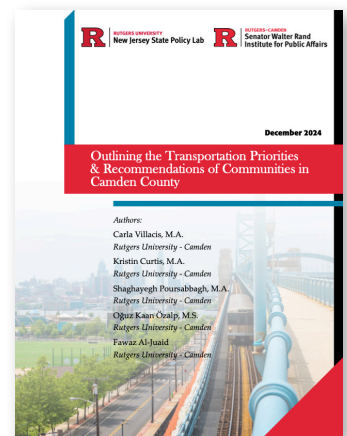
In another collaboration with Inspira Health, WRI and Dr. Tysha Saffold of the Rutgers-Camden School of Nursing explored barriers and opportunities in colorectal cancer screening eligibility in Cumberland and Salem counties, aiming to improve access to life-saving preventative care. This project also aims to learn from high-risk patients receiving colorectal cancer screenings, with the aim of improving access to preventive screenings. The findings will be released and amplified during National Colorectal Cancer Awareness month in March 2026.



Research Spotlight: Transportation

WRI’s transportation research made a major impact this year, sparking conversation and action across South Jersey. Our report—in collaboration with the [NJ State Policy Lab](#)—on community transportation priorities in Camden County was strategically disseminated to key stakeholders, including NJ Transit, PATCO, State agencies, county commissioners, legislators, and community organizations, ensuring the findings reached those who shape policy and deliver services. Through a robust outreach plan, we paired the report’s release with a well-attended webinar that drew strong participation from State and local leaders, transportation providers, and nonprofits.

Media coverage amplified our reach, with stories featured in [WHYY](#), [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#), [TapIntoCamden](#), and [NJ Spotlight News](#), where our research was highlighted alongside remarks from NJ Transit’s CEO Kris Kolluri on the future of transit. Engagement metrics soared across our website, social media, and email campaigns, underscoring the demand for this work. Multiple legislative offices reached out around the findings, demonstrating the report’s influence and WRI’s role as a trusted resource in shaping transportation solutions for Southern New Jersey.



Research Spotlight: Food Security

WRI strengthened its portfolio in addressing food insecurity across South Jersey through both ongoing and new partnerships. We continued to build on existing collaborations with the Camden Food Security Collective and the Rowan University/Rutgers–Camden Board of Governors to evaluate food security initiatives, track food security metrics, and gather community input for a new cooperative grocery store in Camden City.

This year also marked the launch of a groundbreaking South Jersey-wide initiative with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, Mercer Street Friends, Fulfill, Food Bank of South Jersey and Norwescap to evaluate the implementation and impact of a [Growing Healthy Pantries Toolkit](#). Using a community-based, mixed-methods approach, this project centers the voices of pantry staff and residents, ensuring that solutions are informed by lived experience. Together, these efforts reflect WRI’s commitment to its strategic vision to transform research into action that strengthens food systems across Southern New Jersey.



**LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR
CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS**


<https://rand.camden.rutgers.edu/research/current-research-projects/>



























WRI 25TH ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITIES



This year, the Walter Rand Institute proudly celebrated 25 years of impact, partnership, and progress across Southern New Jersey. To commemorate this milestone, WRI launched unique content including a special blog series, a conversation series with past directors, and a commemorative video—all celebrating our history and vision for the future. This anniversary was more than a celebration; it was a reaffirmation of WRI’s mission to connect research, policy, and practice for a strong, healthy, and thriving South Jersey.

In October, WRI hosted an anniversary reception bringing together leaders, partners, champions, and friends to honor our legacy and look toward the future. Emceed by founding Advisory Board member Hon. Patricia Egan Jones, the event featured inspiring remarks from Assembly Majority Leader

Louis D. Greenwald, who shared a call to action for us to embody the public service legacies of Senator Rand and Maria Barnaby Greenwald. Advisory Board Chair Michael Egenton led a moment of silence in remembrance of Senator Rand—2025 also marks the 30th anniversary of his passing.

We also recognized founding supporters and champions—including Richard Harris, Margaret Marsh, Roger Dennis, Judge Charles Rand and the Rand Family, and Jane Massey Licata – with Certificates of Appreciation for their unwavering commitment. Additionally, WRI was honored to receive proclamations from U.S. Senator Andy Kim’s office, Congressman Donald Norcross’ office, and the Camden County Commissioners, underscoring WRI’s enduring role as a trusted regional partner.



In the spirit of Walter Rand, we find solutions. And that’s what the Walter Rand Institute stands for. It’s 25 years of fighting for research and documentation to create evidence-based solutions to problems—and to come up with solutions that are nonpartisan, rational and common sense. And I think if we maintain that, we have a bright future.

—Assembly Majority Leader **LOUIS D. GREENWALD**, NJ-6

LEARN MORE
ABOUT
WRI’S 25TH
ANNIVERSARY:

<https://rand.camden.rutgers.edu/about/25th-anniversary-of-walter-rand-institute/>







23RD ANNUAL WALTER AND LEAH RAND AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIP DINNER



On April 29, the Walter Rand Institute hosted its 23rd annual Walter and Leah Rand Awards and Scholarship Dinner. We had the pleasure of honoring the 2025 South Jerseyans of the Year—the Domenica Foundation (via Pepe and Elena Piperno), Judith Persichilli, Former New Jersey Health Commissioner and Liz Thomas, Founder/CEO of Thomas/Boyd Communications. All three honorees have contributed so much to our region, and we were honored to recognize their achievements with so many friends and colleagues in attendance.

In addition to celebrating our honorees, event proceeds continue to support the students that

work with WRI, and the numerous undergraduate and graduate student fellowships, scholarships, and South Jersey community-based research, teaching, and training initiatives at the Institute. We took time to congratulate the many students that make WRI's work so impactful.

It was a wonderful evening—where we celebrated South Jersey, the South Jerseyans of the Year, and the work of the Walter Rand Institute. With over 300 attendees who contributed to a sold-out event, we caught up with old friends and made some new ones, as well. Thank you to all who took the time to attend and a very special thank you to all of our event sponsors.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



As a teaching, training, and experiential learning lab for community-facing research, engaging students at Rutgers-Camden is at the very foundation of WRI’s work. WRI works directly with students on research projects, supports the research interests of students through scholarships and fellowships, and provides exciting opportunities for students to produce impactful written materials for public audiences across the region and State. This year, WRI distributed over \$50,000 in scholarship, internship, student staff, and student programming funds to students.

STUDENT RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

WRI engaged 4 students from a variety of disciplines across the campus as research assistants who worked alongside our staff on research projects in a variety of content areas, including transportation, food security, education, and public-population health.

2025 SENATOR WALTER RAND RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Cory A. Rand Scholarship: Marlo Rossi

PROJECT TITLE: Abortion Access and Public Opinion in Southern New Jersey

Morenike “Reni” Alugo

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Socioeconomic Factors and Social Capital on Substance Abuse and Healthcare Utilization in South Jersey

Chengcheng “Zach” Yue

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding of the Impact of COVID-19-induced inflation on Gloucester County’s Public Finances and Household Financial Health

Samantha Vega

PROJECT TITLE: Climate Change in Camden and Health Outcomes

Morenike “Reni” Alugo and Chengcheng “Zach” Yue

PROJECT TITLE: Trend Analysis for US Census Data for Southern New Jersey Counties

WRI PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WRITING SEMINAR

Piloted this past academic year among graduate students, the WRI Public Engagement Writing Seminar is a program that teaches and trains students in community-facing research and translating research for public audiences. The program consisted of five sessions, each focusing on a different content area when it comes to conducting community-facing research in and for South Jersey and disseminating the research to different stakeholder groups such as legislators and community partners. This program was received so well that WRI has launched an undergraduate version of the seminar that will launch in the new year.

UNDERGRADUATE SUMMER INTERNSHIP 2025

WRI SUMMER INTERN Hoda Niaz

During Summer 2025, WRI hosted an undergraduate paid summer intern. The internship, launched in 2023, was designed to provide hands-on experience with community-facing public policy research and institutional research support. Over the course of the summer, the intern reviewed existing qualitative data repositories for community-facing research and outlined plans for a forthcoming WRI Alumni network.





LOOKING AHEAD

Looking ahead, WRI will continue successful and robust implementation of its strategic plan, expanding our reach and impact across South Jersey, the State and within the university. Major initiatives for 2026 include:

- Launching the **WRI RESEARCH RESPONSE PROGRAM** to provide nonprofit organizations across Southern New Jersey with research and program evaluation support and research and data analysis training
- Enhancing our **RESEARCH TRANSLATION AND DISSEMINATION INITIATIVE** by expanding our capacity for **translating research findings into publicly accessible formats, disseminating our research** to policymakers, community members and community providers, and convening stakeholders around research findings
- Establishing the **RAND LEGACY INTERNSHIP PROGRAM** to provide Rutgers-Camden undergraduate students with internship opportunities in legislative offices in Southern New Jersey
- Releasing critical research findings, including:
 - 5-year evaluation of the Clayton Model social emotional learning program
 - Addressing nurse workforce resilience
 - 10-year census trend analysis profiles for Southern New Jersey counties



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE WRI STRATEGIC PLAN, VISIT:



<https://rand.camden.rutgers.edu/about/strategic-plan>

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SUPPORT THE WALTER RAND INSTITUTE

Over the past 25 years, the Walter Rand Institute has made significant strides, shaping its role and strengthening its impact on both the university and the broader South Jersey community. WRI continues to uphold a strong commitment to bringing community and leadership together to make connections across research, policy, and practice in the region. We continue to reflect on the lasting impact we've made—and we invite you to be a part of our next chapter.

A donation to the **WRI INITIATIVES FUND** supports the implementation of our strategic plan and all the impactful work outlined in this annual report. Learn more and donate:

<https://give.rutgersfoundation.org/wri-initiatives/23248.html>



BUILDING KNOWLEDGE FOR POLICY AND
PRACTICE IN SOUTH JERSEY



RUTGERS-CAMDEN

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