



Rutgers Addiction Research Center
Brain Health Institute

Rutgers Addiction Research Center

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030

addiction.rutgers.edu
rarc@bhi.rutgers.edu

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear RARC colleagues:

Thank you for coming together across this past year to map out the next phase of the RARC. We initiated a strategic planning process during the 2025-2026 academic year because we have accomplished so much together during our first four years! Since our launch in 2022, we have transformed from a collection of individual researchers spread across more than 50 schools and departments into a vibrant community representing the largest addiction research center in the world. Pages 2-6 detail that process of growth.

Beyond our breadth and size, I have spent time over this past year, as we embark on this next phase of growth, thinking about who we are as a center. Four core values strike me as paramount to the RARC: **Community, Collaboration, Innovation, Impact**. Community is the foundation that the RARC is built upon. You have heard me say many times, “The RARC is a community, not a place”. One of the things that makes our community so special is our highly collaborative nature. We have scientists who span the translational spectrum, working across disciplinary boundaries to generate ground-breaking discoveries. This represents a unique strength that differentiates us from other addiction research centers across the country. It also provides the engine for innovation, evident in the exciting multi-disciplinary research that is underway at the center. Impact is the final cornerstone that I believe will distinguish us as being the premier addiction research center in the world. As we move into our next phase we will focus on going beyond discovery to translate our research into real-world impact, aligning ourselves with the National Institutes of Health motto “Turning Discovery into Health”. The opportunity to grow our translational pipeline was a theme that emerged throughout the strategic planning process, and you will see that reflected in the goals delineated for our next phase.

What will remain unchanged is our unwavering commitment to supporting our addiction research community. We were delighted to hear consistently throughout the strategic planning process that overall individuals are highly satisfied with the RARC and associated programming. We will continue to refine our programming in response to your feedback and identified opportunities for growth and improvement.

Excitingly, the launch of the next phase of the RARC will coincide with our move to the new Rutgers Health Building in the Helix, where several members of the RARC leadership team will be colocalized. The Helix will offer new space for programming and networking. We look forward to seeing you there! As always, thank you for all you do to make this community the special place that it is. Feel free to reach out to me anytime with your feedback and ideas for the RARC.



Danielle Dick, Ph.D

Director, Rutgers Addiction Research Center, Brain Health Institute
Greg Brown Endowed Chair in Neuroscience
Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

RARC 2022-2026: OUR FIRST FOUR YEARS IN REVIEW

The Rutgers Addiction Research Center (RARC) was launched in 2022 within the Rutgers Brain Health Institute with the goal of bringing together addiction-related researchers, clinical partners, and training programs from across the Rutgers system. At the time of its launch, addiction research at Rutgers was strong but distributed across multiple schools, departments, and campuses. The RARC was created to connect these efforts, build a cohesive community of addiction researchers, and position Rutgers as a national leader in addiction science.

Danielle Dick, Ph.D. was hired as the inaugural director of the RARC in January 2022. Starting in February, she held town hall meetings, as well as individual meetings with addiction researchers across the university, to gain an understanding of the landscape at Rutgers, challenges and opportunities, and what the community wanted from the RARC. Five initial goals were laid out:



Strategically assemble on-going addiction research in a way that coherently tells our story and showcases our breadth of expertise



Create a supportive and vibrant interdisciplinary community of addiction researchers



Grow collaborative and interdisciplinary addiction research, and associated training programs, across the translational spectrum



Develop outreach initiatives aimed at translating research findings to the community



Create a transparent, inclusive, and data-driven approach for growth of the RARC

We have made significant progress across each of these goals, with details in **Appendix 10: RARC Progress Towards Mission**. Here we provide an overview of key activities toward achieving the initial goals.

Building the Foundation

To bring together the expansive addiction community across Rutgers and create a central home for RARC activities, one of the Center's first major efforts was the launch of the RARC website: **addiction.rutgers.edu**.

The website serves as the central hub for addiction-related activity across Rutgers and includes a researcher search tool, events calendar, list of active research projects, training opportunities, blog, clinical service information, grant support resources, and community-facing materials. As a virtual research center, the website is the "home" of the RARC.



addiction.rutgers.edu

RARC 2022-2026: OUR FIRST FOUR YEARS IN REVIEW

Concurrently, the Center established a broader communications infrastructure to support connection and visibility across the community. This included hiring a Communications Specialist, the creation of the RARC listserv, development of social media channels, launch of the weekly RARC Digest, and publication of annual reports. Together, these efforts created a consistent pipeline for sharing opportunities, research updates, events, and resources across a rapidly growing community. See **Appendix 1: Communications and Digital Presence** and **Appendix 2: Annual Reports**.

The RARC also established a **leadership team** representing expertise across the translational spectrum of addiction science, including basic science, epidemiology and prevention, treatment and recovery, and public policy. The chairs of each domain consisted of established faculty from each area who worked with the director to identify needs and priorities for each domain and acted as the search committee chairs to hire new Associate Directors for each domain. The domain chairs were supplemented by specialty area chairs who represented areas/contingencies that we wanted to ensure had a place among the leadership (community engagement, early career faculty/trainees). The leadership team works closely with the Director and program staff to guide initiatives, support recruitment, and identify opportunities for collaboration across Rutgers. See **Appendix 3: RARC Leadership Team**.

Cultivating a Collaborative Research Community

Over the past four years, the RARC has grown into the **largest comprehensive addiction research center in the world**. The Center now connects ~120 researchers spanning more than 50 Rutgers schools and departments, along with clinicians, trainees, and community partners working to address addiction and related behavioral health challenges.

The RARC created **signature events** to bring the community together, including the annual Fall Symposium, Spring Year-in-Review Celebration, guest speaker events, trainee networking opportunities, and workshops focused on topics such as science communication and commercialization of research. These activities have steadily expanded participation and have become important venues for showcasing Rutgers addiction research, facilitating networking, and fostering new partnerships. A full list of major events and activities is included in **Appendix 4: RARC Events and Activities, 2022–2026**.

Working groups were also established as a mechanism to support networking and collaboration among researchers with expertise across the domains of the RARC who have shared interest in particular areas. Working groups are faculty initiated and led with RARC staff providing support. Current working groups include: Cannabis, Community Engagement, Science Communication, Treatment and Recovery, Digital Health, Feeding and Compulsive Behavior, Translational Impact, and Psychiatric and Behavioral Genetics. These groups provide regular opportunities for researchers to share on-going research and workshop grant ideas. See **Appendix 5: RARC Workgroups**.

RARC 2022-2026: OUR FIRST FOUR YEARS IN REVIEW

Growing Research and Training

In addition to supporting the existing addiction research community, the RARC has also spearheaded strategic and opportunity hires over its first four years:



Kristina Jackson, PhD, Associate Director of Epidemiology, Etiology & Prevention; Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School: Expert in the development of alcohol and substance use behaviors across adolescence and young adulthood, including risk factors, trajectories, and prevention



Ethan Cowan, MD, Associate Director of Treatment & Recovery, Professor of Emergency Medicine, New Jersey Medical School: Expert in the design, implementation and evaluation of novel interventions in the emergency department setting



Anne Fernandez, PhD, Associate Director of Health Services and Policy; Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School (incoming June 2026): Expert on improving the delivery and uptake of evidence-based substance use disorder screening, intervention, and treatment



Jill Rabinowitz, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School: Research focus ranges from preventing substance use initiation to improving treatment engagement, retention, and care of individuals in recovery from substance use disorders



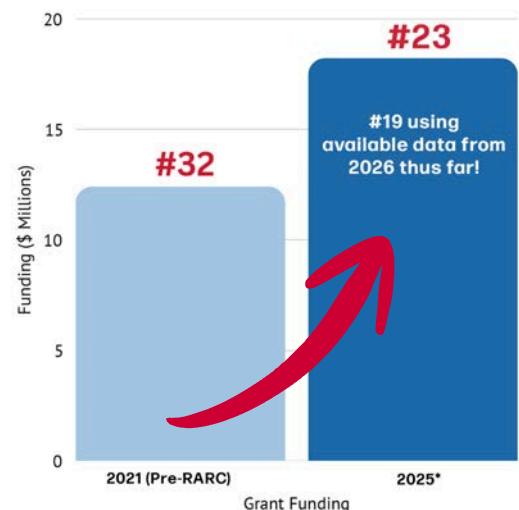
Marilyn Piccirillo, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School: Research focuses on improving assessment and treatment for substance use problems using person-centered approaches and digital technologies to personalize care



Sarah Brislin, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School: Research focuses on determining biological mechanisms that contribute to the expression and development of externalizing behavior in adolescence

Interviews are underway for the final Associate Director position overseeing Basic Science.

As the community has grown, so too has the scope and impact of RARC research. Since the Center's launch, funding from the two primary NIH institutes focused on substance use—the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)—has increased from approximately **\$12.4 million** to **more than \$18 million** annually, with Rutgers' national ranking in addiction-related funding rising from 32 to 22 during this period.



*NIH FY25 (10/1/24-9/30/25), last full year for which data were available

RARC 2022-2026: OUR FIRST FOUR YEARS IN REVIEW

The RARC provides a wealth of **resources to support investigator grant funding**. In 2023, the RARC awarded 3 pilot awards intended to promote new interdisciplinary collaborations and stimulate new grants applications. Priority was given to MPI applications with PIs without an established history of collaboration and/or who spanned multiple domains or departments/units. See **Appendix 6: RARC Pilot Grant Awardees**.

The RARC supports a **Mock Grant Review Program** whereby researchers have the opportunity to submit their aims and research strategy on a rolling basis to a panel of NIH-funded senior faculty who provide NIH-style reviews prior to submission for feedback. The RARC also hosts a list of funding opportunities and grant writing resources on the website, with updates provided through the RARC weekly digest.

The RARC has prioritized building strong training pipelines to support the next generation of addiction researchers. Today, the Center has **multiple NIH-funded training programs** spanning the undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral levels:

- **Rutgers Training in Addiction Research Program** (TARP; NIDA T32, PI Chris Pierce): This program funds 3 graduate students and 3 postdoctoral trainees in addiction neuroscience and offers full funding, professional development events, and connection with external speakers through monthly presentations and an annual symposium.
- **Training in Research on Alcohol Use and its Consequences and Etiology** (TRACE; NIAAA T32, PI Kristina Jackson): This program offers two years of mentored research experience, advanced methodological training, and professional development to postdoctoral researchers (2 recruited annually) in the biological, psychological, and environmental factors that shape alcohol use across the lifespan to prepare them for impactful careers in alcohol research.
- **Training in Research Undergraduate Experience through the Rutgers Addiction Research Center Scholar Program** (TRUE RARC, NIDA R25, Program Director: Jesse Liss, PI Danielle Dick): The TRUE RARC Scholar Program offers undergraduates the chance to take two new courses, Data Science & Addiction Research I and II, and 10 of those students are then invited to engage in year long paid research experiences within RARC faculty labs. The program also includes professional development opportunities for career and graduate school readiness.
- **Guided Research Experience and Applied Training in Alcohol Studies** (GREAT, NIAAA R25, Program Director: Emily Balcke, PI: Danielle Dick): The GREAT program is a collaboration with Virginia Commonwealth University and offers funded summer research training for 5 Rutgers undergraduates. Participants engage in a one-week research bootcamp, seven-week research internship, and professional development activities.

Building Community Partnerships

Although our initial efforts focused primarily on building the research community and associated training programs, we have also built collaborative relationships with key clinical partners including University Behavioral Health Care and the RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery (IFPR). These partnerships support joint research initiatives, access to clinical data and populations, and opportunities to evaluate and implement new approaches to addiction treatment and prevention. In collaboration with IFPR, RARC hosts monthly collaborative research meetings, offering the opportunity to share both project ideas as well as results from ongoing projects to generate and support treatment research.

See **Appendix 7: RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery (IFPR)-Rutgers Addiction Research Center (RARC) Research Collaborative - Active Collaborations.**

The RARC has also worked to engage the broader community through outreach and public-facing initiatives, hosting tables at Rutgers Day, Mobilize Recovery, and other educational and philanthropic events. In addition, the Center produces a biannual community newsletter that shares accessible updates on addiction research, resources, and programs with community members, partners, and stakeholders beyond the university.

The RARC has also launched initiatives designed to strengthen connections between researchers and the communities they serve. These include the Research Community Partnership, a platform that connects community members with research opportunities, and the RARC Leadership Council, a group of civic, business, and philanthropic leaders working alongside the Center to support outreach, engagement, and future philanthropic efforts.

“

“Our job is not finished when we deliver exciting scientific discoveries, our job is finished when people are living long and healthy lives.”

Monica Bertagnolli, NIH Director 2023-2025

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STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Strategic Planning Process

The RARC strategic planning process was launched during the 2025–2026 academic year to guide the Center’s priorities and growth over the next three to five years. The process was designed to be collaborative and transparent, building on the same community-driven approach used when the RARC was first launched in 2022. Through a combination of leadership discussions, community feedback, town hall meetings, and a key stakeholder retreat, the process sought to assess progress, identify opportunities for growth, and define priorities for the next phase of the Center’s development.

Strategic Planning Timeline

Fall 2025 – Leadership Planning: Initial discussions with the RARC Director, Associate Directors, and Leadership Team reviewed the Center’s mission, assessed progress during the first four years, and helped shape the strategic planning process.

November 2025 – January 2026 – Community Feedback Survey: RARC-wide survey was distributed to faculty, trainees, and staff to assess satisfaction with existing programs and identify priorities for the Center’s next phase.

January 2026 – Community Town Halls: Three virtual town hall meetings were held to share survey results and facilitate open discussion about the RARC’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

March 2026 – Key Stakeholder Strategic Planning Retreat: An in-person retreat brought together key stakeholders from across the RARC community to review progress and help define priorities for the Center’s next phase.

Additional details about each of these activities follows:

Community Feedback Survey

To gather input from the RARC community, the Center launched a RARC Feedback Survey between November 2025 and January 2026. The survey was distributed to RARC-affiliated faculty, trainees, and staff to assess satisfaction with existing programming and identify priorities for the Center’s future activities.

The survey received 73 responses representing a range of roles across the RARC community, including faculty, trainees, staff, and community partners. Overall, responses reflected strong support for the Center and its activities. Across RARC programs attended, 93% of respondents reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied, and **95% reported being somewhat/extremely satisfied with the RARC overall.**

Survey responses also provided valuable guidance on priorities for the Center's next phase. The most frequently identified priorities included increasing the translational impact of addiction research, expanding networking opportunities, strengthening cross-school collaboration, and continuing to support trainee development. Respondents also emphasized the importance of maintaining many of the Center's existing programs—such as the fall and spring events, weekly digest, symposia, workshops, and workgroups—while identifying opportunities to enhance communication, collaboration, and partnerships across Rutgers and with external stakeholders.

*A full summary of the survey findings is included in **Appendix 8: RARC Feedback Survey Results**.*

Town Hall Meetings

The Center hosted three virtual town hall meetings in January 2026 to share the survey results and facilitate open discussion about the Center's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

Participants reflected on the RARC's progress since its launch, discussed priorities for the next several years, and identified opportunities to further strengthen collaboration, training, and the impact of addiction research across Rutgers. These discussions reinforced many of the themes identified in the survey and generated additional ideas for expanding the Center's reach and strengthening connections with clinical partners, community organizations, and policymakers.

*Materials from the town hall meetings are included in **Appendix 9: Town Hall Meeting Slides**.*

Key Stakeholder Strategic Planning Retreat

The next major step in the planning process was the RARC Key Stakeholder Strategic Planning Retreat, held on March 6, 2026, at the Rutgers Club. The retreat brought together 38 stakeholders from across the RARC community—including faculty leaders, researchers, and institutional partners—to review progress and help shape the Center's future priorities.

Participants reviewed several materials prepared in advance to frame the discussions, including:

- **Progress Toward Mission:** A document summarizing activities undertaken in support of each of the RARC's mission areas.
- **RARC Feedback Survey Results:** A summary of findings from the community feedback survey.
- **Metrics for Measuring Impact:** Possible metrics to evaluate the Center's success in the coming years, including both traditional academic indicators (e.g., publications and grants) and broader measures designed to capture translational and community impact.

*These materials are included in **Appendix 10: Progress Towards Mission, Appendix 8. Feedback Survey Results, and Appendix 11. Metrics for Measuring Impact**.*

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

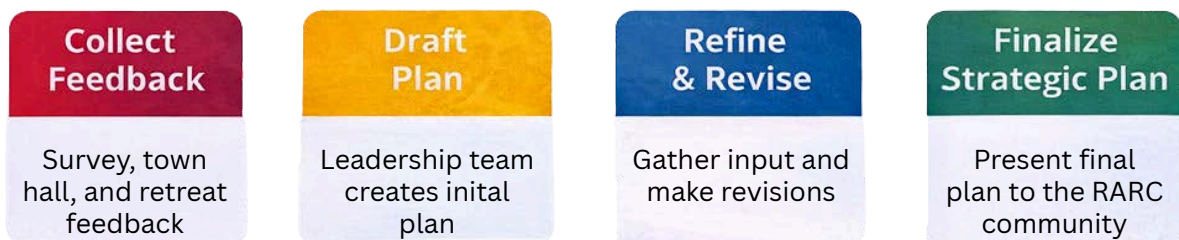
Through facilitated discussions and table-based conversations, retreat participants reviewed the Center's accomplishments and identified opportunities to strengthen the RARC's role within the broader research ecosystem. A consistent theme across these discussions was the importance of maintaining the Center's strong foundation in research and training while expanding efforts to translate addiction science into real-world impact through partnerships with clinical systems, community organizations, and policymakers.

Drafting and Finalizing the Strategic Plan

Following the retreat, the RARC Director and staff synthesized feedback from the survey, town halls, and retreat discussions to draft the strategic plan. The draft was first circulated to the RARC leadership team for feedback, then revised and shared with the broader RARC community for an open comment period through May 1, 2026.

Feedback from the community was incorporated into the final version of the plan, which was completed and made available to the RARC community at the Year in Review event on May 8, 2026.

The strategic planning process was designed to reflect RARC's commitment to collaborative planning, transparency, and continuous improvement, ensuring that the Center's future direction is informed by the perspectives of the community it serves.

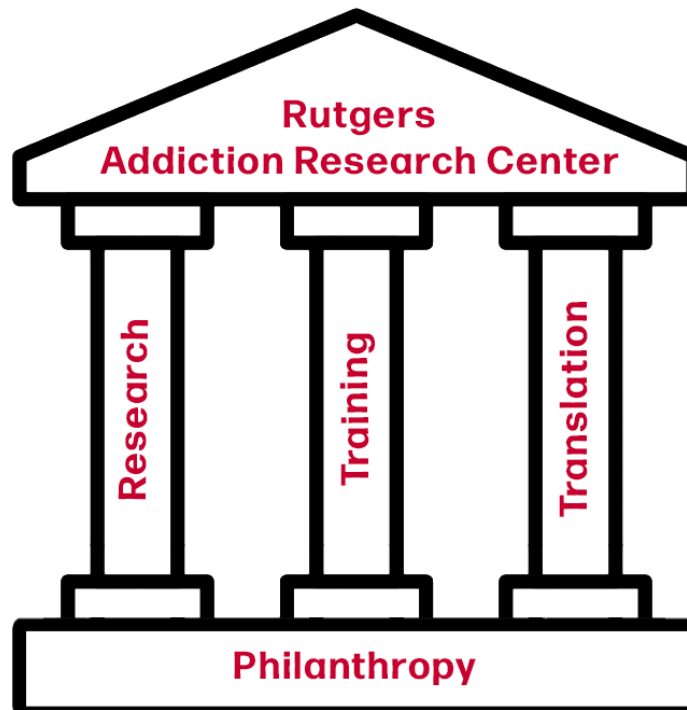


Implementation Process

This plan provides an overarching framework and associated roadmap to advance our work. Point people will be identified for each of the goals, and progress toward goals will be tracked by the RARC leadership team and reported to the broader RARC community as part of our annual reports and year-end-review events.

Executive Summary

Over the next four years, the RARC will build on the strong foundation established in the short time since it was founded to become nationally and internationally known as the premier addiction research center in the world. Being a premier research center means generating ground-breaking research, running excellent training programs, and being actively engaged in translating research discoveries into real-world impact. These are the **three pillars of the RARC: Research, Training, and Translation**, which map onto our mission statement, which we streamlined as part of the strategic planning process. We also added a bold vision, which is intentionally straightforward, designed to sum up the “why” behind our work.



RARC Mission

The Rutgers Addiction Research Center creates a collaborative community that strives to reduce the burden of addiction and improve lives by:

1. Advancing scientific discovery through multi-disciplinary research
2. Training the next generation of researchers
3. Translating research into real-world impact

RARC Vision: Prevent problems. Transform treatment.

RARC 2026-2030: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the first four years, the RARC has focused primarily on activities to build out the Research and Training pillars, while laying the groundwork for Translational initiatives. Through the feedback received throughout the strategic planning process, it became clear that with Research and Training activities well underway, building Translational activities represented an exciting area for future growth. Expanding our excellence to support all three pillars was deemed critical for cementing our reputation as the premier addiction research center in the world. Translation is also a critical component of achieving the RARC vision of preventing problems and transforming treatment. Accordingly, a deeper focus on Translation across the next four years is reflected in the more extensive set of goals related to that pillar.

Leaning into our identity as a translational research center means there will be more programming to support researchers who want to advance their science along the translational pipeline, take the next step in thinking about how their research could bridge pre-clinical to clinical work or lead to improved prevention or treatment, bring their findings to non-academic audiences, or find partners to expand their research beyond the walls of academia. The RARC will invest more time in building partnerships. We will start tracking measures of research to real-world impact in addition to traditional metrics of academic success. *See **Appendix 11: Metrics for Measuring Impact.***

Importantly, a deeper focus on translation does not mean that the RARC will abandon its identity as a research center. Research remains our first and foremost pillar. The first priority specified in the new strategic plan is to continue to support and grow collaborative, multi-disciplinary research. The specific goals under priority 1 reflect areas that were identified for refinement and improvement during the strategic planning process. Similarly, we will continue to support and grow our strong addiction training programs, with goals under priority area 2 focused on increasing synergy across our training programs, building training opportunities for physician-researchers, and creating shared resources for mentoring.

A final priority area was added to grow philanthropic support for the RARC, which was viewed as critical to support all mission areas. Further, translational activities historically have been more difficult to fund through traditional granting mechanisms, despite their centrality to converting research discoveries into real-world impact. Accordingly, we have added a strategic priority focused on building philanthropy. We aim to work with our newly established Leadership Council to build these initiatives.

PILLAR 1: RESEARCH

Priority: Continue to Support and Grow Collaborative, Multi-disciplinary Research

Goal 1: Bolster Programming to Support Multi-disciplinary Research Projects and Grant Funding

Rationale. One of the core strengths of the RARC is its expansive, multidisciplinary research community. Creating programming to connect and support RARC researchers in conducting transformative science has been a primary function of the RARC. During the planning process, several ideas for enhancing current programming were generated. These included reimagining the mock grant review program to enhance participation and impact, creating additional ways for researchers to connect surrounding multi-PI grants, and supporting our research community, particularly early career faculty, through an evolving funding landscape, and reimagining the mock grant review program to enhance participation and impact.

Action Items

- Create opportunities for researchers to connect around multi-disciplinary, multi-PI research grants.
- Create opportunities to exchange ideas and information surrounding grant funding.
- Revise the format of the mock grant review program.

Metrics for Success

- Number of researchers with utilizing the mock grant review program.
- Number of researchers attending programs.
- Satisfaction with programming.
- Number of researchers submitting multi-PI projects.

Goal 2: Increase Transparency and Understanding of Workgroups

Rationale. Workgroups have emerged as a useful way to organize our large addiction research community around shared interest areas. Each workgroup has its own cadence and activities, as determined by workgroup leaders, which was viewed as a strength; however, this means the nature of each workgroup is not always transparent to individuals not yet affiliated with workgroups.

Action Item

- Develop clear descriptions of workgroups to be hosted on the RARC website.

Metrics for Success

- Website contains clearly delineated and understandable workgroup information.
- Participation in workgroups.

Goal 3: Create Regular Opportunities for In-Person Networking

Rationale. RARC events consist of a mix of in-person, online, and hybrid formats. Online and hybrid events were viewed as critical to facilitate participation of RARC investigators who are spread across the state, as well as guest speakers who can present without the need for travel. However, the need for in-person opportunities to network was also emphasized. The in-person fall and spring signature events were consistently highlighted as among the most favored activities sponsored by the RARC. More opportunities to network were consistently requested across all phases of the strategic planning process. The selection of the RARC, and corresponding co-localization of several members of the RARC leadership, into the new Helix complex starting this summer will provide a shared space to facilitate consistent in-person networking.

Action Item

- Establish a regularly scheduled monthly in -person meeting to facilitate networking.

Metrics for Success

- Number of individuals attending in-person events.
- Satisfaction with RARC networking opportunities.

Goal 4: Make Social Media Content More Strategic

Rationale. The RARC has developed active social media channels that were viewed as an important way to communicate with multiple audiences. However, engagement with the various platforms is uneven, and the target audience for various platforms was unclear. We aim to create a more strategic and targeted social media plan to enhance communication between researchers, as distinct from communication with community members and other audiences.

Action Item

- Develop and implement a social media strategy to align platforms with specific target audiences and tailor content accordingly.

Metrics for Success

- Engagement with social media content across platforms.

PILLAR 2: TRAINING

Priority: Maintain and Grow Strong Addiction Training Programs

Goal 1: Enhance Synergy Across RARC Training Programs

Rationale. Now that we have four funded training programs that span undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral trainees, each of which have training and career development activities, there is opportunity for synergy to enhance trainee experience across the RARC training programs, as well as other relevant training programs at the university, and avoid any duplication of effort.

Action Item

- Develop a structured plan for intentional interactions across training programs, including shared resources, near-peer mentoring, and joint career development opportunities.

Metrics for Success

- Clearly defined cross-program interactions and collaborative activities.

Goal 2: Create Physician-Researcher Training Opportunities for MDs

Rationale and plan. Most of our training programs attract PhD researchers. An area that we have not yet built out is training opportunities for MDs who have unique constraints on their time and training owing to the nature of medical training. We will develop a training pipeline for physician-scientists in addiction research. This will include building opportunities for MDs to receive focused mentorship, scaffolding career pathways toward research careers, and submitting a training grant focused on physician-scientists.

Action Items

- Submit a physician scientist focused training grant to establish sustainable funding for mentorship, pilot research, and career development pathways in addiction science.
- Expand clinical and preclinical addiction research opportunities for undergraduates, medical students, and physician trainees.

Metrics for Success

- Physician focused research training programs clearly defined and publicly available on the RARC website.
- Successful award of a training grant supporting physician scientists in addiction medicine.
- Increased number of trainees across levels engaged in addiction research, with measurable outputs including presentations, publications, and grant submissions.

Goal 3: Enhance Shared Training Resources for RARC Researchers who are Mentoring Students

Rationale. We want to avoid any duplication of effort by RARC researchers involved in mentoring by facilitating access to shared resources that can be used across the community.

Action Item

- Develop an online repository of training resources available to RARC researchers mentoring students. Resources may include curated datasets for undergraduate research, R programming materials, and guides on research skills such as abstract writing and poster preparation.

Metrics for Success

- Active use of the online training resource repository by RARC researchers.

PILLAR 3: TRANSLATION

Priority: Build Strategic Partnerships and Programming to Advance Translation of RARC Research into Real-World Impact

Goal 1: Strengthen Relationships with Clinical Partners

Rationale. Our relationships with University Behavioral Health Care (UBHC), RWJBarnabas Health, and University Hospital were viewed as unique strengths and differentiators for the RARC. The RARC Director and Associate Director of Treatment and Recovery have established working relationships with the leadership across these large behavioral health and hospital systems. During our next phase we aim to capitalize on these connections to grow bidirectional, mutually beneficial research \longleftrightarrow clinical practice pipelines.

Action Items

- Collaborate with addiction medicine leadership at RWJBarnabas, University Hospital, and UBHC to identify high-priority areas for collaboration.
- Create a process for integrating new research advances into clinical practice.
- Create networking opportunities for RARC researchers to learn from and connect with clinicians.
- Foster collaborations that bridge basic science and clinical research

Metrics for Success

- Regular cadence of interaction between RARC and addiction leadership at our clinical partners.
- Number of research projects involving clinical partners.
- Number of clinical partners engaged in RARC programs and events.
- Successful collaborations between pre-clinical and clinical researchers/partners.

Goal 2: Build Closer Working Relationships with Community Partners

Rationale. Much of the first four years focused on building the addiction research community within Rutgers. We have established a community engagement workgroup and assembled resources for researchers who want to engage in community work. During our next phase of development we aim to build on this foundation and establish closer connections with community partners who can help facilitate research to real-world impact.

Action Item

- Establish an RARC Community Advisory Board, consisting of community partners and individuals with lived experience, to identify opportunities where RARC research can positively impact communities.

Metrics for Success

- Number of community-focused programs, outreach and educational events, and research collaborations.

Goal 3: Create Pathways for RARC Research to Inform Policy

Rationale. The role of Rutgers as The State University of New Jersey was viewed as another differentiator and strength. The RARC has an opportunity to use our research to inform evolving policies surrounding addiction-related outcomes. Over our next phase we aim to develop closer working relationships between policymakers and the Rutgers government relations team; this will be facilitated with the new Associate Director of Health Services and Policy starting in summer 2026.

Action Items

- Convene a policy-focused faculty working group.
- Develop a strategic plan to build connections with policymakers in New Jersey and nationally, including annual goals for engagement.

Metrics for Success

- Policy working group established.
- Clearly defined pathways for translating RARC research into policy impact.

Goal 4: Build Connections with Industry

Rationale. New Jersey and the larger tri-state region are home to many industry partners, who are necessary to translate basic science findings into new treatments. Building connections with industry has been challenging owing to the fact that there has not been much interest in addiction or psychiatric outcomes. Nevertheless, several RARC investigators have connections to industry partners and we will work on strengthening those connections and exploring more opportunities to collaborate across our next phase.

Action Items

- Convene meetings with industry leaders to explore collaboration opportunities.
- Establish a structured industry engagement pathway within RARC that identifies aligned partners, facilitates introductions between investigators and industry, and supports development of pilot collaborations or sponsored research opportunities.

Metrics for Success

- Number of industry partnerships established.
- Number of joint ventures facilitated by RARC.
- Total industry derived research funding secured.

Goal 5: Support Commercialization of RARC Research

Rationale. Commercial ventures (licensing, patents, start-ups) can allow researchers to increase the impact of their work by delivering them to settings where they can be applied. The RARC Director has established close working relationships with the Office of Research Tech Transfer team and will work on building opportunities for RARC researchers to explore opportunities to commercialize their work across the next phase of development. This will be facilitated by the co-localization of the addiction research unit within the Helix complex alongside Innovation Ventures, an incubator to support commercial activities.

Action Item

- Organize programming to help faculty understand the potential of their work for commercialization, as well as commercialization opportunities and processes.

Metrics for Success

- Number of RARC researchers working with Technology Transfer to register discoveries.
- Number of licenses or patents issued to RARC researchers.

Goal 6: Support RARC Researchers in Translating their Research into Real-World Impact

Rationale. Most researchers are not formally trained in research translation, which can involve many different types of activities, including communicating research findings to community audiences and through non-academic channels (press, social media), moving research findings down the translational pipeline, commercialization or entrepreneurship, and working with policymakers, among other activities.

Action Items

- Develop programming to help RARC researchers learn about and engage in research translation.
- Launch a new translational pilot grant program.

Metrics for Success

- Number of pilot grant submissions.
- Number of pilot projects funded.
- Documented examples of RARC research influencing clinical practice, community programs, school or other educational programs, or other real-world impacts.

PHILANTHROPY

Priority: Grow Philanthropic Support for the RARC

Goal 1: Partner with the Leadership Council to Support Strategic Initiatives

Rationale. Over the past year, the RARC has formed a leadership council comprised of a prominent civic, business, and philanthropic leaders who share a passion for addressing addiction and mental health crises and who are working with RARC to find ways to support the translation of research discoveries into community impact.

Action Item

- Collaborate with the Leadership Council to identify high-priority research and translational initiatives and raise funds to support.

Metrics for Success

- Translational initiatives supported by the council.
- Total philanthropic funding generated.

Goal 2: Host a Signature Fundraising Event Each Year

Rationale. The leadership council grew out of a signature event hosted by an individual who wanted to help raise awareness about the exciting work happening at the RARC. We aim to work with the leadership council to organize at least one event per year to further spread awareness about RARC discoveries and help raise funds to support our work.

Action Item

- Develop and sustain an annual signature fundraising event.

Metrics for Success

- Number of attendees at fundraising event.
- Amount of money raised by event.

Goal 3: Build an Engaged Donor Community

Rationale. Virtually everyone knows someone who has been affected by a substance use disorder. We aim to grow the community of individuals who care about tackling addiction to become more engaged with the RARC and enthusiastic about contributing to our mission.

Action Item

- Create programs and events that engage the community, raise awareness of the RARC mission, and generate philanthropic support.

Metrics for Success

- Number of events hosted.
- Number of event attendees.
- Number of donors supporting the RARC.
- Philanthropic dollars raised.
- Number and types of programs supported and associated outcomes.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Communications and Digital Presence

- [RARC Weekly Digest](#) — 769 subscribers
- [Community Newsletter](#) — 428 subscribers
- Instagram [@Rutgers_ARC](#) — 138 followers
- Facebook [@RutgersARC](#) — 78 followers
- LinkedIn [@RARC](#) — 866 followers
- X [@RutgersARC](#) — 306 followers
- Bluesky [@rutgersarc.bsky.social](#) — 227 followers
- YouTube [@RutgersARC](#) — 26 videos, ~1.9K views

Appendix 2. Annual Reports

- [RARC Annual Reports for 2024–2025](#)
- [RARC Annual Reports for 2023–2024](#)
- [RARC Annual Reports for 2022–2023](#)

Appendix 3. RARC Leadership Team



Danielle Dick, Ph.D.
Director



Emily Balcke, M.Sc.
Program Manager



Ariana Heinsdorf, MLIS
Program Assistant



Ricki Arvesen, MSW
Communications Specialist

Area Chairs



Chris Pierce, Ph.D.
Chair, Basic Science
and Training



Tammy Chung, Ph.D.
Chair, Epidemiology, Etiology
& Prevention



Nina Cooperman, Psy.D.
Chair, Treatment & Recovery



Lia Nower, Ph.D.
Chair, Public Policy and
Behavioral Addictions

Associate Directors



Associate Director,
Basic/Translational Science



Kristina Jackson, PhD
Associate Director, Epidemiology,
Etiology, and Prevention



Ethan Cowan, MD
Associate Director, Treatment
& Recovery



Anne Fernandez, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Health
Services and Policy

Specialty Chairs



Alexandria Bauer, Ph.D.
Chair, Community Engaged
Initiatives



Paul Manowitz, Ph.D.
Chair, Working Groups



Miriam Bocarsly, Ph.D.
Chair, Junior Faculty & Trainee
Engagement, Basic Science



Angelo DiBello, Ph.D.
Chair, Junior Faculty & Trainee
Engagement, Basic Science

Appendix 4. RARC Events and Activities, 2022–2026

- [Appendix of Events and Activities.docx](#)

Appendix 5. RARC Workgroups

- Science Communication Workgroup (3 meetings, 33 members)
- Community Engagement Workgroup (6 meetings, 18 members)
- Cannabis Research Workgroup (12 meetings, 70 members)
- Treatment & Recovery Workgroup (6 meetings, 64 members)
- Feeding Workgroup (2 meeting)
- Translational Impact Workgroup (3 meetings, 29 members)
- Digital Health Workgroup (7 meetings, 32 members)
- Psychiatric & Behavioral Genetics Workgroup (3 meetings, 27 members)

Appendix 6. RARC Pilot Grant Awardees

Developing a Targeted Pharmacotherapy for Pain without Abuse Liability

MPI: **David Barker, PhD**, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, School of Arts & Sciences-New Brunswick; **Zhiping Pang, MD, PhD**, Professor, Department of Neuroscience and Cell Biology, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

A Role for the Habenula Glucose-Inhibited (GI) Neurons in Opioid Addiction

MPI: **Jiang Hong Ye, MD**, Professor, Department of Anesthesiology, New Jersey Medical School; **Vanessa Routh, PhD**, Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Physiology & Neuroscience, New Jersey Medical School

Identifying Transdiagnostic versus Specific Genetic, Environmental, and Neural Risk Factors for Addictive Disorders

MPI: **Sarah Brislin, PhD**, Instructor, Department of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; **David Zald, PhD**, Professor, Department of Psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Appendix 7. RWJBarnabas Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery (IFPR)-Rutgers Addiction Research Center (RARC) Research Collaborative Active Collaborations

Implementation Study of the Comprehensive Addiction Risk Evaluation System (CARES) in a Health Care Setting (PI: Holly Poore, Instructor, RWJMS Psychiatry)

Translating Evidence on Opioid Overdose Prevention into Practice: Implementation and Outcomes of Emergency Department Interventions for Patients Treated for Overdose (PI: Jennifer Miles, Instructor, Center for Health Services Research, Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research)

Translating Evidence on Opioid Overdose Prevention into Practice: Applying Translational Science to Strategies and Outcomes for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Engagement Among Overdose Survivors (PI: Jennifer Miles, Instructor, Center for Health Services Research, Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy and Aging Research)

Assessing consequences of cannabis using EHR data (PI: Danielle Dick, Professor, RWJMS Psychiatry)

Exploring disparities impacting engagement in treatment and outcomes among naloxone-reversed patients (PI: Christine Ramdin, Instructor, NJMS Emergency Medicine)

Designing a clinical decision support system to improve care for ED patients (PI: Cynthia Santos, Assistant Professor, NJMS Emergency Medicine)

Assessing the effect of an educational component reinforcing best-practices for patients who present with an OUD on treatment outcomes (PI: Ana Steussing, Nurse Practitioner, RWJBH Emergency Health)

Appendix 8. RARC Feedback Survey Results

[RARC Feedback Survey Results](#) - Summary of the community feedback survey conducted between November 2025 and January 2026.

Appendix 9. Town Hall Meeting Slides

[Town Hall Meeting Slides](#) - Slides and supporting materials from the January 2026 strategic planning town hall meetings.

Appendix 10. Progress Towards Mission

[RARC Progress Towards Mission.pdf](#)

Appendix 11. Metrics for Measuring Impact

[Metrics for Measuring Impact](#) - Traditional and expanded metrics proposed for tracking RARC success in the next phase, including translational and community impact measures.