



Wake Forest University
School of Medicine

Harnessing Faith-based Leadership For Alzheimer’s Research: Promoting Awareness And Participation Through The Triad Pastors Network

Shawnta L. Lloyd¹, Triad Pastors Network^{1,2}, Kelvin L. Williams^{1,2}, Takiyah D. Starks^{1,2}, Rahma Ajja^{1,2}, Allison Caban-Holt^{1,2}, Brianna Eley^{1,2}, Rodney Witherspoon¹, Christopher L. Edwards³, William Bush⁴, Jonathan L. Haines⁵, Giuseppe Tosto⁶, Christiane Reitz⁶, Adesola Ogunniyi⁷, Rufus Akinyemi⁷, Jeffery M. Vance^{8,9,10}, Margaret A. Pericak-Vance^{8,9,10}, Goldie S. Byrd^{1,2}

¹Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston Salem, NC, USA; ²Triad Pastors Network, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston Salem, NC, USA; ³Department of Psychology, North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC, USA; ⁴Cleveland Institute for Computational Biology, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA; ⁵Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, School of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA; ⁶Gertrude H. Sergievsky Center, Taub Institute for Research on the Aging Brain, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA; ⁷Neuroscience and Aging Research Unit, Institute of Advanced Medical Research and Training, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria; ⁸The Dr. John T. Macdonald Foundation Department of Human Genetics, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, FL, USA; ⁹Department of Neurology, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, FL, USA; ¹⁰Hussman Institute for Human Genomics, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, FL, USA

BACKGROUND

Importance: Genomic research in Alzheimer’s disease (AD) may help identify disease mechanisms and therapeutic targets, addressing a growing public health burden affecting more than 7 million U.S. adults.

Need for Research: Rising prevalence drives the need for causal variant discovery, improved diagnostics, and prevention strategies.

Disparities: Adults of African and Hispanic/Latinx ancestry are 2x and 1.5x as likely to develop AD compared to their White counterparts yet remain underrepresented in genomic studies.

Faith-Based Opportunity: Faith organizations serve as trusted hubs for health outreach in underrepresented communities. Additionally, high proportions of older adults (>50 years) in congregations create an opportunity to increase AD awareness and research participation through trusted leaders.

Objective: To evaluate a community-based participatory AD research platform co-developed by the Recruitment and Retention for AD Diversity within the AD Sequencing Project (READD-ADSP) research team and the Triad Pastors Network (TPN) to increase awareness of AD and enhance participation in the READD-ADSP study among adults of African ancestry by leveraging trusted faith-based partnerships.

METHODS

Partnership: The TPN is a collaborative network of faith leaders founded by the READD-ADSP team to identify health priorities and co-develop initiatives that promote the well-being of congregations and underserved communities.

Project Design: Community-based Participatory Research Framework

Project Engagement: The TPN requested, approved, and took ownership of a community-based health platform, unanimously selecting AD as its 2024–2025 focus to expand outreach and awareness, with commitments to 1) Attend and invite congregants to a READD-ADSP community event, 2) Host an event focused on AD, and/or 3) Connect the READD-ADSP team to faith, professional, or social networks.

Setting: All events were held within faith communities, providing safe and trusted environments.

Project Outcomes: Event Count, Audience Reach, Interest Form Submissions, and Study Enrollments

RESULTS

- 78 Alzheimer’s disease (AD)–focused events were hosted through the platform across 18 U.S. cities. All events were introduced, facilitated, and supported by a TPN Faith Leader.
- 41 events emphasized AD awareness, providing education on disease risk, prevention, and available research opportunities to diverse audiences.
- 37 events were dedicated to READD-ADSP recruitment, actively engaging participants and promoting study involvement within communities.
- Combined outreach and recruitment efforts resulted in 796 individuals expressing interest in READD-ADSP. Of these, 383 individuals (48%) were scheduled for participation, and 304 completed study enrollment, representing 80% of those scheduled.

Figure 1. Community Engagement Model for the Triad Pastors Network Alzheimer’s Disease Platform

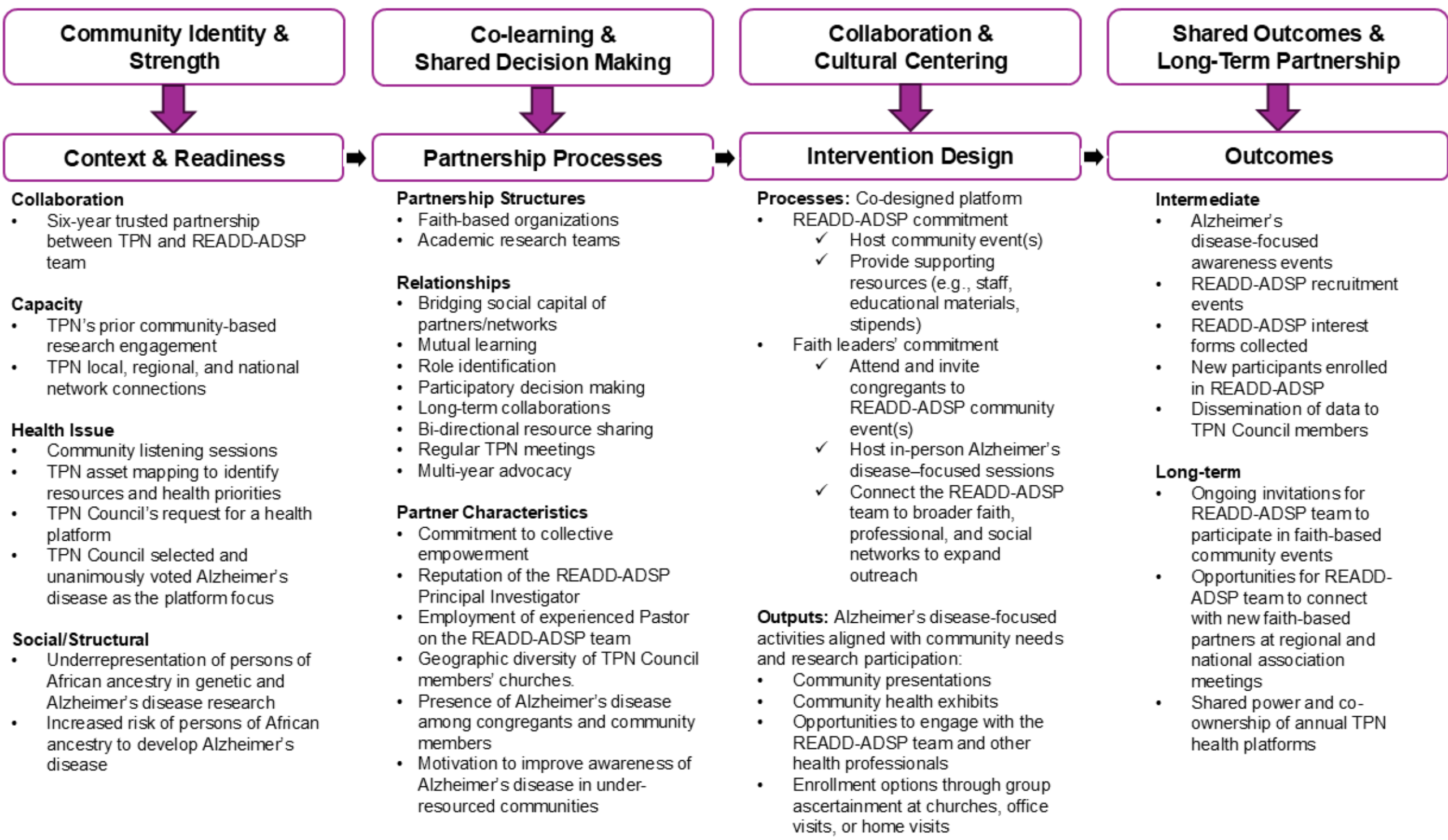


Figure 2. Triad Pastors Network Alzheimer’s Disease Platform for Awareness and Research Study Recruitment

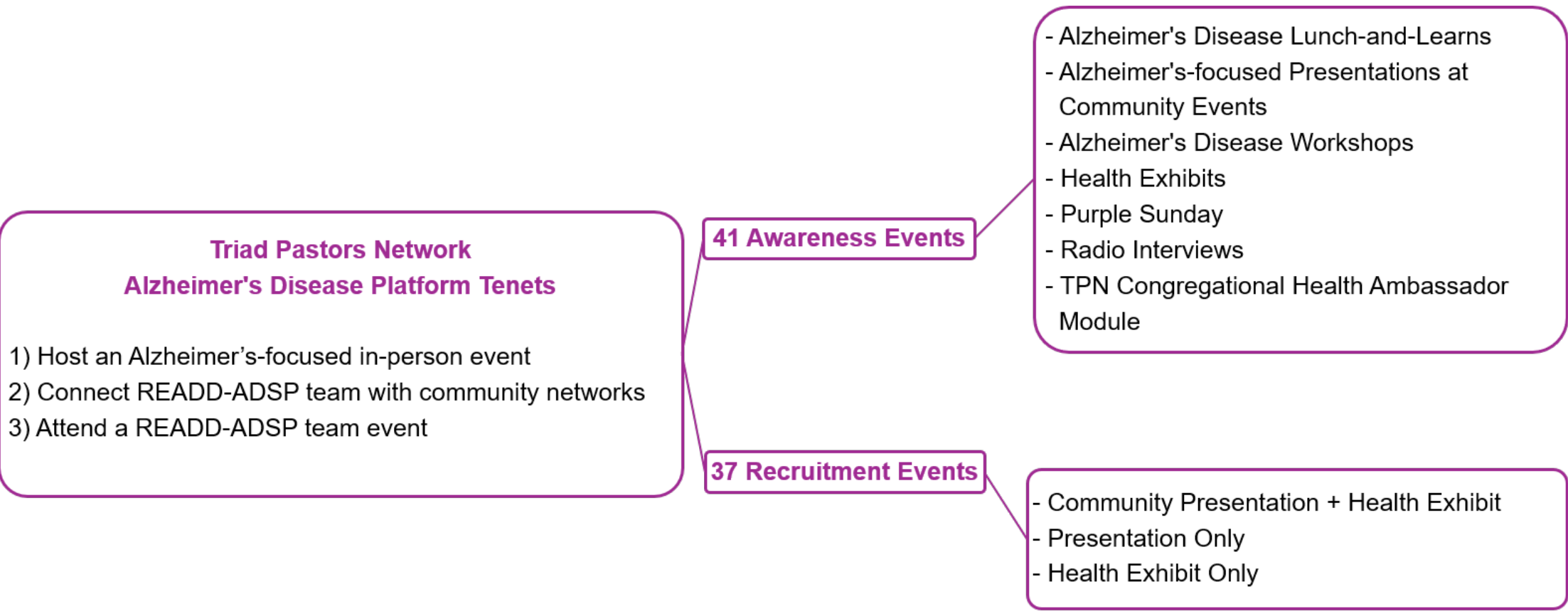
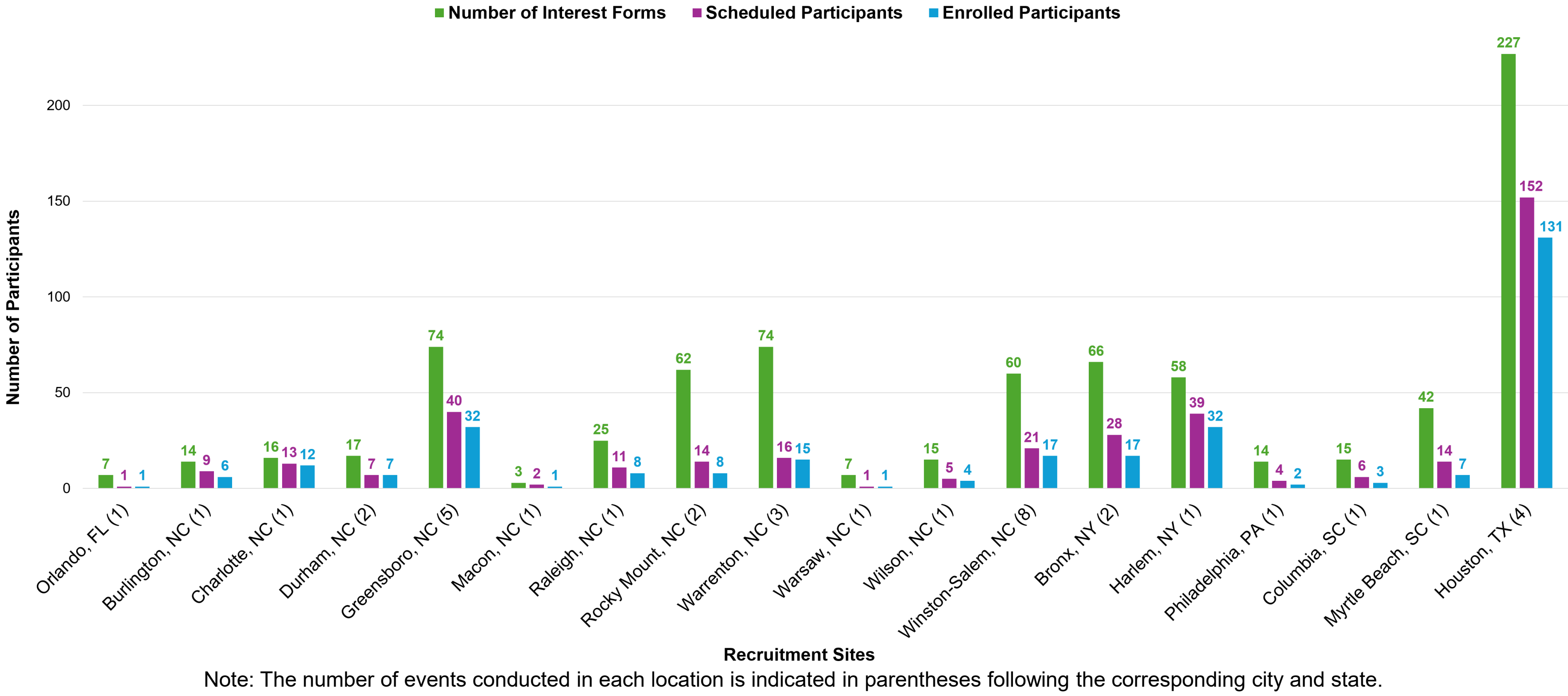


Figure 3. Participant Interest and Enrollment in the READD-ADSP by Recruitment Sites



CONCLUSION

- The platform demonstrates strong potential for scalable, sustaining community-based outreach to support AD engagement efforts, grounded in a long-term, structured community-academic partnership developed over more than five years.
- Combining educational initiatives with targeted recruitment activities enhanced overall reach and participant engagement.
- Awareness-focused programming played a critical role in building knowledge and trust within communities, supporting downstream recruitment success.
- Recruitment-focused efforts translated community engagement into meaningful participation in research.
- Integrating outreach and enrollment strategies within a single platform strengthened the pathway from initial engagement to study participation.
- Community-centered approaches and community investment from research institutions can help reduce barriers to research participation and improve representation in AD studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the participants and families, our clinical and outreach teams, community partners, and the Triad Pastors Network for their invaluable contributions to the READD-ADSP study. This work was supported by the READD-ADSP [U19AG074865] and the General Assembly of North Carolina Special Appropriation North Carolina Registry for Brain Health (Contract# 3531761).