

Supporting seniors through science and community engagement ^[1]

Submitted by [Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer](#) ^[2] on 15 December 2023 - 6:11pm



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Participants of one of the workshops offered as part of this collaboration to support the wellbeing of seniors in Puerto Rico.

The Coalición de Residentes de Vivienda Publica del Área Metropolitana (CRVPAM; Coalition of Public Housing Residents of the Metropolitan Area, in English) in collaboration with Laboratorio de Ciencia Comunitaria, a program of the non-profit organization Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR), celebrated today the “Feria de Servicios para Adultos Mayores” (Services Fair for Seniors). **The event was the culmination of a series of workshops and activities to provide tools, training, and alternatives to improve the quality of life of older adults through science and community engagement.**

The Fair was held at the Renaissance Square Condominium, formerly Residencial Las Gladiolas, in Hato Rey. Several dozens of participants, including older adults and other members of the community, were able to take advantage of the services and orientation of over a dozen health and housing service providers. These included pediatric and adult vaccinations, the Community Legal Office of the Inter-American University, Puerto Rico Community Engagement Alliance (PR CEAL), Iniciativa Comunitaria, and Puerto Rico’s Departament of the Family, among others.

"From our community, we seek not only to make the situation and problems faced by older adults visible, but also to create spaces and offer alternatives for each of us to live as we deserve. We recognize the importance of having the necessary information to be able to access and identify the help that is required to prevent our elderly from suffering loneliness, segregation, being victims of fraud, and other acts that put their health and safety at risk. In addition, they can learn about the importance of nutrition in this population and be prepared for an emergency," said Mirta Colón Pellecier, president of CRVPAM, community leader, activist, and an older adult herself.

Colón Pellecier organized the Fair, as well as the workshops and activities that preceded it, as a component of her participation in the Laboratorio de Ciencia Comunitaria or CienciaCoLab, a program of the non-profit organization Ciencia Puerto Rico. CienciaCoLab is a collaborative and participatory space that provides tools, workshops, mentoring, and seed funding for community leaders in Puerto Rico to design and implement local projects that incorporate science. Along with six other community leaders, Colón Pellecier participated in several trainings and conversations, and wrote a proposal to obtain funding for this community science project focused on older adults.

"CienciaCoLab wants science to be a tool for empowering communities in Puerto Rico, while recognizing and valuing the context, practical knowledge, and particular uses of science that communities already have," described Dr. Mónica I. Feliú Mójer, director of CienciaCoLab and the Division of Public Engagement with Science for Ciencia Puerto Rico. "Community leaders like Mirta play an essential role in addressing the needs and priorities of their communities. It is extremely important for us to collaborate with leaders like her and support them with diverse resources to make them successful. Projects like Mirta's exemplify the many ways in which science can be put in service of Puerto Rico, especially marginalized populations such as the elderly," added Feliú Mójer, who is also a scientist.

According to the Puerto Rico Department of Health, in the last decade, aging in the archipelago has increased by more than 8.5%. A United Nations report published in 2023 indicates that Puerto Rico is seventh on the list of countries with the oldest population in the world. Twenty-seven percent of Puerto Rico's population is over the age of 60, according to the same report. Older adults in Puerto Rico face information and technology gaps. Many of them live alone, face

abandonment, food insecurity, and housing insecurity. According to 2020 Census data, 43% of the Puerto Rico's seniors live below the poverty level.

"The Coalición de Residentes de Vivienda Pública del Área Metropolitana thanks CienciaColab and CienciaPR, for sponsoring this marathon. It has been a very important initiative for our community, especially for our seniors," said Colón Pellecier. "We call on the leadership of our communities, and all citizens of our country to take this issue as a priority and see what is possible. All we need is the will and the desire. We continue to be vigilant, from the community we do our part. Now, to the leaders and politicians of the country, the ball is in your court. We want to see action!", said the community leader.

Tags:

- [Laboratorio de Ciencia Comunitaria](#) ^[3]
- [CienciaCoLab](#) ^[4]

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