Engaged Institutions Initiative: Schools and Graduate Programs of Public Health Working to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in Partnership with Communities

Facilitated by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

A Call to Action

Despite major advances in health care and health status in the 21st century, disparities persist between whites and people of color — creating one of the most pressing social justice issues facing America today. Not only are most racial and ethnic groups less healthy, but they also tend to have shorter life expectancies, higher rates of infant mortality and chronic diseases, worse outcomes once diagnosed with illnesses, and less access to health care than their white counterparts. Racial and ethnic health disparities persist even when socio-economic status and insurance coverage are taken into account, due to a complex combination of factors.

Eliminating these disparities will require collaborative solutions that bring communities and institutions together as partners and build upon the assets, strengths, and capacities of each. Schools and graduate programs of public health — with their roles in educating public health professionals, conducting public health research and applying knowledge to solve public health problems — have a unique and important role to play.

In February 2005, a seminar sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to celebrate its 75th anniversary called upon schools and graduate programs of public health to spearhead efforts to transform all colleges and universities into engaged institutions and work towards the elimination of racial and ethnic health disparities. The Foundation defines engaged institutions as "institutions that invest in lasting relationships with communities... these relationships influence, shape, and promote the success of both the institution and the community."

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The Engaged Institutions Initiative

All schools and graduate programs of public health have teaching, research, public health practice or service activities that address racial and ethnic health disparities in some way. The Engaged Institutions Initiative seeks to be a catalyst for the development of sustained, strategic efforts by schools and graduate programs of public health to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in partnership with communities.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health is working collaboratively and intensively with teams from 12 schools and graduate programs of public health as they develop and implement strategic action plans to become fully engaged institutions with a focus on eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. Team members include academic administrators, faculty, staff, students and community partners who have made a commitment to collective action.

Selected from among 26 applicants, they provided evidence of commitment and participation from institutional and community leaders, made a clear and compelling case for their readiness to invest in authentic community-campus partnerships, and demonstrated the ability to engage other parts of their campuses as partners in the effort. Consultation is being provided by members of the CCPH Consultancy Network, the organization's training and technical assistance arm. The initiative also sponsors teleconferences identifies promising practices and produces resource materials.

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Participating Schools and Graduate Schools of Public Health

Listed in alphabetical order by state:

Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR

Master of Public Health Program in Community Health Education, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA

University of South Florida College of Public Health, Tampa, FL

Master of Public Health Program, John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu, HI

Morgan State University School of Public Health and Policy, Baltimore, MD

Boston University School of Public Health, Boston, MA

Master of Public Health Program, University of Nebraska Medical Center and University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE

University of North Carolina School of Public Health, Chapel Hill, NC

Oregon Master of Public Health Program, a consortium among Portland State University in Portland, Oregon Health and Science University in Portland and Oregon State University in Corvallis, OR

Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

Master of Public Health Program and Center on Health Disparities, School of Medicine, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

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