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$5.5 Million Grant from National Institutes of Health to Conduct Community-Engaged Research to Reduce Brooklyn’s Health Disparities

BROOKLYN, NY, July 10, 2012 - The National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), has announced a $5.5 million grant over five years to advance the work of the Brooklyn Health Disparities Center (BHDC), a joint venture of SUNY Downstate Medical Center, the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health, and the Brooklyn Borough President's Office. The goal of BHDC is to reduce health disparities among minorities and new immigrants in Brooklyn.

The grant, under the leadership of principal investigators Moro O. Salifu, MD, professor of medicine and chief of nephrology at SUNY Downstate, and Ruth C. Browne, ScD, MPH, MPP, chief executive officer of the Arthur Ashe Institute, will support community engagement to drive research, training, and policy.

“Brooklyn is proud to be the most diverse urban area in America, where we are home to everyone from everywhere,” says Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz. “But for far too long, our community has been burdened by a disproportionate share of largely preventable illness, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and AIDS. Thank you to NIH for this generous grant, which will allow the Brooklyn Health Disparities Center, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, and the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health to work collaboratively to help make Brooklyn a healthier place to live, work, and play.”

An innovative community-academic-government partnership, BHDC was established in 2004 with NIH funding. “Since its founding, the Brooklyn Health Disparities Center has used a community engagement process to develop a healthcare agenda for the Borough aimed at eliminating health disparities,” says Dr. Salifu. “This grant will bring together additional community partners and build a base of people across the education pipeline – including students and faculty from high school to the college and graduate levels – trained in identifying health disparities and ways to eliminate them.”

“The Brooklyn Health Disparities Center has paved the way for a new paradigm of engagement, and is grounded in the principles of social justice and community health empowerment that value the community an equal partner in the research, education, and intervention enterprise,” says Dr. Browne. She notes that in the next few years, the Center
will work with 14 local partners to train 30 undergraduate and graduate health disparity researchers, provide community-based internships to over 150 high school students, and develop research projects in collaboration with local organizations.

“The new grant will support the implementation of intervention research projects on two community prioritized issues in non-traditional settings,” says Mark Stewart, MD, PhD, dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Downstate and director of the grant’s Research Core. The first project is a randomized, controlled trial of a program designed to reduce HIV risk among African-American men in Brooklyn. It is led by Tracey Wilson, PhD, professor of community health sciences in Downstate’s School of Public Health, and conducted in collaboration with the Arthur Ashe Institute.

The second project, headed by Girardin Jean-Louis, PhD, professor of medicine and psychiatry and research director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Downstate, is designed to promote screening and treatment for sleep disorders and will explore the relationship between sleep disorders and metabolic syndrome. “Both projects will leverage the signature barbershop outreach strategies developed by the Arthur Ashe Institute,” says Marilyn Fraser-White, MD, associate director for research and training, Arthur Ashe Institute, and director of the grant’s Community Engagement Core.

The grant establishes four interconnected core operations that will each have SUNY Downstate and Arthur Ashe Institute co-directors to 1) build a dynamic research infrastructure to foster community-engaged research collaborations among SUNY Downstate's five colleges, the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health, and its community partners in Brooklyn; 2) conduct rigorous community-engaged research on high-priority health issues in Brooklyn; 3) strengthen local community partnerships to develop policy initiatives with the Borough President’s Office that reduce health disparities; and 4) train high school, undergraduate, and graduate-level underrepresented minorities to address health disparities.

For more information, please visit these sites:

http://www.downstate.edu/healthdisparities
http://www.arthurasheinstitute.org
http://brooklynbp.nyc.gov

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