

Public Relations

\$2.7 million grant renewal to Wayne State University and the University of Michigan continues fight to improve African American health

October 1, 2012

DETROIT — The Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University in partnership with the University of Michigan received a \$2.7 million grant renewal from the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Aging to continue the work of the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research. The center is one of only seven across the country established to improve the health of older minorities through education, scholarship and research participation. This is the center's fourth five-year renewal, which will allow it to continue its work through 2017.

Through scholarship, education and outreach, the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research investigates why older urban minorities suffer from poorer health than their Caucasian counterparts. Center faculty members mentor junior minority scholars to encourage high-quality research into issues affecting aging and ethnicity. The Institute of Gerontology maintains a database of 1,685 older African Americans in the Detroit area who are willing to take part in research projects. This pool of volunteers is highly valuable to researchers because African Americans and other minority groups have traditionally been underrepresented in research. The center also provides free health screenings and community forums to educate more than 1,000 older minority members each year about preventing diseases that are prevalent in certain ethnic groups.

James Jackson, director of U-M's Institute for Social Research, is the center's principal investigator. WSU Institute of Gerontology Director Peter Lichtenberg is co-director of the center's administrative core. "We take great pride in the accomplishments of our Michigan center," said Jackson. "To date, 47 minority scholars have completed our program. More than two-thirds of these researchers have received grant funding, many of them as principal investigators on NIH grants. They are working hard to address the health disparities that plague our African American elders."

As they age, African Americans have significantly higher rates than their Caucasian counterparts of diabetes, stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure and certain cancers. Research is focused on why this disparity occurs and methods for reversing it. "For 15 years, we have partnered with older adults to promote healthier aging," Lichtenberg said. "With this grant, we continue strengthening scholarship and focusing on the health and education needs of Detroit's elders. It takes time to make a difference that will last."

The National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Aging award number for this grant is 2P30AG-15281-16.

The Institute of Gerontology researches the aging process, educates students in gerontology, and presents programs on aging issues relevant to professionals, caregivers and older adults in the community (www.iog.wayne.edu). The Institute is part of the Division of Research at Wayne State University, one of the nation's preeminent public research institutions in an urban setting. For more information about research at Wayne State University, visit research.wayne.edu.

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