



## Addressing Health Disparities and Other Priority Health Problems

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In 1984, Congress authorized the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to create a network of academic health centers to conduct applied public health research. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was selected to administer the Prevention Research Centers network and to provide leadership, technical assistance, and oversight.

Today, with fiscal year 2004 appropriations of \$26.7 million, CDC supports 28 centers associated with schools of public health, medicine, or osteopathy throughout the country. Each center conducts at least one core research project with an underserved population that has a disproportionately large burden of disease and disability.

By involving community members, academic researchers, and public health agencies, the Prevention Research Centers find innovative ways to promote health and prevent disease. Together the partners design, test, and disseminate strategies—often as new policies or recommended public health practices.

In addition to conducting core research, the centers work with partners on special interest projects defined by CDC

and other HHS agencies. As a result, the Prevention Research Centers' portfolio now includes nearly 500 core, special interest, and other-funded research projects a year.

The prevention researchers help people reduce a variety of risk factors in their individual lives or in their communities. For example, some centers work with distinct populations, such as African Americans and Latinos in Harlem, Mexican Americans on the border, American Indians in New Mexico, below-poverty-level residents in rural Missouri and Alabama, and women in blue-collar jobs in North Carolina. Others focus on organizations that serve youth or seniors. While all centers share a common goal of addressing behaviors and environmental factors that cause chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, a few Prevention Research Centers have broadened their programs to address injury, infectious disease, and mental health.

Through scientific rigor, community acceptance, and practical application, the centers are finding ways to improve the nation's quality of life.

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### Prevention Research Centers' Select Core Projects

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**University of Washington at Seattle**

Encouraging Active, Rewarding Lives for Seniors

**University of California at Berkeley**

Health is Strength for Korean American Women

**University of California at Los Angeles**

Worksite-Based Program to Help Parents Promote Healthy Sexual Development Among Their Adolescents

**University of Arizona**

Improving Health of U.S.–Mexico Border Communities

**University of Colorado**

Improving Health in Colorado's San Luis Valley

**University of New Mexico**

Healthy Path Created for Navajo Elders

**University of Oklahoma**

Reducing Health Risks Among American Indian Children

**University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston**

Texas Schools Are Adopting CATCH, Coordinated Approach to Child Health

**Tulane University**

Preventing Lead Poisoning Among Young Children in New Orleans

**Saint Louis University**

Reducing Heart Disease Among Residents of Southeast Missouri

**University of Iowa**

Improving the Health of Residents in Rural Iowa

**University of Minnesota**

Prime Time: A Youth-Development Strategy for Preventing Teen Pregnancy

**University of Illinois at Chicago**

*Si Se Puede!* Latino Diabetes Project

**University of Michigan**

Enhancing Father-Son Relationships in African American Families

**University of Kentucky**

Increasing Colorectal Cancer Screening in Appalachian Kentucky

**University of Alabama at Birmingham**

Improving Health Among African American Families in Rural Alabama

**Morehouse School of Medicine**

HIV Risk Reduction Among African American Women

**University of South Florida**

Citrus Worker Eye Safety Program & Discouraging Tobacco and Alcohol Use Among Middle School Youths

**University of South Carolina**

Promoting Physical Activity Through Environmental and Policy Supports

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

Health Works in North Carolina

## Merging Research and Practice

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The Prevention Research Centers serve as a national resource for developing and applying effective prevention strategies at the community level, as the following examples illustrate.

### Studying Healthy Development

Long-term, community-based research can shed light on ways in which children's health behaviors—including physical activity, eating habits, and substance abuse—put them at risk for disease as adults. Through Healthy Passages, Prevention Research Centers at the University of Texas Health Science Center, the University of Alabama, and the University of California at Los Angeles are studying more than 5,000 white, African American, and Hispanic children from different socioeconomic strata to assess the influence of environment, cultural values, and other factors on health.

### Helping Seniors Stay Healthy and Active

In 1993, the University of Washington Health Promotion Research Center collaborated with the Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound and Senior Services of Seattle/King County to develop a physical activity program to help seniors increase their endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. The pilot study showed that participants improved significantly in almost every area tested—from physical and social functioning to levels of pain and depression—and significantly reduced their health care costs. The program is now being offered at 64 community sites in six states.

### Sharing Expertise Nationwide

Grants provided to the Association of State and Territorial Chronic Disease Program Directors and the

Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education are promoting collaboration between five Prevention Research Centers and state health departments. In one example of these collaborations, the Harvard Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity has worked with the Maine Bureau of Health, the Maine Center for Public Health, and the Maine Department of Education since October 2000 to promote healthy behaviors through knowledge dissemination, policy development, surveillance, and new community research. The partners have organized conferences on television viewing, sugar-sweetened beverages, portion size, and physical education in schools that have launched successful statewide legislative initiatives. In another of these collaborations, the University of South Florida is helping the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services integrate social marketing concepts and methods into health promotion programs.

### Examining Contributions to Public Health

The prevention centers at the University of New Mexico and the University of North Carolina are collaborating with CDC to review and summarize the scientific literature on the process of putting prevention research findings into practice. These two centers and those at the University of Washington and Saint Louis University are also conducting in-depth case studies of completed research projects. Qualitative data are being gathered from prevention researchers and community partners to document their experiences with disseminating promising results and overcoming barriers to improving policy and practice. These lessons learned will help shape future community research efforts.

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## Prevention Research Centers' Select Core Projects (continued)

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### West Virginia University

Not-On-Tobacco Program to Help Curb Smoking Among Appalachian Youths

### The Johns Hopkins University

Evaluating Effects of Community Youth Programs on Adolescent Behavior

### University of Pittsburgh

Ten Keys to Healthy Aging for Pittsburgh's Older Adults

### Columbia University

School Health Initiative for Adolescents in Harlem

### State University of New York at Albany

Preventing Chronic Disease Through Community Interventions

### Yale University

Connecticut Residents Choose Among Options to Help Them Quit Smoking

### Boston University

GirlStars Program for Boston's Public Housing Residents

### Harvard University

Planet Health Improves Students' Health in Boston's Inner-City Schools

# Capitalizing on Unique Opportunities for Research and Collaboration

**“Government public health agencies...must build and maintain partnerships with other organizations and sectors of society, working closely with communities and community-based organizations, the health care delivery system, academia, business, and the media.”**

*The Future of the Public's Health in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Institute of Medicine, 2002*

## Range of Disciplines

Each Prevention Research Center encourages interaction among faculty from different disciplines, thus bringing an array of expertise to each project. This blending of expertise is essential to solving complex health and psychosocial problems. Departments of education, social work, psychology, nursing, and many others work with the schools of public health and medicine. In addition, CDC's prevention centers network allows centers to collaborate with each other.

## Wealth of Partners

The prevention centers work closely with state and local health departments, managed care alliances and health maintenance organizations, state education agencies, and national and community-based organizations. Through these partnerships, promising research findings are translated into practical, cost-effective prevention programs and applied at the community level.

## Knowledge of Community Needs

Long-standing relationships between academic institutions and their communities bring public health researchers close to the people they serve. Because of ties to surrounding communities, researchers can design and introduce prevention strategies tailored to these communities. By understanding community attitudes and beliefs and by making the most of community resources, researchers can simultaneously address multiple health risk factors.

## Resource for Training

In collaboration with the Association of Schools of Public Health, the Prevention Research Centers program established a 2-year fellowship for doctoral-level students

of racial or ethnic minority origin. Eight fellows are now gaining hands-on experience with projects directed by the centers and their community partners. This fellowship increases the number of public health professionals qualified to work with racial and ethnic minority groups.

## Future Directions

The Prevention Research Centers' future will be shaped by results from Project DEFINE (Developing an Evaluation Framework: Insuring National Excellence). The project's evaluation strategies, developed by CDC in collaboration with the Prevention Research Centers' faculty and staff, partners, and community members, will ensure that each center can promote community health and contribute to the national program. Because all centers will report on performance indicators, outcomes can be consistently tracked over time, and data captured electronically can be disseminated to stakeholders to address accountability requirements.

The performance indicators are already helping external peer reviewers assess proposals from applicants for the program's next 5-year funding period. The performance indicators are built into the request for proposals so that applicants describe their plans for achieving the program's unique requirements, including maintaining a community committee that participates in all stages of research. In addition, all centers are expected to define strategies for disseminating research results and for providing technical assistance to their partners. With these measures in place, the future promises that sound results and practices will be widely replicated and that expertise will continue to be shared nationwide.

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