

2020 ELAM® Leaders Forum



School of Medicine
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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Building a Foundational Framework Towards Establishment of a Center for Social Determinants of Health Research

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BACKGROUND

- Social determinants of health (SDOH) are fundamental drivers of health inequity, and a cornerstone of social-biological mechanistic-focused research.
- **This emerging area of research, links cells to communities and neurons to neighborhoods.** It can uncover new interventions to mitigate health disparities, and is of increasing interest to NIH and other large funders
- **GAP:** Although UW SMPH has been a past national leader in SDOH theory and community partnership, expansion into next-generation social-biological mechanistic-focused trans-disciplinary research is needed to maintain this reputation and to compete for emerging NIH funding in the area
- **LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE:** Grow social-biological mechanistic-focused SDOH research across the UW SMPH
- **IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE:** Build a foundational framework towards establishment of a Center in this trans-disciplinary research area. Including key stakeholder engagement, organizational positioning, and needs assessment.

METHODS

- Key research stakeholders primarily from within the UW SMPH (N=31) were recruited to provide feedback and insight on these areas. External stakeholders (N=11) were drawn from NIH, foundations, and large nationally-known academic programs on social determinants. Notes were analyzed. Themes emerged and are presented..

RESULTS

UW Faculty Stakeholders SMPH Department/Programs

Medicine
Emergency Medicine
Biostatistics
OB/GYN
Pediatrics
Population Health
Surgery
Family Medicine
Neurology
Center for Community Engagement and Health Partnerships
Center for Human Genomics and Precision Medicine
Center for Health Informatics
Other UW Schools including Nursing, Engineering, Agriculture & Life Sciences, and Letters & Sciences

Stakeholder Identified Barriers, Needs

EDUCATION:

Need for additional knowledge and practical experience regarding **current mechanistic theory** approaches to social-biological health equity research

Need for additional expertise in latest **methods, measurements and analytic approaches** to facilitate rigorous social determinants of health research

Knowledge gap on current approaches for **linking social and biological data**

Bias that health equity research, particularly R01-level funding, is rarely supported by NIH

Definition of 'health equity research' that does not embrace the full NIH definition

Belief that health equity research does not include basic science

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Lack of expert consultants and infrastructure for designing, conducting and analyzing NIH-level, cutting-edge social determinants of health studies

No universal system infrastructure for individual-level and contextual-level data collection on social determinants of health within clinical affiliates

Need to increase coordination amongst multi-disciplinary faculty interested in the topic (e.g., matching a social scientist with a basic scientist and helping them know how to work together towards a fundable proposal)

Limited number of NIH-funded, nationally recognized experts on social determinants of health at UW for mentoring, building investigator teams

Proposed Components – Center on Social Determinants of Health



- New
- Basic Infrastructure in place, DOM and NIH-Funded
- Basic Infrastructure in place, fully NIH-Funded

CONCLUSIONS

- A broad array of stakeholders across UW SMPH Departments and Centers are engaged
- Social-biological phenotyping linkages were of particular interest to both internal and external stakeholders
- Knowledge gaps were noted as key barriers to progress, with biases/beliefs about the area noted as a particular opportunity for change through wide-spread education
- New infrastructure investments can synergize efficiently with existing programs to fulfill needs.
- External stakeholders confirmed that strong opportunities exist, and that the area is likely to grow rapidly with initiatives progressing at other academic institutions

NEXT STEPS

- Continue development of organizational structure based on identified needs and resources, and stakeholder engagement through new collaborative venues
- Engagement with education leadership to develop specific plans for addressing knowledge gaps
- Awaiting final decision on strongly scored \$29.8m NIH R01 (AG070883, PI: Kind) to establish a 22 site national consortium on topic, setting the stage for future NIH P or other center funding.

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