

The HBEC encourages older African Americans to participate in research with the goal of addressing health disparities

SPRING 2019



HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER

Connecting Older Adults to Research



Research is critical to understanding why African Americans are at much higher risk of developing certain diseases, and why these diseases have a greater impact on their health and longevity. If you agree to be part of the Participant Resource Pool (PRP), we guarantee that:

The research projects meet the highest quality federal, state and university standards.

Your information will be handled with the strictest confidence.

You will be considered for research that is of interest to you.

You have the right to decline a research project for any reason at any time.

If interested, contact the HBEC Program Coordinator at **313-664-2604**

HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER (HBEC)

Part of Michigan State University's, University of Michigan's and Wayne State University's Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research: A National Institute on Aging Grant Program



Healthier Black Elders Programs Expand to Flint

Flint's older adults will soon have access to educational events and Lunch & Learns similar to programs that have successfully engaged thousands of older adults in Detroit for the past 20 years. These community offerings are designed to improve the health and wellness of older adults, primarily African Americans who are at higher risk of contracting serious diseases like diabetes and certain cancers.

The programs are offered through the Healthier Black Elders Center (HBEC), part of the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR), which recently received \$3.5 million to continue its work through 2023. The grant, from the National Institute on Aging, now adds Michigan State University's Medi-

cal School to the University of Michigan and Wayne State University's Institute of Gerontology.

MCUAAAR is one of 18 Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research across the nation tasked with improving the health of older minorities through research, scholarship and education. The Healthier Black Elders Center, part of MCUAAAR's Community Core, has provided educational programs and health screenings to about 2,400 older African Americans a year. HBEC also maintains a database of about 1,300 older African Americans in Detroit willing to volunteer for research. The grant renewal extends HBEC to older African American adults in Flint and adds Michigan State Uni-

SEE FLINT PAGE 2

Flint from page 1

versity team members to the Community Core: Dr. Vicki Johnson-Lawrence and Mr. Sean Knurek.

Dr. Johnson-Lawrence now joins Dr. Tam Perry (Wayne State University) and Dr. Jamie Mitchell (University of Michigan) to co-lead the Community Core. Dr. Johnson-Lawrence is most excited to bring evidence-based practices and resources to aging African-American communities, and work closely with community partners.

"I'd like our older adult community members to know that the goal of MCUAAAR is not just to do more research. We will not simply add more written literature about their health problems. Instead, I want older adults to see MCUAAAR and the Community Core as an opportunity for exchange about their expectations of health science researchers - about the science they expect us to know, for us to share with them what we do already know, and for us to discuss the best, most appropriate, and community approved evidence-based ways to bring about health promoting change in our com-

munities," Dr. Johnson-Lawrence said.

Sean Knurek, a Michigan State University Extension Educator, will be taking the lead on expanding the HBEC program to the Flint community.

"Michigan State University Extension has operated in Genesee County for over a century. One of our main goals is to bring the educational resources of the University to the residents of Flint and Genesee County. By working with MCUAAAR, the door swings wide open to connect even more educational and health resources together than ever before. I look forward to working with HBEC in Flint, particularly in designing new health education opportunities—and learning how to do so in a way that will resonate with everyone," said Knurek.

To Dr. Tam Perry, "MCUAAAR means that we are highlighting the voices of African American seniors which have historically been diminished. Our program seeks to provide access to health information to seniors in our community and offers a way for seniors to contribute their life experiences and health information through participation in research. I also want everyone to know how much I personally treasure the opportunity to be involved and learn from the wisdom that our HBEC members and Community Advisory Board impart to MCUAAAR researchers."

Dr. Jamie Mitchell wants older adults to know that "everything we do is in service of supporting older adults, and advancing science that will lead to longer, healthier lives for older adults. We've had much success with building trust and relationships in Detroit, to replicate that model in other cities where older adults need support would be a wonderful fulfillment of our mission!"

HBEC is thankful for all the community support and participation, and looks forward to another five years of educating the Detroit and Flint communities!

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– Dr. Mitchell

Meet HBEC's New MSU Team Members



Dr. Vicki Johnson-Lawrence is a new HBEC Community Core co-leader. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Family Medicine/ Division of Public Health, and an adjunct professor in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine-Flint Campus. Dr. Johnson-Lawrence is a social epidemiologist who uses community-based approaches to study ways to promote health equity. Her current projects include the SAMHSA funded Flint ReCAST (Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma), the Flint Center for Health Equity Solutions Church Challenge, and she has recently incorporated chronic pain research into her ongoing work.



Sean Knurek works at the Michigan State University Extension. His role is within the Health and Nutrition Institute with the Extension Health Research team to determine how MSU Extension can improve health research and strengthen primary care delivery to patients. As we start to expand HBEC to Flint, Sean will be instrumental in the outreach efforts to the Flint older adult community.



MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH UPDATE:

Memory and Brain Changes as We Age

The Connect Lab studies differences that occur in the aging brain between healthy adults with memory complaints and healthy adults without memory complaints. The lab has been recruiting through the Participant Resource Pool (PRP) since 2015. The study is longitudinal; participants return every 1.5 years to repeat the tests so individual changes in the brain and memory can be tracked over time.

A part of the Institute of Gerontology, the Connect Lab is run by WSU Assistant Professor Dr. Jessica Damoiseaux with three graduate students, one postdoctoral student, a lab manager, and 1-2 undergraduate research assistants. So far, the study has enrolled 80 participants from metro Detroit and 40 participants from a collaborative site in the Netherlands, for a total of 120 individuals that have completed testing. Of the 80 metro Detroit participants, 30 were recruited through the PRP and HBEC.

To study changes in the aging brain, Dr. Damoiseaux uses Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to take detailed pictures of the brain and record brain activity while participants complete a memory task and then let their minds wander. Two major types of brain images are taken: structural images, or high-resolution pictures of the whole brain, and functional images that show brain areas active during different tasks.

What results has the Connect Lab found so far?



Connect Lab Team. Dr. Jessica Damoiseaux second from left

Sanneke van Rooden, a Netherlands collaborator, recently found a relationship between memory complaints and atrophy in a brain region called the hippocampus, a region strongly associated with memory. This suggests that groups reporting memory complaints tend to have more structural markers of aging in the brain. At WSU, Jessica Hayes, a second-year graduate student, explored brain activity that occurs during a memory task. She found that when persons with memory complaints successfully form memories, they use different areas of the brain than those without memory concerns. Raymond Viviano, a fourth-year graduate student, is particularly interested in how brain regions communicate with each other while participants rest and let their minds wander. He found that connectivity among brain regions involved in memory decreases with age, suggesting that aging impacts communication between memory regions. While these findings do not inform us about individual cases, they do indicate that on average, people with memory concerns have differences in brain structure and function compared to those without complaints.

The Connect Lab is most excited about participants returning for follow-

up appointments. This allows the researchers to track the same individuals over time and to draw conclusions about how brain structure and function change in older adults. Without long-term follow-up, researchers can only measure how individuals with and without memory complaints initially differ from one another, rather than how each group changes over time.

Thirty-four participants have completed their second visit with the Connect Lab and 30 completed a third visit. The researchers are excited to analyze this new data and hope this can inform them about brain markers that may indicate early development of dementia or other forms of aging pathology. Earlier identification of dementia could enhance treatment options and effectiveness, thus positively impacting those suffering from the disease, their families, caregivers and communities. Research at the Connect Lab has resulted in three recent publications about memory systems in the brain, and they continue to use the PRP for recruitment. The Connect Lab would thank all those who have participated in the study and contributed to advancing knowledge about dementia and the aging brain.



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New Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR) Scientists



Lenwood Hayman, PhD

Assistant Professor, Public Health, University of Michigan - Flint
Project Title: *Mindful Approaches to Nurturing Lives in Flint (MANLi-Flint)*

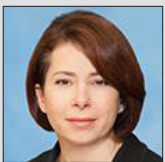
Dr. Hayman earned his Ph.D. from Wayne State University in psychology with specializations in social and health psychology. Overall, Dr. Hayman works to engage students in research on health issues in the communities from which they come. His goal is to inspire social-justice minded scholars to join him in addressing the social, psychological, structural, and environmental influences of emotional arousal in under-privileged populations. He recently completed a study on mental health and coping in adult Black men living in Flint. His current project continues that work by focusing on fostering and enhancing resilience in Flint's adult Black men to reduce negative mental and physical health outcomes.



Lenette M. Jones, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Health Behavior and Biological Sciences, School of Nursing, University of Michigan
Project Title: *Neurocognition Self-Management in African American Women with Hypertension and Type II Diabetes*

Dr. Lenette M. Jones is an assistant professor of nursing at the University of Michigan. Her research interests include health information behavior used to support self-management, and the neurobiological mechanisms underlying self-management. She uses imaging (fMRI) to explore the neuroprocesses associated with self-management behaviors, such as diet, exercise, and taking medication. She also examines how health information behavior (seeking, sharing, and use) can be enhanced to support blood pressure self-management. In her current study, Dr. Jones is designing and pilot-testing interventions to improve self-management of blood pressure among African American women.



Elham Mahmoudi, PhD, MBA, MS

Assistant Professor, Family Medicine, University of Michigan
Project Title: *Predicting 30-day Hospital Readmission among Older African Americans*

Dr. Elham Mahmoudi is a health economist, mixed methods researcher, and research assistant professor at the University of Michigan in the Department of Family Medicine. Prior to that role, Dr. Mahmoudi worked in the U-M Department of Surgery (2014-2017). She earned her PhD in economics from Wayne State University. During her doctoral work, she gained extensive experience working with large datasets. As a fellow, she gained further experience in grantsmanship and multidisciplinary, collaborative research. Most of her work to date has been devoted to determining the underlying factors associated with racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare.



C.A.B. Member Spotlight



Eugene Odom with Shirley McRae at a Healthier Black Elders Reception.

HBEC Benefits From Long Serving Board Member

Mr. Eugene Odom has been a Community Advisory Board member since 2003. Born in Ohio, Mr. Odom came to Detroit at age 4 and continues to live there today. His career was interesting and varied. He first worked at Cadillac Motor, then served as a court liaison for 10 years in the Wayne County Substance Abuse Department, and then transitioned to a career in life insurance for several years before retiring.

As one of the longest serving Advisory Board members, Mr. Odom has brought great wisdom and leadership to the Healthier Black Elders Center. He was inspired to join when a former member told him about the board's important activities and invited him to consider being a part of it. "I really enjoy the variety of events and activities we do to help the seniors," Mr. Odom said. The Healthier Black Elders Center is deeply appreciative of the many years Mr. Odom has dedicated to board service and thanks him for all of his support.

What is Metabolic Syndrome?

What exactly is metabolic syndrome and how does it affect the body? The National Institute of Health provides a straightforward explanation of metabolic syndrome, the causes, treatment options and preventions.

Metabolic syndrome is a group of risk factors that increases your chance for heart disease, diabetes and stroke. These risk factors have been called 'the perfect storm' when it comes to increasing your chances of developing these health problems. The main risks for developing a metabolic syndrome are high levels of triglycerides, low levels of HDL cholesterol, high blood pressure, and high levels of blood sugar. A specific type of obesity is also a risk factor: when a person carries excess fat in the stomach area compared to excess fat in other areas of the body.

Let's go through the other risk factors:

- **Triglycerides** are a type of fat found in the blood. When you eat, your body converts extra calories it does not need right away into triglycerides stored in your fat cells. Later on, hormones release the triglycerides for energy between meals. If you regularly eat more calories than you burn, this can lead to a high level of triglycerides.

- **HDL cholesterol** is sometimes known as the 'good cholesterol' because it helps remove cholesterol from your arteries, having low levels of this cholesterol can increase your risk for heart disease.

- **Blood pressure** is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps blood. If this pressure rises and stays high over time, it can damage your heart and lead to plaque buildup.



- Lastly, high levels of **blood sugar** can lead to or be early warning signs of diabetes. You can have any one of these risk factors alone, although they commonly occur together. You must have at least three of these risk factors to be diagnosed with metabolic syndrome.

You can control some of these risk factors through lifestyle changes, such as diet and exercise. Other factors cannot be controlled, such as getting older (this puts you at higher risk for developing metabolic syndrome) and genetics (such as family history, ethnicity). The best way to prevent metabolic syndrome is to visit your doctor regularly to measure your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels. You can also ask your doctor to perform a blood test called a lipoprotein panel to measure all types of cholesterol and triglycerides.

Treatment of metabolic syndrome focusses on reducing the risk of heart

disease. Depending on your levels, treatment may be directed at increasing HDL cholesterol, lowering blood pressure or managing diabetes. Diabetes is such a serious risk factor of metabolic syndrome that a primary goal is to prevent its onset. Long-term complications of diabetes can include kidney disease, vision loss, and foot or leg amputation. According to the American Diabetes Association, 12 million older adults are diagnosed with diabetes, African Americans have the second highest rate of diagnosis, and it is a leading cause of death.

**See back page
for the spring Lunch & Learn
schedule** to join us for our
May presentations on diabetes
prevention, causes, treatments
and FREE health screening.



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Lunch & Learns

Events are FREE
but you must R.S.V.P. by
calling **313-664-2616**



No breakfast served, so be sure to eat before

10:00 am registration and health screenings | **10:30 am** presentations | **12:20 pm** Lunch

Living with Chronic Illness

Thurs., April 18

Boulevard Temple
2567 W Grand Blvd, Detroit, 48208

Join us for an informative session on common auto-immune diseases and living with chronic illness.

Beyond Diabetes: Part One

Thurs., May 2

Ford Resource Engagement Center
15491 Maddelein St., Detroit, 48205

Is there a connection between diabetes and dental hygiene? Dr. Wenche Borgnakke from U-M School of Dentistry will discuss how oral health influences diabetes occurrence and severity.

Beyond Diabetes: Part Two

Thurs., May 9

Ford Resource Engagement Center
15491 Maddelein St., Detroit, 48205

Led by the HBEC Advisory Board, join us for a continuation of our discussion on diabetes with a focus on metabolic syndromes and cultural influences.

Myths of Hospice

Thurs., May 23

Joseph Walker Williams Rec Center
8431 Rosa Parks Blvd., Detroit, 48206

The Ascension at Home Hospice Care team will give an interesting and informative presentation dispelling the myths of hospice. You will learn about hospice from a social worker, senior volunteers, chaplain, and nurse.

Memory Bootcamp

Thurs., June 6

Farwell Recreation Center
2711 Outer Dr. E, Detroit, 48234

Save that brain! Learn what you can do to preserve your memory, tips and tricks to boost your brain health, and why sleep matters.



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