UAlbany Launches an HIV Research Center Focused on Social Justice

New York collaborators will also address the related epidemics of hepatitis C, sexually transmitted infections and opioid use.

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More HIV researchers in New York state will be working together to tackle health disparities and social justice aspects of the epidemic, thanks to the establishment of a new HIV center at the University of Albany, part of the State University of New York (SUNY) system.

Specifically, the Center for Collaborative HIV Research in Practice and Policy (CCHRPP) is located at the University of Albany (UAlbany) and will include projects with the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, SUNY Downstate (an academic medical center and hospital in Brooklyn) and the New York State Department of Health's AIDS Institute.

According to the CCHRPP website, the center's mission is "to expand health department and academic collaborations to address the public health and social justice challenges in persons at risk for or living with HIV infection and related diseases, such as hepatitis C and sexually transmitted infections. The populations affected by these diseases share common underlying risk factors, such as substance use [and] mental illness and suffer from discrimination and social inequities based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation."

"HIV has many causes and factors, including social determinants of health, poverty and drug use," Gus Birkhead, MD, MPH, professor emeritus at UAlbany and director of CCHRPP, told News10. He added that many of those same factors come into play in the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the importance of researching these issues along with HIV care and treatment.

New York is an epicenter of the HIV epidemic, and researchers at CCHRPP will work with the state on its "Ending the Epidemic" plan, according to a UAlbany press release.

"CCHRPP builds on a strong foundation of longstanding academic and research collaborations on HIV and related epidemics between the School of Public Health, the AIDS Institute and their partners," said Birkhead in the press release. "The Center formalizes these relationships and facilitates exploring new and exciting interdisciplinary opportunities for researchers and students."

The CCHRPP website notes that the center's activities will include:

- Research that translates into policies, programs and practices;

- Formal academic programs and internships that prepare students for careers in public health including full and part-time internships, field placements and practicums;

- Continuing education for professionals;

- Host seminars and partner with collaborating institutions to share research and news that address social justice and public health challenges of persons at risk for or living with HIV and related diseases;

- Establish thought leadership to see to completion the aggressive “End the Epidemic” initiatives for HIV and hepatitis C currently underway in New York.

In related news, last fall, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the state was on track to end its HIV epidemic. For more about that, see this POZ article, and for a closer look at AIDS epidemic metrics in New York state, check out the Ending the Epidemic Dashboard POZ blog.

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