

Understanding Our Vision & Goals for New Mexico



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Dr. Robert Williams MD, MPH is the Principal Investigator/Director of New Mexico Center for Advancement of Research, Engagement & Science on Health Disparities, Director of the Administrative Core, Professor of Family and Community Medicine, Director of Research Involving Outpatient Settings Network, and Director of the UNM component of Native American Research Center for Health (NARCH).

By [Nora Chavez](#), NM CARES Health Disparities Center

In 1999, Dr. Rob Williams came to UNM as a Professor of Family and Community Medicine. Since then, Dr. Williams has also become the Director of the Research Involving Outpatient Settings Network (RIOS Net, as well as the Principle Investigator/Director for the New Mexico Center for the Advancement of Research, Engagement and Science on Health Disparities (i.e. the M CARES Health Disparities Center). When asked what drew Dr. Williams to this profession, he responded, “I have spent my career working with underserved communities both domestically and internationally and have seen the impact of health disparities. This is what fuels my interest in the work being done by NM CARES Health Disparities Center. NM CARES is addressing these issues.”

Health disparities have been defined as differences in health status and impact of diseases on different racial and ethnic populations (see the Racial & Ethnic Health Disparities Report Card 2010-New Mexico Department of Health). Such disparities are also linked to gender, socioeconomic and regional/location differences. In New Mexico, research over the last 15 years indicates that disparities associated with ethnicity, race and gender tremendously affect New Mexicans, yet we are also aware that traumatic life conditions resulting from the chronic strains of poverty and marginalization contribute to cumulative health concerns as well. Dr. Williams suggests that underlying issues such as access [to health care] combined with “economic, geographic, cultural differences and language” also drive health care disparity issues”

The mission of the NM CARES Health Disparities Center is to create a self-sustaining research center that advances the scientific base of knowledge about interventions and solutions to combat these health disparities conditions in New Mexico. While our original projects focus on Southwestern indigenous Native American and Hispanic communities, resources from the center are available for researchers working with any communities challenged by health disparities, including at present, projects in Asian populations in Albuquerque’s international district, and medical students treating African American and Hispanic patients across the nation.

Dr. Williams adds that “the focus of NM CARES is to advance the dialogue on health disparities by focusing on the interface between the health care system and its underlying causes.” Chronic and pervasive health conditions seen in underserved populations such as chronic disease, higher mortality and poorer overall health outcomes are just symptoms of health disparity. Social and economic opportunities, public policies, and power and wealth across one’s lifespan ultimately affect poor or good

health. At any given time, these factors interact or moderate health and well-being within New Mexico’s political, economic, environmental, cultural, ideological, ethnic and racial context. The NM CARES Health Disparities Center seeks new solutions to these complex problems that affect New Mexicans.

“Our purpose in supporting the Undergraduate Pipeline Network mentorship program is to increase awareness, increase the number of people engaged in finding solutions [to health disparities] and to increase engagement at many levels in the health care system,” says Dr. Williams. “We want to reach out to people who are beginning their careers and give them the skills important to working in this area.” This year, Estefany Frias, was matched as a student intern with RIOS Net. In this capacity, Estefany has helped design a survey on maternal depression and/or anxiety, translate consent documents into Spanish, helped the team to return research findings to members of the provider network, and conducted research on primary care physicians across the state. Dr. Williams says, “We are delighted to have Estefany Farias as one of our research interns. Her interest and enthusiasm that she brings to work is contagious.”

Dr. Williams recommends this process for other faculty as well. He says, “This is a rewarding experience and a great opportunity to get engaged with our students” He is also hopeful that other students will find the experience beneficial. He says, “Consider spending a summer as a research intern with NM CARES Health Disparities Center. We will provide you with an opportunity to learn more firsthand about the factors that underlie health disparities and to work with the NM CARES team to try to resolve them. Here is an opportunity to see every facet of research work.”

For more information about the NM CARES Health Disparities Center, our Speaker Series, Research Resources, and/or the Undergraduate Student Pipeline, please contact Miria Kano at mkano@salud.unm.edu, at 505-272-3876, or check out the links below.

Links:

Undergraduate Pipeline Network:

http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/brep/pipeline_overview.shtm

NM CARES Health Disparities Center:

<http://hsc.unm.edu/programs/nmcareshd/index.shtml>