Institute for Health Research and Policy

A university-wide multidisciplinary institute administered through the School of Public Health

www.ihrp.uic.edu

Annual Report 2008
Finding ways to build healthier communities is at the heart of the mission of the Institute for Health Research and Policy. Our investigators do “research that matters” to help those most affected by health inequities and those most at risk for the development of health problems.

Our work begins with a commitment to collaboration among diverse constituencies, so that everyone feels a sense of ownership in the work and outcomes. We share our research findings and engage the ultimate end users of our research: the communities and people most affected by our work. Across projects, our goal is to understand the factors that contribute to health problems in diverse communities and the complex ways they intertwine and compound each other, and to develop effective strategies to address or solve these problems.

At the broadest level, we define community as a group of people linked by social ties, common perspectives, and joint activities. Historically, communities have been defined by geography, although more recently, “virtual communities” have grown in importance and influence. Thus, we also consider the sense of community that is established among people, which involves individuals coming together to work on common issues.

An important goal of IHRP is to create a spirit of community among our investigators and staff, fostering a sense of intellectual commitment and belonging within the institute. Communities plan, address and solve problems, and celebrate accomplishments. We highlight some of the many successes of our researchers in this annual report.

This report also marks a transition in IHRP’s leadership. After seven years of dedicated and exceptional service, Sue Curry has left UIC and is now dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa. Sue’s dynamic and visionary leadership helped to establish our institute as one of the true jewels in the crown of UIC research enterprises, overseeing a 375 percent growth in research funding from 2001 to 2008. We have all benefited from Sue’s time at UIC and pledge to continue her legacy of impressive scientific and administrative accomplishments.
Focus on Communities: ASSESSING NEEDS

IHRP researchers conduct studies that advance scientific understanding of our greatest health challenges and develop interventions to prevent or reduce these problems. These challenges include health behaviors, such as smoking, high-fat diets, and sedentary activity, which are among the top causes of premature death and disability in the United States. IHRP researchers also break new ground with studies that focus on assessing health needs or understanding the influences on a particular community’s health. Here are some questions IHRP researchers are investigating among communities and populations that face health risks.

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE SCHOOLCHILDREN

One of every three U.S. children is overweight or obese, increasing the likelihood of earlier and more severe onset of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease. Policymakers at all levels, from Congress to individual school districts, are adopting policies to fight the obesity epidemic, but little is known about what efforts are being made and how effective they are.

A $16 million study to address this need is underway at IHRP’s Health Policy Center, where Frank Chaloupka, the center’s director and a distinguished professor of economics, is leading an effort to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the influences of policy, programs, and environment on obesity among youth. Using a nationally representative sample of school districts, Chaloupka and his team are gathering data about policies, programs, and practices regarding physical activity and the school food environment. The research team will tie these to school financing, community characteristics, and youth reports of their health behaviors and weight.

As part of this study, schools will be surveyed to obtain information on the availability of various foods and beverages in vending machines, school stores, and school meals; participation in school meal programs; classroom snack policies; student physical education and physical activity; and other factors. In addition, the researchers will visit a subset of school communities to assess the factors in the physical environment that promote or serve as barriers to activity among youth and document the availability of healthy food options in those communities.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is funding this effort as part of the Bridging the Gap study.

ILLINOIS WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER

Only 9 percent of breast cancers in Illinois are detected at the earliest and most curable stage. An epidemiologist at IHRP sees the potential for understanding the conditions that contribute to this low rate with a new database she is developing, which pools information regarding breast cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment, and survival in Illinois.

With funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health, Therese Dolecek is combining the many medical details—regarding the stage of breast cancer at diagnosis, treatment, and outcome—collected by the state cancer registry with hospital discharge records and other information, such as socioeconomic data from the 2000 census and distances from mammography centers to patients’ residences.

“The database could help answer a variety of questions,” Dolecek said. “For example, we could look at the impact of various forms of insurance on the stage of diagnosis, or at how cost differences in various parts of the state affect treatment.”

Dolecek, research associate professor of epidemiology, and colleagues in the Center for Population Health and Health Disparities, housed at IHRP, hope the combined data will serve as a foundation for new research into breast cancer disparities among Illinois women.

TEENS WHO EXPERIMENT WITH CIGARETTES

Four out of five adult smokers began using cigarettes before age 18. Yet, notes Robin Mermelstein, “Surprisingly little is known about why some teens experiment with smoking and quit, while others experiment and become dependent.”

Mermelstein, professor of psychology and IHRP director, is leading a team of investigators in a $13 million study that aims to understand the pathways that contribute to teen smoking, identifying who is most vulnerable to becoming dependent on nicotine. The study has tracked 1,200 high school students over three years and is examining how their family dynamics, emotional states, physiological reactions, and social lives have influenced the development of smoking habits.
Focus on Communities: DEVELOPING INTERVENTIONS

To promote health in communities, researchers work from a foundation of solid theory and available empirical evidence to develop programs that are both conceptually solid and appealing to the target audience. These interventions are often first tested under conditions controlled by researchers and then refined for real-world conditions to ensure successful adoption by non-researchers and sustained use in communities. Here are some examples of interventions being tested by IHRP researchers with the cooperation of organizations, schools, and businesses in Chicago.

OLDER ADULTS IN THE WORKPLACE

With a graying workforce, U.S. employers are interested in keeping their older employees healthy. Susan Hughes has adapted an intervention proven to prevent disability among older adults for use in the workplace. More than 420 UIC staff members participated in a randomized study of Hughes's intervention, called Coach. Significant improvements were seen in diet, physical activity, and waist circumference among participants after 6 and 12 months.

In anticipation of using this intervention in other workplaces, Hughes, professor of community health sciences and co-director of IHRP's Center for Research on Health and Aging, has interviewed Chicago business leaders about health promotion efforts for older workers to learn what factors foster or inhibit the use of wellness programs in local corporations.

CHILDREN IN CHICAGO PRESCHOOLS

Over the last 30 years, the prevalence of obesity among preschool children has increased from 5 percent to more than 12 percent. Higher rates of overweight and obesity among Mexican-American and African-American children place them at risk for a lifetime of chronic health problems.

More than 2,000 Chicago preschoolers have sung and exercised their way to learning about healthful nutrition and physical activity in a program developed by Marian Fitzgibbon, professor of medicine and health policy and administration and IHRP deputy director. About 80 Chicago Public Schools teachers and assistants have used the culturally appropriate curriculum, called Hip-Hop to Health, in their classrooms.

Fitzgibbon and colleagues have reported in scholarly journals that the program is effective in reducing subsequent increases in body mass index in African-American children. She and her colleagues are now refining it for Latino children.

MEXICAN AMERICANS ON CHICAGO’S SOUTHWEST SIDE

Mexican Americans living near Marquette Park in Chicago have identified diabetes, which affects 11.9 percent of their adult community nationwide, as a primary health concern. Laurie Ruggiero, professor of community health sciences, is testing an intervention that may address this concern.

Ruggiero adapted the intensive lifestyle intervention of the clinically based Diabetes Prevention Program, which was proven in a national study to prevent or delay diabetes among adults at high risk for the disease. She trained Spanish-speaking community members to use the intervention to coach others in losing weight through a healthy diet and exercise. Study participants and their coaches meet in local schools and community organizations.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN AT THE BARBERSHOP

African-American men are 66 percent more likely than white men to develop oral cancer, and their cancers are much more likely to be diagnosed at late stages of the disease, leading to higher death rates. The men most at risk do not routinely use preventive services.

To increase screening and earlier detection among this high-risk group, IHRP research scientist Charles LeHew and colleagues in the UIC College of Dentistry have trained medical care providers in the Woodlawn and Englewood neighborhoods of Chicago to screen for oral cancer, a procedure more commonly done by dentists. With the Woodlawn Health Center and its Project Brotherhood, a clinic dedicated to African-American men, LeHew reached out to local barbers to increase awareness of oral cancer among their customers and promote detection services at the clinic.
IHRP Highlights in 2007–2008

IHRP RESEARCH FINDINGS
IN THE NEWS

The overwhelming majority of food-product advertisements seen on television by American children and adolescents are for products high in sugar, fat or sodium, according to Lisa Powell, senior research scientist, and colleagues in IHRP’s Health Policy Center. Their study, published in the September 2007 issue of Pediatrics, was the first to use television ratings data to draw a sample representative of U.S. kids’ viewing patterns and to weight the nutritional content of each ad, given that some ads are viewed more than others.

A quarter of all TV commercials seen by teens promote food, reported Sherry Emery, research associate professor of economics, and others in an October 2007 supplement of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. The supplement, which focused on obesity among U.S. youth, included six articles contributed by Emery and others working on Bridging the Gap, a study led by Frank Chaloupka, distinguished professor of economics. The research group also found an association between greater availability of convenience food stores and higher body mass index of the adolescents who live near them.

Women who live in Chicago’s gentrifying neighborhoods are more likely to receive a late diagnosis of breast cancer than women who live in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, IHRP researchers reported in the Annals of Epidemiology in January 2008. Led by Richard Barrett, professor of sociology, the researchers suggested that women living in upward-changing neighborhoods may experience a disruption of social networks, interruptions in access to health care services, and stress related to social isolation and financial problems as housing costs rise.

Older adults who learned that becoming sedentary is not inherent to aging walked more and reported a better quality of life in a pilot study based in Los Angeles. “We might be able to raise physical activity levels by teaching older adults that they have greater control over their own mental and physical health,” said Thomas Prohaska, professor of community health sciences and one of the pilot program’s designers. He and his colleagues reported their findings in the Journal of the American Geriatric Society.

A documentary based on IHRP research premiered in Chicago’s Latino Film Festival in April 2008. The film, “Tal Como Somos,” or “Just As We Are,” was screened at film festivals in other cities, on public television stations, and at scholarly conferences. The film is based on studies examining stigma among gay, bisexual, and transgender Latinos by Jesus Ramirez-Valles, associate professor of community health sciences.

Selected Publications

IHRP authors published more than 110 scholarly publications in 2007–2008.


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IHRP Highlights continued

INFORMING ILLINOIS PUBLIC POLICY

According to the Sinai Health Institute, one third of children living in Chicago’s predominantly Latino neighborhood of West Town suffer from asthma, and about 65 percent are overweight or obese. The Healthy Schools Campaign contracted Dianne Rucinski, senior scientist at IHRP, to help them evaluate interventions they developed with community partners to fight these problems in Chicago schools. Working closely with community organizations and parents in West Town and similarly affected Little Village, Rucinski assessed and strengthened their collaboration with the Healthy Schools Campaign and monitored outcomes of their initiatives to foster healthier school environments. The results of these collaborations were described in a bilingual publication in 2008.

Tobacco control efforts in Illinois would be more effective if they focused on populations that smoke at disproportionately high rates, according to a team led by Frank Chaloupka, distinguished professor of economics and director of the Health Policy Center, who examined several tobacco issues for the state health department in 2008. About 20 percent of Illinois adults smoke, but the researchers found higher rates of smoking among young adults (26.1%), adults who did not graduate from high school (33.3%), those who earned a GED (45.0%), homosexuals (28.8%), and bisexuals (34.2%). Chaloupka and colleagues also reported “consistent evidence that smoke-free policies are effective in reducing tobacco use among Illinois smokers.” They are now studying bar and restaurant revenues before and after smoking was banned in nearly all Illinois workplaces and public places on January 1, 2008.

Twenty-six percent of Illinois adults aged 65 years and older last visited the dentist more than two years ago or never, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health. But this may improve since the department expanded its outreach to and focused more on vulnerable populations such as children, older adults, and immigrants in its second oral health plan, said Karen Peters, assistant professor of health policy and administration. She evaluated the implementation of the statewide plan in 2008 as well as the previous plan. Only 24 states have oral health plans.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE UIC INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY


The Illinois Board of Higher Education approved a new degree program that trains clinicians in research skills and methods. The School of Public Health will award the new Master of Science in Clinical and Translational Science degree, which evolved from an IHRP training grant directed by Jack Zwanziger, professor and director of

Selected Publications continued

health policy and administration.
In 2008, the National Cancer Institute renewed its funding of the UIC Cancer Education and Career Development Program for the third time. Established in 1992, the program provides pre- and postdoctoral fellowships in conducting **transdisciplinary research in cancer prevention and control**. In 2008, the program was directed by Richard Warnecke, professor emeritus of epidemiology, public administration, and sociology.

IHRP awarded three pilot grants in fall 2007 to foster **new multidisciplinary research** on the UIC campus. Ben Gerber, assistant professor of medicine, conducted a feasibility study of a case management program that aims to improve diabetes treatment among Latinos through coordination between pharmacists and a community health promoter. Claudia Hernandez, assistant professor of dermatology, developed a program led by lay health workers to improve melanoma detection among Latinos. Jon Kassel, associate professor of psychology, studied the effects of alcohol on attention span. These researchers collaborated with faculty in six other UIC departments to conduct their studies.

**RECOGNITION FOR IHRP RESEARCHERS**
The American Society on Aging recognized an exercise program developed at IHRP for **innovation and quality in health care and aging**. The Fit and Strong! program, developed by Susan Hughes, has been shown to reduce pain and increase mobility among older adults with arthritis. Hughes, professor of community health sciences and co-director of IHRP’s Center for Research on Health and Aging, is testing the efficacy of the program as senior centers adapt it nationwide with a $1.3 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Illinois Public Health Association bestowed its Excellence in Public Health Policy Award on William Baldyga for his contributions in **developing and disseminating evidence-based public health programs**. Baldyga, IHRP associate director, is an investigator in the Illinois Prevention Research Center, one of IHRP’s longest-running grants, and has developed a program that teaches public health professionals to use evidence-based practices. In October 2007, the UIC campus also recognized Baldyga with its Award of Merit.

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Helping Young Smokers Quit: Highlights from an Eight-year Study

Historically, most tobacco control efforts directed toward youth and adolescents focused on the prevention of smoking, with far less attention paid to quitting. It was commonly believed that teens were not addicted to cigarettes and could quit if they wanted. By the late 1990s, however, researchers had evidence that adolescent smokers did want to quit, but were unable to do so and needed help. At the same time, because teen smoking rates increased through the 1990s, public health practitioners wanted to implement smoking cessation programs for teens. A good base of evidence, however, did not yet exist about what programs worked for teens and how communities responded to this need.

In 2001, IHRP researchers established the Helping Young Smokers Quit (HYSQ) initiative to describe and evaluate community-based smoking cessation programs geared toward youth. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Cancer Institute, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention combined funding for this groundbreaking study, totaling $10.7 million as of 2009. Leading the project was Susan Curry, then IHRP director and professor of health policy and administration.

INITIAL FINDINGS

Through a complex process of identifying and tracking individuals who might have knowledge of smoking cessation programs for teens in their communities, the IHRP researchers identified almost 10,000 key informants working in nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and schools who might help to pinpoint programs to profile. After much screening, IHRP researchers located and surveyed 591 programs for teens in 48 states. In this first phase of their work, researchers learned that:

» Few teens sought treatment despite having an interest in quitting.

» A typical smoking cessation program for teens was school-based, was conducted over multiple sessions, and served fewer than 50 youths a year.

» Fewer programs were found in low-income and rural communities, where smoking is more common among teens.

» The content of most smoking cessation programs was consistent with practices found effective by scientists and included special components for youth.

Next, researchers closely evaluated a sample of 42 programs to learn about characteristics of youth who participated in
Almost 900 teens completed surveys before starting smoking cessation programs, upon completing them, and six months and one year after the programs. The researchers found:

- Teen smokers who sought treatment were more likely than other teen smokers to face academic and intrapersonal challenges, live in a home where smoking was common, and experience symptoms of nicotine addiction.
- After completing a treatment program, most teens did not change their smoking patterns or their perception of themselves as smokers, but decreased the amount they smoked.

Three years after the initial program survey, the researchers tried contacting the 591 programs again. The researchers tracked down 360 programs, of which 60 percent continued to operate. They learned that sustained programs tended to have diverse funding sources, adhere to the original program design, and have community leaders consider youth smoking cessation a priority.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

HYSQ researchers are finalizing several scholarly publications highlighting their key findings, including characteristics of successful programs and the communities that support them, as well as which youth are more likely to quit with these programs.

For program administrators, they are developing a CD-based kit that will provide tools for evaluating programs with standardized measures based on HYSQ research. Program administrators have told HYSQ that such a tool would help them improve their programs and obtain more organizational and financial support.

For other researchers, the HYSQ team plans to share its datasets and protocols through archives maintained by the University of Michigan.

HYSQ researchers have developed a new research project to evaluate strategies to increase Internet demand for evidence-based smoking cessation treatments among young adults. This new study begins in spring 2009 with funding from the National Cancer Institute.

For more information about Helping Young Smokers Quit, see [www.hysq.org](http://www.hysq.org) or [www.ihrp.uic.edu](http://www.ihrp.uic.edu).
Grant Addresses Needs of Childhood Cancer Survivors While Fostering New Research Career

Adults who survived the grueling experience of cancer as children face a high risk of developing subsequent cancers, cardiovascular disease, or other chronic conditions long before middle age. Delayed effects of cancer treatment challenge the health of one of every 640 U.S. adults in their 20s or 30s.

“Most of these adults don’t know they’re at risk for such problems,” said Lisa Sharp, a clinical psychologist and an assistant professor of medicine working at IHRP. It’s only been in the last decade, long after completion of their cancer treatments, that these delayed effects were recognized, she explained. Aggravating the risk for these conditions, she said, are unhealthy habits such as high-fat diets, smoking, and sedentary lifestyles.

Sharp is planning an intervention to help these survivors protect their health by “empowering these adults to become more active partners in their health care,” she said.

She will recruit research participants from a larger study led by Melinda Stolley, assistant professor of medicine. This larger study is assessing the health behaviors and awareness of health risks among minority adults who were treated for childhood cancer. Sharp has been a co-investigator on that study since 2006.

Through focus groups, Sharp intends to learn what these adults would find useful to promote their health, and then she will involve them in the development and piloting of an intervention.

“My goal is to build their confidence to talk with their health care providers about their unique health needs,” Sharp said.

She will do this work with a five-year grant from the National Cancer Institute. Characterized as a career development grant, the funding will support the creation and piloting of this health intervention as Sharp shifts her career as a clinical psychologist from teaching and counseling patients to conducting research.

MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION

In addition to mentoring junior faculty such as Lisa Sharp in the pursuit of their first federal research grants, IHRP supports the university’s teaching mission by hosting four training programs funded by the National Institutes of Health, providing more than 70 graduate students with hands-on research experience annually, and mentoring some of these students in the development of their own research based on IHRP data.
The grant is intended to prepare her for further research and establish her credentials as an independent researcher. Marian Fitzgibbon, professor of medicine and health policy and administration, will mentor Sharp as she develops the health-promoting intervention.

Depending on what she learns in the focus groups, the intervention could focus on patients’ communication with physicians, said Sharp. Many internists or family practitioners, who might see only one or two survivors of childhood cancer in their practice, do not know about their special needs, she explained. The intervention therefore may teach people how to obtain their cancer treatment records and to communicate with physicians about their health risks.

Cancer survivors must be “active partners in their health care,” Sharp said. “They need to know how to act on their behalf, to ask the right questions of their health care providers.” This is a central concern for all cancer survivors, Sharp said, and she may address it further in future research.

Dissertations Based on IHRP Research

In FY2008, UIC awarded doctoral degrees to five former students who based their dissertations on IHRP research:

- Diana Grigsby, PhD, Community Health Sciences, “Neighborhood Influences on Childhood Diabetes Risk”
- Lisa Kuhns, PhD, Community Health Sciences, “An Assessment of the Relationship of Social Stigma to Suicidality Among Latino Gay Men”
- Zia Lakdawalla, PhD, Psychology, “Behavioral and Cognitive Protective Factors for Depression Among Adolescents”
- April Y. Oh, PhD, Community Health Sciences, “Understanding Neighborhood Supports for Physical Activity Among Women in Diverse Neighborhoods in Chicago”
- Sarah Kohler Wahl, PhD, Psychology, “Social Integration and Adolescent Cigarette Smoking”


* In children younger than 20, all races, both sexes
Snapshot of the Institute for Health Research and Policy, FY2008

GRANT ACTIVITY
Proposals submitted: 55
Number of these proposals funded as of January 2009: 26
Research projects conducted: 66

CAMPUS RELATIONSHIPS
UIC schools and colleges whose faculty members conduct research at IHRP: 11
UIC departments whose faculty members conduct research at IHRP: 39
Collaborating faculty: 107

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
Community organizations, health agencies, advocacy organizations, and other groups that partnered with IHRP-affiliated researchers: 254
Chicago-area schools where IHRP conducted research: 71

STAFFING
Professional staff members (full- and part-time): 163
Fellows funded by National Institutes of Health training grants: 17
Graduate students employed on research studies: 73
Undergraduate student employees: 19

FINANCES
For every dollar of state support received in FY2008, IHRP generated $23 in research funding.
Governmental, nonprofit, and private agencies awarded institute-affiliated projects $15.1 million in new and continuous grants in FY2008.
The institute has been awarded $150.3 million in research grants since it was established in 1997.

IHRP EXTRAMURAL RESEARCH FUNDING, FY2008
(Total: $15,075,718)

- Federal Government $11,858,294 (77%)
- Associations, Foundations, and Private Agencies $2,976,566 (20%)
- State and Local Government $440,858 (3%)

IHRP LEADERSHIP
Robin J. Mermelstein, PhD
Director, IHRP
Director, Center for Health Behavior Research
Professor of Psychology
Clinical Professor of Community Health Sciences

Marian L. Fitzgibbon, PhD
Deputy Director, IHRP
Director, Health Promotion Research Program
Director, Section of Health Promotion and Research, Department of Medicine
Interim Director, Program for Cancer Control and Population Science
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