

New Partnership Between Saint Louis University and World Health Organization Targets Chronic Disease

Collaboration Paves Way for Opportunities for International Research

ST. LOUIS — The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated the Prevention Research Center at Saint Louis University School of Public Health as a collaborative partner on programs to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, type 2 diabetes and obesity.

The Centre for Evidence-Based Chronic Disease Prevention at SLU will work with the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization on research projects and will train scientists in Latin America, Europe and North America how to conduct evidence-based research to prevent and control diseases.

“The designation builds on the work we’ve already done,” said Ross Brownson, Ph.D., chair of community health and director of SLU’s Prevention Research Center. “It also opens up important collaborations in training and opportunities for international research.”

The WHO, which is the United Nation’s health agency, selected the Prevention Research Center because of its deliberate science-based research – known as “evidence-based research” – on chronic health issues such as obesity, cancer and type 2 diabetes.

“So much of what has been done in public health is based on what has been done in the past, what feels right, what politics are involved or what funding allows. Through evidence-based research, we approach public health practice differently, using a scientific and systemic approach to develop a plan of action to address important issues, such as how to promote healthy eating and more physical activity,” Brownson said.

Brownson, who also is a professor of epidemiology, and Bill True, Ph.D., professor of epidemiology and director of the doctoral program at Saint Louis University School of Public Health, will be co-directors of the new SLU-WHO collaboration.

“We requested the designation as a WHO Collaborating Centre so that work we’ve begun with the World Health Organization headquarters and its offices in Europe, Canada, Brazil, Cuba, Peru and the United States can be formally recognized,” True said.

“But even more important, our designation will allow us to identify and carry out future collaborations in a timely and productive manner.”

Brownson and True both have strong relationships with leaders of the World Health Organization and of its subsidiary, the Pan American Health Organization. They have taught courses on evidence-based research to WHO scientists and collaborators.

True participated in an evidence-based course for public health professionals presented in 2004 in Santiago, Chile. He worked in Peru for two years and has conducted research for two and a half years in San Jose, Costa Rica. His research has focused on the causes of mental health issues, particularly alcohol and drug abuse. In addition to serving as co-director of the centre, True will examine ways to extend the spread of evidence-based research in Latin American countries.

Brownson's background is in chronic disease epidemiology and prevention. He specializes in translating science into public health practice. He was one of the originators of the evidence-based public health course and works with practitioners and researchers around the globe.

In addition to his responsibilities as the centre's co-director, Brownson will create national train-the-trainer programs to teach health professionals about evidence-based public health.

Saint Louis University School of Public Health is one of only 36 fully accredited schools of public health in the United States and the nation's only School of Public Health sponsored by a Jesuit university. It offers masters degrees (MPH, MHA) and doctoral programs (Ph.D.) in six public health disciplines and joint degrees with the Schools of Allied Health, Business, Law, Medicine, Nursing and Social Service. It is home to seven nationally recognized research centers and laboratories with funding sources that include the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the American Cancer Society, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the World Health Organization.

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Editor's Note: To arrange interviews with Ross Brownson or Bill True, call Nancy Solomon, Saint Louis University media relations, at (314) 977-8017.