**Wayne State University receives award to bridge Detroit’s resident-research divide**

DETROIT – For decades, research participation by African Americans and other minorities has lagged research involvement by white volunteers. Minority representation in research is critical, however, to better understand the health disparities that put older African Americans at higher risk of hypertension, heart disease, certain cancers and other health problems. How to improve minority participation in research? Wayne State University has received a two-year $250,000 award to increase participation of Detroit’s older minority population in research projects.

Carrie Leach, Ph.D., M.P.A., a research assistant professor at WSU’s Institute of Gerontology, is project lead of “Bridging the Divide: Fostering Partnerships for Urban African American Aging Research.” The project is funded through the Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Awards, an initiative of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), with the goal of increasing older adults’ participation in and partnership with research that matters to them. Bridging the Divide will primarily:

* Convene an Aging Research Council (ARC) of older Detroit residents, researchers, and local community health and aging advocacy organizations.
* Adapt, pilot and refine an age-friendly guide for using computers and connecting virtually.
* Deliver the technology and guide to older adults to be part of virtual ARC meetings.
* Adapt and deliver a research literacy curriculum tailored to aging-related research.
* Facilitate interactive processes and dialogue to prioritize research needs relevant to older African Americans.

Ambitious community goals don’t deter Leach, whose doctorate is in health communication. For several years, she has led the Community Engagement Core for CURES ([Community Engagement, Center for Urban Responses to Environmental Stressors](https://cures.wayne.edu/community-engagement)) and is associate center director of community inclusion for CHECK-UP ([Center for Health Equity and Community Knowledge in Urban Populations](https://check-up.wayne.edu/)).

“This project is a great fit for me personally,” she said. “I am dedicated to conducting research that has a social justice component, and I am committed to reducing the communication inequities that play a role in health disparities.”

At CURES, Leach worked with community partners to co-create events and materials with health-protecting information disseminated to more than 5,000 Detroiters through face-to-face seminars and print and digital media.

“Many of us want to use our research to help improve lives in Detroit, but don’t always know where to start,” she said.

Leach’s team will adapt an existing guide on how to use a tablet to connect to the internet so it can be more useful to older Detroit residents. They will also adapt an existing curriculum about building research participation to apply it more specifically to older African Americans. Every step of the project relies on multi-directional communication between project staff, research partners, community organizations and older adults.

“Having a conversation is a good place to start,” said Leach. “First, we need to hear what people have to say about participating in research. Listening is step one so we can understand where a person is coming from. Then, we can have open and honest conversations about local concerns, what we have to offer as researchers, and how we might problem-solve together — that’s the next step. Those conversations can be transformative if they’re done right, and they’re an opportunity for imagining possible partnerships for addressing the issues together.”

Improving older Detroiters’ access to and comfort with online interactions has benefits beyond virtual participation in research projects: It can increase social interactions and reduce loneliness and depression. It enables telehealth checkups to improve health and well-being. These benefits are critical in Detroit, one of the most impoverished cities in the nation with one of the lowest rates of internet connectivity. This “digital exclusion” contributes to older African Americans’ poorer health outcomes and lower participation in research.

Leach wants more Detroit residents to benefit from “in-reach.” Outreach is unidirectional and offers the community what someone thinks it needs, while in-reach creates a way for community members to connect with a resource network — like Wayne State — and extract for themselves what they know they need.

“I’d like to show more people how to ‘in-reach,’ especially to our university,” Leach said. “Being a resource to the community is a core part of Wayne State’s mission.”

*Bridging the Divide project collaborators are* ***the*** *Institute of Gerontology, Detroit Food Policy Council, Village of Oakman Manor of Presbyterian Villages of Michigan, HOPE Village Revitalization, Denby Neighborhood Alliance, Oakland County Cancer Action Council, Karmanos Cancer Institute, CURES and CHECK-UP.*