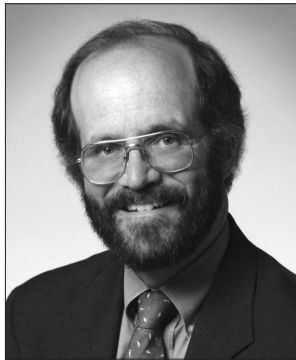




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## Assuring Conditions for Population Health

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*This is the first of two articles that describe the activities of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health's (SMPH) Wisconsin Partnership Program. The program represents a far-reaching commitment by the school to greatly improve the health of people in Wisconsin for years to come. The Partnership Program—which is celebrating its 10th anniversary and recently released a plan for its next 5 years—includes two main, complementary committees: the Oversight and Advisory Committee (OAC) and the Partnership Education and Research Committee (PERC). SMPH faculty members chair the committees. Dr Remington serves as OAC chair; Richard Moss, PhD, chairs the PERC. A future WMJ, will focus on plans for research and physician education over the next 5 years.*

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Simply stated, the goal of public health is to assure conditions in which all people can live long and healthy lives.<sup>1</sup> A recent analysis of the trends in Wisconsin's health shows decidedly mixed results toward reaching this goal. Although people in the state are living longer, this increase in longevity may

ity and affordability, but also for public health approaches that create healthy communities and assure conditions for population health. These policy, systems, and environmental approaches complement health care interventions and are needed when confronting complex, multifactorial health problems.<sup>5,6</sup> The

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have come at the cost of higher morbidity and a lower quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Troubling increases in rates of obesity, infant deaths,<sup>3</sup> and children living in poverty will make future progress more challenging. Even more vexing are the significant and persistent health disparities across the state, as shown by the County Health Rankings.<sup>4</sup>

Although these are not insurmountable problems, progress will be made only if we go beyond the traditional medical model of providing services solely to those in need—whether through private health care systems or in governmental public health settings. Health care systems and physician leaders must advocate not only for improvements in health care qual-

University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health has embraced this public health approach, as we work to seamlessly integrate public health into our education, research, and service missions.<sup>7,8</sup> In this brief commentary, we describe one important element of this effort—the grants to communities directed by the Wisconsin Partnership Program's Oversight and Advisory Committee.

Through this 9-member committee, the Wisconsin Partnership Program has provided more than \$53 million in grants to support community-based public health initiatives throughout the state. The committee is responsible for developing the infrastructure for reviewing public health-related grant applications, moni-

toring the progress and assessing outcomes of funded applications, establishing priorities for the portfolio, and setting the strategic direction for its activities. Grant programs in 3 broad areas have been established, as described below.

### **Community-Academic Partnership Grant Program**

The Community-Academic Partnership Grant Program has been a cornerstone of the Wisconsin Partnership Program since its inception in 2004.<sup>9</sup> The program supports community-academic partnerships with direct funding for projects proposed by community organizations. The projects are selected through a competitive, peer-reviewed process. Each community organization provides overall leadership and direction for its project, which must be designed to address an identified local, regional, or statewide need. Each project has an academic partner who supports the work by providing advice on evidence-based approaches and/or on program evaluation. This community-driven approach responds to local needs and brings together the expertise of community members and UW faculty and staff.

A new component of the Community-Academic Partnership Grant Program—the Opportunity Grants Program—will begin this year. This new grant mechanism will support selected short-term projects designed to enhance communities' capacity to collaborate with their local health care systems on community-identified priorities. The Opportunity Grants Program will capitalize on community-driven efforts such as facilitating the establishment of local Accountable Care Organizations or community health improvement plans. Through a rolling application process, these grants will be strategic, flexible, responsive, and timely.

### **Public Health Service and Workforce Development**

The Oversight and Advisory Committee also supports several public health service and workforce development programs. For example, the Wisconsin Population Health Service Fellowship supports early-career public health professionals in government or community

organizations. Fellows focus on issues such as preventing injuries, reducing exposure to occupational and environmental risks, and promoting healthy communities.<sup>10</sup> Another example is the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute, a public health leadership and training program that provides yearlong training to community teams. This program responds to local needs by using a shared-learning model. More than 40 Wisconsin communities have applied policy, systems, and environmental approaches to their health initiatives through this program, thus strengthening partnerships.<sup>11</sup>

### **Targeted Public Health Initiatives**

In 2009, the Wisconsin Partnership Program began to focus on the enormous public health challenge of improving birth outcomes among African-Americans in Wisconsin—committing up to \$10 million to the Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families. The initiative focuses on the cities of Beloit, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine, which account for nearly 90% of African-American infant deaths in Wisconsin. The “lifecourse” perspective holds that the stresses an individual encounters through environmental factors, economic conditions, societal problems, and personal circumstances have lasting implications and impact on health. Through the Lifecourse Initiative, community collaboratives in each of the cities seek to improve African-American birth outcomes by improving health care, strengthening families and communities, and addressing social and economic inequities.

The Wisconsin Partnership Program is developing a new, targeted initiative to address obesity prevention. The program's goal is to reduce the obesity rate in Wisconsin by funding evidence-based strategies—particularly those that take sustainable policy, systems, and environmental approaches. Grants provided to community organizations through the Oversight and Advisory Committee will focus on preventing obesity and serve as a “population health laboratory” for expanding the evidence-base for obesity prevention in Wisconsin and beyond, while providing resources and interventions to communities.

In summary, the grants provided through the UW School of Medicine and Public Health's

Oversight and Advisory Committee not only support “good work” but also are aimed at beneficial, sustainable changes in health policies, systems, and the environment. The partnerships developed through these programs bring the university's resources into communities and enrich the university with community perspectives that help guide our teaching and research efforts. Together with our partners, we are committed to supporting new and innovative policy, systems, and environmental approaches, so that all people can live long and healthy lives. The Wisconsin Partnership Program's new 5-year plan sets the stage to build upon the successful efforts of its initial decade.

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