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Media Relations

Grant Will Explore Intersection Of Active Living And Community Safety In Manchester

January 25, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – What does childhood obesity have to do with graffiti, street violence, or law enforcement? Quite a lot, public health officials are finding, as programs that break the walls between public health and community safety gain traction nationwide. Now, a \$90,000 grant to the University of New Hampshire in partnership with the Prevention Research Center at Dartmouth and the City of Manchester will explore a program in Manchester that aims to create safer, activity-friendly neighborhoods. The case study will be widely distributed to inform other such efforts nationwide, which are being encouraged under the new health reform legislation.

“Historically, we’ve tended to look at community problems from a silo approach, with violence, physical inactivity, or mental health in distinct silos,” says UNH assistant professor of health management and policy Semra Aytur, director of the project. “But in order for children to get out and get active, they need to feel safe in their neighborhoods.” The work will be funded by a one-year grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its national program Active Living Research (ALR).

Aytur and her colleagues will systematically examine the policy process in Manchester that began in 2001 with a U.S. Department of Justice Weed & Seed Initiative and has become a catalyst for bringing citizens, law enforcement, public health, and other partners together to create neighborhoods that are safer and more supportive of physical activity.

With 250 sites nationwide, the Weed & Seed Strategy aims to prevent and control violent crime by working with law enforcement to “weed out” violent criminals and drug abusers and with community organizations to “seed” human services and neighborhood restoration programs. Manchester’s approach, says Aytur, is unique in its public health prevention perspective that strives to increase physical activity and healthy lifestyles by creating partnerships between multiple city agencies and residents to simultaneously prevent crime and create social and environmental conditions that promote health.

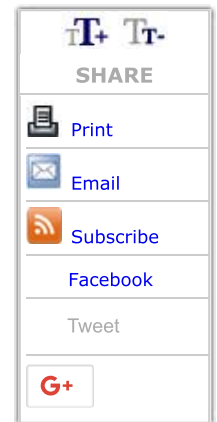
“Using Weed & Seed as a catalyst, Manchester exemplifies the public health approach that first lady Michelle Obama takes in her ‘Let’s Move’ campaign. We hope to answer the question, ‘what does it mean to have a healthy neighborhood? And how can we work together to achieve it?’” says Aytur.

To conduct the case study, Aytur and her colleagues will survey stakeholders like leaders in public health, law enforcement, education and transportation, as well as parents and caregivers living in two neighborhoods that took different approaches to implementing Weed & Seed. In addition, researchers will engage 13- through 18-year-olds in a photography project that will examine their perspectives of neighborhood safety.

“The most immediate thing we hope to do is to get these ‘hidden perspectives’, such as those of youth, out to people making decisions in Manchester,” says Aytur.

“Understanding the link between the neighborhood and health behaviors is critical to advancing population health efforts,” says Ethan Berke M.D., MPH, director of the Prevention Research Center at Dartmouth. “We are delighted to collaborate with the City of Manchester and UNH on understanding how policies aimed at creating livable neighborhoods translate to better health for residents. We hope the lessons we learn from Manchester’s experience will assist other communities in developing neighborhood design policies that promote health.”

“We look forward to working more closely with UNH and Dartmouth on this exciting endeavor,” says Tim Soucy, Manchester’s public health director. “This case study will undoubtedly provide a solid evaluation of the community’s ongoing initiatives to enhance neighborhood health and safety, but more importantly, the study



findings will be tremendously helpful in strengthening our future efforts and capability in improving the quality of life for Manchester residents." The research team also hopes that results of their work will help to inform similar prevention efforts occurring in other cities across the country.

The Prevention Research Center at Dartmouth (PRCD) serves the people of New Hampshire and Vermont by helping communities measurably improve cardiovascular health. The PRCD is part of [The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice](#) and is funded by the [Prevention Research Center Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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