

SDSU, UCSD Researchers Start Five-Year Partnership With San Ysidro Community To Study Latino Health Issues

\$3.4 Million, CDC-Funded Project to Look at Ways to Promote Physical Activity

September 21, 2004

Sue Pondrom

Researchers from San Diego State University and the University of California, San Diego, in collaboration with the San Ysidro Health Center, will receive \$3.4 million from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) over the next five years to establish the San Diego Prevention Research Center. The center will study how to promote increased physical activity among Latinos in order to prevent diabetes, heart disease and other chronic diseases that afflict that group, especially recent immigrants and their families.

The researchers will collect data related to physical activity via surveys and other tools, and later test programs designed to increase the amount of exercise Latinos incorporate into their lives. The project is being led by principal investigator John Elder, Ph.D, professor of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences in SDSU's Graduate School of Public Health. Co-principal investigators for the project are Barbara E. Ainsworth, Ph.D., MPH, professor of Exercise and Nutritional Sciences at SDSU; and Kevin Patrick, MD, professor of Preventive Medicine in UCSD's School of Medicine. They and other faculty from both universities will collaborate with staff from the San Ysidro Health Center on the project.

Elder said the San Diego Prevention Research Center is especially important because its focus on recent immigrants addresses a rapidly expanding - yet traditionally under-researched and underserved - element of the local and U.S. population.

"When Mexican or other Latino immigrants come to the United States, we've observed that often one of the first things to go as they make their transition to living here is an active lifestyle," Elder said. "That puts this particular group at increased risk for the onset of these chronic diseases. We need to find ways to keep that from happening both to enhance the health of this group and to reduce strain on our overburdened health care system."

Starting this month, the center's researchers will examine potential barriers to physical activity, such as time constraints caused by job pressures; environmental factors such as access to parks, recreational facilities and youth sports leagues; and cultural forces.

"Once we identify the most significant factors that negatively affect physical activity, we'll begin to target programs and intervention strategies that will address those factors," Elder said.

The project's funding comes from the CDC's Prevention Research Center (PRC) program. The PRC Program is a network of 28 academic centers, public health agencies, and community partners conducting applied research and practice in chronic disease prevention and control. The research strives to develop disadvantaged communities' long-term capacity for addressing their health issues and some of the socioeconomic factors associated with those issues.

Patrick, from the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine within UCSD's School of Medicine, said PRC status is very prestigious in public health circles because it means the CDC has recognized the recipients as national leaders in addressing a particular health issue. Institutions applying for PRC funding undergo a rigorous and very competitive peer review process and have to meet stringent programmatic and facility criteria.

"For years SDSU and UCSD have been very active in working with the community to address immigrant health issues, and so has the San Ysidro Health Center," Patrick said, adding that the San Diego PRC is the only such center in the country to partner two universities. "By combining our resources, experience and expertise, we made a strong impression on the CDC that we are well-prepared to tackle this complex problem and come up with solutions that will make an impact here and elsewhere."

For more information on the San Diego Prevention Research Center, contact Amelia Arroyo at (619) 594-2395.

Since its founding in 1959, UCSD has rapidly risen to its status as one of the nation's premier institutes for higher education and research exploration, ranking fourth in the nation in research impact in a report compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information. The UCSD School of Medicine is one of the nation's top-ranked academic institutions devoted to medical research, education, and health care services. Based on faculty research cited in prestigious journals, the School of Medicine ranks first in the country in federal dollars expended for research per faculty member and first nationally for research funding from the National Institute of Health to the medical school's Department of Family and Preventive Medicine. UCSD physicians account for 24 of the 29 San Diegans selected for "America's Top Doctors," and in a recent "San Diego's Best Doctors" listing, more than 80 are UCSD physicians - one-third of all those listed.

San Diego State University is the oldest and largest higher education institution in the San Diego region. Since it was founded in 1897, the university has grown to offer bachelor's degrees in 81 areas, master's degrees in 72 areas and doctorates in 14 areas. SDSU's more than 33,000 students participate in academic curriculum distinguished by direct contact with faculty and an increasing international emphasis that prepares them for a global future. For more information, visit www.sdsu.edu.

Media Contacts: UCSD Health Sciences Communications Sue Pondrom (619) 543-6163 SDSU Marketing & Communications Jason Foster (619) 594-2585