

Back-to-Back Conferences Take on Challenges in Health Disparity Reduction

On consecutive days in April, two complementary conferences took place at the Berkeley City Club. At the first, academics, practitioners, and community leaders presented research, tools, and strategies for reducing health disparities. At the second, panelists and participants looked within health organizations to discuss barriers related to privilege, bias, and oppression that hinder health disparity initiatives.



At the “Poverty, Race, Place...” conference, associate dean Denise Herd (left) moderates while Dr. Camara P. Jones of the CDC and UCLA Professor David Hayes-Bautista take questions.

Panelists present promising tools and approaches

More than 230 people attended the April 19 conference, “Poverty, Race, Place: Research and Community-Based Interventions to Reduce Health Disparities.” The meeting—the fourth in the UC Berkeley Center for Health Research’s “Science & Society” series—highlighted the latest place-, race-, and poverty-based research, as well as strategies and interventions to reduce health inequities.

“This event occurred at the right moment in time. There’s been increasing interest in the nexus of race, place, and poverty,” said **Meredith Minkler, Dr.P.H.**, professor of health and social behavior at the School of Public Health and a presenter at the conference.

The presentations were organized into sessions on social determinants of health disparities, research tools, and community interventions. The event’s keynote speakers were **Camara P. Jones, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H.**, research director, social determinants of health, CDC; **David Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D.**, director of UCLA’s Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture; and **Angela Glover Blackwell, J.D.**, founder and CEO of PolicyLink. Featured

speakers included **Raymond J. Baxter**, senior vice president, community benefit, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan; **Reverend Cecil Williams**, CEO and pastor of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church; and many others.

“Typically conferences on poverty and race have neglected the critical element of place. Also, while they dissect in great detail the problem posed, they are often not nearly as helpful in talking about what can be done through research, policy, and practice to help address the problem,” said Minkler. “This conference, I think, was unique in having a full panel on new tools for studying health disparities and then having a panel where people presented promising approaches for dealing with the challenges posed by such disparities. It was not a traditional academic conference in that it spoke as much to what we can do about the problem as it did to what we know about the problem.”

Audiofiles and presentations from the meeting are available online at healthresearch.berkeley.edu/disparities/agenda.html.

Participants strategize to overcome “-isms” within health organizations

The second conference, “Privilege, Bias, and Oppression: Addressing Barriers to Eliminating Health Disparities Within Health Organizations,” also called the “-isms’ conference,” was held April 20. The event had its roots in a discussion that took place at a 2004 conference, in which a theme emerged about internal organizational barriers to addressing health disparities. Participants expressed a strong interest in gaining more information on the resources and models available for addressing powerful underlying “-isms” in organizations that sometimes limit their ability to move initiatives forward, including racism, classism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and able-bodyism. They also wanted the opportunity to talk with colleagues about challenges and promising practices in this area and to support one another in dealing with this issue.

A planning group, convened by the School’s Center for Public Health Practice, organized the event that became the “-isms’ conference,”

