



CENTRE FOR
Urban Health
INITIATIVES



Spring Newsletter 07

Bringing together researchers, policy makers and the community
to support urban health research development.

Notable News

In this spring issue of the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives Newsletter, we are delighted to bring you news on a number of fronts. To kick off the year, we have ten new seed grant research project projects up and running that you can read about. These are collaborative projects in one of our three research areas of urban health: Food Security and Urban Agriculture; Neighbourhoods or Physical Environments. CUHI welcomes our new research associates and their community and policy partners.

We are delighted to introduce our new Community Intern, LoAn Ta-Young, a health promoter from Parkdale Community Health Centre. LoAn will be participating in the Intensive Research on Neighbourhoods and Health Initiative (IRONhI-Toronto), research that examines the differences in “health opportunity structures” between neighbourhoods and their contributing effects on health outcomes. Loan will support community stakeholder consultation on three of the six IRONhI neighbourhoods to identify priority neighbourhood issues that will inform research needs, community action and neighbourhood-based interventions that address health disparities.

We would like to give a royal welcome to LoAn and thank the Parkdale Community Health Centre for their collaboration. This is one way we can provide skills-enhancing opportunities in urban health research to community members.

We are also delighted to continue to supporting undergraduate and graduate students from a range of disciplines. In this issue, you will read about the Health Studies projects that focus on curriculum enhancement and career paths. We continue to place students in the community so they may gain experience in community and policy settings relevant to urban health. We have also offered 11 conference scholarships for students to present and/or attend the Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CPPH) Conference in Toronto in April.

Our Community Based Research Award of Merit (co-sponsored with the Wellesley Institute and University College, University of Toronto) has been selected and an award ceremony will take place at the CPPH conference. The award ceremony is on Friday, April 13th at the breakfast session. Award recipients and their project teams will be honored and their posters will be displayed.

Also in this issue, you will see our new communication materials. Centre staff have been working with “Defining Design” to create innovative postcards that highlight the work of our centre. We also have a new look for our newsletter and a great banner for the conferences we participate in. We were pleased to see the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives highlighted in the February issue of the CIHR, Institute of Population and Public Health, POP News. The Urban Pesticide Reduction project was also recently featured as a “Research Spotlight”. (see www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca)

In closing, we would like to encourage you to re-visit our website (www.cuhi.utoronto.ca). There are continual updates including upcoming forums, training opportunities, release of reports, and more recently an update on funding opportunities for urban health related research. We are always looking for ways to attract and engage new researchers to our centre and our three research interest groups. We also welcome community and policy folks to let us know what research would inform their agendas. Please feel free to contact either Alexis, our Centre Co-ordinator or myself to discuss your research interests.

Regards,

Brenda Ross

Director of Research (A)

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Notable News

Centre for Urban Health Initiatives Welcomes Our New Community Intern

CUHI is excited to announce LoAn Ta-Young as its new part-time Community Intern. This position is integral to the commitment of the Centre to provide skills-enhancing opportunities in urban health research for community members. LoAn will be participating in the Intensive Research on Neighbourhoods and Health Initiative (IRONhI-Toronto), a research project investigating the differences in "health opportunity structures" between neighbourhoods, and their contributing effects on health outcomes. She will support community stakeholder consultation in three of the IRONhI neighbourhoods (Eglinton East, Parkdale South & Weston- Mt. Dennis) to identify priority neighbourhood issues that will inform policy, community action, research needs and neighbourhood-based interventions that address health disparities.

LoAn brings to the project valuable experience and knowledge with eight years as a Health Promoter with Parkdale Community Health Centre. She is knowledgeable of one of the targeted IRONhI neighbourhoods as well as, more generally, the delivery of programs and services to multicultural, diverse communities that address the social determinants of health. LoAn has extensive background in outreach and community collaboration with established links with local Parkdale community agencies. Such ties will enable CUHI to build connections with IRONhI neighbourhoods, thereby enhancing its own role in knowledge generation and dissemination. CUHI extends a warm welcome to LoAn and we look forward to our work together in the coming year.

CUHI Community Campus Partnerships for Health Student Scholarships

Community Campus Partnerships for Health is convening its 10th Anniversary Conference in Toronto from April 11th to April 14th. It aims to nurture a network of community-campus partnerships that strive to achieve systems and policy changes necessary to address the root causes of health, social and economic inequalities. The conference seeks to build new knowledge, skills, and actions in areas critical to achieving healthy and just societies.

In order to facilitate the participation and engagement of undergraduate and graduate students in this learning and networking forum, CUHI is providing student scholarships to cover conference registration, presentation, and interaction costs.

CUHI is pleased to have offered 11 awards (including one travel grant) to students, four of whom will be presenting at the conference (*below). The recipients represent institutions from across Canada, including University of Victoria, McMaster University, University of Waterloo, York University, Ryerson University, and University of Toronto. Students come from a range of disciplines that include Medicine, Public Health, Nursing, Environmental Studies, Geography, Community Development, Medical Anthropology, and Policy & Public Administration.

- Mandy Bergman (York University)
- Winnie Chow (University of Victoria)*
- Karla Dozzi (University of Toronto)
- Fatimah Jackson (York University)
- Fiona Knight (Ryerson University)
- Crystal Melin (University of Toronto)
- Carolyn Mooi (University of Waterloo)
- Erin Moriarty (McMaster University)
- Felix Munger (York University)*
- Kate Reeve (McMaster University)*
- Kate Rossiter (University of Toronto)*

CUHI Supported, U of T Health Studies Projects Coming to a Close

CUHI collaborated with University of Toronto undergraduate students through the Work-Study program to examine issues relevant to the Health Studies program offered by University College. CUHI supports the Health Studies Program in its emphasis on the application of social science methods to research and policy-making and its focus on the social determinants of health.

The first project examined the role of community placement experiences offered by Health Studies courses. It determined the current status of the placement program in terms of availability, structure and the advantages of providing such an experience. In addition, the types of placement programs offered by similar programs at other universities and departments within the University of Toronto were surveyed. The challenges involved in successful implementation of a placement program were assessed and recommendations for the continuance and expansion for Health Studies students were reported.

The second project involved the creation of an inventory of relevant graduate programs and career opportunities available with a Bachelors degree in Health Studies. The information was collected through the Internet, the University of Toronto Career Centre Library as well as through contact with Health

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Studies alumni, who shared their own experiences subsequent to graduation. New resources for students to access information on Health Studies opportunities have been developed and will be made available on the Health Studies website.

Reports on both these project's findings will be presented to the new Director of the Health Studies program and other stakeholders. Both projects were implemented by a team of four undergraduate students, under the supervision of CUHI staff. The Health Studies work group included: Marleane Searle, Marino Iurillo, Xiao Jin Chen, Renaud Boulanger, Brenda Ross and Alexis Kane Spear.

CUHI Student Placement Program Success Story

"After approaching the staff at CUHI for assistance finding a community placement opportunity, I was referred to the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). It is a very exciting time to be an active participant in planning activities at the Toronto Central LHIN. As a student researcher, I have been looking into examples and literature from other jurisdictions to identify a structured role and process for Toronto Central LHIN to engage with neighbourhood areas. My findings will inform the community engagement and planning team at the Toronto Central LHIN of engagement options at the neighbourhood level. Moreover, I have become familiar with the broad objectives of a LHIN and its current community engagement strategies as an observer at internal LHIN meetings and community engagement meetings with the public."

Michelle Lee
4th year student, Health Studies Specialist

Neighbourhoods Are Making Their Mark on the Urban Agenda

With the recent municipal shift to targeted "priority" areas in Toronto, there has been a renewed interest in studying health at the neighbourhood scale. The new buzz on neighbourhoods has inspired the following upcoming events, the first of which is sponsored by CUHI:

Policy Forum on Neighbourhoods and Policymaking: The Role of Neighbourhoods in the Development of Social and Health Policy

May 10 2007, 2:30 to 4:30 PM
St. Christopher's House, Community Hall - 248 Ossington (at Dundas)

Neighbourhoods play an important role in the development of healthy, vibrant and inclusive cities but policies that impact neighbourhoods are often formulated at city-wide, provincial or even federal scales. Instead of making social and health

policies fit neighbourhoods, how can the unique conditions of neighbourhoods influence policy? What is it about the neighbourhood scale that may result in more responsive and effective social and health policies? Which policy issues are best tackled at the neighbourhood scale, and why? How have planners and policymakers begun to think differently about the role of neighbourhoods in policy development? What is the role of neighbourhood residents in the policy process?

A panel of four speakers will discuss the challenges and successes of focusing on neighbourhoods in the development of social and health policy.

- Jim Dunn (Centre for Urban Health Initiatives and the Centre for Research on Inner City Health) will present research on the link between neighbourhoods and healthy populations
- Russell Mawby (Director of Housing, City of Ottawa) will present views from a City Planning and Policy perspective with a focus on housing
- Maureen Fair (Executive Director, St. Christopher's House) will discuss how neighbourhood engagement can influence a research and advocacy agenda
- Armine Yalnizyan (Toronto Social Planning Council) will discuss the influence of neighbourhoods on the Social Planning Council's policies and programs

All are welcome, please RSVP to: cuhi.admin@utoronto.ca.

Social & Physical Determinants of Health in Toronto: What Do We Know and What Is To Be Done?

April 26 2007, 10:00-12:00 noon
St. Joseph's Health Centre, 30 The Queensway, Toronto. Education Centres A&B - 1st floor Barnicke Wing

- Keynote: Keith Denny, The Canadian Population Health Initiative (writer of the CIHI report *Improving the Health of Canadians: An Introduction to Health in Urban Places*)
- Bill Sinclair, St. Stephen's House
- Lynne Raskin, South Riverdale Community Health Centre
- Rick Edwards, St. Joseph's Health Centre

The St. Joseph's Health Centre Community Integration Seminar Series showcases new developments in the fields of health promotion and population health with a focus on service integration. Seminars and panel discussions feature practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Seminar topics are practice-oriented, and are relevant to both professional needs and the scope of the communities in southwest Toronto. Community health planners, service providers, practitioners, students, and all other interested parties are welcome to attend these free events.

To RSVP and/or to share suggestions for future topics, please contact

AnnMarie Marcolin: 416-530-6000-1-3224 or marcoa@stjoe.on.ca



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CUHI Managing Director, Dennis Magill, Appointed to the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) Board of Directors

Dennis Magill (Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto) has been appointed to the Board of the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) which plans, integrates, and funds local health services including hospitals, home care, long-term care, and community health centres. As a community and health activist, he is currently a board member at the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives, the Wellesley Institute, the Wellesley Central Residence and a former board member of the Sherbourne Health Centre, Rekai Centre for Long-Term Care and Wellesley Central Hospital.

CUHI New Seed Grant Recipients

As a CIHR Research Development Centre, CUHI offers seed grant funding to support collaborative projects that explore the physical and social environmental factors that impact the health of residents. Seed grants assist research projects in their development phase by funding pilot projects, literature reviews, testing of innovative methodologies and use of secondary data. Funded research projects must focus on one of three areas of urban health: Food Security and Urban Agriculture; Neighbourhoods or Physical Environments. In our most recent competition (Fall 2006), CUHI received 73 inquiries of which 40 proposals were submitted. In total, ten grants were awarded, three of which were co-sponsored by the Wellesley Institute due to their emphasis on community-based research. An additional requirement of seed grant eligibility is the participation of community and policy partners with the proposed research. Such partners were diverse this year including the Dixie-Bloor Neighbourhood Centre, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, City of Saskatoon, Toronto Public Health, Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, and the AIDS Committee of Toronto. CUHI welcomes our new research associates and their partners.

Funded projects include the following:

“Cornering the Market: Changes in Supermarket Distribution and Restrictive Covenants and Implications for Public Health and Urban Sustainability”

Naima Cameron (University of Alberta, Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences)

Examines consequences of restrictive covenants for food access, the neighbourhood and the health of residents. In partnership with the local community, this study will analyze the corporate policy of restrictive covenants by assessing their prevalence, effects and possible interventions in Edmonton but with wider application to other urban areas.

“WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE: ROADS, SCHOOLS, OR FOOD ACCESS? EXPLORING FOOD SECURITY WITH YOUNG ABORIGINAL MOMS”

Cyndy Baskin (School of Social Work, Coordinator of Indigenous and Food Security, Centre for Studies in Food Security, Ryerson University)

Explores food security issues confronting young Aboriginal mothers in Toronto and how their daily circumstances connect to food related policies. The project will consider the determinants that relate to food choice and food access and the relationship between food insecurity, housing costs, and child welfare involvement.

“Building Capacity for Local, Sustainable Food Systems: Planting the Seeds for Food Security in Nova Scotia”

Patricia L. Williams and Christine Johnson (Department of Applied Human Nutrition, Mount Saint Vincent University)

Aims to increase understanding of the food system-related challenges faced by low-income citizens and food producers of two agriculturally based urban communities in Nova Scotia (Spryfield and Antigonish). Research objectives involve the exploration of urban food systems and the investigation of the barriers to an environmentally sustainable, economically viable, socially just alternative food system within these regions.

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“Using Brownfields for Community Gardens: Opportunities & Risks”

Nick Istvanffy and Rebecca Siggner (Research and Consulting, SPARC BC)

Explores the risks and benefits of using brownfields for community gardens. Their project will involve establishing a multi-sectoral advisory committee to share current research on the topic and develop a research program.

“Use of 911 Ambulance Dispatch Data for the Syndromic Surveillance of Heat-Related Illness in Toronto”

Donald C. Cole and Kate Bassil (Department of Health Sciences, University of Toronto)

This study will explore the development of a surveillance system using 911 ambulance dispatch data to monitor heat-related illness in Toronto, a city where no such monitoring occurs despite the existence of a heat alert system. They seek to gather data on the most severely effected urban areas and the impacts on community members in order to inform the development of public health interventions and policies targeted at mitigating negative health effects.

“School Grounds and Health: Investigating the Influence of School Ground Design on Children’s Physical Activity and Related Health Benefits”

Cameron Collyer (Evergreen), Anne Bell (Environmental Studies, York University)

This study builds on research that explores the relationship between school ground design and the quality and quantity of children’s physical activity and other health effects. Research methods such as direct observation, objective measurement and the involvement of school children will be piloted and research partnerships between academics and community groups will be strengthened.

“Examining Determinants of Health among Immigrant Populations in the Dixie-Bloor Neighbourhood”

Kathi Wilson (Department of Geography, University of Toronto)

Investigates the determinants of health that are most relevant to the immigrant population at the neighbourhood level. Collaborating with the Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre, the data collected will assist with program planning and will help develop a larger proposal on the role of neighbourhoods on health among immigrant populations.

“The Role of the ‘Third Place’ in Community Health and Well-Being”

Patricia Manuel (School of Planning, Dalhousie University)

Examines the role of informal meeting places in neighbourhoods outside of the home or work place (known as “third places”). The study will examine how residents use third places, the potential of using third places as community health indicators and how policy may support the inclusion of third places in neighbourhoods.

“Mapping the Attributes of the Church and Wellesley Neighbourhood with Influence Tobacco Use among Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender People”

Gala Arh, Nadia Minian, Robert Schwartz, Dorrie Fiessel, and Jessica Schnoll (Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, University of Toronto)

Explores the attributes of the Toronto Church and Wellesley neighbourhood that influence tobacco use among the lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender population. The study will examine social, economic and environment factors of the neighbourhood, its history facilitating smoking and the effects of tobacco control programs and services. Study results will support the development of tobacco control and prevention initiatives for the target population.

“Bridging the Gap: Good Governance for Local Environment and Health Decision-Making”

Cory Neudorf (Saskatoon Health Region)

Examines the institutional context for environment and health decision-making at the local level, including the challenges to effective public health participation in decision-making, and the means and practices for improving public health engagement.



Thank you to all those who submitted proposals and also to those individuals that reviewed them.



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CUHI Research Team Evaluates Urban Pesticide Reduction Strategies

This project was recently in the CIHR - Institute of Population & Public Health Research Spotlight!

See <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/33503.html#6>

Dr. Donald Cole – Department of Public Health Sciences,
University of Toronto

Dr. Loren Vanderlinden, Dr. Monica Bienefeld, Ms. Carol Mee and
Mr. Rich Whate – Environmental Protection Office, Toronto Public
Health

Environmental groups, the public and, increasingly, municipal public health authorities, are advocating for reductions in pesticide use in urban areas, primarily because of concerns about potential adverse health impacts. In Ontario, municipalities have responded with a variety of approaches designed to reduce the amounts of pesticides used in their jurisdictions, ranging from public education and voluntary activities to implementation and enforcement of by-laws.

In 2004, the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives at the Univ. of Toronto provided seed grant funding to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies to reduce urban outdoor pesticide use. The resulting project partnered researchers from the University of Toronto and Toronto Public Health to develop indicators to track the impacts of pesticide use reduction programs on an ongoing basis.

The research team interviewed key informants from municipal government, industry, health care and environmental organizations about the range and types of strategies they used to reduce pesticide use. While education is the most common approach, by-laws are being considered by many municipalities. The respondents recognized the challenges of measuring effectiveness of efforts and committed in principle to continuing a partnership on a long-term evaluation project.

A literature review revealed that the use of outdoor space and aesthetic considerations surrounding lawns and gardens (the primary reason for residential pesticide use) are complex and deeply-rooted socio-cultural phenomena. The aggressively advertised “perfect” lawn and garden can act as a status symbol,

reinforced by a sense of community responsibility to “keep standards high,” that discouraged residents from voluntarily reducing pesticide use. Thus, to be effective, by-laws must be accompanied by education and information campaigns that address socio-cultural and socio-economic barriers to change.

The research team proposed seven possible indicator domains for evaluation of pesticide use reduction programs, including community behaviour and response, education and outreach, legal and enforcement and environmental contamination. Many of the research findings from this pilot project are now informing a City of Toronto initiative to evaluate the success of its own pesticide by-law. This evaluation will be reported to the Toronto Board of Health in spring of 2007.

“Ideally, we would be comparing the levels of pesticide use over time across multiple municipalities: then we’d have the best kind of evidence about what is the most effective type of public health protection intervention in this situation”, explains Dr. Monica Bienefeld from the research team. She notes however that, “because this particular issue is very multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional and politically sensitive, it has been challenging to put together a specific proposal for evaluation. Instead, we have focused on developing and promoting a collaborative strategy, wherein we encourage other local jurisdictions to gather the same information that we are collecting (e.g. self-reported pesticide use) in compatible ways (e.g. using the same survey questions). We hope that in the future we may be able to use the data collected for a large-scale comparative evaluation of pesticide-use reduction by-laws and education campaigns.”

The team is also researching the impacts of the interventions. Initial work has resulted in a spin-off project now funded by SSHRC. The Multicultural Yard Health & Environment Project is exploring how two ethno-cultural groups in Toronto receive, interpret and respond to campaigns about pesticide use reduction and whether the public health protection provided by the by-law may vary across different communities. This collaborative project between Toronto Public Health, the Univ. of Toronto, the Univ. of Western Ontario and local organizations will share its findings with the community in early 2007 and has already led to new partnerships with Cantonese and Spanish-speaking community groups engaged in outreach on environmental issues in Toronto.

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