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# 2010-05-03: Heart disease study receives \$10 million NIH grant

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FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

### Heart disease study receives \$10 million NIH grant



A National Institutes of Health grant will expand research at Northeastern on chronic illness in the Puerto Rican community. Photo by Getty Images

#### May 3, 2010

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Northeastern University has received a \$10 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a five-year study that aims to explain the surprisingly high incidence of heart disease and other chronic conditions among Puerto Rican adults living in the United States.

The funding is part of a new NIH initiative to create Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities to better to understand and address inequities associated with the two leading causes of death in the United States-cancer and heart disease.

Northeastern is one of 10 institutions nationwide selected for this initiative.

Katherine Tucker, professor and chair of the health sciences department at Bouvé College of Health Sciences, is the principal investigator on the grant. The study will attempt to uncover the complex factors -including genetics, social networks, diet and pollution-that contribute to the elevated threat of cardiovascular disease among the Puerto Rican community.

"This is an incredible achievement for Katy and her team," says Stephen Zoloth, dean of Bouvé College of Health Sciences. "We are very excited that Bouvé and Northeastern have been selected as the home of one of 10 NIH Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities. The center is an excellent example of Bouvé's strength—multidisciplinary translational research focused on critical urban-health issues."

The study is a continuation of Tucker's research, which has already revealed a high prevalence of chronic illness—including diabetes, depression and hypertension—in Boston's Puerto Rican community.

"We want to gain a better understanding of what factors lead to these health disparities so we can find new ways to address them," Tucker says.

Researchers hope the study's insights will lead to effective preventative measures, and also prove beneficial to other disadvantaged groups who are similarly vulnerable to heart disease.

"Katherine Tucker's work embodies Northeastern's mission to create knowledge that addresses pressing societal needs," says Joseph E. Aoun, president of Northeastern. "The research done under her leadership will not only deepen our understanding of disparities in health and health care, but also create solutions that will improve lives on a global scale."

One of the projects that make up the study will be led by Luis Falcon, vice provost for graduate education and associate professor of sociology, who will examine the effect of the Puerto Rican community's social networks and local environments. Carmen Sceppa, associate professor of health professions, will serve as the principal investigator on an intervention program involving heart-healthy activity.

The grant is the latest of several awards Northeastern has received to expand critical health research -including a \$9.9 million NIH grant to study how exposure to environmental contamination affects preterm birth rates in Puerto Rico and what sustainable solutions might be developed. That study involves a collaboration between researchers at Bouvé and the College of Engineering.



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The Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities grant is also supported by the National Cancer Institute; the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research.

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