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NIH grant gives CANHR boost for next five years

Lex Treinen/Sun Star Reporter

October 16, 2012

The Center for Alaska Native Health Research announced on October 5 that it received a \$5.3 million five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Bert Boyer, the Director of the ten-year-old research center said that the grant is crucial in the center's transition from building a foundation in Alaska Native communities to doing more research projects

The National Institutes of Health awards \$30.8 billion in grant funding per year to 2,500 universities and research institutions, according to its website. Boyer said that despite the large funding, the grant application is extremely competitive. Less than ten percent of the total applicants receiving the funding. To get the grant, CANHR had to prove that its researchers and the university had the resources and knowledge to make projects successful. Boyer said the Center's

Boyer said that the pilot programs will most likely continue to focus the research centers' special interest areas like of metabolic disorders, mental health, suicide prevention and obesity.

CANHR wants to conduct more cancer-focused research. Alaska Natives face huge disparities with cancer. For example Boyer pointed out the colorectal cancer rates in Northwest Alaska, which are the highest in the nation according to Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium numbers.

Of the \$5.3 million the research center will receive, a third will fund three or four pilot projects. The rest will go to fund core operations of the center, which Boyer said gives support to those researchers unfamiliar with challenges of doing health research in rural Alaska. An out-of-state review panel composed of research scientists will decide which of the projects have the most potential and which ones to fund

Ashley Strauch, an undergraduate junior psychology major currently involved with CANHR cancer research, said that she thought the NIH grant provides a great opportunity to expand research.

Boyer stressed the innovative way that CANHR conducts research—community based participatory research—as well as the large disparities in Alaska Native health issues as reasons that the center and the grant are so important. Boyer will travel to Washington D.C. later this month to present CANHR's methods.

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