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Native health research center awarded \$5.3 million grant

By University of Alaska Fairbanks

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A grant for \$5.3 million has been awarded to the work of the Center Alaska Native Health Research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The five-year grant is the final in a series of National Institutes of Health grants meant to build biomedical research infrastructure. The center has been studying obesity, genetics, nutrition, cancer and resilience in Alaska Natives for 11 years.

CANHR faculty and staff members will build upon previous research in order to become sustainable after the grant ends.

“The next five years are critical,” said Bert Boyer, CANHR director. “We have a good track record with our work over the last 10 years in Alaska Native health disparities. We have a great opportunity to add to our knowledge.”

Medical research is often slow, but methodical. In order to win competitive grants, scientists need preliminary data to build on, said Boyer.

To help researchers generate that preliminary data, CANHR will offer 12 pilot grants over five years to UAF scientists. The applicants must use at least one of CANHR’s services, which include administration, data management, community engagement and clinical support, as well as dietary and physical activity assessment expertise.

The pilot grant recipients also need to gain tribal approval to conduct the research with tribal members, and collaborate with a scientist from outside UAF who has a record of successful research.

The goal is for the new researchers to build a foundation of data so they can be successful when applying for large grants, said Boyer. CANHR has been moving in this direction since it began in 2001.

The \$5.3 million grant is part of NIH’s efforts to balance research funding. Historically, states with medical schools and established biomedical research scientists would win the bulk of NIH funding. Alaska, and 22 other states, didn’t compete well.

The NIH program, called the Institutional Development Award, has allowed CANHR to build research capacity and address health needs in the state of Alaska, said Fred Taylor, who oversees the program at the NIH’s National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

“The new phase of funding will allow the center to extend these activities, which include its pioneering community-based participatory research on metabolic disease and its efforts to foster the next generation of biomedical researchers in Alaska,” Taylor said.

Information about the center is on the web at canhr.uaf.edu.

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