Access to timely, comprehensive, and equitable health care for individuals in the United States varies considerably, with significant percentages of many populations having only limited access to health care. The United States ranks last among 16 high-income nations in the rate of deaths that are considered preventable with timely and effective health care, according to a 2011 report from the Commonwealth Fund. Social work research is well suited to address the social determinants of health and disparities in health care and to inform the care of the complex patient in both acute and chronic care settings. On these pages are a range of activities in which the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work is involved that are focused on health.
Professor John Wallace, the Philip Hallen Chair in Community Health and Social Justice in the School of Social Work, and the Homewood Children's Village, which he helped to create, have been awarded a three-year grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities for the innovative Healthy Learning, Healthy Living, Healthy Lives (HL3) project. HL3 equitably engages community and academic partners in an effort to investigate, ameliorate, and ultimately eliminate disparities in children's health, with a particular focus on asthma and its correlates, consequences, and comorbidities.

Research associate Anita Zuberi is leading a pilot study examining the relationship between neighborhood distress and racial health disparities, with a focus on infant mortality and premature birth. Her work also focuses on children's exposure to danger and perceptions of safety among low-income families, which has implications for outcomes related to health and well-being.

Preterm Birth by Race

The geographic information system mapping work of research associate Anita Zuberi shows that preterm birth is unequally distributed across neighborhoods in the City of Pittsburgh and higher in majority Black neighborhoods. The yellow dots represent the percentage of preterm births out of all births in a neighborhood in the birth cohort from 2006 to 2010. The shading represents the percent of the population in a neighborhood that is Black as of the 2010 Census.

The School of Social Work's Center on Race and Social Problems’ Race Research Online Directory offers a wealth of scholarly information, including lecture videos, research projects, publications, and other educational resources—all at the touch of a button. Visit www.crs.pitt.edu to view the directory.
Assistant Professor Gerald Cochran’s research interests are centered on behavioral health services. His area of expertise involves identifying and studying appropriate care for underserved populations in health care settings, with particular emphasis on individuals who misuse drugs and alcohol.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- The school has been involved in a variety of community health initiatives, including a University community health and wellness program that works with neighborhoods to define health, fitness, and wellness as community issues.
- Social workers play vital roles in hospital systems in areas like oncology, palliative care, work with family members, and follow-up care.
- Social workers are present in community-based primary health care centers for underserved populations like the poor; the uninsured; and immigrants, including undocumented immigrants.
- Public health social workers are critical partners in the treatment of specialized health conditions like HIV/AIDS, sickle cell disease, substance abuse, and mental and behavioral disorders.
- Social workers are one of the largest groups of professionals in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ system of health care and lead the behavioral/mental health side of the VA system of care.

CENTER ON RACE AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The School of Social Work Center on Race and Social Problems includes racial health disparities as one of its seven areas of focus. As part of this focus, the center:

- examines racial disparities in health conditions across the life span, access to and quality of care, and strategies for reducing disparities;
- hosts a research advisory panel that includes faculty members from across the University; and
- published a health report based on the speeches and panels at the 2010 conference Race in America: Restructuring Inequality; a special health inequality issue of the School of Social Work’s journal, Race and Social Problems; and a report based on the health and racial demographics of the region.

“...My passion for research comes from knowing that by evaluating the services delivered by social workers and other health care professionals, the health and well-being of individuals and communities can be significantly improved.”

-GERALD COCHRAN, Assistant Professor

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