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Wayne State University and University of Windsor forge international partnership on public health research

Detroit, Mich. – The presidents of the University of Windsor and Wayne State University recently came together with the mayor of Windsor, Mr. Eddie Francis, to discuss an international collaborative project, known as the North American Public Health Institute (NAPHI), which the two universities are creating to address public health issues.

Two years ago, the vice presidents for research at these two institutions met with 150 faculty at both universities to gather ideas on ways the two could work together on a unique, cross-border comparative research project in public health. No other international cities in the world located on a common international water border just a few miles apart have a shared environment, resources, urban health problems and need for protection from bioterrorist threats, yet have very different healthcare policies and delivery systems.

“We at Wayne State University are excited about this opportunity to collaborate with our colleagues in Windsor,” said Irvin D. Reid, president of Wayne State University. “Detroit and Windsor may have very different health care delivery systems, but they share a number of critical public health problems as well as a common boundary. We now have an effective way to combine the research expertise of Wayne State and the University of Windsor to confront the health-related issues of our two cities.”

Detroit and Windsor have a greater public health burden than other areas of Michigan and Ontario. In 2003 the Detroit Health Care Stabilization Workgroup reported that Detroit’s population has sharply higher rates of illness, severity and mortality than the rest of the state. Similarly, the 2001 Community Health Profile of Windsor reports that mortality and morbidity rates were higher there than in the rest of the province.

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“By setting priorities and coordinating and integrating them in a way that is best for our two cities and surrounding areas, this cross-border collaboration will make an impact on our two very different public health structures,” commented Dr. Reid. “Many projects have been identified at both of our universities where collaborations have already begun, making it evident that our teams of researchers see this as a unique opportunity to develop research projects that were previously not possible.”

Currently, groups of researchers at both institutions are developing collaborative projects focusing on:

- The cause of variations in vaccination rates between Canada and the U.S. and strategies for improvement;
- The impact of gambling addiction on finances and society;
- The victimization and assault perpetration on women;
- The examination of how educational systems relates to child health outcomes, particularly childhood obesity;
- The relationship of land use to health outcomes.

Other opportunities for partnerships are being explored and developed. The University of Windsor’s Partnership for Road Safety group, led by Dr. Anne Snowdon, professor of Management Science at the University of Windsor, is one such group. Dr. Snowdon has worked closely with Michigan industry to design an improved booster seat to increase child safety in automobiles for children ages 4 to 8. Road crashes are the leading cause of death of children in Canada and the U.S., and the use of this improved booster seat for this age group could prevent 74% of deaths and 67% of serious injuries, according to Dr. Snowdon.

This new North American Public Health Institute will continue to expand research programs, and begin to develop a more formal directorship and administrative staff to further develop a formal research agenda for the Institute. U.S. and Canadian grants will be sought to fund various research projects. For further information about NAPHI, visit <http://www.research.wayne.edu/naphi/>.

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Wayne State University is one of the nation’s pre-eminent public research universities in an urban setting. Through its multidisciplinary approach to research and education, and its ongoing collaboration with government, industry and other institutions, the university seeks to enhance economic growth and improve the quality of life in the city of Detroit, state of Michigan and throughout the world.