HEALTH EQUITY AND THE ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The defining aim of global health is to find ways to improve people's health no matter where they live, by promoting social justice, addressing the social and structural determinants of health, empowering people and providing opportunities to achieve good health and wellbeing — this involves building effective, equitable, sustainable and accountable health systems, including the provision of quality health care. The cornerstone of achieving health equity is addressing issues that prevent opportunities for good health and wellbeing, which inspire our four priority research themes: Food Nutrition & Security, Healthy Environments, Gender Equity & Justice, and Transformative Technologies & Institutions.

Johns Hopkins University (JHU) launched the Alliance for a Healthier World with the understanding that health equity is influenced by factors such as education, income, gender, race, ethnicity, geography, nutrition, politics, environment and access to technology. The Alliance is an extension of JHU’s longstanding commitment to addressing inequities. What is new, and exciting, is that the Alliance breaks down barriers between disciplines to bring the best and brightest ideas, people, and work to resolve complex global health challenges. Addressing global health disparities requires a recognition that we live in an interdependent world. We need to better understand the diverse connections between and among the people, communities, institutions, and environments in which we live in order to make a significant impact.

“Not only are more than 800 million people going to bed hungry each night around the world, but we also recognize that nearly 2 billion people suffer from obesity and overweight. Our current food production system is accountable for a quarter of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, 70% of global freshwater use, and is depleting soils, water quality, and natural habitats in much of the world. These challenges—while unprecedented—are not insurmountable. Success will require new thinking, bold initiatives, increased capacities and the ability to translate innovative science into effective policy and practice.”

— Roy Steiner, The Rockefeller Foundation

FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY

Food & Nutrition Security is one of four thematic areas for the Alliance for a Healthier World. Through this work we study critical linkages between food systems and dietary needs to maintain nutritional health across all stages of life. Research will integrate public health, nutritional sciences, food security, ethics, and agriculture economics to address nutritional inequities in underserved communities.

Poverty and poor nutrition are inextricably linked. Poverty affects nutrition throughout the entire life-span with an array of adverse outcomes, including increased prevalence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, increased risk for certain cancers and mental health issues. Research indicates these health conditions result in reduced physical work capacity, a lower learning and intellectual capacity, increased exposure to environmental risks, and reduced participation in social decisions.
OUR WORK IN ACTION: ADDRESSING HYPERTENSION CARE IN AFRICA

The rates of cardiovascular diseases and stroke in Sub-Saharan Africa have surged dramatically in recent decades because of poor diagnosis, inadequate control of key risk factors and lack of treatment. Poor diet, physical inactivity, obesity, population growth, and urbanization are exacerbating the problem, and the World Health Organization estimates that hypertension will be the cause of 75 percent of all deaths in the region by 2020. This project addresses the gaps in management and treatment of hypertension for residents of Ghana. Our researchers will enhance the ability of local healthcare providers and public health workers to utilize interventions specifically targeted to local communities, building both infrastructure and capacity. This project will create a model that is scalable and translatable to other regions.

Our Food & Nutrition Security Hypertension Care in Africa team is comprised of researchers and students from three schools at JHU: Nursing, Medicine, and Arts & Sciences. We are proud to work in partnership with Kwame Nkrumah University.

Co-principal investigators, Yvonne Commodore-Mensah (seated 3rd from left) and Fred Stephen Sarfo (standing 4th from left) with ADHINCRA research colleagues.

All forms of malnutrition are the result of interactions among poor diets, unhealthy food systems and inadequate health services. Initial research topics will reflect these drivers of food and nutrition insecurity and include:

- Multiple burdens of malnutrition in low- and middle-income countries: undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight/obesity
- Implementation and measurement of sustainable diets and food systems for planet and human health, including potential roles for technology
- Mechanisms for improving the food environment within urban settings
- Tools and technologies for preventing, mitigating, or adapting to responses to food and water insecurity in conflict settings and regions prone to extreme weather (storms, drought, etc.)
- Design and evaluation of national programs/policies that promote adaptation to climate change, specifically focused on how they reach the poor and address inequities
- Health and environmental impacts of industrial animal production in low- and middle-income countries

ABOUT JOHNS HOPKINS ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER WORLD

The Alliance is an initiative integrating diverse expertise and perspectives to unlock ground-breaking knowledge and resolve the most complex global health equity challenges of our time. Scholars, researchers, and leaders from all disciplines—medicine, nursing, public health, international relations, engineering, education, business, the social sciences, creative arts, and bioethics—work side-by-side with partners and disadvantaged communities around the world to create a healthier, more equitable, and more just world.

THEME LEADER FOR FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY

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ABOUT JHU

Knowledge for the world
The mission of Johns Hopkins University is to educate its students and cultivate their capacity for lifelong learning, to foster independent and original research, and to bring the benefits of discovery to the world.

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