



ILLINOIS PREVENTION  
RESEARCH CENTER

# HEALTHLINES

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2

JULY 2009

**Recent immigrants were concerned about mental health. Long established immigrants worried about chronic disease.**

*Healthlines* is published by the Illinois Prevention Research Center (IPRC), which is directed by Robin J. Mermelstein, PhD, at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The center is a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cooperative agreement number 1-U48-DP-000048. The contents of this newsletter are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Copyright © 2009 Send address changes to [johnsto@uic.edu](mailto:johnsto@uic.edu).

## Latino Immigrants Identify, Address Health Concerns

Over the past year, an IPRC researcher and colleagues at the University of Illinois at Rockford have worked with Spanish-speaking immigrants in five communities in rural Illinois to identify health concerns and ways to address them.

Health concerns differ among Latino immigrants, depending on how long they have lived in the United States, IPRC researcher Karen Peters learned.

Recent immigrants were most concerned about stress, anxiety and depression, while immigrants with longer ties to this country worried more about cardiovascular disease, easy access to fast foods and a lack of physical activity, they discovered.

Dr. Peters, assistant professor of health policy and administration, said such studies are crucial to understanding the health needs of an overlooked population.

"These communities tend to be highly mobile and scattered geographically, so health departments are not often able to gather health and lifestyle information about them in their surveys," she said.

Although Hispanics and Latinos made up only 2.1 percent of rural Illinois in the 2000 Census, Spanish-speaking Americans make up the fastest growing minority group in the state and nation. More than 14 percent, or about 1.9 million,

of Illinois residents are of Hispanic or Latino origin.

The researchers helped community groups develop and conduct surveys to determine health concerns. After reviewing the survey results, community members identified ways to address their concerns, such as group workshops focused on identifying and reducing stress, classes on healthy cooking, sports, dances and walking clubs.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the research team provided each of the five communities with a \$5,000 grant to set up these activities.

Participating in this research were community members from rural DeKalb in northern Illinois; Monmouth in northwest Illinois; Beardstown in central Illinois; and an area encompassing Carbondale and Cobden, in the state's southern tip.

Peters calls this project an excellent example of community-based participatory action research.

"These communities really felt ownership of the project since they had an active role in examining and suggesting

solutions. They demonstrated high levels of commitment and enthusiasm to addressing the issues identified by Latinos in each of the towns participating in the project," she said.

Peters partnered with the National Center for Rural Health Professions at the College of Medicine in Rockford and the Rural Hispanic Health Alliance, or *Alianza*, in this research.

UI-Rockford members of the research team were Sergio Cristancho, research assistant professor of family and community medicine; Marcela Garces, community outreach specialist; and Ben Mueller, community development specialist.

The researchers plan to report on their findings to local and state public health departments, Latino advocacy organizations and to the residents of the communities that participated in the study later this summer.



Representatives from five rural Illinois communities celebrated their partnership with researchers led by Karen Peters, assistant professor of health policy and administration, in Effingham, Ill., at the conclusion of a health study of Latino immigrants.

# Awards Bestowed on IPRC Research Team Members



**Susan L. Hughes, DSW**

## Health Intervention Recognized

Fit and Strong! — the exercise program developed and tested by **Dr. Susan Hughes** for older adults with arthritis — continues to receive recognition for quality. In April, it received honorable mention for the national Prescription for Better Health Award. Fit and Strong! was nominated by Resources for Seniors Inc. of Raleigh, NC, where 122 older adults have participated in the program since May 2006.

The award, sponsored by CVS Pharmacy and the National Council of Aging, recognizes healthy lifestyle programs at senior centers.

Dr. Hughes, professor of community health sciences, co-directs IPRC's involvement in the CDC Prevention Research Centers' Healthy Aging Research Network.



**Nelson Soza**

## Scholarships Awarded to IPRC Research Assistants

Two graduate students receiving research training through the IPRC have been awarded scholarships.

**Nelson Soza** has been named a fellow in the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Program, a statewide program that supports the pursuit of graduate degrees by underrepresented groups from Illinois institutions.

Soza, who is completing his first year in the master's degree program in urban planning and policy, joined the IPRC in September 2008. Born and raised in Chile, Soza has worked on community development and advocacy in

Chicago since 1993. As a condition of his \$20,000 fellowship, Soza will seek a position at an Illinois university or college after graduation.

**Lora Oswald**, an IPRC research assistant since September 2007, has been named a Paul Q. Peterson Public Health Doctoral Scholar for 2009-2010. She works on the CDC's Cardiovascular Health Intervention Research and Translation Network. She is in her second year of the UIC master's degree program in public health, focusing on community health sciences.

One Paul Q. Peterson Public Health Scholarship is awarded annually to a UIC School of Public Health (SPH) graduate student interested in the practical application of public health delivery or research. The \$5,000 scholarship honors the first dean and founder of the SPH.

## Fellow Awarded Scholarship for the Study of Aging

**Renae Smith-Ray**, a predoctoral fellow in the Gerontological Public Health Training Program who works on IPRC research, has been named a Paul D. Doolen Scholar for 2009-10. Winning in the behavioral-social sciences category, she will receive \$5,000.



**Renae Smith-Ray, MS**

Smith-Ray is a doctoral student in the Division of Community Health Sciences in the UIC School of Public Health, which awarded her the 2009 Estelle Goldstein Memorial Scholarship earlier this year. She is studying the effects of cognitive training on balance and gait in older adults.

Smith-Ray earned a master's degree in neuropsychology from University of Northern Colorado and a bachelor's in psychology from Illinois State University.

The Doolen Scholarship is awarded annually to two outstanding University of Illinois students who have completed at least two years of graduate study and whose scholarship focuses on the field of aging. Funded by an endowment from the Retirement Research Foundation, the scholarship honors the late Paul D. Doolen, a longtime member of the University of Illinois Foundation Board of Directors.

## Community Sessions End for IPRC Core Study

The IPRC diabetes prevention study, Making the Connection, held its final Healthy Living Program meeting with community participants at the Latino Organization of the Southwest on May 4. The 24-session program led by trained community residents was offered at four locations in the Marquette Park area, beginning in April 2007. About 90 adults at risk for diabetes participated in the Healthy Living Program.

The research team, led by Laurie Ruggiero, professor of community health sciences, is now analyzing data and preparing scholarly presentations and articles to share their findings with the community and national research community.



Maria Martinez (left) and Alicia Martinez, recent graduates of the Making the Connection Healthy Living Program at the Latino Organization of the Southwest, proudly show their certificates of program completion.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Meet Shirley Fox, Nurse and Community Advocate



Shirley Fox, RN

As a nurse, community organizer and long-time resident of Chicago's South Side, Shirley Fox has helped thousands of people, providing care and education to patients with chronic diseases and directing youth programs for the Southwest Community Congress. She now works with the Latino Organization of the Southwest (LOS), promoting the awareness of high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke and teaching people how to prevent and manage these conditions.

Ms. Fox's involvement with the IPRC dates back to the late 1990s, shortly after IPRC began working with schools and LOS to promote health in West Lawn, Gage Park and Chicago Lawn. Ms. Fox served on the IPRC Community Advisory Board and more recently worked on Making the Connection Healthy Living Program, a research study that aims to reduce diabetes among at-risk communities.

Here, Ms. Fox shares her views about research and the community.

Tell us about your Southwest Chicago neighborhood.

This community is a melting pot of different ethnic groups. Diversity is a source of its strength and potential tension. To live as neighbors with people from different ethnicities provides residents an opportunity to experience the larger reality of the United States closer to home.

This community faces some big challenges: the need for better education, a healthier lifestyle and a renewed focus on the family. There is a crying need for more schools and health facilities. Preventive education programs are needed for people with diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, kidney disease and cancer. The com-

munity also needs easy access to stores that sell healthy foods. Besides, the tough economy is leading to an increase in gang behavior among the youth. Increasingly, people from across different ethnic groups are working together to shape the Southwest Side into a safe community.

So, you see the potential for more programs to address the community's health needs?

Oh, yes! Future community programs could focus on high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, kidney diseases, cancer, glaucoma and other eye diseases and obesity. Other areas that concern me include depression, mental health and suicide among adults, as well as youth, and health problems among the elderly.

How do you view partnerships between universities and communities?

The IPRC has been extremely beneficial for the community. Making the Connection created awareness of the need for diabetes prevention activities in the community. The program offered easy access to the Kidney Mobile (of the National Kidney Foundation) for screenings to people in the neighborhood. The health fairs that IPRC organizes encourage community members from all age groups, who often do not have medical insurance, to get immunizations, flu shots and health check-ups done.

These partnerships also provide opportunities for community organizations to participate, learn and voice their opinions on the conditions in the Southwest Side.



IPRC Researchers Contribute to Public Health Field

IPRC investigator Bill Baldyga is working on a project led by Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital to improve the **Illinois Behavioral Risk**

**Factor Surveillance System.** Over the next few years a statewide survey to improve understanding about the health practices and behaviors of Illinois adults, adolescents and children will be developed, tested, and implemented. Also partnering on this project are the Illinois Department of Public Health, Chicago

Department of Public Health, and Northern Illinois University.

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Thomas Prohaska and Susan Hughes, professors of community health sciences and co-directors of the Center for Research on Health and Aging, recently completed an examination of the **Illinois Department on Aging Community Care Program** service cost maximum and service utilization in reference to the needs of older adults receiving state-funded home care such as housekeeping and bathing assistance. They will compare the allo-

cation of these services to those provided by the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation services to adults with similar disabilities and to best practices nationwide. Funded by the Illinois Department on Aging, this work was mandated by the Illinois legislature.

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Thomas Prohaska, co-director of IPRC's involvement in the Healthy Aging Research Network, convened a panel of experts in Chicago in mid May to plan a second edition of the textbook **Public Health and Aging**, to be published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

## IPRC Researchers Examine Brain Health Among Older Adults



**Thomas R. Prohaska, PhD**

Where and at what pace older adults prefer to walk may reflect their brains' health, found IPRC researcher Thomas Prohaska and colleagues. In assessments of nearly 900 older adults, the researchers found that the sharpest thinkers were more likely to walk briskly and to frequent parks or jogging paths, while those whose brains were slightly impaired preferred a slower pace and walking indoors. Previous research indicated an association between greater levels of exercise, such as walking, and better brain performance among older adults.

Dr. Prohaska is professor of community health sciences and co-investigator of the Prevention Research Centers Healthy Aging Research Network, comprising nine PRCs nationwide. He also

co-directs the UIC Center for Research on Health and Aging.

His findings were published in a special issue of *The Gerontologist* that focused on the healthy brain.

People affected by Alzheimer's disease view health differently from their loved ones, reported Renée Beard and others in same issue of *The Gerontologist*. According to the researchers, individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their families highlighted the importance of accepting cognitive decline and associated losses as a necessary component of "aging well."

While family members of persons with Alzheimer's disease viewed memory loss negatively, those with the disease were more positive, emphasizing the importance of feeling good rather

than looking good or having a perfect memory, indicated the researchers.

Dr. Beard conducted this research as a post-doctoral fellow in the UIC Gerontological Public Health Training Program. She is now an assistant professor of sociology at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass.

Alzheimer's disease affects 222,300 Illinois adults and their families, according to the state public health department.

The special supplement on *The Gerontologist* was published online in June 2009 with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Healthy Aging Research Network.

Drs. Prohaska and Beard contributed to six articles in the issue.



**Renée Beard, PhD**

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#### **IPRC Mission**

To reduce disparities in health by studying approaches to promote healthful behaviors and prevent disease across the lifespan; to conduct this research in partnership with communities across Illinois; to share findings and best practices locally and nationally; and to improve the practice of public health through training and education.

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