

## **GHPC and IWES Partner to Center Community in Aligning Efforts**

The [Georgia Health Policy Center](#) (GHPC), home to Aligning Systems for Health, and the [Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies](#) (IWES), a community-based, public health non-profit organization, are pleased to announce they formalized a partnership on ways to bring community to the forefront of efforts that align health care, public health, and social services.

“The bedrock of this partnership is the belief that more equitable outcomes are achieved when community members drive efforts to align systems,” says Hilary Heishman, project officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which is supporting the work. “This project will focus on working with community members to shape solutions for better health and healthcare systems that are ultimately capable of disrupting racialized health outcomes.”

Together, GHPC and IWES will codesign strategies and a practice guidance to amplify aligning capacity among community leaders and institutional partners working with community leaders.

“IWES firmly believes in the power of community to contribute to its health, healing and wellbeing,” says IWES Founder/CEO, Denese Shervington, MD, MPH. “We believe that true change happens when community becomes the mechanism of change, and we work respectfully and humbly together to ignite such change.”

“Learnings from Aligning Systems for Health indicate that cross-sectoral, community-led partnerships are best positioned to advance equity,” says GHPC CEO Karen Minyard, Ph.D. “We are thrilled to be partnering with IWES in this next phase of work to test the effectiveness of these assumptions for advancing racial and health equity in real-world settings.”

This fall, GHPC and IWES will collaborate for a minimum of two years with four sites, working to develop, evaluate, and amplify community-led systems change utilizing equity-centered aligning processes. The focus at each site will be based on locally identified needs, and could include strategies such as:

- Building equity into operational processes
- Developing best practices to prioritize community voice
- Overcoming interorganizational power dynamics
- Fostering trust with community

As with the initial phase of Aligning Systems for Health work, going forward the joint team will synthesize insights from ongoing research across the field and insights from practice-oriented activities in various communities to generate and disseminate knowledge and useful resources that support community-led systems change. Combining the evidence the program gathered in the first phase of this work together with the wisdom and science already deeply embedded in the community will catalyze actions to decrease health disparities and equity gaps that currently plague American society.

Both organizations are grateful to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for recognizing the importance of a collaboration such as the one that has been established between GHPC and IWES. To further the efforts of cross-sector alignment, it is imperative to bring together researchers and policymakers with organizations that represent and center the needs of community, and this opportunity would not exist without the generous support from RWJF.

For more information about this partnership, please reach out to Japera Hemming ([jhemming@gsu.edu](mailto:jhemming@gsu.edu)) at GHPC or Lisa Richardson ([lrich@iwesnola.org](mailto:lrich@iwesnola.org)) at IWES.

#### ABOUT GHPC

*The Georgia Health Policy Center, established in 1995, provides evidence-based research, program development, and policy guidance to improve health status at the community level. The center conducts, analyzes, and disseminates qualitative and quantitative findings to connect decision makers with the objective research and guidance needed to make informed decisions about health policy and programs. Today the center is at work in more than 220 communities in all 50 states, helping our nation to improve health status.*

#### ABOUT IWES

*Founded in 1993, IWES is a national, non-profit health organization that creates initiatives to heal communities, especially those facing adversity. Through community-driven research programs, training, advocacy and partnerships, IWES helps to build emotional and physical well-being, resilience and capacity among women, their families and communities of color, especially those which are disadvantaged. IWES uses a Social Ecological Model (SEM), which recognizes that individual behavior is shaped by the intersection of multiple influences occurring at the interpersonal, community and societal levels. Through this in-depth, multi-dimensional approach, IWES creates culturally proficient programs, activities and research to address and advocate for the emotional and physical well-being, resilience, and capacity of women of color, their families and communities to heal and create sustainable change. IWES works in the following areas: Resilience, Well-Being, and Mental Health; Adolescent Health; Maternal and Child Health; and STI/HIV Prevention & Care.*