Nemours Children's Health Secures Urgent NIH Grant Funding to Increase Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake in Black and Latino Communities

Study Will Build on Nemours' Commitment to Equity and Addressing Social Determinants of Health

WILMINGTON, Del. (Sept. 27, 2021) –Researchers at Nemours Children's Hospital, Delaware, as part of a public-private partnership, have received a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant supplement through the Delaware Clinical and Translational Research (CTR) ACCEL Program to develop and test an approach to foster uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine among children in Black and Latino communities. The $200,000, one-year award comes in response to an urgent NIH call for proposals to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake in underrepresented communities.

"With the recent concerning uptick in infections from the Delta variant of COVID-19, it is even more critical that families and communities protect themselves through vaccination," said Gregory Hicks, professor of physical therapy at the University of Delaware and principal investigator of the Delaware CTR-ACCEL Program, which received the funding award. "This project, led by Nemours Children's Health, is designed to bring greater equity to COVID-19 prevention among children in underrepresented communities."

> *"This is a very important project – and one that illustrates Nemours' strategy of caring for the whole child," said Mary M. Lee, MD, FAAP, Nemours Children's Chief Scientific Officer and Physician-in-Chief in the Delaware Valley. "By working with families and communities to determine how best to reach them and address concerns or challenges they face in getting their children vaccinated, we can reduce vaccine disparities and bring greater equity to COVID-19 prevention among children in underrepresented communities."*

The project is led by clinician-scientists from the Nemours Center for Healthcare Delivery Science (CHDS) and the Department of Pediatrics, in collaboration with the Nemours Value-Based Services Organization, Office of Health Equity and Inclusion, and Division of Infectious Disease. This Nemours team will be working in partnership with colleagues at the ChristianaCare Institute for Research on Equity and Community Health (iREACH), Harrington Community Partnership Fund, and University of Delaware Partnership for Healthy Community through the Delaware CTR-ACCEL Program. This NIH-funded decade-long collaboration involves Nemours, the University of Delaware, Christiana Care, Delaware State University, and the Medical University of South Carolina.

"With COVID-19 vaccines now available for children, we need proven strategies ready to ensure equitable uptake," said project co-lead Paul Enlow, PhD, a pediatric psychologist and research scientist in the Nemours CHDS. "Black and Latino adults have had higher COVID-19 infection rates and lower vaccination rates. We cannot let these vaccination disparities translate to children, or the infection rates will follow suit."

The study, "Improving Pediatric COVID-19 Awareness, Access, and Accountability in Underrepresented Communities," will partner with community stakeholders, including Black and Latino youth leaders, leaders from Black and Latino community organizations, and collaborators with the Delaware Division of Public Health, to develop a multi-pronged approach to increase COVID-19 vaccination among Black and Latino children in Delaware. The project will refine the interventions based on feedback from families and youth in these communities. The team will then pilot-test the intervention in a cluster randomized controlled trial at Nemours primary care locations across the state of Delaware that serve diverse populations. The final product will be available to other organizations and communities, to promote pediatric COVID-19 vaccination.

"We will create a culturally-tailored, community-informed approach to increasing pediatric vaccine uptake broadly," said Nemours co-lead Thao-Ly Phan, MD, MPH, a pediatrician and research scientist also in Nemours' CHDS. "This approach can then be applied in other cities and states to reduce disparities in COVID-19 vaccinations and in other childhood vaccinations and health outcomes."

The study will address three factors known to influence vaccine uptake – awareness, access, and accountability – by delivering messages developed with community input through primary care providers to boost awareness, facilitating vaccination among Black and Latino families who receive care at Nemours to improve access, and by linking vaccination data to Nemours' electronic health records to ensure accountability for equitable allocation and distribution of pediatric COVID-19 vaccines.

"COVID-19 has reinforced the need to develop culturally-tailored interventions to address health disparities and build trusting relationships with historically underserved communities," said Marshala Lee, M.D., MPH, director of iREACH Harrington Community Partnership Fund. "We are very excited to receive this grant because it will help strengthen our efforts to engage with communities of color, expand access to the vaccine, and ensure that more people continue to get vaccinated. In addition, this grant helps us advance our efforts to address misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine so we can make our communities safer."

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About Nemours Children’s Health

Nemours Children’s Health is one of the nation’s largest multistate pediatric health systems, including two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of nearly 80 primary and specialty care practices across five states. Nemours seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours also powers the world’s most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org.

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves.

About ChristianaCare

Headquartered in Wilmington, Delaware, ChristianaCare is one of the country’s most dynamic health care organizations, centered on improving health outcomes, making high-quality care more accessible and lowering health care costs. ChristianaCare includes an extensive network of primary care and outpatient services, home health care, urgent care centers, three hospitals (1,299 beds), a freestanding emergency department, a Level I trauma center and a Level III neonatal intensive care unit, a comprehensive stroke center and regional centers of excellence in heart and vascular care, cancer care and women’s health. It also includes the pioneering Gene Editing Institute.

ChristianaCare is nationally recognized as a great place to work, rated by Forbes as the 5th best health system to work for in the United States and by IDG Computerworld as one of the nation’s Best Places to Work in IT. ChristianaCare is rated by HealthGrades as one of America’s 50 Best Hospitals and continually ranked among the nation’s best by Newsweek and other national quality ratings. ChristianaCare is a nonprofit teaching health system with more than 260 residents and fellows. With its groundbreaking Center for Virtual Health and a focus on population health and value-based care, ChristianaCare is shaping the future of health care.

About the Delaware Clinical and Translational Research ACCEL Program

The Delaware Clinical and Translational Research ACCEL Program, one of the largest projects funded by the National Institutes of Health in the state of Delaware, provides resources for outstanding investigators to conduct cutting-edge clinical and translational research, with the goal of improving the health of the citizens of Delaware and the nation. The program brings together researchers, clinicians, practitioners, community partners, and faculty and staff from the University of Delaware, Delaware State University, ChristianaCare, Nemours/A.I. duPont Hospital for Children, and the Medical University of South Carolina. The program receives additional financial support from the state of Delaware and partner institutions.

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https://nemours.mediaroom.com/Nemours-Secures-NIH-Grant-Funding-for-COVID-Research