Higher education partnership aims to improve Ohioans’ health
Ohio University and University of Toledo create population health alliance

ATHENS, Ohio – Oct. 2, 2017 – As the state of Ohio struggles with multiple critical health issues, Ohio University and The University of Toledo are coming together to find solutions. Today, Ohio University President M. Duane Nellis and University of Toledo President Sharon L. Gaber signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” to formalize the collaboration agreement between Ohio University’s College of Health Sciences and Professions and The University of Toledo’s College of Health and Human Services.

“The future of higher education is dependent upon collaboration across disciplines to develop innovative solutions to today’s problems,” says Nellis. “This includes working in conjunction with experts at other institutions to enrich the experiences of our students, while working toward a better future for Ohio, our nation, and our world.”

The health colleges of the two universities will form the Ohio Alliance for Innovation in Population Health, which will collaborate with The University of Toledo College of Law and Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, to help create community-specific ways to fix the state’s health problems, such as opioid addiction, health-care access, chronic disease and infant mortality.

Each partner contributes unique strengths and robust research capabilities to the alliance. The collaboration also features joint academic offerings for students.

“Our institutions represent two of the largest health-focused colleges in Ohio with well over 100 faculty researchers between the two colleges,” said Dr. Randy Leite, dean of the OHIO College of Health Sciences and Professions. “OUCHSP has vibrant applied health programming and The University of Toledo has a well-developed population health foundation. We are both strategically located in areas of the state with considerable disparity in health outcomes compared to the rest of the state and nation.”

“We’ve developed the alliance to enhance outreach and improve lives in Ohio, as well as increase our infrastructure to more strategically engage in relevant research that matters,” said Dr. Christopher Ingersoll, dean of the UT College of Health and Human Services. “By combining forces and assembling teams of experts, we will be able to compete for the resources necessary to solve the population health problems in our region and throughout the state.”
The Ohio Alliance for Innovation in Population Health will research the often-ignored root causes of health issues and will incorporate partner organizations as sources of content expertise to build on networks of strong community relationships to develop and test solutions. The goal of this work is to establish best practices for addressing critical population health issues.

Rick Hodges, former director of the Ohio Department of Health and UT alumnus, was named director of the alliance to identify and collaborate with partner organizations across the state.

“I’m looking forward to working with the many excellent programs that are already in place across the state,” Hodges said. “The alliance will serve as a collaborator, not a competitor.”

One area of interest to Hodges is healthcare informatics, which is the study of resources and methods for the management of health information. According to Hodges, both the technology and the data currently exist to answer many public health questions, but they are not yet connected to each other. This type of information could lead to the creation of a variety of useful databases, such as a database showing space availability for drug treatment facilities in the state. While such a database exists to identify hospital bed availability, no comparable database exists for drug treatment facilities.

The alliance’s first initiative will revolve around opioid abuse and addiction in Perry County and other locations.

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