The Institute Today

From an ambitious idea to a thriving research enterprise 25 years later, the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research (IHHCPAR) remains dedicated to scholarly collaboration and research that tackle some of society’s most challenging health problems.

Located at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the Institute’s growing research endeavors engage faculty from nine Rutgers schools and colleges, more than a dozen academic departments, and the public health and medical schools of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). These outstanding faculty members also play key roles in our undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral training programs, which bridge disciplines to provide rich and diverse opportunities for studying health and health care issues.

Founded in 1985 by director David Mechanic, the Institute today has 74 faculty and researchers and 26 administrative staff, and a number of affiliated researchers at Rutgers and other institutions. In 2010, with generous support from the University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the Institute consolidated its activities and programs in a new 57,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art academic and research building. Adjacent to the Rutgers College of Nursing and the UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, this new location integrates the Institute with the New Brunswick health care community.
Our Research

Institute faculty, whose work is often funded by government and foundation grants, conduct rigorous research that translates into evidence-based, clinical practices and policy solutions. A highly skilled staff supports the Institute’s advanced analytic infrastructure and provides expert management of the Institute’s research and related activities. Our organizational structure helps leverage the diverse talents of faculty who share challenges, theories, concepts, and methods across disciplines. This information and skill sharing promotes the development of innovative approaches central to better understanding and improving health, health care, and health policy in the United States.

Research Areas

As we celebrate 25 years of cross-cutting and innovative research, we look forward to addressing the many policy issues and opportunities emerging from national health reform. Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, an estimated 32 million previously uninsured Americans will gain access to health insurance coverage. Despite the enormous changes that are unfolding, many of the problems that we faced in 1985 still challenge our system today, including continued growth in health care spending, fragmentation and inefficiencies in our financing and delivery systems, and unacceptable health and treatment disparities that disadvantage poor and minority populations.

While cost pressures mount and efforts to provide comprehensive care to all still fall short of our aspirations, Institute researchers are designing studies to generate new solutions. This collaborative, methodologically rigorous work is aimed at contributing to multiple aspects of health care reform by:

- Helping people with chronic illnesses manage their diseases, use medications more effectively, and live healthier, longer lives.
- Improving systems of care for persons with serious and persistent physical and mental illnesses and disabilities.
- Boosting the efficiency and quality of hospital care.
- Increasing access to affordable private and public insurance coverage.
- Addressing race, class, and gender-based disparities in health and in health care delivery.

- Building new databases and models to determine which treatments work best and to help promote cost-effective treatment and prevention efforts.
- Advancing community health by helping smokers quit and reducing childhood obesity.
- Examining how work, family, and environment affect well-being and health.
- Studying the causes of depression and anxiety and developing better methods for diagnosing and treating these disorders.
- Improving the quality of long-term care in nursing homes and communities.
- Documenting the ways patients, their families, and health care providers can foster excellence in end-of-life care.

These examples represent just a few of the Institute’s broad range of activities. We are also home to several research centers and special programs, including the:

- Center for State Health Policy, which serves as a respected and non-partisan source of incisive analysis, research data, and policy advice for New Jersey and other states.
- Center for Health Services Research on Pharmacotherapy, Chronic Disease Management and Outcomes, which focuses on more effective use of medications and improved quality of care to reduce the disabling impact of chronic diseases, especially severe mental illness.
Center for the Study of Health Beliefs and Behavior, which studies how to enhance communication among patients, clinicians, and families and develop strategies to improve health behaviors and treatment outcomes.

Center for Behavioral Health Services and Criminal Justice Research, which produces state-of-the-art research aimed at improving the welfare of people with mental illness who become involved in the criminal justice system.

National Program Office for the RWJF Investigator Awards in Health Policy Research, supporting innovative scholars from a wide range of fields to undertake ambitious studies of significant health policy challenges facing America.

RWJF’s New Jersey Health Initiatives Program Office, which supports innovative approaches to resolve health and health care needs in New Jersey and funds community-based service projects.

National Program Office for RWJF’s Evaluating Innovations in Nursing Education, designed to help boost the numbers of U.S. nursing school graduates by supporting and evaluating interventions that expand teaching capacity or promote nursing faculty recruitment and retention.

Our Educational Programs

In addition to research training for students in advanced degree programs from various disciplines and professions throughout the University, the Institute offers two special non-degree programs.

Postdoctoral Training Program in Mental Health Services and Systems Research

The Institute runs a prestigious, interdisciplinary mental health services and systems research postdoctoral training program funded for many years by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Each year, six fellows in residence at the Institute develop their own research programs with faculty who share their interests. Consistent with the interdisciplinary goals of the Institute, our fellows represent a range of fields, including anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, epidemiology, history, social work, and sociology. Past fellows have authored hundreds of articles that have appeared in leading journals of social science and psychiatry and many books. Many former trainees are now major contributors in mental health services research, policy, and teaching.

Project L/EARN

Founded in 1991, Project L/EARN is a summer research training program for undergraduate students that seeks to increase the number of health researchers from groups traditionally under-represented in health-related graduate programs. More than 150 students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, racial/ethnic minority groups, or first-generation college attendees have completed Project L/EARN. As many as 65 have earned or are working on Masters Degrees, and more than 40 have undertaken doctorates. Many of the program’s graduates have launched successful careers in health research and academia.

Our Faculty

Our faculty and associated members include nationally recognized experts who help create new knowledge, generate innovative ideas, advance research methods, and prepare the next generation of researchers. The Institute also provides opportunities for new Rutgers faculty embarking on research careers in health and health care to develop research programs, collaborate with others across disciplines, and acquire new skills.

Faculty members have made an impact through award-winning scholarship that has influenced fields such as medical sociology, health psychology, history of medicine, mental health, gerontology, and health services research. IHHCPar has served as home to six faculty elected to the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). IHHCPar faculty regularly serve in key leadership positions in professional societies, on journal award ceremonies, Project L/EARN 20th Anniversary Conference.
editorial boards, and as advisors to a wide range of organizations, foundations, and federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Food and Drug Administration, the NAS, and the IOM. Examples of prestigious awards received by our faculty include:

- Election to the NAS and to the IOM

- Four named professors at Rutgers, several Board of Trustees Awards for Excellence in Research, a Rutgers Faculty Scholar-Teacher Award, and the President's Award for Service in Research to New Jersey

- Rhoda and Bernard Sarnat International Prize in Mental Health, IOM

- Fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Russell Sage Foundation, and Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences

- Health Services Research Prize, Association of University Programs in Health Administration and the Baxter Allegiance Foundation

- Distinguished Investigator Award, Association for Health Services Research

- National Institute on Aging Merit Award

- Gold Medal Award for Lifetime Achievement in Psychological Science, American Psychological Association

- William H. Welch Medal, American Association for the History of Medicine

- Distinguished Mentor Award, Society for Behavioral Medicine

- Rema Lapouse Award and the Carl Taube Award for Distinguished Contributions to Mental Health Services Research, American Public Health Association

Our Longstanding Funders

Over the years, the Institute has received generous funding support for its research and educational programs from Rutgers and from a wide range of federal and state agencies, foundations, corporations, health-related organizations, and private donors. Sources of longstanding support outside the University include:

- The National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute on Aging, National Cancer Institute, and National Institute on Drug Abuse

- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and other federal agencies

- RWJF, the Commonwealth Fund, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and other foundations

- Agencies of the State of New Jersey

- Johnson & Johnson and other health-related companies

About the Director

David Mechanic, Ph.D. is René Dubos University Professor of Behavioral Sciences at Rutgers University. He was formerly dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and established the Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research in 1985. He also serves as the director of the RWJF Investigator Awards in Health Policy Research program. A member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the IOM, he has served on numerous panels of the NAS, federal agencies, and non-profit organizations.