

# Boston University School of Public Health.

RESEARCH THAT LEADS THE WAY

We are at an inflection point in the history of the Boston University School of Public Health. As we mark the school's 45th anniversary, the world is just beginning to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of its devastating consequences can be traced to underinvestment in public health infrastructure and in the conditions that make people healthy.



NOW IS THE TIME

## for real public health leadership to take center stage.

The call to support public health research, education, and practice is urgent. SPH is committed to advancing the science, preparing the next generation of public health thinkers and doers, and building the partnerships that can create health at home and around the world. Investments made now will shape population health and health disparities for decades to come.

*Think. Teach. Do. For the health of all.* This is our school's ethos. We remind ourselves every day that effective action can only grow out of thought and preparation—and that *without* action, the best knowledge and preparation can have little impact.

That philosophy has brought us into the top ranks of schools of public health. At 45 years strong, our mission remains to build a vibrant, engaged public health community dedicated to creating a better world for all.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are at the heart of all we do. They inform our recruitment of faculty, staff, and students, our commitment to increasing scholarship support, and programs such as our Public Health Conversations, which explore antiracist policies and other approaches to improving population health and equity. And we are pursuing five strategic research areas—our Big Ideas. Each is relevant to the consequences arising from today's global pandemic and will play a role in our preparing for and preventing the next one.

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# Health inequities.

COVID-19 has laid bare the harsh reality of health inequities. As of March 7, 2021, nationwide, Black people had died from the virus at 1.4 times the rate of white people. Low-income communities have fared worse than higher-income ones. Now is the time to address the structural racism and structural inequities that led to disparities in COVID-19 and in food and housing insecurity during the pandemic.

Such inequities are not new. But the pandemic has created a window of opportunity to act in the world—and to connect the dots between social justice and health.

## **Current projects include:**

- The Black Women’s Health Study, the largest longitudinal study of African American women ever undertaken, including 64,500 Black women, ages 21–69, from all areas of the country, enrolled in 1995
- An investigation of how health and social policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are shaping racial and ethnic disparities

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# Climate, the planet, and health.

Climate change threatens nearly every aspect of how we live, work, and play, including our health and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how ill prepared most countries are for dealing with large-scale public health emergencies. SPH researchers are at the forefront of understanding how climate change affects health and providing the evidence needed for communities around the world to address it.

## **Current projects include:**

- Using big data to conduct comprehensive assessments of the adverse health impacts posed by extreme weather events such as hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and days of extreme heat, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations
- Creating a rich suite of novel indicators of population risk, health, and well-being in order to foster the growth of communities that are healthy, equitable, sustainable, and resilient in the context of a rapidly changing climate

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# Infectious diseases.

COVID-19 is but one infectious disease, and there are many others that continue to cause serious morbidity and mortality—requiring renewed attention and solutions.

SPH is home to researchers with deep expertise in infectious diseases: how to model spread, how to contain outbreaks, and how to prepare for the next novel contagion.

## Current projects include:

- A study on the role of the media in the online spread of misinformation about COVID-19
- A project in South Africa to improve retention in HIV-care programs, and to analyze the impact of changes in South Africa's National Treatment Guidelines for HIV
- A study to assess the efficacy and safety of a new drug for the treatment of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis
- An effort to reduce infant mortality in Zambia through the collection of data on deaths that can be attributed to pertussis and respiratory syncytial virus

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## **Cities and health.**

By 2050, 66 percent of the world's population is expected to live in cities. Cities offer improved access to services and resources, but they are also areas with extreme economic and racial/ethnic disparities, increased environmental exposures, and distinct threats and challenges to our physical and mental health. Our experts study employment opportunities, housing, food access, discrimination and segregation, climate change, and other realities of urban life in Boston and beyond.

### **Current projects include:**

- Studies of social and environmental determinants of health, as well as studies to address systemic, social, and structural stressors in the home that lead to health disparities
- Incentivizing urban health through evaluations and rankings of city policies addressing key social determinants of health
- Community-engagement studies of urban heat exposure and population vulnerabilities related to housing, poverty, adaptation, and access to greenspace

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# Mental and behavioral health.

In September 2020, a team of BU researchers were the first in the country to report on a threefold increase in poor mental health during COVID-19.

That is just one example of SPH scientists' role in examining multiple facets of mental health and behavior, including how trauma, racism, illness, and other harmful factors increase risk for conditions from post-traumatic stress disorder to suicide.

## **Current projects include:**

- Understanding suicide, including novel methodological approaches to predicting suicide risk and understanding the short- and long-term impact of suicide on the health of loved ones
- Numerous projects related to substance abuse, including comparisons of treatment models for opioid abuse and reviews of interventions to decrease drug use and its consequences in primary care patients
- Studies of how wealth and income shape mental health disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic
- A project on college students' mental health with a focus on how structural stigma shapes mental health disparities among transgender relative to cisgender students

### **Opportunities to support our Big Ideas include:**

Donor support can accelerate and sustain ongoing research in these areas, help us hire new faculty, and seed promising new research. We welcome your support as we explore the Big Ideas that can lead to lasting progress.

- \$3 million to endow a professorship in any of the Big Idea areas
- \$100,000 to endow a student scholarship
- \$25,000 to seed a new Big Idea research project
- \$10,000 to provide current-use support for research in a strategic area

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
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