Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health

For nearly four decades, the Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health has developed pioneering evidence-based public health programs on behalf of the global community’s most vulnerable women, men, adolescents, children, and families.

Our faculty and students work in locations throughout the United States and globally, from Columbia University’s Upper Manhattan neighborhood to 30 countries worldwide, examining the legal, policy, and human rights dimensions of health. Informing all of these efforts is an acute understanding of the synergies among public health education, research, and practice.

By combining rigorous academic training and research with on-the-ground public health programs, we are working toward a future in which equitable health care for all is not just an ideal but a reality.

Examples of our work:

- Working to better understand the HIV risk factors faced by young people in rural Uganda
- Helping the governments of Ghana and Tanzania—two countries that have developed highly effective public health approaches—share knowledge with one another
- Working/Helping to prevent women from dying in childbirth
- Enhancing the field of humanitarian response so that the best intentions also produce the best results
- Operating eight school-based health centers, a family planning clinic, and the Young Men’s Clinic that has emerged as a national model for men’s reproductive health care, in partnership with NewYork–Presbyterian Hospital
- Connecting low-income, high-risk children in our community with basic health, nutrition, and early development services through a local child health initiative

MISSION

The Department addresses a wide range of challenges to health. We focus on child, adolescent, reproductive, and sexual health, both in established communities and those that have been displaced as a result of political or environmental emergencies.

We strive to improve health conditions in our Upper Manhattan neighborhood, throughout the nation, and around the world. We pursue this mission locally and globally through innovative science, education, and leadership.

HISTORY

Dr. Allan Rosenfield, an OB/GYN who devoted his life to making access to family planning a critical public health priority, founded the Center for Population and Family Health in 1975. It was renamed in 2000 as the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn Department of Population and Family Health in honor of two extraordinary supporters.
Our faculty are experts in reproductive and sexual health; humanitarian assistance and forced migration; child, adolescent, family and men’s health; global health; human rights; and demography and population sciences, among other topic areas. This remarkable constellation of teachers and researchers is led by John Santelli, MD, MPH, a pediatrician and nationally and internationally recognized adolescent health researcher and the 2012 recipient of the American Public Health Association’s Carl S. Shultz Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Each year, our faculty serve as a bridge between our students and the practical field work that they carry out in the United States and abroad. Faculty mentors ensure that students have the knowledge and skills needed to solve complex public health problems.

Select projects and research

- The Averting Maternal Death and Disability Program has worked to improve access to the emergency obstetric care in more than 50 countries around the world by promoting the training and systems changes needed to make childbirth safer.
- The Child Protection in Crisis Network fosters collaborative action by humanitarian agencies, local institutions, and academic partners to strengthen and systematize child care and protection in crisis settings.
- Columbia University Head Start provides center- and home-based education and support to hundreds of families each year in northern Manhattan.
- Global Doctors for Choice helps mobilize a powerful missing voice—that of physicians—to advocate for high quality reproductive health services around the world.
- The Northern Manhattan Community Voices Asthma Basics for Children Initiative works with diverse community partners to help parents learn how to better manage their children’s asthma.
- The Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies (RAISE) Initiative works to ensure that emergency and humanitarian response programs address reproductive health.
- The Young Men’s Health Initiative provides education and outreach to thousands of young men in New York City each year.
- The Center for Advancing Research on Comprehensive Health Systems (ARCHeS) is a collaborative program for implementation, research, and training. Two ARCHeS’ projects, the Ghana Essential Health Intervention Program (GEHIP) and the Connect Project (Tanzania), seek to transfer health systems innovations between Ghana and Tanzania.
- The Rakai Youth Project works to understand trends in HIV prevention and prevalence in Uganda, a country where early and remarkable progress is showing signs of backsliding.
- The Systems Improvement at District Hospitals and Regional Training of Emergency Care works to train local doctors and hospitals in Ghana to provide the emergency health care that is needed to improve survival rates.

Our students

Graduates go on to leadership positions in government, hospitals, universities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. Alumni hold top posts at the CDC, WHO, the Rockefeller Foundation, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Pfizer, and many other organizations.

BY THE NUMBERS 2012-2013

75 Master’s Students
3 Doctoral Students
24-54 Age Range
29 Average Entry Age
24 States Represented
7 Nations Represented