MANHATTAN DISTRICT ATTORNEY CYRUS R. VANCE JR. HAS AWARDED $45.9 MILLION TO CREATE FIVE NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED “YOUTH OPPORTUNITY HUBS” AS PART OF HIS OFFICE’S CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE. The four-year, $10.3 million award to the Washington Heights hub will be co-led by Alwyn T. Cohall, MD, professor of Sociomedical Sciences and Population and Family Health, and director of the Harlem Health Promotion Center.

“I am delighted to accept this grant, which will help build upon our work on incarceration and public health—particularly as it relates to prevention—creating an ‘urban sanctuary’ for high-risk youth, to reduce their involvement in the criminal justice system,” says Cohall. “The award represents a concrete example of interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty at NewYork-Presbyterian, the New York State Psychiatric Institute, and the Mailman School of Public Health, along with a network of community-based organizations. Additionally, I envision this project as an extraordinary opportunity for student involvement across our campus.”

Cohall’s areas of research include adolescent health; reproductive health; violence; access to healthcare, particularly for young men of color; and health communication/health promotion. A board-certified pediatrician and adolescent medicine physician, Cohall also directs Project STAY (Services to Assist Youth), a New York State Department of Health–funded program that provides confidential health services to young people affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS. He is also medical director of the New York City STD Prevention Training Center, one of eight centers funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to enhance the skills of health providers working with patients who have sexually transmitted infections. With his wife, Renee Cohall, LCSW-R, he is co-director of BeWell Health and Wellness, which supports young people involved in BridgeUP, an academic enrichment program housed in five New York Public Library sites.

“The role of law enforcement in the 21st century is not merely to arrest and prosecute,” said Vance in his announcement. “By creating attractive spaces offering one-stop resources and serving thousands of additional young people and families, we can help build the strongest generation of New Yorkers yet.”

**HONOR ROLL**

**A SAMPLING OF AWARDS**

- The Mailman School’s Initiative for Maximizing Student Development (IMSD), awarded funds for eight doctoral students by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health.
- DuBois Bowman, PhD, chair of Biostatistics, recipient of the department’s first endowed professorship: the Cynthia and Robert Citrone-Roslyn and Leslie Goldstein Professorship in Biostatistics.
- Sandro Galea, MD, MPH, DrPH ’03, adjunct professor of Epidemiology and Robert A. Knox Professor and Dean at the Boston University School of Public Health, awarded the 2017 Allan Rosenfield Alumni Award for Excellence.
- Wafaa El-Sadr, founding director of ICAP and Dr. Mathilde Krim-amfAR Chair of Global Health, inducted as an honorary member to Sigma Theta Tau, one of the largest nursing organizations in the world.
IN JANUARY, ANTICIPATING MAJOR POLICY CHANGES FROM THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, HUNDREDS OF FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF GATHERED FOR “EVIDENCE INTO ACTION,” A DAYLONG TEACH-IN WITH CONCURRENT EVENTS HOSTED ACROSS THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER CAMPUS. Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH, commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, gave opening remarks. As public health braces for “an assault on all the protections and safety nets that many of us have been advocating for our entire lives,” she said, “it’s important that we come together and confront these challenges.” Breakout sessions featured discussions on the Affordable Care Act; climate change, pollution, and the Environmental Protection Agency; immigration and the humanitarian implications of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border; and the humanitarian consequences of exposure to structural forms of stigma, and the health outcomes of policies that protect the “sanctity of marriage” laws, reduced housing and employment protections for LGB people, and the like.

Hatzenbuehler also plans to track possible mechanisms by which structural stigma undermines HIV-prevention activities, thereby raising the risk of infection. The research team will also conduct in-depth interviews with 60 study participants, seeking out ways that the men buffer their experience of structural stigma—through social connection within their local LGB community, for example.

This project extends the scholar’s ongoing investigations into the causes of health disparities related to sexual orientation, the health consequences of exposure to structural forms of stigma, and the identification of biological, psychological, and social mechanisms linking stigma to adverse health outcomes. His recent work has examined how policies that protect the civil rights of sexual minorities, such as same-sex marriage laws, employment nondiscrimination policies, and anti-bullying policies, affect the health of LGB populations.

HONOR ROLL

* Merlin Chowkwanyun, PhD, Donald H. Gemson Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences, awarded the 2017 Mailman School Teaching Excellence Award.

* John Rowe, MD, Julius B. Richmond Professor of Health Policy and Aging in Health Policy and Management and former chair of the Mailman School’s Board of Overseers, elected president of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics’ 21st Congress.

* Calderone Junior Faculty Award recipients: Almamy Kante, PhD (Population and Family Health), Marianti-Anna Kioumourtzoglou, ScD (Environmental Health Sciences), Gen Li, PhD (Biostatistics), Christine Mauro, PhD ’14 (Biostatistics), Nischay Mishra (Center for Infection and Immunity), and Rafal Tokarz (Center for Infection and Immunity).

* Linda P. Fried, MD, MPH, dean and DeLamar Professor of Public Health at the Mailman School, honored with the 2016 Inserm International Prize, given each year by the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm), a counterpart of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
MARK BITTMAN LECTURES

A member of the Health Policy and Management faculty, Bittman expanded the conversation this fall as host of a public lecture series that emphasizes justice and health, sampling such issues as meat production and global climate change, pervasive low wages in the food industry, pesticide exposures on factory farms, and how soft drinks, poor nutrition, and obesity are linked. “We want to invite people to think about the larger food system in the U.S. and around the world,” says Bittman, “how we got here, and what we need to do to move toward a food system that is equitable.”

Speakers for the Monday evening series include environmentalist Bill McKibben, New York City Health Commissioner Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH, Rep. Chellie Pingree of Maine, and chef Tom Colicchio. Topics will include land use and food security; animal diets and ecosystems; and race, class, and immigration in food production. Lectures and panel discussions will examine long-term trends—the development of agriculture, for example—as well as contemporary policy issues.

The talks, as well as an accompanying course for students in the master’s program, endeavor to imagine a better way of doing things. “We want to examine what food policy would look like if it were guided by public health concerns, fairness, [and] the interest of the people it should be serving,” says Bittman. The food justice course—limited to 20 Mailman School students—will cover the global food system. Bittman, who previously taught journalism, spent months developing the syllabus and lining up speakers. “This is really the course I want it to be,” he says. “I’m excited to make it happen.”

OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST 20 YEARS, MAMMOGRAM SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN A MOVING TARGET. Among the controversies has been the relevance of breast density, the percentage of fatty tissue relative to dense, fibroglandular tissue. National estimates find that more than 40 percent of screened women aged 40 to 74 have mammograms that show dense breasts. “It’s one of the strongest independent risk factors for breast cancer,” says Parisa Tehranifar, DrPH, assistant professor of Epidemiology. “And large amounts of dense breast tissue also interfere with detection, making it harder for mammograms to pick up tumors.”

Twenty-seven states now mandate that if screening reveals a woman has dense breasts, she must be notified as part of her mammogram report. With a $2.78 million grant from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, Tehranifar will follow 1,000 women screened in Washington Heights to explore what they know about breast density, how they feel about their screenings, how well they understand their results, and what healthcare they pursue in response to their mammogram reports. She plans to focus on differences across racial, ethnic, or socio-economic groups. “We need to know if the information is being used differently depending on education level, health literacy, access to coverage, or income,” Tehranifar says. “Disparities can take a while to develop, but we may be able to predict them and possibly prevent them from developing in screening and early detection.”

With separate funds from the National Cancer Institute, Tehranifar and colleagues will tap into the Sister Study, a ten-year prospective study of more than 50,000 women with sisters who have had breast cancer. Researchers already have a wealth of data on the women, but no mammographic data. To fill this gap, Tehranifar and her colleagues will collect a series of mammograms for the study participants to document changes in each woman’s breast density over time and assess whether these trajectories can improve breast cancer risk assessment.
AS A GRADUATE STUDENT AT HARVARD, RAYGINE DIAQUOI, EdD, DUG INTO “THE TALK”—THE CONVERSATION THAT GENERATIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PARENTS HAVE HAD WITH THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT RACISM, INCLUDING WARNINGS ABOUT INTERACTIONS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT—AND HOW THAT DISCUSSION HAS EVOLVED OVER THE LAST FEW CENTURIES. Her sobering finding: The messages parents are sharing with their children today resemble those from Jim Crow—a reflection of the structural racism of mass incarceration and policing that disproportionately affects people of color. As director of the Office of Diversity, Culture, and Inclusion (ODCI), the assistant professor of Sociomedical Sciences invites the Mailman School community to lean into the difficult work of examining power and privilege. Says DiAquoi: “We need to be committed to each other’s learning and growth around these issues.”

What successes are you celebrating in your first year at ODCI? Faculty, staff, and students are coming to the office, thinking about how issues of inequity intersect with their work, and asking about ways they can be involved in co-creating an inclusive community at the School.

You champion introspection as an antidote to oppression. Why? My thinking around the importance of reflection draws heavily on the writing of education theorists Maxine Greene and David Kolb. When it comes to understanding systemic inequity, introspection is the bulk of the work. To create new paths forward for everyone, we have to reflect critically, alone and together, on how we benefit from social-group hierarchies that disadvantage others. Such introspection often causes discomfort, which inspires action.

What does that look like in your life? Critical reflection is a part of my practice. To process, I take time to jot down notes about what I’ve experienced, making parallels to prior experiences—my own and those of others—and theory. I don’t have a ton of time, so I’m often quickly typing thoughts into my notes app on my phone or quickly scribbling something onto a Post-it. These notes are often the seeds for programming.

In your email signature, you state your pronouns in use (she, her, hers). Why? I get asked this a lot. ODCI programming focuses on raising awareness around the ways that inequity manifests at the societal, cultural, and individual levels. Having pronouns in my signature has opened up many conversations about the ways that we, as individuals, can create environments that are more gender-inclusive and leads to discussions about what it means to keep inclusion at the forefront of our minds.

Your approach echoes the mantra that the personal is political. People’s narratives are very important. I encourage people to think about the relationship between the self and broader social, political, and historical events. Our stories are the best points of entry for understanding the way that systems operate.

And how does it all tie in with public health work? It’s easy to talk about health disparities beyond our walls, but an important part of the work is being open to analyzing the conditions within our own institution. We start with ourselves. It’s difficult work to look as deeply as we need to look to make the changes that we need to make, and our community has embraced that project.