Panelists present promising tools and approaches

More than 230 people attended the April 19 conference, “Poverty, Race, Place: Research and Community-Based Interventions to Reduce Health Disparities.” The meeting—the fourth in the UC Berkeley Center for Health Research’s “Science & Society” series—highlighted the latest place-, race-, and poverty-based research, as well as strategies and interventions to reduce health inequities.

“This event occurred at the right moment in time. There’s been increasing interest in the nexus of race, place, and poverty,” said Meredith Minkler, Dr.P.H., professor of health and social behavior at the School of Public Health and a presenter at the conference.

The presentations were organized into sessions on social determinants of health disparities, research tools, and community interventions. The event’s keynote speakers were Camara P. Jones, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., research director; social determinants of health, CDC; David Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D., director of UCLA’s Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture; and Angela Glover Blackwell, J.D., founder and CEO of PolicyLink. Featured speakers included Raymond J. Baxter, senior vice president, community benefit, Kaiser Foundation Health Plan; Reverend Cecil Williams, CEO and pastor of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church; and many others.

“Typically conferences on poverty and race have neglected the critical element of place. Also, while they dissect in great detail the problem posed, they are often not nearly as helpful in talking about what can be done through research, policy, and practice to help address the problem,” said Minkler. “This conference, I think, was unique in having a full panel on new tools for studying health disparities and then having a panel where people presented promising approaches for dealing with the challenges posed by such disparities. It was not a traditional academic conference in that it spoke as much to what we can do about the problem as it did to what we know about the problem.”

Audiofiles and presentations from the meeting are available online at healthresearch.berkeley.edu/disparities/agenda.html.

Participants strategize to overcome “-isms” within health organizations

The second conference, “Privilege, Bias, and Oppression: Addressing Barriers to Eliminating Health Disparities Within Health Organizations,” also called the “-isms’ conference,” was held April 20. The event had its roots in a discussion that took place at a 2004 conference, in which a theme emerged about internal organizational barriers to addressing health disparities. Participants expressed a strong interest in gaining more information on the resources and models available for addressing powerful underlying “-isms” in organizations that sometimes limit their ability to move initiatives forward, including racism, classism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and able-bodiedness. They also wanted the opportunity to talk with colleagues about challenges and promising practices in this area and to support one another in dealing with this issue.

A planning group, convened by the School’s Center for Public Health Practice, organized the event that became the “-isms’ conference.”
which was attended by 130 representatives of health departments, hospitals, community clinics, and organizations, as well as UC Berkeley. The program featured presentations by Eva Paterson, J.D., president and founder, Equal Justice Society, and Roberto Almanzán, M.S., diversity and cultural competency consultant. Joan Schoenhals, Ph.D., and Jim Turner, Ph.D., of VISIONS, Inc., presented a conceptual model that can be used for addressing the “-isms” in organizations. The program also included a panel, “Practical Examples from Organizations Working on the ‘-isms,’” which was followed by an action planning session in which the group determined next steps for themselves and their organizations. Some of these included an “-isms” film festival (already in the planning stages); training in how to use films for diversity work; development of peer consultation groups for people responsible for diversity work in their organizations; and multicultural book groups composed of people across organizations.

“This was a first step in a long-term process for the development of community-based plans and support networks,” said Ellie Schindelman, M.P.H. ’80, field director and lecturer for the School’s Center for Public Health Practice and Dr.P.H. Program and a member of the planning committee.

Cosponsors for both conferences included the UC Berkeley Center for Health Research, the School of Public Health’s Center for Public Health Practice, and the Pacific Public Health Training Center. In addition, the “Poverty, Race, Place…” conference was cosponsored by the Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy and the UC Berkeley Office of the Chancellor. Additional cosponsors of the “-isms” conference were Alta Bates Summit Medical Center; City of Berkeley Public Health Division; Contra Costa Health Services; John Muir Health; the NCMHD Center of Excellence in Nutritional Genomics; Kaiser Permanente–Community Benefit Programs, Northern California and National Diversity; Children’s Hospital and Research Center, Oakland; and the Alameda County Public Health Department.

Registration at the “Poverty, Race, Place…” conference.