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Edward Fitzpatrick  
*Roger Williams University*

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# Roger Williams University Forges New Partnership with R.I. Department of Health

As its public health program grows rapidly, RWU enters agreement aimed at improving health of Rhode Islanders through research, policy, training



Public health students Jenna Clavette and Kelsey Shakin share their research for the Bristol Health Equity zone project.

May 10, 2018 | Edward Fitzpatrick

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – Roger Williams University’s rapidly expanding public health program is forging a new partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), aiming to bolster the health of all Rhode Islanders through a range of public policy, research and quality-improvement initiatives.

RWU President Donald J. Farish and Director of Health Nicole Alexander-Scott signed the memorandum of understanding just as RWU is about to create a Department of Public Health on July 1. The University’s public health program has experienced rapid growth since it began working with the RIDOH about nine years ago. At first, the University offered a public health minor, and it began offering a public health major in 2015.

The newly formalized partnership calls for student “public health scholars” at the RIDOH Academic Center, research opportunities for students and faculty members, summer programs for high school students interested in public health fields, joint quality-improvement programs, a health-care speakers bureau, and the sharing of data for research and public policy matters.

“Roger Williams University is pleased to formalize and deepen its ongoing partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health,” RWU Provost Andrew Workman said. “We are committed to serving our community by helping it to improve the health of Rhode Islanders and to provide our students with the kind of experiential learning opportunities that this kind of partnership will foster.”

“This new collaboration will allow us to develop, implement and evaluate cutting-edge public health interventions that will help improve health outcomes in every ZIP code in Rhode Island,” Dr. Alexander-Scott said. “At a time when Roger Williams University is expanding its public health program, this partnership will bring together committed faculty, active researchers and ambitious, talented students with leading public health professionals at RIDOH and other state agencies to embark on careers building healthier communities throughout the entire state.”

Laurie Leonard, the Director of the RIDOH Academic Center, said, "The Rhode Island Department of Health is excited to formalize our partnership with Roger Williams University as we utilize research to inform public health policy and practice and provide interdisciplinary experiential learning opportunities for students through the RIDOH Public Health Scholar Program to achieve improved health for all Rhode Islanders."

"This is wonderful opportunity," RWU Anthropology, Sociology and Public Health Professor Marybeth MacPhee said. "I am hopeful that the partnership will expand beyond the public health program to include all divisions of the university, including the law school. The hope is that more students can take advantage of the relationship and that the Department of Health will benefit from the insights of faculty and students in an effort to improve the health of all Rhode Islanders."

RWU's Public Health (Bristol) and Healthy Communities (Providence) programs are part of a national emphasis on community-based public health strategies, which focus attention on the social and environmental conditions, such as housing, employment, and transportation that affect people's health, MacPhee said. For example, the University is working with the Department of Health on their Health Equity Zone initiatives in Bristol, Providence, Newport and Central Falls/Pawtucket. Students and faculty have participated in assessment, outreach and programing activities to help reduce health inequalities in these communities.

More information about the RIDOH Academic Center is available [online](#).

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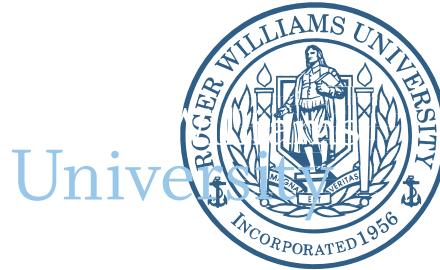
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