The Center for Health Equity Transformation (CHET): CHET’s mission is to synergize innovative, transdisciplinary and impactful research and training to improve the health of the most vulnerable residents of Kentucky and beyond. Kentuckians suffer tremendous health inequities—among the highest national rates of the leading causes of death, cardiovascular disease, cancer, substance abuse, diabetes, and obesity. CHET researchers aim to go beyond documenting health disparities and move to reducing or eliminating these health problems through intervention, implementation, dissemination, and translational science.

CHET was approved by the UK Board of Trustees in June, 2018 and aligns with UK’s commitment to achieving health equity. This commitment includes the Kentucky legislature’s major investment in a health disparities research facility ($265 million research building); implementation of UK’s strategic plan (emphasizing health equity, transdisciplinary research, community engagement, inclusivity); and a growing critical mass of stellar UK researchers with health equity-focused research and training interested in joining forces. CHET is supported across the UK campus, with resources provided by the Colleges of Medicine, Arts and Sciences, and Public Health; the Center for Clinical and Translational Sciences (CCTS); Markey Cancer Center; and the Office of the Vice President for Research.

With a founding director and two associate directors, professional staff, graduate research assistants, sixteen founding affiliates, and over 160 faculty affiliates across the nineteen colleges of the UK, CHET aims to enhance capacity of current UK researchers to effectively compete for numerous funding opportunities to conduct high impact health equity research. Recruitment is underway for tenured or tenure track CHET faculty members, along with postdoctoral scholars, and undergraduate and graduate trainees.

CHET programming is varied. A pilot grant competition supports significant, innovative, and rigorous research capable of providing preliminary data for future extramural submissions in conjunction with the Center for Clinical and Translational Science and the Office of Research. A speaker and seminar series provide an enriching, transdisciplinary environment. Methods workshops and professional development opportunities foster collaborations across disciplines, populations, and diseases. In conjunction with UK’s Proposal Development Office, CHET assists with customized boilerplate materials, health equity grant review, and supports applications from other programs, centers, and institutes.

CHET provides training and professional development to undertake innovative, transdisciplinary science for the next generation of health equity scholars. Connecting to cross campus opportunities like the NIH’s Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women’s Health (BIRCWH) training program; numerous programs in the CCTS (PSMRF, KL2); the Markey Cancer Centers T32 and ACTION programs, and others, CHET trainees enjoy a range of opportunities. Partnering on the DREAM scholars program (pre, postdoc, junior faculty) promotes scientific careers in health equity research and the Students Participating as Ambassadors for Research in Kentucky (SPARK) (undergraduates) partners with the CCTS and other campus units to provide undergraduate students opportunities to return to their home communities for health promotion research and practice. Outreach to communities most burdened by health conditions is a fundamental component of these research and training programs.

Contact: CHET@uky.edu

Visit: https://chet.med.uky.edu/
SPARK program: Now in its second year, SPARK trains talented undergraduate students to undertake meaningful health equity related research. Our first cohort (right) completed the program in May, 2020. Collectively, they presented papers, developed posters, and are developing manuscripts. Two are pursuing graduate studies. Our second cohort consists of two African American women and one Latino, all of whom are interested in graduate studies.

Graduate Training program: Our training includes extensive engagement with the DREAM scholars program (above). We also maintain a robust Graduate Research Assistantship program, and welcomed five graduate students from four colleges to CHET this year, four of whom are from URM/disadvantaged backgrounds. They will be located in HKRB and engaged in our next recruitment efforts. CHET also provides leadership for the Research Scholars Program and the Inclusive Postdoctoral Enrichment Program, two collaborative initiatives with the Office of the Vice President for Research.

Faculty: Seven primary faculty, several shown below, focus on cancer prevention and control, tobacco use, substance use, diabetes/obesity, multiple morbidities, cancer survivorship, and cardiovascular disease. These faculty members represent varied disciplines, including biobehavioral health, sociology, anthropology, biostatistics, clinical psychology, communications, and health behavior/public health.

Core faculty: Sixteen core faculty members, most of whom are from underrepresented backgrounds, across eight colleges. The chair of our Core faculty is Dr. Anita Fernander (left), College of Medicine.

Future goals:

- Recruit 1-2 URM faculty, 2-3 URM postdoctoral fellows, (with aim of retaining to faculty)
- Develop and submit for external funding pipeline programs for URM future faculty
- Re-submit T32 for training in implementation science and underserved/under-represented populations
- Submit a Center of Excellence, National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities
- With the VPR’s office: Develop and implement Inclusive Postdoctoral Enrichment Program (IPEP), expand number of administrative supplements submitted for URM trainees.