

FSU College of Medicine receives \$3.75M grant to continue improving care for older adults in Florida

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With a \$3.75 million grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Department of Geriatrics at the Florida State University College of Medicine will help shape the future of health care in Florida.

Florida's older adult population will number almost 7 million by 2040 and is typically challenged by chronic illness and high numbers of medications. As one of only two programs in Florida funded by HRSA's national Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program (GWEP), the Florida State-based North and Central Florida GWEP will address these needs.

"We have partnered with national, state and local stakeholders to strengthen the capacity of community organizations to improve care and support for our aging population," said Project Director Paul Katz, chair of the department and co-principal investigator of the grant.

As of 2018, the United States had fewer than 3,600 full-time practicing geriatricians and 49.2 million older adults. The demand is especially high in Florida, a state that had only 404 geriatricians in 2017. But the good news is that geriatricians are only one part of the expanding range of health-care options for older adults, and the College of Medicine is committed to developing training and resources for a wide range of health-care professionals.

"Rather than treat an 85-year-old the same as a 30-year-old, we are working to improve processes that screen for cognitive impairment, depression and falls, and reduce medications so that we can address this population's unique needs," Katz said. "All these things systematize a comprehensive approach for older adults and improve quality of care."

As a geriatrician and an educator, Lisa Granville, associate chair of the Department of Geriatrics and co-principal investigator of GWEP, knows the importance of incorporating key geriatric-care strategies into practice and training.

"Many look at the complexities of geriatrics and feel overwhelmed," she said. "Our goal is to provide strategies that feel simple, focus on high-yield areas and empower people to take action toward providing older adults with the best care possible."

Building upon the success of previous GWEP funding (\$3 million since 2015), the current projects will continue to increase access to a geriatrics-trained workforce. They will encourage strategies that focus on maintaining and reinforcing abilities that people retain even while suffering from dementia; provide programs that improve family caregiver mental health; train hundreds of professionals within the primary care spectrum; and more.

"What's unique about this grant is that it highlights interprofessional care and all the different pieces it takes to holistically care for older adults," said Nicolette Castagna, GWEP community engagement director. "The workforce is defined very broadly, and we're working with everyone from home health workers to faith-based caregivers, PAs, nurses, physicians, health educators, and assisted-living residents and their families."

Granville said the GWEP is well positioned to strengthen geriatrics-care knowledge and collaboration across Florida's workforce and improve support within communities as people age.

"Many people talk about the aging population and the concerns coming in the future," Granville said. "However, as the state with the highest percentage of older adults, Florida is already working on solutions. It's a privilege to have the opportunity to broadly explore strategies for enhancing the health of older adults."

For more information about programs and access to geriatrics care and community education resources, please visit [REACH.med.fsu.edu](https://reach.med.fsu.edu).

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