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UGA, Forum Institute partner for preconception to infancy public health initiative



Athens, Ga. — The University of Georgia College of Public Health has announced a new strategic partnership with The Forum Institute, an Oregon-based nonprofit think tank, to implement a first-of-its-kind preconception to infancy public health initiative for the state of Georgia.

The Forum Institute will provide \$2.4 million in funding to the UGA College of Public Health over two years to support the establishment of the P2i Center of Excellence, the nation's first center focused on preconception to infancy care. Dr. José F. Cordero, Patel Distinguished Professor of Public Health in the College of Public Health, will serve as director of the new center, which will open in Atlanta in early 2017.

The Forum Institute established the Preconception to Infancy initiative, or P2i, on the conviction that existing strong science and clinical practice offer a means of improving outcomes and significantly reducing the incidence of chronic disorders among infants when women reduce exposure to toxins, ensure proper nutrition and maintain optimal health before and during pregnancy.

Cordero and the College of Public Health will lead the center's efforts in developing best practices for preconception care, while expanding current knowledge in the field through clinical research, statistical analysis and the publication and distribution of scientific findings. The college will also collaborate with The Forum Institute in developing curricula for physicians and mothers-to-be in preconception care and related topics.

“We are very pleased to establish this partnership with The Forum Institute to advance the Preconception to Infancy public health initiative,” said Phillip Williams, dean of the College of Public Health. “With Dr. Cordero, we have one of the leading experts in child and maternal health guiding this program. His role places us in an ideal position to implement an outstanding public health program for Georgia residents.”

Representatives from UGA and The Forum Institute met on Sept. 9 to formalize the partnership. UGA officials in attendance were Cordero; Williams; Pamela Whitten, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost; David Lee, vice president



UGA Vice President of Research David Lee, left, and Board President and Executive Committee Member David Humphrey of The Forum Institute sign an agreement between the College of Public Health and the Oregon-based think tank to form a strategic partnership to implement a preconception to infancy public health initiative in the Peabody Board Room at the Administration Building on Friday, Sept. 9, 2016.

for research; and Kelly Kerner, vice president for development and alumni relations. Representatives from The Forum Institute included board Chair Gleason Eakin, board President David Humphrey, Executive Committee members Lee Grossman and Judi Rees, and P2i Program Executive Director Mary Closson.

“I’m honored to serve as the director for the P2i Center of Excellence,” Cordero said. “This is an outstanding partnership that will leverage the public health expertise at UGA and will be able to help many couples have healthy babies. The research developed at the center will prove invaluable for future generations of families in Georgia and around the country.”

An internationally recognized researcher and public health leader, Cordero has dedicated his career to addressing maternal and child health, minority health and health disparities. For 27 years, he served in the U.S. Public Health Service at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. During his time at the CDC, he attained the rank of assistant surgeon general of the Public Health Service and held a number of leadership positions focused on improving the health of mothers, children and adults in programs such as immunizations, birth defects and disabilities. The most prominent of these roles included deputy director of the National Immunization Program and founding director of the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

“We are delighted to be working in cooperation with UGA to implement the public health component of P2i,” Eakin said. “Dr. Cordero’s participation in our think tanks over the past few years, combined with his role on the UGA faculty and the P2i initiative give him a unique perspective into the steps which must be taken to successfully deliver the program through a public health mechanism.”

Whitten noted that that the P2i initiative has the potential to impact the lives of children and families for generations to come. “Improving pregnancy outcomes and reducing the incidence of chronic conditions in infants is an urgent priority,” Whitten said, “and the strategic partnership between the University of Georgia and The Forum Institute underscores our shared commitment to creating a healthier future in Georgia and beyond.”



Officials from UGA and The Forum Institute were present when they signed an agreement between the College of Public Health and the Oregon-based think tank to form a strategic partnership to implement a preconception to infancy public health initiative in the Peabody Board Room at the Administration Building. Pictured left to right are College of Public Health Dean Phil Williams, The Forum Institute Executive Committee member Judi Rees, professor Jose Cordero, Vice President of Development and Alumni Relations Kelly Kerner; Provost Pamela Whitten, The Forum Institute Board Chairman Gleason Eakin, The Forum Institute Board President David Humphrey, The Forum Institute Executive Director of the P2i program Mary Closson, Vice President of Research David Lee, The Forum Institute fundraiser Gary Smith, and The Forum Institute Executive Committee member Lee Grossman. (Photo credit: Andrew Davis Tucker/UGA)