



## Office of the President

4200 Faculty/Administration Building  
656 West Kirby  
Detroit, MI 48202  
313-577-2230  
president@wayne.edu

Dear colleagues and friends:

The United States is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, yet when we look at health outcomes, it's among the poorest. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this unfortunate reality is how unnecessary it is. This country is home to the world's best researchers, scientists and clinicians, whose work could make a difference in ensuring optimal health for all.

As a glaucoma specialist, I became aware early in my career that African Americans suffer a disproportionate burden of glaucoma. I became committed to better understanding health disparities, and it's among the reasons I chose to come to Wayne State University as president in 2013. Wayne State is making important contributions to alleviating health disparities in Detroit and beyond, and I wanted to be a part of these efforts.

In each of Wayne State's health science programs, researchers and clinicians strive to ensure good health for all. Our students — many of whom plan to dedicate their careers to medicine and health — are aware of this urgency from the moment they set foot in their first class. It's also one of the reasons our faculty choose to continue and advance their careers here.

Many of our departments, laboratories and projects are focused on tackling health disparities. Take, for example, the Perinatology Research Branch (PRB) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), located at our School of Medicine. The PRB is the only NIH branch of its kind outside of the central campus in Bethesda, Maryland. It's located here because of Detroit's diverse population and Wayne State's well-known dedication to the community. Since 2002, more than 20,000 at-risk mothers in Detroit and beyond have been helped through our research and direct patient care.

Another example of Wayne State's concerted effort to address health disparities is found inside the 200,000-square-foot Integrative Biosciences Center, which opened in 2015. Wayne State made a deliberate decision that the research conducted in this building be focused on the health problems that urban Detroiters face every day.

A number of other research initiatives further prove Wayne State's commitment to eradicating health disparities. We're embarking on a five-year, \$3.5 million multicenter trial aimed at helping parents in underserved communities manage the daily needs of adolescents with diabetes. Thanks to a \$9 million grant, our NCI-designated cancer center, the Karmanos Cancer Institute, is investigating the reasons for higher mortality rates of black cancer survivors. We remain dedicated as well to research that supports health interventions to treat HIV, asthma, hypertension, substance abuse and addiction, as well as efforts to improve sustainable food systems and nutrition.

We've made great strides, but there is still much to be done. Major systemic issues remain, including delivery of care in the United States, navigating personal biases and better understanding biology. It's not just a matter of access to care. Some diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obesity and asthma, simply manifest differently in certain populations.

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To step up efforts and enhance collaboration, we created the Mayor’s Summit on Health Equity at Wayne State in 2016. This summit was an opportunity for academics, local and national foundations, and community leaders to share knowledge and strategize solutions for eliminating health disparities in our country and around the globe. A follow-up summit is planned for the spring of 2018.

While Wayne State is now a comprehensive university with more than 340 degree and certificate programs spanning the arts as well as the sciences, it was founded 150 years ago as the Detroit Medical College to treat Civil War veterans. Improving health equity has thus always been a part of what we do. Our deep roots in the Detroit community come with great responsibility — and the great opportunity — to serve our fellow citizens. By addressing health disparities, we will serve our mission of positively impacting local and global communities for the next 150 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Roy Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

M. Roy Wilson  
President  
Wayne State University