

Public Health Program at Brown Launches Healthy Aging Initiative

Diamond Fund gift estimated at \$4-\$7 M

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PROVIDENCE – Thanks to an estimated \$4 to \$7 million gift from the Irene Diamond Fund, Brown University’s Program in Public Health will undertake a broad-

based healthy aging initiative linking public health strategies and care to the elderly.

The funds, which will come from a 12.5 percent share of a limited partnership interest in a building on Roosevelt Island in New York City, will be disbursed after the sale of the

building. It is the largest gift the Brown public health program has received to date, and it couldn’t be timelier. The Brown Corporation will vote this month on a plan to transform the program into a School of Public Health. If approved, the school would be launched on July 1st and will be located at 121 South Main St., where the educational program, departments and 11 public health research centers are located. It is anticipated that the two-year accreditation process will also begin in July.

Terrie Fox Wetle, PhD, associate dean of medicine for public health and public policy, will co-direct the healthy aging

initiative with Richard Besdine, MD, director of the Center for Gerontology Healthcare Research. (*See Spotlight page 53.*)

The gift recognizes Brown’s national leadership in aging research and teaching. “Most public health programs in the country focus on younger populations, such as child and maternal health,” said Wetle, who is former deputy director of the National Institute on Aging.

The numbers

Rhode Island is a fertile incubator for aging research, with its rapidly aging population.

A report on population projections issued by the Rhode Island Statewide

Planning Program (www.planning.ri.gov) estimates that there will be more than 29,000 residents in the state who are 85 and older by 2015, and 18,277 in the 80–84 age group.

The United States Bureau of the Census figures (estimates as of 2012) show that 14.7 percent of Rhode Islanders are 65 and older. That compares with 13.3 percent nationwide.

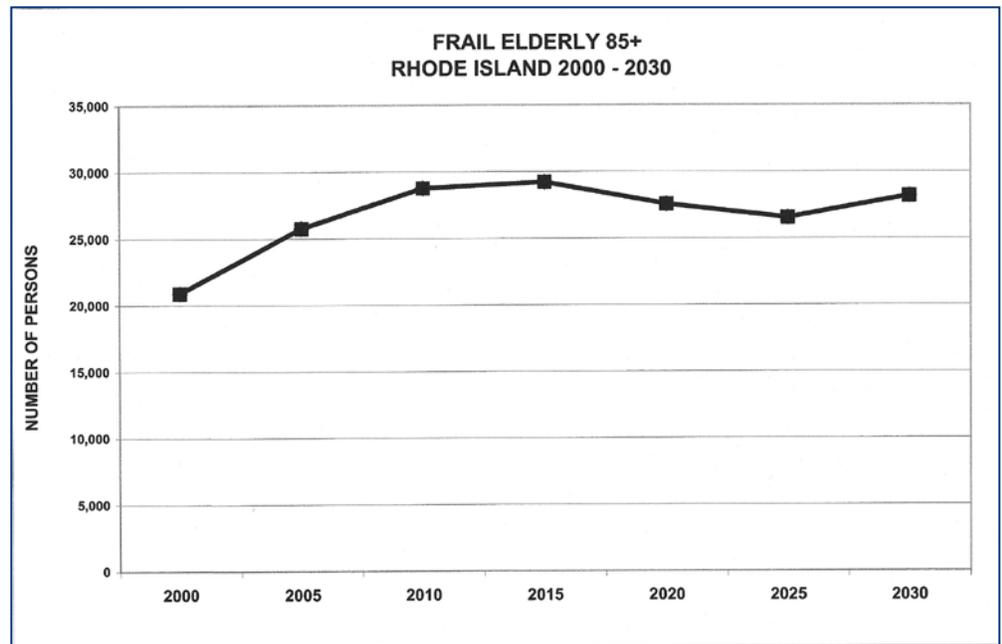
Statewide population projections show that by 2030, the number of persons 65 years and older is expected to reach 233,749, and represent 20 percent of Rhode Islanders.

Nationwide, the census figures project that:

By 2030, the number of adults aged 65



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Source: U.S. Census Bureau
RI Statewide Planning

FRAIL ELDERLY 85+ %

and older will be more than 72 million, an increase from 13 percent of the U.S. population to almost 20 percent.

By 2050, the population aged 85 and over could grow to nearly 19 million.

The first pilot project of the initiative, even before receiving income from the Diamond gift, is being planned with the Rhode Island Dept. of Health. A Brown graduate student will be assigned to work with Health department staff on the project. They will review data relating to hundreds of older people who are frequent users of 911 and emergency departments, and who have made at least four such costly trips within a year's time.

"What are the reasons for multiple 911 calls for these older people and how might we intervene to improve health and avoid emergency calls?" Wetle said in a discussion of the project. "We want to be able to work with this population and identify ways of supplementing their health care. It could be connecting them with a PCP or community health center. If we can provide evidence-based strategies to improve health and reduce expensive emergency room visits and hospitalizations, it will be a positive first step for the initiative," she said.

In addition to working with Health and community organizations, the Diamond healthy aging initiative will focus

on expanding and innovating Brown's public health and medical school curricula, relevant to aging population health. It will also support student and faculty research in this area, with the goal of implementing healthy aging programs statewide with community partners.

The Diamond Fund committed the balance of its endowment, \$40 million, at the end of 2012 to grants for healthy aging projects. Other beneficiaries include Weill Cornell Medical College, the American Federation for Aging Research and Columbia University.

The 2003 *New York Times* obituary of the late Mrs. Diamond, who in her earlier years was an editor and film scout responsible for acquiring the script *Casablanca*, quotes her as saying: "Philanthropy is a lot like Hollywood: You find a good script; you support it."



Brown University's Program in Public Health is located on South Main Street in Providence.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

The Diamond Healthy Aging Initiative at Brown will focus on identifying opportunities for preventive health interventions for older people, in order to improve their quality of life and reduce health care costs. ❖