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## The Minority Student Caucus Presents the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Minority Health Conference: Revolutionary Healing and Rebuilding

The Minority Health Conference, which is the largest and longest-running student-led health conference in the country, aims to raise awareness around minority health and mobilize students, academics, and community members to take action for change. The conference was founded and is led by students at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, UNC-Chapel Hill.

We are excited to announce that this year's theme:

**Revolutionary Healing and Rebuilding: Learning from Today, Transforming Tomorrow.**

"Where do we go from here?" Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. posed this question in his 1967 book of the same title, in which he reflected on the state of America following a decade of struggle for civil rights. He called for a shift in American society towards greater economic justice, without which there could be no true progress towards equality. Over 50 years later, this is once again one of the most critical questions our generation faces. We are in the midst of multiple overlapping crises that impact human health and wellbeing -- the COVID-19 pandemic, racial and systemic injustices, and worsening climate change, to name a few. As such, governments, institutions, and communities are facing a crossroads; we can either maintain the status quo, or radically change the way we do things. Dr. King aptly describes these sentiments in this excerpt from his book:

*"One of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. Every society has its protectors of the status quo and its fraternities of the indifferent who are notorious for sleeping through revolutions. But today our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change."*

The past eighteen months have heightened public awareness that the systems of today are not only failing, but disproportionately harming people of color. COVID-19 has exacerbated longstanding disparities in the healthcare system. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people have experienced disproportionate risk of illness and death, and Asian Americans have endured scapegoating and consequent violence throughout the pandemic. Systemic racial injustices in the legal system and police shootings of unarmed Black people continue to tear families and communities apart. Moreover, we are in a climate crisis worsened by an extractive economic system that continues to threaten the health of marginalized communities globally. Evidently, the status quo is unacceptable, but with the current

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increased focus on public health and equity, we are in a unique position to uproot and reconstruct our health systems.

**Revolutionary Healing and Rebuilding** recognizes that the first step in transforming systems and structures is to acknowledge past and present traumas of systemic racism. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation defines racial healing as “a process and tool that can facilitate trust and build authentic relationships that bridge divides created by real and perceived differences... Before you can transform systems and structures you must do the people-work first.” As we learn from today to transform tomorrow, we must recognize the pressing need to take lessons from our current situation and act now to build a better, more equitable future. As Dr. King wrote in his book:

*“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late... This may well be mankind’s last chance to choose between chaos or community.”*

This year’s conference seeks to provide a space to acknowledge the wounds of systemic racism, reflect on the structural challenges and barriers to health equity, and advance the work being done to sow seeds that will grow into more equitable systems for tomorrow. We hope that the theme, *Revolutionary Healing and Rebuilding*, will renew, inspire, and empower us all to reimagine the future of our communities.

At the Gillings School of Global Public Health, community is at the heart of what we do, where we lift voices to accelerate change. The Minority Student Caucus was founded to raise the voices of Black students and to impact policies at the School of Public Health. Nearly every year since 1977, we have convened hundreds of community members, professionals and students to explore a diverse range of topics that have an impact on minority health. Together, we connect multidisciplinary champions working at the local, regional, national and global levels to support communities everywhere.

2021 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Minority Student Caucus. As we go into our 51<sup>st</sup> year, we are excitedly looking ahead to what the next 50 years will bring, including the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Minority Health Conference. We look forward to seeing you virtually and in-person at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Minority Health Conference on **Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2022!**

Sincerely,



Takhona Hlatshwako  
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Minority Health Conference Co-Chair



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Minority Health Conference Co-Chair