

OU receives \$400,000 grant to expand healthy living efforts in Pontiac

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Oakland University professors Laurel Stevenson and Jennifer Lucarelli will oversee a new grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund that will expand the university's collaborative efforts to promote healthy living in and around the city of Pontiac.



The two-year, \$400,000 award will be used to initiate a community-based program called "Prescription for a Healthy Pontiac."

Health Sciences Professors Laurel Stevenson (right) and Jennifer Lucarelli will oversee a two-year, \$400,000 grant to implement a community-based program called "Prescription for a Healthy Pontiac."

The program builds on the efforts of OU and other community partners to connect residents with local resources to improve nutrition and exercise habits. It will focus on "social prescribing" to encourage healthy eating and active living. Going beyond traditional health care, social prescribing connects individuals to non-clinical services and community resources to support health and well-being.

"We hope to facilitate and create a culture of healthy eating and physical activity within families with children and seniors, reduce loneliness and social isolation among seniors, and strengthen community relationships," Stevenson said.

Along with Oakland University, the program will be supported by the Healthy Pontiac, We Can! Coalition and the Oakland County Health Division, in collaboration with three major clinic sites in Pontiac – the Gary Bernstein Community Health Clinic, Honor Community Health and St. Joseph Mercy Oakland's Mercy Place Clinic.

With an emphasis on reaching families with children and seniors, the program will offer integrated health education sessions focused on healthy eating across the lifespan; cooking on a budget; creative cooking with herbs and spices; incorporating physical activity into daily living; stress management; relaxation techniques and other topics.

Community surveys indicate that over half of Pontiac residents do not meet recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption or physical activity, and statewide data indicates residents have higher death rates for diabetes and heart disease compared

to state and national data.

To address these disparities, the program will also increase offerings for fruit and vegetable voucher redemption and engage in community asset mapping to identify additional free and low-cost physical activity opportunities.

To learn more about Oakland University's collaborations with the city of Pontiac, visit oakland.edu/studentaffairs/pontiac-initiative.