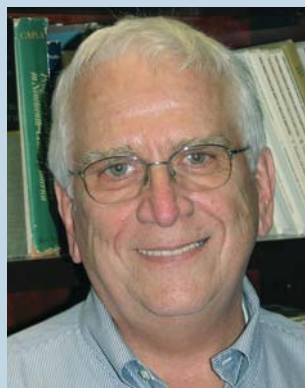


Gillings Gift positions UNC to better meet 21st century public health challenges



Dr. Joseph Ibrahim



Dr. Joseph Morrissey



Dr. Ralph Baric

Throughout its nearly 70-year history, the University of North Carolina's School of Public Health has aggressively confronted public health challenges as close as Carrboro, N.C., and as far away as China. UNC public health faculty members, staff and students have built the School into one of the top research and teaching facilities in the world addressing areas such as water quality, nutrition, cancer screening, clinical trials and infectious disease control.

One of the distinguishing features about our School is a strong emphasis on applying research to solve real-world problems. *U.S. News and World Report* consistently has rated UNC the top public school of public health since the magazine began its ratings in 1990. Overall, UNC ranks just behind the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and is tied for second place with the Harvard School of Public Health.

To remain a top school of public health, we must address the enormous public health challenges of the 21st century. As infectious diseases reemerge, as gaps caused by health disparities widen, as pollution threatens the quality of air and water, we must ask hard questions, work even harder to solve public health problems in North Carolina and around the world and educate the next generation of public health leaders.

That's what makes the gift from Dennis and Joan Gillings so important to UNC.

"The enormously generous gift from Dennis and Joan Gillings is giving us the resources and freedom to tackle some of the world's biggest public health challenges quickly, our way, with colleagues from across the School, University, state and world," says Dean Barbara K. Rimer. "Their gift will enable us to accelerate our impact in solving public health problems and educate students using these new paradigms—and that's why most of us chose public health as our life's work."

Researchers who already have received Gillings funding for projects explain the importance of these grants.

"Funding for the Gillings Innovation Labs (GILs) serves as a novel platform for developing key early-stage technologies for improving human health outcomes across the globe," says Dr. Ralph Baric, epidemiology professor and principal investigator of a project designed to find a single-dose vaccine for respiratory diseases that's easy to store and administer. If successful, the vaccine could save millions of children's lives in developing countries. (See page 32.)

"The Gillings gift has, among other things, really enabled us to bridge the gap between academia and industry in clinical trials research," says Dr. Joseph Ibrahim, Alumni Distinguished Professor of biostatistics and principal investigator for the UNC Center for Innovative Clinical Trials. "It has facilitated an unprecedented new form of dialogue and collaboration between academic researchers

and practitioners in tackling important and practical research issues in clinical trials."

Another project already funded through the Gillings gift will look at ways to improve North Carolina's mental health services. The critical problems of providing mental health care are not unique to North Carolina—and finding better ways to provide care here will be useful across the U.S. and throughout the world. (See page 31.)

"Improving mental health services is one of the biggest public health challenges facing North Carolina today," says Dr. Joseph Morrissey, UNC professor of health policy and administration. "Our GIL will link Carolina and Duke faculty with community partners to work on ways of improving the mental health system using computer simulation and other decision-support tools."

Our School's new name—the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health—recognizes the transformational gift made possible by two people with strong ties to the School who feel passionate about its work. (See their stories on pages 10 and 14.)

"The words *global public health* reflect the fact that all public health is global, and that global health is public health," Rimer has said. "We are fully committed to North Carolina and its citizens, and we recognize the interconnectedness of all people in today's world."

Rimer explains that about 18 percent of School expenses are covered by the state of North Carolina. "We are grateful for this funding," Rimer says. Much of the money for research comes from competitive federal grants for specific projects, but the federal budget for health research is shrinking dramatically and many fewer grants are being awarded.

"Dennis and Joan Gillings have made it possible for our world-class School to serve our friends and neighbors across North Carolina and around the world with stronger research, educational and outreach programs," Rimer says. "Meeting the challenges of the 21st century is a daunting task, but this gift strengthens our ability to anticipate public health problems and accelerate their solutions." ■

— BY RAMONA DUBOSE