The Native Investigator Development Program: Increasing the Presence of American Indian and Alaska Native Scientists in Aging-Related Research

Spero M. Manson, R. Turner Goins, Dedra S. Buchwald

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Abstract

The 2005 National Academy of Sciences’ report, Assessment of NIH Minority Research Training Programs: Phase 3, underscored the importance of minority representation in the scientific workforce for acquiring the knowledge required to address our nation’s racial and ethnic health disparities. This conclusion stands in sharp contrast to the finding that, in 1999, the National Institutes of Health supported 35,000 grants; among the principal investigators, only 9 were designated American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN). How can we increase the presence of AI/ANs in leadership roles? The authors describe a highly successful postdoctoral training program that prepares young AI/AN investigators for careers as independent, externally funded scientists who work at the nexus of research on culture, aging, and health. The program employs a structured, skill-driven approach that intensively mentors Native trainees without requiring relocation from their home institutions. This model holds promise for training similar populations in this and other fields.