

## New Mexico Communities Embrace Prevention Research Center

Factors that influence one's chances of surviving to age 65 have been identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as lifestyle, at 50 percent; heredity at 20 percent; environment at 20 percent; and the medical care system at 10 percent. Clearly we have influence over our own health.

Researchers at UNM's Prevention Research Center (PRC) want us all to live longer, more fulfilling lives. To discover innovative and effective ways to improve health, the PRC offers the total package – rigorous science, multidisciplinary faculty and a vast network of academic, public health and community partnerships.

The PRC is not new to the Health Sciences Center. Since 1994, it's been a part of a network of academic centers funded by the CDC that partner with agencies and communities to conduct research in disease prevention and control. In 1998, UNM's PRC was selected as the lead center in the CDC network and last year was funded for another five years.

At its core, PRC is about people – individuals and communities – identifying and investigating their own health issues. Currently, there are 36 funded projects in New Mexico from sources that include the CDC, National Institutes of Health, Indian Health Service, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, New Mexico Department of Health, New Mexico Public Education Department and others.

Research priorities include nutrition, physical activity and obesity; drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse; injury prevention and control; and adolescent physical and mental health. UNM's PRC works with communities, oftentimes at their request, in developing, translating, disseminating and converting community based research into practice. Diverse leadership teams create localized field-based clinical trials and translational



*Sally Davis, PhD*

research models to effectively apply results in the respective communities. These clinical trials and research models lead to interventions and policies that ultimately improve health at the local level, while providing models for the broader population.

“We implement a lot of team science, involving health practitioners, attorneys, psychologists, educators and community leaders,” remarks Sally Davis, Ph.D., PRC director, professor of Pediatrics and division chief for Prevention and Population Sciences at the Health Sciences Center. “This is important research for under-represented communities throughout New Mexico that may be isolated from health and other essential services and information.”

Davis, who has been at UNM for 33 years and helped launch PRC 15 years ago, has overseen numerous, successful projects that address disparities in health of New Mexico's populations, including high teen-suicide rates, substance abuse, teen pregnancy and obesity. She has participated with local communities as they embrace and transform their health issues at every level – in the schools and community centers, at the grocery store, in their living rooms and at their dinner tables. “It's very gratifying to see health research embraced by communities for a positive change,” Davis says.



*Cuba, NM, community members prepare trails and signs, and participate in lunchtime walking as part of the UNM Prevention Research Center's "Step Into Cuba" project.*