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National and Global Health Equity Leaders to Convene at Columbia to Examine Future of Research in Turbulent Times

Oct. 1 symposium will explore how health equity science — and the universities that produce it — must evolve amid profound political, social and institutional change

NEW YORK (Sept. 17, 2026) — Health equity research has reached a critical inflection point. Persistent and widening health inequities are unfolding alongside political polarization, challenges to evidence-based science and equity-focused research, rapid technological change, climate-related disruption, migration and displacement, funding uncertainty, and other forces reshaping population health around the world.

On Oct. 1, leading scholars from around the world will gather at Columbia University Irving Medical Center to consider an increasingly urgent question: How should health equity research evolve to remain rigorous, relevant and impactful in turbulent times?

The Health Equity Research Symposium will be convened by [Adana A. M. Llanos](#), PhD, MPH, and [Dustin T. Duncan](#), ScD, of Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Llanos and Duncan are co-editors of the forthcoming Oxford University Press volume, *Health Equity Research in Turbulent Times: Theory and Applications*.

The symposium will bring together book contributors, researchers, practitioners, students, and emerging scholars for cross-disciplinary discussion about the future of health equity science, including how universities and other research institutions can strengthen scientific innovation and resilience while building greater accountability, community partnership, and public trust.

“Health equity research is entering a new era,” said Duncan, Associate Dean for Health Equity Research and Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia Mailman. “We cannot simply keep asking the same questions using the same systems and expect research to meet the challenges facing communities today. We need to examine not only what we study, but how knowledge is produced, who participates in producing it, and how our institutions translate that knowledge into meaningful change.”

[Moving Beyond Documenting Inequities](#)

The forthcoming book re-centers theory as a critical foundation for understanding and addressing health inequities during periods of profound change. Through theoretically grounded scholarship, real-world applications, and global perspectives, contributors examine the structural and social forces shaping population health and offer approaches for translating health equity science into research, policy, practice, and action.

The symposium is designed to move that conversation beyond the pages of the book.

Participants will examine what will be required for health equity science to remain rigorous, actionable, and resilient — not only during the current period of disruption, but through the turbulent conditions communities and societies will inevitably continue to face. The gathering is also intended to foster collaboration across disciplines and generations of scholars and strengthen the connections among the ideas presented in the forthcoming volume.

“Understanding disparities is essential, but documenting inequities is not enough,” said Llanos. “We also have to understand the systems, structures, and mechanisms that produce and sustain them. This symposium gives scholars an opportunity to think collectively about the intellectual foundation of our field and how we can ensure that the science ultimately leads to better policy, practice, and health outcomes.”

Rethinking How Universities Produce Research

For Duncan, the symposium also advances his broader body of work examining how universities can redesign the systems through which research is conceived, conducted, evaluated, and translated into societal impact.

His Health Equity Research Production Model (HERPM) proposes embedding equity throughout the research-production process, including community engagement, research-team composition, funding, and authorship. The framework emphasizes transparent and accountable systems that support scientific excellence, collaboration, authorship integrity, meaningful community partnership and public trust.

The premise is increasingly important as universities navigate changing federal priorities, evolving public expectations, funding uncertainty, and growing demands for institutional accountability. Producing consequential research, Duncan argues, requires more than scientific excellence; the systems through which universities produce knowledge matter as well. The symposium's communications strategy identifies research governance and institutional accountability as central themes of the convening.

Duncan is also leading the Black Professors Study, a Columbia-based research initiative examining the professional experiences, institutional environments, health, and well-being

of Black faculty in the United States. The study is designed to produce evidence that can ultimately inform university policy, faculty success, and institutional governance.

His broader portfolio includes Writing Action Groups (WAGs) and the STEP-UP Mentorship Model, initiatives focused on creating academic structures that help scholars develop, collaborate, and succeed, as well as extensive health equity research involving LGBTQ+ populations and other structurally marginalized communities.

Together, these efforts reflect a larger question increasingly at the center of Duncan's work: What should the research university of the future look like and what institutional systems will be necessary to produce excellent, equitable, and socially consequential research?

“Universities have historically transformed themselves in response to major societal change,” Duncan said. “This is another of those moments. We have an opportunity to think much more intentionally about the research institutions we want to build for the future rather than simply reacting to the challenges immediately in front of us.”

About Health Equity Research in Turbulent Times: Theory and Applications

Health Equity Research in Turbulent Times: Theory and Applications is a forthcoming edited volume from Oxford University Press, co-edited by Adana A. M. Llanos, PhD, MPH, and Dustin T. Duncan, ScD, of Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. The volume brings together leading and emerging scholars from the United States and around the world to examine the theories, structural forces and real-world approaches needed to advance health equity research amid rapidly changing social, political, environmental and scientific conditions.

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Event Information

Health Equity Research Symposium and Authors Workshop

Thursday, October 1, 2026

Columbia University Irving Medical Center

New York, New York

Media are invited to attend. Journalists interested in attending the symposium in person or remotely, interviewing Drs. Llanos or Duncan in advance, or securing a complimentary copy of the book should contact: Beth LaBreche at 612-578-2834 or beth@labreche.com.

