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## **Leading Scholars Convened at Columbia on the Future of Health Equity Research**

**NEW YORK (Oct. 12, 2026)** — Some of the world's top researchers and scholars gathered at Columbia University on Oct. 1 for *Health Equity Research in Turbulent Times*, a symposium examining how health equity research must evolve in response to significant social, political, legal, funding, and institutional changes and advance health equity solutions that move beyond documenting inequities.

The event included an authors' workshop; co-editors Dr. Adana A. M. Llanos and Dr. Dustin T. Duncan of Columbia University led the content discussion for their upcoming book titled *Advancing Transformative Health Equity Research: Theory and Application*, by Oxford University Press, to be completed in early 2027. Drs. Llanos and Duncan make a powerful team: both are health equity researchers and scholars. By training, Llanos is a molecular epidemiologist while Duncan is a social epidemiologist, providing a multi-level perspective to health equity research and bringing complementary expertise. Both prioritize international research partnerships in East Africa, learning Swahili to engage communities there and further inform their research studies. The co-editors intentionally selected authors representing diverse genders, racial backgrounds, disciplines, geographic regions, and institutions, recognizing how researchers' identities, experiences, and institutional contexts shape health equity scholarship.

"The symposium demonstrated that there is tremendous appetite for a deeper conversation about where health equity research goes from here, in and out of turbulent times," said Duncan, Associate Dean for Health Equity Research and Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. "We addressed questions not only about the inequities researchers are trying to address, but about the systems in which research takes place: how it is funded, how evidence is translated into policy and practice, how researchers can be supported, and how universities can advance rigorous and consequential scholarship during periods of significant change to solve the world's most persistent health inequities."

Participating authors also included Dr. Thoai D. Ngo, Chair of the Department of Population and Family Health of Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, writing with colleagues Dr. Eunice Muthengi (Director of Evidence and Learning Insights at the Mastercard Foundation) and Dr. Sapna Desai (Senior Fellow at the Population Council Institute), on health systems in the Global South through a health equity lens, emphasizing how historical, political, and structural forces shape access to care and health outcomes

for vulnerable populations, and Dr. Chandra L. Ford, Professor of Behavioral, Social and Health Education Sciences and African American Studies at Emory University, who delivered an engaging featured address at the symposium. Ford is writing with colleagues on intersectionality as a critical theoretical framework, exploring how overlapping systems of oppression (i.e., race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) structure health inequities. Her chapter will illustrate how intersectionality not only exposes interlocking systems of disadvantage but also informs methodological innovations, policy analysis, and community-engaged approaches to advance health equity.

The book will also address how research can inform legal and policy change. Temple University contributors Carolina Villamil Grest, Ph.D., M.S.W.; Ruqaiijah Yearby, J.D., MPH; and Scott Burris, J.D. bring together legal epidemiology and health justice to examine how law can both produce and reduce health inequities, and how evidence can guide reforms that address unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power.

“Health equity research has built an increasingly sophisticated understanding of disparities and the forces that produce them; despite the pressures, we must build on and refine our practice for a dynamic future,” said Llanos, Associate Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia. “Bringing scholars together across disciplines, institutions, and career stages allows us to challenge current thinking and systems to strengthen the science and its consequential impact.” Dr. Llanos also co-leads the Cancer Population Science Program at the Columbia Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center. Her research examines how social, structural, and biological factors shape cancer inequities, with particular attention to breast cancer outcomes among Black women. In Kenya, Llanos and her colleagues are using community-engaged approaches to study hair product use, including chemical relaxers, among women in Embu and Nakuru.

The symposium and book reflect a growing focus within Duncan's work on the institutional structures through which research is produced. He is the architect of the Health Equity Research Production Model (HERPM), a governance framework that considers equity across four dimensions of research production: engagement with and centering of the communities being studied; representation within research teams; distribution of research funding; and authorship and publication practices.

His other related initiatives include the Black Professors Study (BPS), which examines the professional experiences, institutional environments, health and well-being of Black faculty, as well as Writing Accountability Groups (WAGs) and the STEP-UP Mentorship Model (SUMM), designed to strengthen faculty development and advancement.

The symposium and forthcoming book advance the use of theory to strengthen health equity research questions, methods and interventions, offering researchers, institutions and policymakers a foundation for translating evidence into meaningful change. Llanos and Duncan also recently received a grant from Columbia's Office of the Provost to develop a massive open online course (MOOC) entitled *Health Equity Research: From Theory to Action*. The course will extend their educational reach beyond the university, bringing scholarship on health equity to a broad global audience.

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