

Centers of excellence adds Texas consortium

By Eddy Ball

NIEHS has designated the Center for Translational Environmental Health Research (CTEHR) in Texas as the newest National Center of Excellence in Environmental Health Science. Led by veteran NIEHS grantee [Cheryl Walker, Ph.D.](#),

(<http://www.ibt.tamhsc.edu/director/>)

CTEHR is a collaboration among [Texas A&M University](#)

(<http://bionews-tx.com/news/news-category/texas-am/>)

(TAMU), [Baylor College of Medicine](#),

(<http://bionews-tx.com/news/news-category/baylor-college/>)

and the University of Houston, funded by a four-year, \$4.4 million NIH grant.

According to an [announcement](#)

(<https://news.tamhsc.edu/?post=texas-am-tmc-partners-unlocking-the-mysteries-of-environmental-health-through-team-science>)

April 22 by the TAMU Health Science Center, CTEHR becomes the 21st [NIEHS Environmental Health Sciences \(EHS\) Core Center](#), serving as the cornerstone for integrated environmental health research, translation of research advances into practice, and community outreach and engagement aimed at improving human health. The research base of the new center will focus on five thematic areas impacting human environmental health - early life exposures, chronic disease, metabolism, emerging technologies, and the microbiome, all the microorganisms that live in the human body.

"Understanding and mitigating environmental causes of diseases, such as asthma, heart disease, obesity, and cancer, offers the greatest opportunity to decrease disease burden," said Walker, who also serves as director of the Texas A&M Health Science Center Institute of Biosciences and Technology. "Unlike genetic causes of disease, environmental exposures are modifiable, and if detected early, present opportunities for intervention to prevent disease occurrence and transmission to the next generation."

Integrating existing resources into a team approach

The center represents a comprehensive team approach to addressing the more than one quarter of all deaths and disease, globally, that can be attributed to the environment. The top environmental health researchers, from each of the partners in CTEHR, bring expertise in a broad range of areas related to promoting human health. The research centers will also work with the Texas Medical Center in Houston, the largest medical center in the world with one of the highest densities of clinical facilities, anywhere, for patient care, basic science, and translational research.

In addition to exploring the connections between genetic traits and environmental health factors in humans, CTEHR researchers plan to call upon veterinary medical resources at TAMU, which houses the state's only veterinary college, to advance the TAMU [One Health Grand Challenge](#).

(<http://onehealth.tamu.edu/challenge>)

One Health refers to the link between animal, human, and environmental health. Animals and people share many diseases and are similarly affected by the environment.

A hallmark of the EHS Core Centers is their commitment to community engagement, which ensures that research findings can be translated into practical tools and resources for community residents, health care providers, public health practitioners, and policymakers. As part of these efforts, centers collaborate with community partners to identify and address community concerns, increase public awareness of the potential health risks of exposures, and inform decision-making to reduce environment-related disease.

"We are delighted to welcome the CTEHR team into the Environmental Health Sciences Core Centers program fold. Under the leadership of Dr. Walker, and with its discovery pipeline and state-of-the-art resources, we expect the center will build teams to address complex questions in health, and of concern to communities, both locally and nationally," said [Les Reinlib, Ph.D.](#), NIEHS EHS Core Centers program manager. "We are confident that the new center will enhance research and outreach on the



Walker came to TAMU three years ago from the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. She said the creation of CTEHR, as a hub for environmental health science research, was her priority from the beginning. (Photo courtesy of TAMU)



In addition to managing the EHS Core Centers grants, Reinlib is also the lead for the NIEHS [Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program](#). (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

interaction of genes with common exposures that may alter our risk for disease."

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(bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

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