

DURING BROWN'S 2023 COMMENCEMENT WEEKEND, PANDEMIC CENTER FACULTY (LEFT TO RIGHT) JENNIFER NUZZO, WILMOT JAMES AND BETH CAMERON DISCUSS THE CENTER'S WORK TO PREPARE FOR FUTURE INFECTIOUS DISEASE EMERGENCIES.

HEALTH COMMENCEMENT FORUM
**HEIGHTENED ALERT:
 SECURING THE WORLD FROM THE NEXT
 PUBLIC HEALTH CATASTROPHE**
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 LIST ART CENTER ROOM 120

Building Pandemic Resilience

By Debra Bradley Ruder '80

Brown's Pandemic Center is developing evidence, informing policymakers and educating new leaders to thwart pandemics and other public health catastrophes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed millions of lives, caused economic, educational, social and political upheaval, and deepened health inequities. While others may despair, scholars with the Pandemic Center at Brown University's School of Public Health (SPH) are helping the world prepare for the next massive public health crisis.

Launched in October 2022, the center and its powerhouse faculty are harnessing lessons from COVID-19 and other infectious disease outbreaks to help communities prevent, detect, respond to and recover from pandemic harms. With decades of research and policy experience in global health security and pandemic preparedness, center scholars also are training tomorrow's public health leaders. They're learning ways to

assemble the right teams, spot biological threats early, support vulnerable populations, counter misinformation and keep society functioning.

"Our center is committed to action," says founding director Jennifer Nuzzo, a professor of epidemiology at SPH. "We're generating and analyzing evidence to answer the most pressing questions: What resources do we need to react quickly? What are the true tolls of this pandemic? How do we do better next time?"

"Then, we are taking that evidence to decision-makers so this work can be translated into effective policies and practices," Nuzzo adds. "We need better, faster data to inform better, faster decision making."

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Identifying Solutions

Pandemic Center investigators are identifying and developing public health, medical and social best practices that can be broadly shared through tools ranging from policy playbooks to global preparedness models, biosecurity networks, fellowships and webinars. Capitalizing on Brown's collaborative culture, they're partnering with experts across the school and University — including SPH Dean Ashish Jha, former White House COVID-19 response coordinator — and with such institutions as Africa CDC, Gates Ventures, Nuclear Threat Initiative, CDC Foundation and Wellcome.

One global Pandemic Center initiative is examining how certain low- and middle-income countries successfully delivered essential health care services while addressing citizens' pandemic needs. Another is studying innovative early warning systems in Africa, Southeast Asia and South America that are integrating climate-related data into their infectious disease surveillance. The center is also supporting biosafety and biosecurity efforts across Africa.

Domestically, the center is co-leading an effort to seek bipartisan approaches for strengthening health security in the U.S., working with the COVID Collaborative, Center for Strategic and International Studies, National Academy for State Health Policy and others. They have convened dozens of national thought leaders and produced recommendations that include identifying flexible strategies to meet communities' unique needs rather than simply defaulting to more binary choices for school, business and societal closures that proved polarizing during COVID-19.

To that end, the Brown team is harvesting local COVID-19 experiences from experts in select states across the political divide, and it intends to create playbooks for decision-makers on ways to surge diagnostic testing, improve early detection and engage the private sector during health emergencies.

"We are looking for community-supported solutions that can be replicated," notes Beth Cameron, a center senior advisor and SPH professor of the practice.

Developing Pandemic Leaders

Another center goal is to educate a diverse cadre of next-generation pandemic decision-makers who can mobilize against natural, accidental or deliberate biological threats and focus on groups most likely to suffer harm, such as lower-income populations, according to Nuzzo.

The Pandemic Center opened a satellite office in Washington, D.C., to expand policy opportunities for students and faculty, and this fall it began offering Pandemic Game Changers, an undergraduate and graduate course that examines public health and national security issues vital for mitigating pandemic risks.



IN MAY 2020, BROWN STUDENT CESAR ORDUÑA '22 (RIGHT) BEGAN COORDINATING THE RHODE ISLAND FREE CLINIC'S COVID-19 TESTING SITE TO SERVE VULNERABLE RESIDENTS.

"One question is, how do you persuade citizens in a democracy to act for a common good during a health emergency?" says center senior advisor Wilmot James, a professor of the practice and former member of the South African Parliament who co-teaches Game Changers with Cameron.

"At the end of this course, we want our students to look at some really hard problems in pandemic preparedness and present options to a mock White House National Security Council," says Cameron, herself a former security council staffer. "We want to train future public health leaders to be critical thinkers in a crisis, and to act as quickly as possible."