Dillard University has been awarded a $25 million National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant to further expand its research infrastructure and initiatives regarding health disparities. The grant was formally announced on Oct. 24 in Dillard's Professional Schools and Sciences Building by Dr. John Ruffin, director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) of the NIH. The grant, which will be disbursed over a five-year period, will enable Dillard University to:

- Recruit between five and seven additional tenure-track faculty with research emphases in epidemiology, bioinformatics, clinical research and other related disciplines to participate in health disparities research.
- Expand its CORE (Capacity-Outreach-Research Endowment) health disparities program in the community and globally.
- Recruit and support talented, underrepresented students to engage in health disparities and

environmental research.

- Recruit an internationally recognized scholar/researcher as an endowed chair to engage in and expand cross-disciplinary research.

Dillard's president emerita, Dr. Marvalene Hughes, and a team of faculty and administrators began working on this initiative prior to her departure in June, and she is thrilled to see the project come to fruition. "This is a giant step for Dillard because it puts the university in a position of leadership in helping to address health inequities," said Dr. Hughes, the grant's principal investigator. "Not only will the university be able to grow its health and research programs, but the New Orleans community at large will significantly benefit as the city continues to expand its health and biomedical research infrastructure."

The grant will provide $5 million for each of the next five years to the university's research endowment. Earnings on the endowment funds will go to expand Dillard's research capacity and infrastructure.

"We are excited and honored to have been selected for one of these awards," said Dr. Lyons, Dillard's interim president. "This affords us the opportunity to continue to build our infrastructure and greatly advance our capacity to engage in high-end health and health disparities research. By making this an endowment grant, the NIMHD has made a very significant and long-term commitment to Dillard's efforts to address health inequities."

The award will have a major impact on Dillard's Schools of Nursing and Public Health and increase cross-disciplinary research between the Departments of STEM and Social Sciences, said Dillard provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, Dr. Phyllis Worthy Dawkins, who is the grant's other principal investigator. "What's so exciting about this award is that it not only strengthens and advances current research activity, but it will also facilitate the hiring of additional stellar research faculty, including an endowed chair and a number of endowed research professors," Dr. Dawkins said. "All of this dramatically advances undergraduate research by enabling us to recruit, support, and mentor additional students in health disparities and related research."

In 2010 and 2011 Dillard was also awarded $6.5 million and $5.6 million grants from the NIH for university centers in health disparities research and environmental health sciences. According to the grant agreement for this new award, funds will be invested and investment earnings will be utilized to carry out the grant objectives, including research facility upgrades.

“The $25 million award for this grant represents the largest single grant award to the university in its history, and is the result of the hard work of a number of faculty and administrators,” said Theodore Callier, Dillard’s assistant vice president for research and sponsored programs. “This is an extraordinary award for the university, and it represents a multimillion-dollar investment in the area’s economy over the life of the grant.”