Working group tackles public health and health inequality

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Public health and health inequality are embedded in complex systems, and public health officials stand to gain from a complex systems approach, according to co-organizers of a working group begin held this week at SFI.

"Complex systems approaches are still new in public health, and they're quite promising," says Ross Hammond, especially when it comes to understanding demographic disparities in health outcomes – for example, why physical activity varies so much as a function of age and race.

Hammond, a Brookings Institution senior fellow and SFI External Professor, is co-organizing the meeting with University of Michigan

professor emeritus George Kaplan.

The two-day gathering is the capstone meeting of the Network on Inequality, Complexity, and Health project, or NICH, a diverse collaboration of North American researchers from epidemiology, economics, computer science, human development, sociology, and other fields, co-founded by Kaplan.

NICH's diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity, Hammond says. While the team is still working on how to successfully communicate the value of complex systems to different audiences, ""or me what's coming out of NICH are new partnerships, new colleagues, and a more honed sense of where the interesting questions may lie," he says.

The invitation-only meeting is focused on finalizing a number of papers authored by NICH subteams, and on creating a final product summarizing NICH's work.

"We're trying to figure out how to have a lasting impact," Hammond says.

Provided by Santa Fe Institute

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