

New Baltimore-based health initiative aims to close disparities in research, treatment of brain disorders

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A Baltimore-based research institute that focuses on brain disorders has partnered with a prominent local African-American clergy group to

establish the nation's first research outfit aimed at closing long-standing racial disparities in research and in treatment, the groups announced recently.

The Lieber Institute for Brain Development, an independent nonprofit institute in Baltimore, is working with the African-American Clergy Medical Research Initiative, which advocates for equitable funding and representation in research.

Their African-American Neuroscience Research Initiative seeks to tackle a long-standing gap in [brain research](#) and research generally—minority groups are woefully underrepresented in basic research and trials involving humans, officials said. For [brain disorders](#) specifically, groups including African Americans make up less than 5 percent of research subjects.

This is despite some [genetic differences](#) based on race and ethnicity and research that shows higher rates of serious mental health problems and diseases including Alzheimer's among African-Americans than those of European ancestry, officials said.

"So far, personalized medicine has not really been for everyone," said Dr. Daniel R. Weinberger, director and CEO of the Lieber Institute, in a statement. "Through this initiative, we hope to build data sets about the brain that can be used by researchers globally, with the ultimate goal to develop new treatments for people of African ancestry."

Weinberger said the research will ultimately help all people, not just African Americans, because understanding genetic diversity will help scientists devise more customized therapies and improve the effectiveness of treatments.

Rev. Dr. Alvin C. Hathaway Sr., principal of the African-American

Clergy Medical Research Initiative, said diversity in research was overdue.

"My clergy colleagues and I have been studying the emerging science behind precision medicine and believe that this technology has potential for finding cures and treatments for diseases that uniquely affect African-Americans," said Hathaway, the senior pastor at Union Baptist Church in West Baltimore. "This revolution in medicine has largely left behind ethnic minority groups like African-Americans, and it is time to change this."

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