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Population health: A rapidly evolving discipline in US academic medicine

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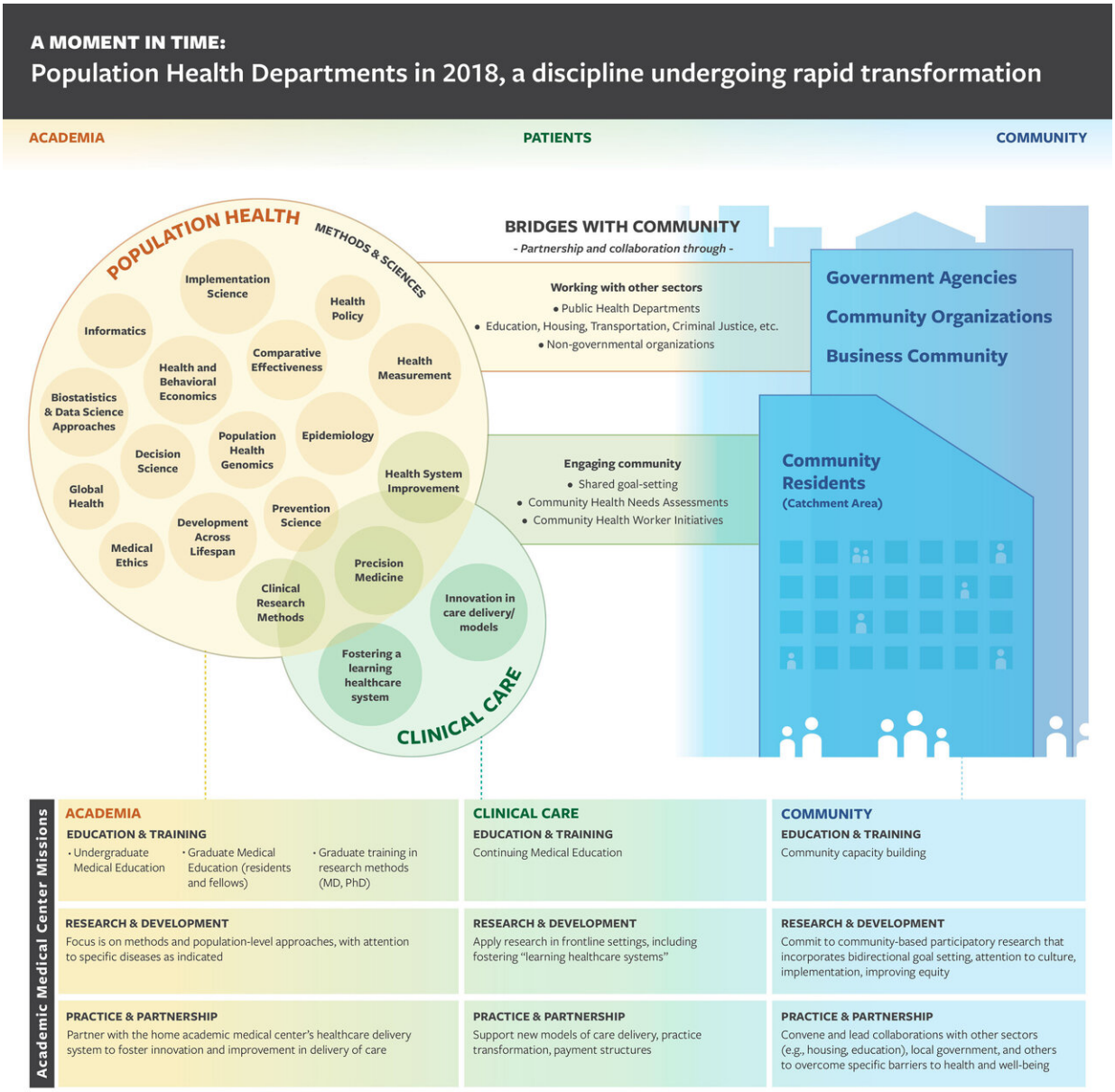

Population Health Departments are undergoing rapid transformation. Credit: Dell Medical School, Design Institute for Health

Leaders from department-level initiatives across the U.S. weigh in on how academic medicine is embracing population health and the opportunities med schools have to make an impact, according to a new analysis published in *JAMA Network Open*.

Produced by a working group of chairs from nine population-focused medical school departments, the qualitative study reviewed areas of focus, structure, faculty size, teaching programs and service engagement of existing population health departments within U.S. academic medical centers and medical school departments. According to the analysis, there are five primary opportunities for U.S. medical schools to advance population health:

1. Promoting a holistic view of health that includes both clinical and social determinants of health, well-being, disease and disability and the multidisciplinary and cross-sector interventions and policies required to address them, such as early childhood education, economic development and environmental protection. This would help extend the engagement of health care beyond its principal focus on sick care—diagnosis and treatment—to encompass both traditional and upstream approaches to prevention.

2. Engaging community residents and leaders as equal partners in health improvement, including generating ideas to overcome local barriers to progress. This requires information-sharing, mutual trust and respect, intensive listening and understanding the history of experiences each party brings to the conversation.

3. Supporting health care delivery systems in addressing high levels of social need, including those of high-cost patients, in part by facilitating engagement with community resources.

4. Reinvigorating institutional acceptance of a social justice mission as integral to health care delivery.

5. Training the next generation of scholars to solve the pressing challenges of improving population health advancing health equity.

More information: *JAMA Network Open* (2019). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.2200

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