Better communication, better health: Cronkite School launches new Health Communication Accelerator

The 3-year initiative will address health disparities by improving health communication

By Tracy Nicolle Lewis, ASU News
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The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has awarded Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication a three-year, $800,000 grant as part of a new program that will address health disparities through strategic communication.

The Health Communication Accelerator aims to drive better health outcomes through stronger communication. Uniting students, faculty experts, practitioners and community partners, the accelerator will develop, research and test messaging approaches, focusing on a different health challenge each year.

The school's award-winning Cronkite Agency will anchor the initiative, conducting audience research, launching pilot tests and producing practical tools for community partners while nurturing a growing body of evidence-based health communication knowledge.

The accelerator will address critical information gaps between health professionals and the communities they serve by creating an infrastructure that combines research, professional communication practice, community partnership and workforce development into one approach that organizations can use to inform and prepare families.

"Access to good health information is as essential to our communities' well-being as access to health care itself," said Jessica Pucci, senior associate dean of the Cronkite School. "Through the Health Communication Accelerator, we have a tremendous opportunity to prepare a new generation of professional communicators while generating the knowledge and strategies that will

help the field engage more effectively, advancing our charter commitment to enhance the overall health of the communities we serve."

"We are uniquely positioned and equipped to provide expertise, insights and training to address these challenges," said Battinto L. Batts Jr., dean of the Cronkite School. "We're honored that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation would entrust us with the resources to do so."

In addition, emerging health care professionals will benefit from the accelerator by using the tools created to navigate misinformation and cultural differences to shape how information is shared with communities.

Over time, the accelerator will serve as a national model for how universities can combine professional communication practices with interdisciplinary collaborations and community partnerships to address health disparities, while preparing future professionals to navigate complex public health communication challenges.

The initiative runs parallel to ASU Health, a groundbreaking movement transforming how health care is designed, delivered and measured while educating new health professionals.

The grant is part of ASU's Changing Futures campaign and advances two of its priorities: empowering community resilience and building the future of health. Through the Health Communication Accelerator, the university will strengthen community health communication, address health disparities and prepare future professionals to navigate complex public health challenges.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's support of health reporting and communication initiatives at the Cronkite School dates back to 2018. In 2022, the foundation awarded the school with a $1.3 million grant for the Southwest Health Reporting and Communications Initiative, which addressed health disparities in Hispanic and Indigenous communities with a dedicated reporting team in Cronkite News and a Spanish-language health campaigns team in the Cronkite Agency.

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Main image



The new Health Communication Accelerator aims to drive better health outcomes through stronger communication. The university's award-winning Cronkite Agency will anchor the initiative. ASU Cronkite School photo