Preface

DIONNE J. JONES, PHD
ARNOLD R. MILLS, MSW
HENRY L. FRANCIS, MD

In 2001, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in collaboration with the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities and the Office of Research on Women's Health of the National Institutes of Health held a workshop on health disparities among drug users in racial and ethnic populations. The workshop, entitled “Differential Drug Use, HIV/AIDS, and Related Health Outcomes Among Racial and Ethnic Populations: A Knowledge Assessment Workshop,” examined drug use, HIV/AIDS, and the social, medical, and health consequences of drug use within and across racial and ethnic minority populations. This supplement to Public Health Reports presents articles derived from the workshop. It reports results of research supported by NIDA, describes innovative programs being implemented, and synthesizes the current literature on various topics in the field.

The Knowledge Assessment Workshop was an outgrowth of NIDA's Health Disparities Strategic Plan. In 2000 each Institute and Center of the National Institutes of Health was asked to develop a strategic plan on health disparities. The goal of the strategic plan was to identify programs and activities that, when implemented over a five-year period, would eliminate differential health outcomes among racial and ethnic populations.

Since the early 1990s NIDA has been committed to filling significant gaps in knowledge about drug use by racial and ethnic minority groups and to addressing disparities in prevention and treatment. To help achieve these goals, in 1993 it established the Special Populations Office. Under the guidance of that office, Institute-wide initiatives and policies have been implemented that have increased support of research on the social, behavioral, and health needs of minority populations. NIDA has also established training programs to encourage minority scholars to pursue careers in drug abuse research.

Four objectives are set forth in NIDA’s strategic plan: (1) to improve understanding of the epidemiology and etiology of drug abuse and addiction in all racial and ethnic groups, recognizing the diversity by gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors within these populations; (2) to strengthen and expand the community and research infrastructure for conducting research within racial and ethnic populations; (3) to improve prevention and treatment for racial and ethnic groups at highest risk for addiction and for medical consequences of drug use and addiction; and (4) to widely disseminate information on drug use and addiction in racial and ethnic minority communities, describing best approaches to prevention and treatment.
Six research areas were identified as essential to achieving the plan's objectives: (1) epidemiology of drug abuse, health consequences, and infectious diseases among minority populations; (2) prevention of drug abuse and addiction; (3) approaches for addressing disparities in treatment and health services; (4) approaches for addressing racial and ethnic disparities in basic and clinical neurosciences; (5) development of a research infrastructure; and (6) public information and outreach.

The workshop, one of the first activities from the strategic plan to be implemented, brought to the forefront major issues in these six research areas. The research gaps identified during the workshop will help NIDA's program staff develop requests for applications, program announcements, and grant supplements.

The articles in this special issue of Public Health Reports reflect panel presentations at the workshop and address the four objectives of the workshop:

1. To assess current knowledge of disparate drug use and related social, medical, and health consequences within and across racial and ethnic populations.
2. To assess current knowledge and research gaps related to disparate acquisition and transmission of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases within and across racial and ethnic drug-using populations.
3. To identify and assess risk and protective factors and their influences on disparate drug-use patterns and related health disparities within and across racial and ethnic populations.
4. To delineate a research agenda for addressing research gaps on drug-related health disparities across racial and ethnic groups in epidemiology, etiology, prevention, treatment, and services research.

The workshop participants also addressed the objectives in small discussion groups. In addition, they were asked to identify research gaps and make recommendations for research priorities.