

logo not found or type unknown

New Dept. of Health-University of Miami Program Invites USVI Students to Join Fight Against Cardiovascular Disease

With over 40% of healthcare positions unfilled, the CREW fellowship offers USVI students immersive training in cardiovascular research, aiming to build a skilled local workforce to address the territory's urgent health challenges

Health / **Published On November 12, 2024 02:56 PM /**

Staff Consortium **November 12, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



Cohort 1 CREW students visit the UVI Medical Simulation Center on St. Croix with Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar, VI Dept. of Health Chief Medical Officer. By. VIDOH

The University of Miami-Miller School of Medicine, in collaboration with the V.I. Department of Health, has opened the application period for the second cohort of its Cardiovascular Research

Empowerment Workforce (CREW) fellowship program, DOH announced Tuesday.

The initiative, funded by a \$154,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, is intended to develop medical research skills in USVI students and encourage them to pursue careers in healthcare, with a particular focus on cardiovascular medicine. The fellowship aims to address critical health challenges and healthcare workforce shortages in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

CREW is open to U.S. Virgin Islands undergraduate students who were born or raised in the territory and have an interest in medicine, according to the health department. Students selected for the program will spend two weeks at the University of Miami (UM) to begin their research training before returning to the U.S. Virgin Islands to complete the fellowship. The application deadline for the program is January 31, 2025.

“We are encouraging USVI senior high school and undergraduate students in science or pre-med programs to participate in this eight-week immersive research training,” said Dr. Sonjia Kenya, a professor of general medicine and public health at UM’s Miller School of Medicine, who developed the CREW program. “This unique training program is designed to expose the territory’s students to cardiovascular research methodologies and to prepare and inspire them to pursue medical and research careers in cardiovascular medicine.”

The fellowship, which aims to address the territory's pressing cardiovascular health concerns, is particularly vital as the USVI faces some of the nation’s worst rates of cardiovascular outcomes, according to the release. These health challenges are compounded by a healthcare workforce shortage, with over 40 percent of local healthcare positions unfilled. The CREW program seeks to build local talent by embedding participants within the VIDOH, strengthening their ties to the territory’s healthcare system.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion highlighted the importance of this initiative in encouraging students to return and serve their communities after their education. “What we truly appreciate about this program is that it trains USVI undergraduates in cardiovascular research and then embeds them with the USVI Department of Health, so they develop a strong connection with the USVI healthcare infrastructure,” said Encarnacion. “We hope it’s a strong incentive to come back after college to work within the territory.”

The program’s inaugural cohort recently completed its training, which concluded with a research symposium featuring students’ presentations. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Tai Hunte-Cesar of the VIDOH praised the program’s mentorship component, stating, “Their research training included meeting with mentors at UM’s Miller School and here at the University of the Virgin Islands. We’re looking forward to accepting applications for the second cohort.”

The CREW fellowship is a cornerstone of the Navigating Home initiative, a collaborative project with the University of Miami, VIDOH, and the University of the Virgin Islands. This project is dedicated to supporting underrepresented groups in the geosciences, public health, and medical fields across U.S. territories. For more information on the CREW fellowship and other opportunities, interested applicants can visit the Navigating Home project website