

ATTENTION MEDIA

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University receives \$5 million gift to create program on water, climate and health

Donor wishes to raise awareness of the importance of public health

The University of Nebraska will receive a \$5 million gift to create a new program to address some of Nebraska's most pressing public health issues associated with water and climate.

The Water, Climate and Health program will be based in the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Public Health and brings together experts from the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska to conduct research and disseminate information on environmental issues related to water, climate and health.

Anne Hubbard, a retired physician, alumna of UNMC and member of the University of Nebraska Foundation Board of Directors, has made a \$5 million gift commitment to the University of Nebraska Foundation through her family's foundation, the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation, to create the program.

“Until the pandemic, public health did not get much publicity, and it is significantly underfunded,” Hubbard said. “The idea of public health is to prevent disease instead of just treat it. I decided to focus on water quality after learning more about diseases in Nebraska that may be related to water. The University of Nebraska is doing important work in water quality and climate change. Human health is significantly affected by our environment. As we make the disease-environment connection, are there things we can do about it?”

Dr. Hubbard said she was particularly interested in the university's ability to draw experts together from UNMC's College of Public Health, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, to address these issues.

The Water, Climate and Health program will work in three main capacities:

- Bring diverse university experts together to solve complex issues;
- Find technical and policy solutions to improve the environment for better human health; and
- Provide experiences for students studying these issues.

Research topics the program could address include:

- Links between the state's water quality and pediatric cancer and birth defects;
- Health outcomes related to Nebraska's flooding;
- The impact of technology, such as precision application of nitrogen fertilizer on soil and water quality; and
- Mapping of at-risk populations and environmental exposures in the state.

"These are all issues that affect people around the globe," Dr. Hubbard said.

"Dr. Hubbard's gift to the College of Public Health and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute is transformational in nature and will directly impact the health of people in the state, region and nationally," said Ali S. Khan, MD, MPH, Dean, UNMC College of Public Health. "Her gift will allow us to look at the spectrum of environmental issues at the nexus of water and health. All the way from what is happening in the environment that are the sources of our water to its health impacts on humans. We also will ensure we are sustainably looking at how water use occurs in our state and beyond."

Dr. Hubbard's gift not only provides program start-up funds but also will make possible a named professorship and support graduate and professional students who are conducting research in water, climate and health. The student support funds are being matched by a gift from the Robert B. Daugherty Foundation, which will allow more students to receive research stipends. The gift also is meant to fund outreach to Nebraska middle and high school students and educators, to engage them in issues of public health and the environment and inspire them to pursue a career in public health.

Mike Boehm, PhD, NU vice-president for agriculture and natural resources and IANR Harlan vice-chancellor at UNL, said the gift would help students build valuable, interdisciplinary relationships early in their careers.

"This gift makes it possible for students interested in public health to work alongside students studying water quality and climate and a host of other interrelated issues," Boehm said. "These students will be tomorrow's practitioners and leaders, and will begin their careers with a broad understanding of the interconnectedness of water, climate and health, along with deep connections to their peers across these fields. That's the true power of this gift."

Jesse Bell, Ph.D., an expert in public environmental health and environmental science, has been named as the director for the new program and will hold the Claire M. Hubbard Professorship of Water, Climate and Health. Dr. Bell is currently an associate professor of health environment in

the UNMC College of Public Health. With his appointment as the program director, Dr. Bell also will assume a leadership position within the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute.

“Water quality and its effect on public health is one of DWFI’s top five areas of focus,” said DWFI’s Executive Director, Peter G. McCornick. “We are very pleased to welcome Jesse Bell to our leadership team, as his expertise in connecting the effects of water quality and climate change on public health is a tremendous addition to our capabilities. Dr. Hubbard’s generous gift will foster collaboration and accelerate progress in ensuring health and quality of life under changing conditions here in Nebraska and beyond and achieving our mission of a water and food secure world.”

Dr. Hubbard encouraged other donors to [take advantage of the matching gift](#) offer from the Robert B. Daugherty Foundation, as she did, to provide more financial support for students interested in studying Nebraska’s water, climate and health. Matching funds are available through 2020.

Brian Hastings, president and CEO of the University of Nebraska Foundation, said, “Anne Hubbard cares deeply not only about Nebraska, its people and natural resources, but about our planet. Her gift will support scientific research that will lead to a healthier state for all of us to live, work and play.”

About Anne Hubbard

Anne M. Hubbard, MD, of Omaha is a graduate of the University of Nebraska Medical Center and a retired pediatric radiologist. She leads the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation, which was established by the estates of her late mother and father, Claire Watson Hubbard and Theodore Hubbard. Over the years the family has made gifts to UNMC, UNO and UNL, including generous support to Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park and the University of Nebraska State Museum.

About UNMC’s College of Public Health

The mission of the College of Public Health is to promote optimal health and well-being through robust education, research and service in collaboration with communities in Nebraska, across the country and around the world.

About UNL’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources

The Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources strives to provide food, fuel, feed and fiber to a growing world, in a way that is environmentally sustainable and provides quality-of-life for those engaged in agriculture. IANR innovation in research, teaching, and extension education places Nebraska on the leading edge of food production, environmental stewardship, human nutrition, business development and youth engagement.

About DWFI

The Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska (DWFI) was founded in 2010 to leverage the university’s expertise and extend it with strong state, national and international partnerships. Its mission is to have a lasting and significant impact on achieving more food security with less pressure on scarce water resources by conducting

scientific and policy research, using the research results to inform policy makers and sharing knowledge through education and communication.

About the University of Nebraska Foundation

The University of Nebraska Foundation grows relationships and resources that enable the university to change lives and save lives. It is ranked among the top 25 public U.S. universities for its endowed assets of \$1.7 billion. During the foundation's last fiscal year, more than 53,000 people and organizations gave \$320 million to aid the university and its affiliated organizations, with 99 percent of all assets restricted to a specific use. The University of Nebraska has been named to America's Favorite Charities by the Chronicle of Philanthropy for the last two years. More information is available at nufoundation.org.

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