

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

## MYRLIE EVERS-WILLIAMS LENDS NAME TO UMMC INSTITUTE BOLSTERING HEALTH EQUALITY

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JACKSON, Miss. – Myrlie Evers-Williams, widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers, helped dedicate the UMMC Myrlie Evers-Williams Institute for the Elimination of Health Disparities during a ceremony today at the Jackson Medical Mall Thad Cochran Center.

The launch of the institute represents a new partnership between the University of Mississippi Medical Center and the Jackson State University College of Liberal Arts, and signifies the renaming of the Mississippi Institute for the Improvement of Geographical Minority Health Disparities, created to close the gap between those who receive proper medical care and those who don't.

The revamped organization will focus on three main areas of concern in Mississippi: child health disparities, minority men's health and research training – issues that resonate with Evers-Williams, who spoke to a gathering of an estimated 130 people.

"I am so honored to lend my name to this wonderful, motivational group of programs we have here that will move Mississippi from the bottom of the list to the top," Evers-Williams said.

"If Mississippi is going to be a strong state in every way, we have to be healthy, too."

The three areas of focus were also chosen based on their capacity to dovetail with existing programs at UMMC and JSU, said Dr. Bettina Beech, executive director of the institute and UMMC associate vice chancellor for population health.

"For instance, UMMC has the only children's hospital in the state and deals with vulnerable children," said Beech, referring to the Blair E. Batson Hospital for Children.

"Jackson State will be a valuable partner in exploring the social determinants of health (education, income, employment, and geographic factors) that the health-care system was not traditionally designed to address.

Evers-Williams has a "passion" for children's health and men's health, said Beech, who introduced Evers-Williams as "one of the foremost civil rights figures of our time."

"The area of minority men's health has been overlooked in this country, for the most part," Beech said. "Our partnership with JSU will enable groups of faculty and students to make a real impact in these areas of research."

The institute will also collaborate with Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center's Maya Angelou Center for Health Equity, where Beech formerly served as co-director.

Housed in the Medical Mall, the institute also plans to team up with Alcorn State University – the alma mater of Medgar and Myrlie Evers – and the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute in Jackson, created to continue the legacy of Medgar Evers, who was assassinated June 12, 1963 in Jackson. The dedication was held the day after the 51st anniversary of his death.

"When I came back to Mississippi a year ago, I had no intention to stay," Evers-Williams said. "I wouldn't have thought it was possible to embrace the state. Anything is possible."

Naming the institute after Evers-Williams is a "historic milestone" in the growing relationship between the university and the Evers family, Beech said.

Evers-Williams, who delivered the commencement address at Ole Miss in May 2013, told the graduates, "I believe in you, in Mississippi, in America. May we find peaceful dialogue to deal with issues – not walk away from each other."

A Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at Alcorn State, Evers-Williams will be involved in the organization named for her, said Dr. Claude Brunson, UMMC senior advisor to the vice chancellor for external affairs.

"The institute focuses on improving the lives of Mississippians, especially those with limited access to health care," he said.

"It has tested strategies that maintain people's health and gets those out to the community to make a difference. That has been the life's work of Myrlie Evers-Williams, and we are thrilled to name the institute in her honor.

"Her international prominence will enable us to collaborate with other folks that we may not have had access to otherwise. Her name will provide us with some opportunities that we may not have had without her being an active part of its work."

Among those who spoke at today's dedication were U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson; state Sen. John Horhn, Jackson Mayor Tony Yarber; Dr. James Keeton, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs and dean of the School of Medicine; and Dr. Lawrence Potter Jr., dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Jackson State University.

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at (601) 984-1100 or click [here](#).