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University of Louisville Launches the First Envirome Institute with \$5M Gift

Louisville, KY – University of Louisville President Dr. Neeli Bendapudi today announced the university’s first multimillion dollar gift of her tenure to establish The Envirome Institute at the School of Medicine. The gift, \$5 million, from the Owsley Brown II Family Foundation, supports of the first institute dedicated to the study of the human envirome. Taking a holistic approach to researching how the human-environment interrelationship impacts peoples’ lives, the institute will build on the pioneering work of Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar, the institute’s director, in the field of environmental cardiology. The institute will incorporate community engagement and citizen science to introduce a singular, new approach to the study of health.

Twenty-five years ago, the Human Genome Project completed the first map of our genetic code, revealing how our genes relate to our health, and potentially our susceptibility to disease. Built on a new vision of health, the Envirome Institute pioneers actionable knowledge about all forms of health and how they are affected by the environment beyond genomics. This gift from Christina Lee Brown catalyzes existing resources and adds new capabilities toward the ambitious, long-term mission of studying the human envirome with the same precision and rigor applied to decoding the human genome.

“All of us at the University of Louisville are grateful to Christina Lee Brown for the trust she has put in us to tackle such a large and complex idea as how our broad environment impacts our lives,” said UofL President Neeli Bendapudi. “Her generosity will enable our group of researchers, staff and students to explore new concepts associated with exploring the elements of a single person’s overall environment and determine how that affects their lives. The impact this will have will be felt well beyond Louisville.”

“This isn’t just the University of Louisville’s Human Envirome Institute. It is Louisville’s Human Envirome Institute,” said Brown, “Each of us, individually, must put health, broadly understood, in the center of all of our public and private efforts. And we are encouraged by the will and determination of the new president, Neeli Bendapudi, to immediately step in and support the Institute’s efforts and importance to both the city of Louisville and the university.”

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity — the University of Louisville serves as the perfect home for this new unique, holistic, interdisciplinary, educational model. It is truly a world-class organization,” said Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar.

The institute will open a door to a healthier future in Louisville and across the globe. The research of Bhatnagar and colleagues has pioneered the field of environmental cardiology and begun to uncover the important influence of the environment on heart disease. The institute, by studying the relationship of our health to the natural and the social world around us, will amplify the potential of this broad and promising territory.

Humans live in complex, variable, and diverse environments that are fashioned by their unique mix of history, culture, and social organization. Until recently, we lacked the material and conceptual tools required for studying the health effects of the natural, social, cultural and economic dimensions of the human environment as a whole. As in the graphic circle below, health should be understood holistically as psychological, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, nutritional, economic, and environmental health.



This institute serves as a unifying capstone organization over several existing centers including the Diabetes and Obesity Center, the Superfund Center and the Tobacco Regulation and Addiction Center. Together these centers have successfully attracted over \$100 million in extramural funds over the last decade. This new interdisciplinary, connected Institute creates new potential to expand those resources significantly. Additionally, a Center for Healthy Air, Water and Soil will be established within the Envirome Institute to advance the work that the Louisville community began five years ago.

The Envirome Institute also introduces a more public science and opens a welcoming door for the residents of Louisville. Enviromics can involve the participation of whole communities in the process of data collection as well as in the benefits from health initiatives that may be free or subsidized. As part of a medical institution, the Institute is committed to healing and helping turn discovery into actionable change, with Louisville as a living, urban laboratory.

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About Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar, Ph.D., FAHA

The Smith Lucille Gibson Professor of Medicine at the University of Louisville, Bhatnagar is a senior member of the Institute of Molecular Cardiology and the Director of the Diabetes and Obesity Center at UofL. He also is co-Director of the American Heart Association Tobacco Research and Addiction Center.

Dr. Bhatnagar's work has led to the creation of the new field of environmental cardiology. His studies how pollution affects the heart and blood vessel and how exposure to polluted air affects the risk of obesity and diabetes. His research is supported by several grants from the National Institutes of Health.

About Christina Lee Brown, Activist & Philanthropist

Leading the nation in creating new ways to empower "citizen scientists" to reveal the connections between environmental health and human health. She believes passionately in the potential of faith communities to effect positive change by working together, at the same time celebrating their commonalities and differences.

Co-founding board member of the Berry Center who's missions is to perpetuate a **culture** that uses nature as the standard, that accepts no permanent damage to the ecosystem and that takes in consideration human health in local communities.

The Institute for Healthy Air, Water & Soil was initially founded by Christina Lee Brown in 2014. As the institute began to lean into its work, a bigger mission began to occur all around, attracting both local and national ambassadors.

The, now formerly, Institute for Healthy Air, Water & Soil's work will transition into the newly founded Center for Healthy Air, Water & Soil.