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## **Room to Grow Selected with Columbia University for New National Leadership Program to Build Culture of Health**

(New York, NY) As members of one of only 15 teams selected nationally, Room to Grow New York's Executive Director, Allyson Crawford, and Columbia University's Co-Director of the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at the Columbia Population Research Center, Dr. Christopher Wimer, join *Interdisciplinary Research Leaders (IRL)*, a new program led by the University of Minnesota with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Room to Grow and Columbia University will participate alongside other researchers and community leaders from across the country to collaborate and innovate to solve persistent challenges and advance a Culture of Health—one that places well-being at the center of every aspect of life.

As part of the program, Crawford and Wimer will partner with Dr. Helena Duch, child clinical psychologist and assistant professor of Population and Family Health at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, to launch a randomized controlled trial of Room to Grow, an innovative early childhood program that combines parenting education, material goods, and connections to community resources in order to promote the early health and development of children from birth to age three. Their research will evaluate early parent and child outcomes, with hopes of launching a larger demonstration project in the future.

"This [IRL] program gives our fellows the tools to make their work even more relevant and potent—and to bring new leadership skills and perspective back to their communities as well," says J. Michael Oakes, PhD, director of IRL and professor at the University of Minnesota. "We were overwhelmed by the commitment, diverse perspectives and innovative ideas in our applicant pool and are very excited to work with this first group to put research into action and create a lasting, on-the-ground impact."

"I'm honored to be part of this passionate group of changemakers addressing health disparities across the country," says Allyson Crawford, Executive Director of Room to Grow New York and IRL fellow. "The RWJF recognizes that social determinants of health and quality of life directly impact population level health outcomes, and they are breaking new ground with the IRL program by investing in early childhood projects to advance a Culture of Health. We're proud that Room to Grow and Columbia University will be a part of defining and implementing such solutions."

Additional partners providing training and coaching to fellows include: AcademyHealth, Allina Health, ISIAH and Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

**Interdisciplinary Research Leaders** is one of four new leadership development programs launched this year by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and represent a four-year, multimillion dollar investment. The programs join five existing leadership programs in advancing RWJF's legacy of supporting the development and diversity of leaders impacting health. [www.interdisciplinaryresearch-leaders.org](http://www.interdisciplinaryresearch-leaders.org)

**Room to Grow**'s mission is to enrich the lives of babies born into poverty throughout their critical first three years of development. This research-informed program model combines tailored, one-on-one in-person sessions with an expert clinical social worker every three months, plus ongoing communication by phone and email, provision of essential baby items, and connections to vital community resources. [www.roomtogrow.org](http://www.roomtogrow.org)

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