ECSU Committed to Breaking Down Stigma Related to COVID-19 and Testing

Not only is access to healthcare a challenge for racial and ethnic minority, rural, and socially vulnerable populations, but the social stigma triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak has also had an impact on these populations. The negative association related to the virus is discouraging individuals from getting tested.

With a $1 million grant from the N.C. Policy Collaborative at UNC-Chapel Hill, Elizabeth City State University plans to remove the stigma associated with COVID-19 and getting tested through education and access.

“The goal of the project is to enhance capacity and infrastructure to support COVID-19 response, recovery and resilience for racial and ethnic minority, socially vulnerable, and rural communities in northeastern North Carolina,” said Dr. Kuldeep Rawat, dean of the School of Science, Aviation, Health and Technology, and project lead.

Emerging data suggest that racial and ethnic minority populations bear a disproportionate burden of illness and death from COVID-19. These vulnerable groups also live in areas that are further from medical facilities or where medical facilities are under-resourced.

ECSU will mitigate these issues by holding educational and testing events throughout northeastern North Carolina. ECSU has hosted its first testing event in Pasquotank County and is planning education and testing events in the surrounding 21-county service area. Additional events in Pasquotank County will also be planned.

“These events will be focused on dispelling the myths about getting tested for COVID-19,” said Dr. Anthony Emekalam, chairperson of the department of health and human studies, and the project’s community outreach coordinator. “We will be providing education as well as testing at these events.”

ECSU is hosting its first campus testing event for faculty and staff on Thursday, Oct. 29 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. This will be a drive-up event at the front of the Fine Arts Center. There will be students directing the flow of traffic for testing. Employees can register for the event here.

ECSU testing is unique in that it allows individuals to self-administer the test after receiving thorough instructions. This makes the test less uncomfortable and safe. All collected samples are then returned to the lab where trained graduate students will test them.

Community members interested in being tested can register here. Individuals also should check the grant webpage for updates on education and testing events.

By Michelle Ball