CCPH Member Dr. Angela Ford is the Associate Director of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Minority Health (CMH) and the Director of the Research Center of Excellence Community Engagement and Research Core. With a team of dedicated staff, CMH provides the infrastructure among the University of Pittsburgh Schools of Health Sciences for addressing health issues among ethnic and racial minorities. In this interview, Angela shares her belief that to build and sustain authentic partnerships, it takes a team of people dedicated to developing trusting relationships and a foundation of credibility both on the inside and out.

1. Briefly, what is the mission of your organization/partnership? What do you most want people to know about your organization/partnership and the work that you do?

The vision of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Minority Health is to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health. Established in 1994 - in the Graduate School of Public Health - with a generous grant from the R.K. Mellon Foundation, the Center for Minority Health is committed to translating evidence-based research into community-based interventions and innovative outreach practices. The CMH provides the infrastructure, among the University of Pittsburgh Schools of Health Sciences, for addressing health issues among ethnic and racial minorities and other vulnerable and underserved populations. Dr. Stephen B. Thomas is the Principal Investigator of our NIH designated Center of Excellence in Research on Minority Health Disparities, the Director of the Center for Minority Health, and the Philip Hallen Professor of Community Health and Social Justice.

I am the Associate Director of the Center and also the Director of our Research Center of Excellence Community Engagement and Research Core. The Core includes our community initiatives: including our Community Research Advisory Board (CRAB), Health Advocates In Reach (HAIR), Health Disparity Working Groups, Healthy Class of 2010 and our Healthy Black Family Project. The Center also houses the Atlantic Regional branch of the NCI Cancer Information Services, which is a part of the Core as well. The Core also provides on-going support to our research partners.

What I most want people to know is that we have a committed team of staff members who have made significant contributions to the success of the Center's community engagement, partnerships and national reputation. I especially want to highlight our staff that provides leadership on our community engagement initiatives as Project Directors: Karen Reddick, Mario Browne, Victoria Garner, Lora Ann Bray, and Dr. Anthony Robins and our Graphic Artist, Tatiana Maxenkova.

2. What are you most passionate about in your work?
I am most passionate about the authentic relationships we have built, the commitment and talents of the Center’s faculty and staff and the relationships they have built with our community and media partners.

I am also passionate about our Healthy Black Family Project and the spirit and philosophy in which our health coaches (Chris Howard, Felicia Savage, Verna Vaughn, Lilon Rose, and Francisca Amatekpor) provide interventions, motivation and support to assist the HBFP members in changing lifestyle behaviors to improve health. And, I am passionate about our administrative support team (Beth Marchal, Rosalie Jones, Angela Hicks, Angela Howze), our project assistant (Tiffany Kinney), our project coordinator (Veronica Sansing), and our HBFP data manager (Staci Green) who are the backbone of our work.

Photo: 2085 - Take A Health Professional to the People Day (The HAIR Project) Dr. Ford with the owner of Hamms Barbershop, GSPH Dean - Dr Donald Burke (white hair) and visitors from the Mayo Clinic.

3. What is the biggest challenge you face in your work? How are you working to overcome it?

The biggest challenge we face as an organization is our ability to sustain our community-based programs; however, we believe our program outcomes will speak for themselves and local funders and health providers will take full advantage of continuing our partnerships.

The biggest challenge I face as a supervisor is ensuring that our staff - who are not as visible on a national level - get the recognition they deserve for the hard work they do.

4. What wisdom, tips or lessons learned in your work would you like to communicate to fellow CCPH members?

Trusting relationships and credibility provide the foundation for successful community partnerships. However, relationships and trustworthiness can take years to build and require the commitment and work of not only leadership but the entire team. Keeping your word and showing humility are key elements necessary in building trusting and credible relationships. It takes a team to do the work and fulfill any mission. Therefore, building trusting relationships on the 'inside' is just as critical.

5. What is your dream for the future of your organization/partnership?

My dream is that the Center for Minority Health continues to grow and contribute to building local community capacity; that we continue to share our wisdom and experience in order to
replicate our community initiatives on a national level; and that our team is rewarded for their hard work and commitment to excellence.

6. What does "community-campus partnership" mean to you?
It means we all have an opportunity to repair some historical damage, experiences and perceptions that communities have related to universities; and for universities to experience and perceive communities full of strengths and as the great resource they are.

7. If you could give advice to a policy maker (e.g. a Legislator, President, Prime Minister, etc.) what would you say?
Everyone has a right to and must have access to quality and affordable health care!!!!!!

8. Why did you join CCPH?
I am most interested in the CCPH emphasis on building 'authentic' partnerships.

9. What strengths and talents do you bring to CCPH?
My two core values:
1. We are the people we serve; and
2. In the words of Gandhi, we must be the change we want to see in the world.

10. What is your greatest hope for CCPH going forward?
My response is related less to what CCPH can do or achieve, but more related to how others can take advantage of CCPH.
I would like for community members, as well as staff of organizations such as the Center for Minority Health, to be able to fully participate in the learning opportunities offered by CCPH and that their ability to fully participate in not dependent on their budget and fiscal resources. This would mean memberships would be paid for the organization and its employees through some funding source so their participation is guaranteed.