



RUTGERS

The Rutgers Addiction Research Center (RARC)

A Proposed Roadmap to Establish Rutgers as a Premier,
Nationally-Recognized Center for Addictions Research*

**a starting point for discussion – open for input!*

January 21, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to join you, and honored to have the opportunity to lead the Rutgers Addiction Research Center (RARC). As an initiative of the Brain Health Institute, a pan-Rutgers enterprise, the RARC aspires to link addiction research across all Rutgers entities. I want to work closely with all of you to build the RARC through a collaborative and inclusive process, toward a shared vision of Rutgers as one of the premier places in the world for addiction research.

In this document, I have laid out my initial ideas for building out the research center. I know that I have much to learn from you. This document is intended as a starting point for discussion. I want to know what you like, what you don't like, what I'm missing.

To that end, I will be holding a series of Town Hall meetings to get your feedback and ideas for the RARC. I hope you can attend one:

Tuesday, Feb 8th: 12 Noon to 1.30 PM

(<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/92076789578?pwd=aFV0SmIzbTJaOGZqc3M4RWxDOTVvQT09> ; Meeting ID: **920 7678 9578**; Password: **444150**; Phone: +1 646-558-8656 US (New York))

Thursday, Feb 10th: 3 PM to 4.30 PM

(<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/96336419403?pwd=MUg4cUMvU0VrN29GMjZHSHE2Mjk1QT09>; Meeting ID: **963 3641 9403**; Password: **488507**; Phone: +1 646-558-8656 US (New York))

Monday, Feb 14th: 9 AM to 10.30 AM

(<https://rutgers.zoom.us/j/93534094126?pwd=UU1odVlXcUfKUIXxdHNOem1waTVZQT09>; Meeting ID: **935 3409 4126**; Password: **834520**; Phone: +1 646-558-8656 US (New York))

In addition, there is a link at the end of this document to a survey where you can anonymously provide feedback.

I would also welcome the opportunity to meet individually with anyone who is interested. I would love to learn more about your research, your ideas for the RARC, your experiences at Rutgers, or anything else you'd like to discuss! Please reach out to me at danielle.m.dick@rutgers.edu if you'd like to set up a one-on-one meeting.

Finally, I want to tell you again how grateful I am to join your faculty. Thank you for being so welcoming throughout my interview process. Rutgers is already an amazing place for addiction research, and I am excited to work with you to showcase and expand on the impressive work that is already underway.

Warmly,



Danielle M. Dick, Ph.D.
Greg Brown Endowed Chair of Neuroscience
Founding Director, The Rutgers Addiction Research Center

Initial Goals for the RARC

1. Strategically assemble on-going addiction research in a way that coherently tells our story, showcases our breadth of expertise, and allows us to build upon strengths and identify areas for growth
2. Grow collaborative and interdisciplinary addiction research, and associated training programs, across the translational spectrum
3. Create a supportive and vibrant interdisciplinary community of addiction researchers
4. Develop outreach initiatives aimed at translating research findings to the community
5. Create a transparent, inclusive, and data-driven approach for growth of the RARC

Vision: The RARC will improve human lives by

- advancing scientific understanding of addiction through multi-disciplinary research
- translating basic research into more tailored and effective prevention, intervention, treatment, and policy
- training and diversifying the next generation of researchers
- enhancing public literacy and decreasing stigma surrounding addiction by bringing research to the public in engaging and empowering ways

Action Items

Note: Action items represent concrete steps intended to support the goals listed above. They are numbered to facilitate discussion, not necessarily in terms of order of importance or timing. Many of these items will be advanced simultaneously.

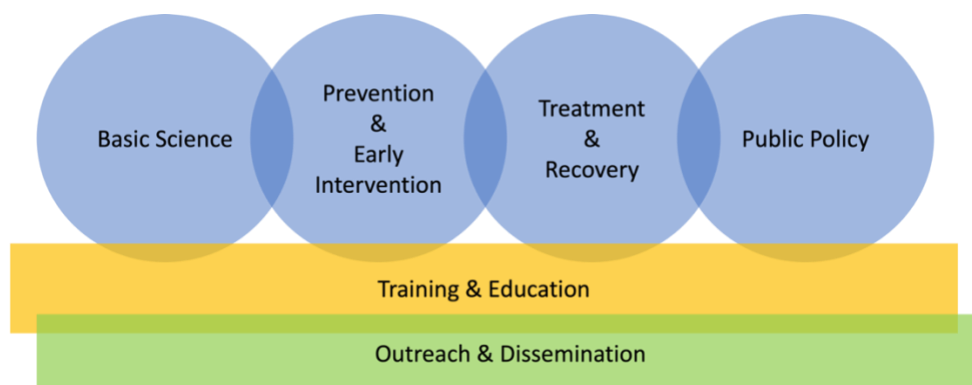
Action item 1: Create an organizational structure for the RARC that captures the breadth of existing addictions research and provides a roadmap for growth.

Background & Rationale: Rutgers has a tremendous amount of addiction research already on-going. We are poised for growth. But the university is large and extends across multiple campuses and medical centers. A theme that repeatedly emerged during my interviews was that it was challenging to traverse the many pockets of addiction researchers across the university.

My goal is to create an organizational structure to showcase addiction research across the translational spectrum, that allows everyone to recognize how they fit into the RARC. We need to be able to effectively communicate all that Rutgers has to offer in terms of addiction research in a coherent and manageable fashion.

Creating a coherent organizational structure will serve multiple purposes: to help faculty and trainees identify how their program of research fits within the broader addiction research landscape at Rutgers; to identify potential collaborators; to form the foundation for new interdisciplinary projects and grants; to support faculty and trainee recruitment by enabling them to appreciate the breadth of addiction research at the university.

Proposal: In line with the [Addiction Research Center prospectus](#), I suggest the RARC is organized across four domains: (1) Basic Science, (2) Prevention & Early Intervention, (3) Treatment & Recovery, and (4) Public Policy. Two additional areas span all four domains: Training & Education, and Outreach & Dissemination.



Within each domain we will organize on-going research activities, faculty, and trainees. Domains can be further sub-divided for organizational purposes as needed.

All faculty who wish to be associated with the RARC will be asked to identify the domain(s) that their work covers, and list research interests and on-going projects in that area. In addition, we will take stock of existing teaching, training, and outreach activities. A wide selection of training and education programs appear to be available at Rutgers; however, currently they are not consolidated in a way that is easy for interested applicants to find based on their training level (pre-doc, postdoc, physician, CE, etc). By consolidating and organizing both research and training programs available across the university, the RARC will be a central hub to showcase addiction research at the university, and allow us to identify areas for growth.

Action Item 2: Appoint Associate Directors for each of the four domains of the RARC

I plan to appoint Associate Directors to lead each of the four domains of the RARC (Basic Science, Prevention/Intervention, Treatment/Recovery, Public Policy). Associate Directors will work with faculty in their area to collate information about existing faculty research, grants, seminars, and other training programs, and to identify priority areas for further development, to include opportunities for grants, faculty recruitments, training programs, etc. If you are interested in serving as an Associate Director and working with me to build out the RARC, please [email me!](#)

Action Item 3: Create the RARC website.

Once we have collated the information above, we will work with a website design company to create a website for the RARC. Since we are a virtual rather than physical institute (i.e., not housed together in a single building), the website will serve as the “home” for the RARC, with news, information, grants, research findings, activities, seminars, etc. regularly updated. Having a consistently updated and vibrant website for all addiction-related activities across the university will also help address the challenge many faculty raised during my interviews with learning about all the addiction-related activities offered by various groups.

Action item 4: Create a listserv for RARC faculty to facilitate communication and exchange of information

This will serve as a central mechanism to announce funding announcements, pilot grants, seminars, faculty/trainee recruitments and opportunities, outreach initiatives, new grants and research findings, etc. It will be a mechanism for anyone interested in addiction research to stay up-to-date on all things addiction-related across Rutgers.

Action Item 5: Compile centralized funding alerts and host workshops to discuss collaborative grant opportunities.

We have started compiling funding announcements related to addictions research (and please send any you come across our way too!). We will keep this information continuously updated, distributed, and centrally accessible. Additionally, we will host

workshops surrounding funding opportunities and/or grant ideas for faculty who are interested in potentially participating. These will be brainstorming sessions with the intention of leading to grant submissions. Obtaining center grant funding will be a center priority. Appendix 2 contains ideas for themes that could be developed into center applications, presented as part of my vision presentation in summer 2021. Note that these are just initial ideas based on my review of extant faculty expertise/research areas as listed on published websites.

Action Item 6: Launch the “Ask Anything” Addiction seminar series

This seminar series would be intended to build a sense of community among Rutgers addiction researchers who work across different areas. The intention is not to duplicate or replace any existing seminars; however, often seminar series tend to focus on a subgroup of researchers working in a particular area (e.g., researchers who focus on neuroscience or genetics or cognition). These opportunities to interact with researchers in one’s field are clearly critical, but they do not always serve as mechanisms to promote cross-disciplinary collaboration because individual fields tend to be highly specialized and technical. The Ask Anything Addiction Seminar Series would consist of short presentations by addiction researchers across the university, that are intended to introduce their area of research to scientists who work in different areas. In this way, they are high-level, free of jargon, and focus on the big picture. The goal of the seminar series is to allow researchers to better understand the scope of research across the university and identify areas for collaboration. We could also explore the possibility of building a parallel seminar series for the public and/or recording these talks for distribution through outward facing channels and activities. This would be facilitated by Action Item 10: hire a communications coordinator.

Action item 7: Initiate a pilot grant program to promote new interdisciplinary collaborations and stimulate new grant applications.

The pilot program will be modeled after the program previously administered by the BHI. My plan is to launch the pilot program after Action Item 1 is complete. In that way, we will first take stock of existing research, make that information available to all faculty, and then identify strategic priorities to seed for future growth.

Action Item 8: Assess diversity, equity, and inclusion, as related to the RARC and associated initiatives

Addictive disorders affect all of us. Ensuring that everyone benefits from advances in science is an ethical imperative. This necessitates having a diverse and inclusive community of researchers driving the field forward. My goal is for the RARC to be a place where budding scientists have diverse role models and mentors, our training programs are intentional about creating a diverse future workforce of researchers and practitioners, our research portfolio includes projects that address health and social disparities related to addiction, and our outreach efforts engage diverse communities. To that end, I would like to form a workgroup to assess how we can address diversity,

equity, and inclusion in the RARC - to identify areas of strength, and areas for growth. If you are interested in working with me on this initiative, please [let me know](#).

Action Item 9: Hire new faculty to further grow addiction research at the university

The RARC will be recruiting multiple faculty to further expand addiction research at the university. The plan is to post open-rank job advertisements that explicitly reference all four of the RARC domains, with the hope of building out faculty with additional expertise across the translational spectrum.

Action Item 10: Hire a communications coordinator

The communications coordinator will work with RARC leadership and faculty, as well as the central university media office, to facilitate both internal and external communications about RARC activities and research findings. The communications coordinator will work with RARC faculty to spotlight new grants and research findings, keep the RARC website up to date, and translate research findings for social and traditional media via infographics, blogs, stories, and public outreach. These activities will be critical to “tell our story”, both internally and externally. It will also help us build relationships with the broader community to ensure a pipeline for our research to reach the public, and to help support philanthropic endeavors. Additionally, the NIH is increasingly recognizing the importance of outreach and translation of research findings to the public, and this is an explicit requirement for NSF grants; accordingly, the communications coordinator will also support grant initiatives in this way as well (support for this position can be written into grant applications). The communications coordinator will work with the Director on regular newsletters and an annual report.

Action Item 11: Build opportunities for philanthropic giving to the center

I plan to work with the Rutgers development office to explore and formulate a plan for developing philanthropic support for the center. My hope is that progress on organizing the RARC, telling our story, and associated outreach activities, will facilitate building these community connections. The communication coordinator will also assist with these efforts.

Action item 12: Develop measurable goals to assess RARC growth, and provide regular updates on progress, to include an annual report made available to all faculty.

Annual goals for the RARC will be developed in collaboration with BHI and other university leadership, as well as RARC faculty, and these priorities will be communicated to RARC faculty and listed on the website. Progress toward goals will be reported annually. Metrics to be tracked may include: grants submitted/funded by RARC faculty; Rutgers ranking with respect to NIDA/NIAAA funding (see Appendix 1); faculty

recruitment, mentoring, and development activities; training programs/trainees supported by Center activities; seminars and workshops offered by the Center and associated faculty/trainee participation; outreach activities; initiatives related to promoting diversity, equity and participation in the Center by individuals from traditionally under-represented backgrounds; philanthropic development activities; and other Center development activities. Feedback from the Town Hall meetings and Feedback Survey will be used to set priorities for the first year of the center.

Other Items for Discussion:

- “Addiction” is a broad term, referring to different substances of abuse, gambling, compulsive overeating, sex, use of technology, etc. In taking stock of existing research across the four domains, we will want to evaluate the scope of our addictions research and incorporate that information into discussions about strategic growth. Are there areas that we want to prioritize for growth? How do we balance depth versus breadth of expertise across the Center?
- How can the RARC help you take your work to the next level? Are there shared resources that would be useful, e.g., biobanks, a clinical research registry, etc.?

Thank you for reviewing the RARC Roadmap.

Click [HERE](#) to provide your feedback.

Appendix 1: Current Rutgers Addiction Research Grant Funding

In order to assess future growth, we must start by benchmarking where substance use research at Rutgers stands today.

While grant funding is not the only or best measure of impact, it does give an idea of the breadth and vitality of a research program. Grant funding also generates money through indirect funds to promote future growth, and is generally an important metric utilized by university leadership to assess growth.

The table below combines data on grant funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and National Institute Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) from 2021. This does not fully capture all the addictions research on-going at Rutgers University (e.g., as funded by other institutes and foundation grants), but it provides a useful benchmark of where Rutgers stands in terms of ranking. I provide corresponding grant numbers for two reference points:

Combined NIDA and NIAAA funding from fiscal year 2021 (tabulated in January 2022):

	<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Funding</i>
• Rutgers:	#32	\$12.4 million
• VCU:	#15	\$24.1 million (top 10 - \$29.6 million)
• Yale:	#1	\$82.7 million (#2 UCSD, \$57.4 million)

Institution	Center	T32s	Rs	Ks	Fs
Rutgers	0	1	23	6	2
VCU	3	1	27	5	13
Yale	6	4	67	20	3

Assessment: we are poised for growth! Center grant funding plays a major role in rankings, and should be a priority.

Appendix 2: Possible Themes for Building Center Grants

Some possible areas for Center grant funding that build upon existing strengths and on-going work at Rutgers:

- **Translational Precision Medicine** – using findings from neuroscience/genetics to develop tailored prevention/intervention/treatment; research to advance novel technologies to therapeutics
- **Substance Use and Health** – physiological, metabolic, and physical consequences and correlates of substance use
- **Developmental Effects** – characterizing risk and resilience across the lifespan, through both human studies and animal models
- **Substance Use and Co-Morbidity** – studying connections between substance use and other mental health conditions, e.g., depression, PTSD, psychoses, etc.
- **Addiction and Health Disparities** – community engaged research aimed at addressing substance use in underserved populations
- **Special Populations** – Take advantage of the unique structure of Rutgers to conduct research in incarcerated populations and the juvenile justice system, college students and emerging adults, or veterans
- **Other forms of addiction** – Center(s) focused on gambling, social media/internet gaming, other non-drug related addictive behaviors

These focal areas align with the strategic plans for both [NIDA](#) and [NIAAA](#).

NIDA	NIAAA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Goal 1</u>: Understand Drug Use, Behavior, and the Brain (neuroscience, individual & population strategies across lifespan) • <u>Goal 2</u>: Novel Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery Strategies (opioid, stimulant, cannabis, vaping) • <u>Goal 3</u>: Implement Evidence-Based Strategies in Real-World Settings (integrate prevention, treatment, recovery into general medical care, justice systems) • <u>Cross-cutting topics</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health disparities • Stigma • Sex/Gender differences • Co-occurring conditions • Big data/new technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Goal 1</u>: Biological, social, environmental, and behavioral causes/consequences of alcohol • <u>Goal 2</u>: Prevent and reduce alcohol misuse & associated harms, health consequences • <u>Goal 3</u>: Advance diagnosis, treatment, & recovery • <u>Cross-cutting themes</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health disparities, increase diversity • Lifespan approach • Co-occurring conditions • Collaborative science • Individual differences/precision medicine • Use of data science approaches, innovative technologies