



## **MEDIA ADVISORY: PVAMU, TAMUS, AND CITY OF HOUSTON LAUNCH “HEALTHY HOUSTON INITIATIVE”**

*PVAMU will deliver health, wealth, and nutrition services to underserved Houston populations.*

**HOUSTON** (October 14, 2020) – Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU) will soon expand its expertise, services, and training in Houston. In a joint news conference on Monday from Houston City Hall, City of Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) John Sharp, and PVAMU President Ruth J. Simmons announced a partnership called the **Healthy Houston Initiative** (HHI). This effort will counter health disparities and food insecurities in ten deserving communities

Mayor Turner has empowered the City of Houston Complete Communities—an office he created in 2017 focused on improving and revitalizing underserved neighborhoods—to select the communities to benefit from the services PVAMU.

“By investing in these communities, we are investing in people; we are investing in families: we are investing in children,” Mayor Turner said. “It does make a difference. The uniqueness of today coming from the Texas A&M System and Prairie View [A&M] is that Dr. Simmons is an example that when you do invest—you can come from these communities—and [you can] be the head of Brown University—now the president of Prairie View [A&M] and be right here today. I cannot underscore the importance of the contribution that the Texas A&M University System, as well as the university, is making.”

TAMUS Chancellor John Sharp assured Mayor Turner, Houston City Council members, and Harris County Commissioners in attendance that The System would work with PVAMU to address the pockets of poverty in certain neighborhoods and deliver needed services to individuals deserving of access to quality food and preventive healthcare.

“It’s bringing all the resources of Prairie View’s land-grant mission and The System’s land-grant mission to all of the people in these communities. Just like our work in South Texas, this is going to be a transformative event.”

HHI’s mission hits home for PVAMU President Simmons, who is proud to partner with empathetic civic leaders in her hometown.

“I want to express our gratitude for the manner in which the mayor advocates ceaselessly for the neediest communities in Houston. Having grown up in Fifth Ward, I know firsthand how meaningful it is for the mayor of the city to include these communities in his mandate,” shared President Simmons. “In our first year, we’re going to focus on Third Ward, Haverstock, and Acres Homes. Residents in these and other areas deserve better physical, mental, and financial help. And that is what this program is all about.”

Gerard D’Souza, Ph.D., dean of PVAMU’s College of Agriculture & Human Sciences, says HHI will take a holistic approach to help individuals and communities heal and develop.

“Recent events such as COVID have heightened awareness of health disparities and reinforced the important link between food and health and how agricultural colleges—such as ours—can play a role in research, discovery, and dissemination toward more healthy outcomes,” Dean D’Souza explained. “The Healthy Houston Initiative is about taking the university to the people, which is consistent with our land-grant mission. HHI is about harnessing the interconnectedness among food, nutrition, and wellness for better health outcomes. It is in this spirit that we are delighted to be of service to the communities of Houston that many of us call home.”

With a \$750,000 grant awarded by The Texas A&M University System, PVAMU professors, researchers, and practitioners from the Colleges of Agriculture and Human Sciences, Nursing, Juvenile Justice and Psychology, and Business will bring training and programming to targeted communities to help individuals begin to lead healthier lives.

**HHI will deliver services in four areas:**

- **Finances** – The College of Business will offer life skills and training in financial literacy and workforce development to strengthen families through programs like the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. This program includes free tax preparation and financial planning assistance.
- **Food Insecurity** – The College of Agriculture and Human Sciences will provide food demonstrations via their mobile kitchen and education on developing and maintaining urban gardens/farms.
- **Public health** - provide self-care practices such as screenings, assessments, and referrals for various common conditions through the College of Nursing.
- **Mental Health and Wellness** –Through efforts like PVAMU-Haverstock Venture, the College of Juvenile Justice and Psychology will offer short-term counseling services to support families and individuals. The educational programming and psychological assessments being offered to residents will have a goal to improve mental health awareness and access to services.

**The City of Houston has selected the following ten communities for the HHI launch:**

- **Alief-Westwood**
- **Acres Homes**
- **Fort Bend**
- **Gulfton**
- **Kashmere Gardens**
- **Magnolia Park-Manchester**
- **Near Northside**
- **Second Ward**
- **Sunnyside**
- **Third Ward**



(Left to right: PVAMU President Ruth J. Simmons, Mayor Sylvester Turner, and TAMUS Chancellor John Sharp.)

If you missed Monday's news conference, you can watch it in its entirety on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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About Prairie View A&M University: Designated an institution of "the first class" in the Texas Constitution, Prairie View A&M University is the second-oldest public institution of higher education in the state. With an established reputation for producing engineers, nurses, and educators, PVAMU offers baccalaureate degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral degree programs through eight colleges and schools. A member of The Texas A&M University System, the university is dedicated to fulfilling its land-grant mission of achieving excellence in teaching, research, and service. For more information regarding PVAMU, visit [www.pvamu.edu](http://www.pvamu.edu).

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