



## Inspiring Leadership: Leonard Jack, PhD

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Leonard Jack, PhD, attending the 5th Annual Health Disparities Conference sponsored by the Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy in March 2012. *Photo courtesy of 1 Joshua Group.*

Leonard Jack, Jr., PhD, MSc, grew up in south Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where chronic health conditions were common in his family and community. Early on, he recognized the connection between poor health and community

factors like access to quality health care and education. Ultimately, he pursued a career that put him in a position to do something about them.

That career spans 40 years in public health, 25 of them in the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) in roles promoting community health, leading a peer-reviewed journal, and mentoring the next generation of public health professionals.

For this work, in March, Jack was sworn in as president of the [Society for Public Health Education](#) (SOPHE) and received the prestigious SOPHE Trophy for dedication and exemplary service in advancing the mission and vision of SOPHE. The SOPHE Trophy is one of many awards he has received from the organization. In 2011, he also received SOPHE's highest honor, the Distinguished Fellow Award, which recognizes significant and lasting contributions to health education, health promotion, and behavioral sciences.

"I've become the public health professional that I am as a result of working in this center," said Jack, who is editor-in-chief of [Preventing Chronic Disease](#) (PCD). "I've had an opportunity to work with some of the most respected individuals in their content area and individuals at the highest level of center leadership. Being able to learn and work closely with those individuals has really shaped me."

### **The mentor "blueprint"**

Throughout his academic and professional journey, Jack gained support and valuable insights from mentors. But his first mentor, whom he described as the "blueprint" for all others, was his mother.

"Watching how she navigated the world around her helped me understand the value of community and makes me bold," he said. "I often refer to her as my mom-warrior — she was my mom, but she also fought for me."

Today, Jack prioritizes mentoring students and colleagues, and he's also creating opportunities for students across the country to learn and grow. Last year, under his leadership, *PCD* established a scientific writing

committee of 17 students, high school to postgraduate, who received training and experience in a range of areas, including:

- Quantitative and qualitative research.
- Critique and review of publications.
- Effective scientific writing skills.
- The peer-review process.
- Working with peers who bring different backgrounds, experiences, training, and interests to the table.

### **Top tips for early-career professionals**

Jack emphasized the importance of pouring knowledge into others. He has three pieces of advice for early-career professionals looking to grow and pursue leadership roles:

- Be patient with your journey. Seek rich experiences and acquire what you need before you arrive.
- Be comfortable receiving feedback.
- Be a constant learner and committed to self-improvement.

### **Bringing lived experience to academic training**



Leonard Jack, PhD, is recognized as the new SOPHE president and honored with the SOPHE trophy. *Photo courtesy of Society of Public Health Education (SOPHE).*

Jack majored in community health education at Virginia State University and earned advanced degrees at Pennsylvania State University. He knew that connecting the public health discipline with his own lived experience would equip him with the tools he needed to make a difference in communities. Early in his CDC career as a behavioral scientist in NCCDPHP's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, he took an interest in the art and science of leadership. He pursued short-term leadership opportunities for experience and got feedback. Ultimately, his leadership roles in NCCDPHP led to the center's highest honor in 2022: the Jeffrey P. Koplan Award.

As SOPHE president, serving in a voluntary capacity independent of his CDC roles and responsibilities, Jack will have new opportunities to learn, lead, and inspire. He's ready for the job.

"I am beyond excited. This is a very special and honorable opportunity that doesn't come around that often," he said. "I hope to make SOPHE proud, and I hope to make CDC proud."

This *CDC Connects* Feature Story by Aja Powers, NCCDPHP Office of Communication