

Health Equity

Health Equity Matters Newsletter

OMHHE Champion

Office of Minority Health and Health Equity Champion

The Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) recognizes Victor J. Schoenbach, Ph.D. as OMHHE's Fall 2020 Health Equity Champion!

Victor J. Schoenbach, Ph.D., began his public health journey as a master's student in health education, especially sexuality education. After learning TM (Transcendental Meditation) and becoming a TM teacher, he decided to seek a PhD in epidemiology to conduct public health research on TM. But instead he investigated depressive symptoms in early adolescence, social ties, smoking cessation, and sexually transmitted infections. A faculty member in the Department of Epidemiology from 1980 to 2018, Dr. Schoenbach taught introductory epidemiology to over 6,000 students in person and online, conducted research on health disparities, and promoted diversity and health equity at The University of North Carolina and nationally.

Among his first major projects was a 1985-1988 collaboration with the NC Mutual Life Insurance Company to develop and evaluate a self-help quit smoking program for African Americans. From that experience, he concluded that rather than lead such projects he should team up with an African American principal investigator. In 1989 he obtained a "program project-like" grant from National Cancer Institute for minority cancer control research.



In 1991, Dr. Schoenbach became founding chair of the American College of Epidemiology's [Committee on Minority Affairs](#), which drafted a Statement of Principles with published commentary, and wrote three articles on diversity and inclusion. In 1998 Schoenbach was asked to lead the UNC Minority Health Project and its Annual Summer Public Health Research Videoconference on Minority Health, now the [National Health Equity Research Webcast](#). Over the years, the number of participants increased from several hundred to as many as 2,000.

In 2012 UNC's student-led Annual [Minority Health Conference](#) and webcast created a keynote lecture in Dr. Schoenbach's name, and in 2014 UNC Diversity and Multicultural Affairs gave him an inaugural Martin Luther King, Jr. Unsung Hero Award. Schoenbach's dedication to teaching epidemiology, promoting health equity, and advancing diversity and inclusion in epidemiology has been recognized with awards from the APHA Epidemiology Section in 2016 and the American College of Epidemiology in 2018. [Dr. Schoenbach maintains an extensive website](#) with recorded presentations, interviews, and documents on social justice and equality.

Dr. Schoenbach received his Ph.D. in epidemiology and M.S.P.H. in health education from the UNC School of Public Health, M.Sc. (Econ) from the London School of Economics, and B.S. from Columbia University's School of General Studies in NYC. He also completed a postdoctoral fellowship in psychosocial epidemiology at UNC with his mentor Berton Kaplan. He is currently Emeritus Associate Professor in the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health.