



State of the University Address
“Fulfilling Our Promise”
David M. Carlisle, MD, PhD
August 26, 2021

Good morning to all the friends of CDU, our board of trustees, distinguished faculty, alumni and students, and all the other guests who are joining us today. Thank you for attending our State of the University Address in this, the university’s 55th year. I am coming to you, as I was last year, live but virtually from our campus in South Los Angeles.

Despite the ongoing circumstances of the pandemic, Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science has continued to thrive and proceed on its upward trajectory. We came into this public health crisis as a “hidden gem,” well-known to our immediate neighborhood and stakeholders but perhaps somewhat off-the-radar beyond that. No more.

The perseverance of our students, faculty, staff, and the entire CDU community in the face of historic challenges and times has lit the University’s collective spirit like a flame. A flame that is attracting donations, partnerships, and new avenues of support to grow our university. Most importantly it is attracting students looking for a place to gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise to change health outcomes and make a difference in their communities...in our community.

Through this, we are fulfilling our promise and our mission of cultivating diverse health professional leaders who are dedicated to social justice and health equity for underserved populations through outstanding education, research, clinical service, and community engagement.

From Compton to Watts, Lynwood to Willowbrook, in South Central Los Angeles and beyond, CDU’s mission and promise clearly resonates with people who want to make a difference, starting with our students. Enrollment at CDU reached an all-time high, during academic year 2020 propelling us beyond the thousand-student barrier to exceed 1,100 students this fall.

Why do they come? Ask our students and they often cite the significance of our mission, our drive towards fulfilling our promise, and how deeply CDU resonates with them.

Isaura Macias, a recent College of Science and Health graduate told us she chose CDU because one of her many values is Compassion, which is what “propels her to hear the

voiceless and advocate for the oppressed.” She also told us that from the very beginning, she knew CDU’s was “a mission that she had to be a part of.”

When asked how he would leverage his CDU education throughout his career, College of Medicine graduate Kalonji Cole stated that he wanted to utilize his “advocacy skills to lobby for equitable access to high-quality healthcare for all patients, no matter their social or financial status.”

For Nursing alumus Guada Ann Andaya, she says she was “inspired to attend CDU because of the University’s mission, curriculum, and promise to produce health leaders who directly serve under-resourced populations, work to target social injustices and health disparities, and create catalysts for change.”

We thank these students, and the many others who echoed similar sentiments, for their kind words and for their drive to carry the CDU mission forward in their careers and communities. The ardent dedication from students such as these drives us to continue fulfilling our promise.

Charles R. Drew famously said “Excellence of performance will transcend artificial barriers created by man.” In doing so, CDU’s namesake highlighted the unlimited horizons that exist for those who have the will and opportunity to be their best selves. Our students bring their will, we provide the opportunity. It’s something we take so closely to heart at the university that we enshrined the quote in our University’s new Grand Entrance.

In last year’s remarks, I noted 2020 demonstrated the need for CDU’s voice and work in the world at large. As more media outlets continue to shed light on racial and social inequities, it’s easy to get swept up in a desire to bemoan how long it took, and what it took, for our nation to significantly begin realizing and acknowledging that these inequities exist. After all, those of us whose work has been rooted in providing culturally-conscious care, health education, and equitable policymaking have been well aware of these long standing systemic and structural inequities. However, I suggest that we instead broaden our perspectives to see the value and opportunity this increasing national awareness brings.

For example, when we learned last year that affluent communities were more likely to have access to testing sites, we leveraged our awareness into action by partnering with L.A. County and other valued partners to launch the CDU COVID-19 Testing Site right here in South Los Angeles, which tested over 80,000 individuals in just under four months.

The effort was herculean, and the responsibility was extraordinary, but we fulfilled our promise and vision of directly enhancing health equity in Los Angeles. CDU students, faculty and staff tirelessly staffed the site, directly interfacing with our communities, to make a measurable difference in a time of historic crisis. Through these dedicated actions, more people and organizations came to recognize the importance of investing in resources such as CDU.

The most recent--and perhaps most notable--investment happened this year when Governor Gavin Newsom approved the annual state budget granting CDU a one-time 50-million-dollar allocation. This significant funding will support the University’s upcoming new four-year medical degree program, which will in return benefit the state by increasing the number of Black and Latino medical graduates in the healthcare workforce.

That level of investment and support for our university, with its humble yet ambitious beginnings as two mobile buildings on 120th Street 55 years ago, is inspiring...and it doesn’t stop there.

Bloomberg Philanthropies' Greenwood Initiative, helmed by former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, has invested over \$9 million dollars in the University, starting with their award of \$7.7 million granted last September. This largest private gift ever presented to CDU allows the University to provide nearly 75% of our medical students on financial aid with up to \$100,000 in tuition support. This has already equated to over \$3.6 million in scholarships, allowing our students of color to focus and thrive in their medical education without worrying about the burden of massive debt.

The Greenwood Initiative followed up with another \$1.6 million grant to the University this April, enhancing our efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccinations and add several mobile health units to CDU's community outreach efforts towards protecting vulnerable populations.

Last fall, the California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development granted \$8.6 million to our College of Medicine and School of Nursing to support our residency programs. L.A. Care Health Plan this year announced a \$5 million commitment to support our upcoming new medical school as a continuation of their ongoing partnership with CDU. This initiative has granted more than \$8.4 million in funding which has allowed CDU to provide full scholarships to 16 medical students.

A groundswell of other donors and supporters have also stepped up to support our mission. Organizations such as The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, California Health Care Foundation, Rose Hills Foundation, LA Care, The Confidence Foundation, Northrop Grumman, Kaiser Permanente, Servicon, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Far Western Region, Inc. have together contributed over four million dollars to the University in support of student scholarships and initiatives.

I am reminded of a very salient phrase from the report issued by the McCone commission, appointed to examine causes and recommend policies in the wake of the 1965 Watts Uprising. It described education as "our fundamental resource." The inspiring level of funding we have received shows that others believe this to be true. These are investments in our students, in the community, in our society. I extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone whose support moves our mission forward and allows CDU to fulfill our promise and provide this fundamental resource.

Speaking of investing in CDU, our institution has a longstanding history of hiring high-impact faculty members based on their expertise in addressing the politics, economics and determinants of health in their communities, and each year we honor select members with our annual Outstanding Faculty Awards. Recognizing these recipients is always a personal highlight for me. This year, Dr. Roberto Vargas, received the Outstanding Professor Award, Dr. Delia Santana the Outstanding Service Award, Dr. Magda Shaheen was awarded the Outstanding Research Award and the late Dr. Ingrid Roberts-Terrell was posthumously awarded the Outstanding Teaching Award. Congratulations to them all!

This new school year comes on the heels of graduating the largest class in the University's history. CDU conferred 489 degrees at this year's commencement-ceremony to a diverse class that represents our inclusive culture. Now we prepare to embark on our next journey as a University. This includes opening a four-year medical education program and undertaking a significant expansion of our campus footprint. The forthcoming medical education program, pending LCME review and approval, will graduate an additional 60 medical students each year, which will increase the number of Black medical graduates in the State of California by

approximately 30 percent and Latinx medical graduates by roughly 20 percent upon graduating its first class of medical students in 2027.

CDU and APLA will welcome the upcoming opening of the Avis and Mark Ridley-Thomas Wellness Center on our campus. The Center will provide urgent care, mental health counseling and wellness programs to CDU students, faculty and staff, while the APLA clinic will provide primary medical care, dental care and behavioral health services to our local community.

The year saw the launch of our Internal Medicine Residency program which will enroll as many as 24 residents by summer 2024. Since the return of residency training to the University in 2018, we have retrained and developed nearly 50 residents. Their focus is providing care throughout Los Angeles County's Service Planning Areas 6 and 7, which have long been federally designated health professional shortage areas.

Additionally, our Family Medicine residency program graduated its first cohort of seven residents, marking the first time that medical residents have graduated in South Los Angeles in 15 years.

CDU's College of Science and Health also had an exceptional year under the leadership of Dean Hector Balcazar. The Community Health Worker Academy graduated its first cohort of ten graduates. This puts the University at the forefront of pioneering health education by providing state-of-the-art training opportunities to community health workers and instilling the knowledge necessary to administer culturally appropriate care tailored to the communities they serve.

I am pleased to report that all graduates of the Academy's first cohort already have successfully secured permanent employment at their internship sites and other LA County health care systems.

Meanwhile CDU's Mervyn M. Dymally School of Nursing is establishing our first Doctorate in Nursing Practice program, pending final approval from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, allowing us to address the ongoing nursing shortage that affects residents in our community. Additionally, the School of Nursing has received accreditations for our Family Nurse Practitioner program and our Psychology Mental Health Nurse Practitioners program. Finally, we'll be welcoming our first group of students in our new Bachelor of Science in Nursing program this fall.

CDU is also a research institution holding the same mission and goals as our educational activities. The University has 56 active research awards totaling over \$26 million. Under the leadership of Dr. Jay Vadgama, CDU was recently awarded \$2.6 Million from the American Cancer Society to increase diversity in the biomedical workforce by expanding CDU's career development activities around cancer research.

Our research enterprise has also collaborated with three other HBMSs and the pharmaceutical company Regeneron to develop a sequence database primarily for African-American individuals. The genomic database will help develop research and clinical program highlighting efforts to address health disparities with technology. The partnership will also result in a Genetics Counseling Program, as well as a graduate Medical Genetics Degree Program in the future.

CDU supports, welcomes, and appreciates when our graduates find their careers to be rewarding on many levels. Therefore we took it as a point of pride when Payscale, a leading provider of compensation data and software, conducted an analysis of alumni salary data from 3.5 million respondents spanning over 4,000 colleges and universities across the U.S.. The results, published in Forbes this summer, showed CDU alumni reported the 5th highest average pay for new bachelor degree recipients.

Altogether, our recent accomplishment and immediate plans represent a clear marker of progression in our institution's 55-year journey. We are taking major strides towards solidifying the legacy of our institution and propelling us beyond our 'hidden gem' status to a more significant position on the higher education landscape.

We are on the path to building CDU into a full-service university. Our commitment to graduate education has been very evident, but now we are also looking at our undergraduate programs as an ideal opportunity to further our mission. The biggest drop off in diversity in the health professions occurs at the college level, so we are ramping up there too. Our ongoing North Campus expansion of 14 acres was embarked upon as a signal of Institutional commitment to undergraduate education. Many of these students will elect to continue into graduate school, either here at CDU, or carry our diversity to other graduate level programs.

Although it has been a phenomenal year for the University and our future looks equally promising as an institution, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the profound ways that this past year and a half has affected the greater CDU community. The path through the pandemic has not been easy and all of us are not yet done walking it, though the light at the end of the tunnel sometimes appears tantalizingly near.

We have made it this far due to the grace, strength, fortitude, and heroic perseverance of our students, faculty, staff, and the extended campus community. Our success is a reflection of all who have embodied the spirit of CDU in trying times. Thank you to each and every one of you. It truly gives me a distinct sense of pride to be at the helm of a university that can come together as well as this one has.

I look forward to what we'll accomplish in the year ahead and beyond as we continue to make strides in expanding access to health education and ultimately improving the health of our community and others like it. We will continue to fulfill our promise.

Thank you and take care.