



## Peter Damiano and the Public Policy Center: Creating New Knowledge Through Research

**Dr. Peter Damiano**, Department of Preventive & Community Dentistry and director of the UI Public Policy Center (PCC), entered research by accident.

An Iowa dental student in the 1980s, Damiano did an internship working in former U.S. Senator Tom Harkin's office researching some Medicare policy changes. "The research and report process," he says, "showed me the importance of providing research-based data to inform and improve the public policy decision-making process."

After graduation, he spent two years with the Indian Health Service. "It was quite a clinical and cultural experience. It brought home the importance of treating both individuals and populations to improve health."

From 1988-1990, as a dental public health graduate student and a Robert Wood Johnson Dental Health Services Research Scholar, Dr. Damiano learned about research methods and issues concerning access to care, quality of care, and cost of care at the health systems level. He also realized the value of non-partisan research on sensitive issues.

In 1990 he was hired jointly by former Dean James McLeran as a faculty in the Department of Preventive & Community Dentistry and Dave Forckenbrock in the new Public Policy Center (PPC). During this time, Damiano initiated the health policy research program at the PCC to conduct health services/policy research on nationally significant health policy topics.

In 2007, after becoming PCC director, he added several research programs to the Center: environmental policy; social and education policy; politics and policy; and the Iowa Social Science Research Center to support grant applications and data collection for campus researchers.

"One of our primary missions at the UI, including the College of Dentistry and Public Policy Center," he says, "is creating new knowledge through research." Noting the College of Dentistry's ties to research, Damiano adds, "It can be challenging during tight budget times, but it is critically important that the College of Dentistry maintain its status as

one of the top dental schools in the world. The College has done a good job educating its dental students, with faculty who are on the cutting edge of new science with important clinical applications."

In 2016, the PCC was the highest funded center at the UI with \$31 million in external funding. Working with faculty and staff from almost every unit, the center produces data that informs policy makers and the public about important societal challenges and facilitates campus-wide collaborations on research projects.

The PPC is not an advocacy center, Damiano stresses. Its non-partiality helps with the credibility of their research for policymakers and the public. For instance, PCC research conducted on the former IowaCare program determined that the program's biggest gap was oral health. As a result, Iowa's Medicaid program was expanded to cover dental care services to low income adults.

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A community engagement program was created under Damiano's directorship to disseminate research information to the public and to policy makers through speakers, symposia and policy briefs.

"The most difficult problems we face require effectively studying multiple perspectives," Damiano says. Different UI scholars each add their own methodologies and perspectives to the discussion. Collaborations may result in journal articles, symposiums and/or policy briefs. One interdisciplinary project has addressed the impact of the Affordable Care Act on health insurance coverage and the health care delivery system.

The PCC encourages student success through education and research experiences. About 100 UI students are funded on PCC research annually. "Being involved in our research projects is an excellent part of the student's learning experience," he says. "It helps fund their education and adds vitality to the center."

In 2007, Dr. Damiano received the Iowa Dental Association Outstanding Service Award and in 2008, he received the Regents Award for Faculty Excellence. The UI Dental Alumni Association and the College of Dentistry recognized him with the 2014 Educator of the Year Award for his dedication to dentistry and public policy.