

APPROVALS

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Understanding the Drivers of a High and Rising Life Expectancy Inequality Money Matters Money Wealth and Life.

(by order of preference)

By Smera Tiwari

[Insert image & caption here when ready. Standard caption: Photo by _____, CLAgency's Head Photographer]

Write no fewer than 500 words and no more than 900.

Hook/Introduction

Even as a young student of Economics at the University of Oslo in Norway, Vegard Nygaard knew he wanted to come to the States to pursue a PhD. in the subject. Owing to the University of Minnesota's highly reputed macroeconomics program Vegard decided to come to the U for further studies. "One of my advisors at the University of Oslo worked at the University of Minnesota for a brief period of time and he also encouraged me that this was a really good place," says Vegard and adds, "I thought Minnesota was a good fit for me and I've really enjoyed it so far!"

[Content Brief](#)

The Beginning

Vegard realized very early in life that he quite enjoyed applying himself to problem-solving and using “every tool available” to attack puzzling, so far unanswered, questions. Today, as a sixth-year graduate student, Vegard is trying to find a policy measure to solve the problem of a burgeoning income inequality between people from different income groups. His interest in this topic can be attributed to the cloud of political chatter that has surrounded healthcare and welfare schemes in the United States for the past few years. “It’s an interesting thing for researchers because suddenly healthcare has changed dramatically,” notes Vegard, “We can now look at what happens if we have huge healthcare reforms.” His research, a pioneer in its field, concentrates on the underlying factors determining the difference in life expectancy and on the various policy measures that can help mitigate these differences and thus, solve the problem of life expectancy inequality without any distortionary effects.

Collecting Data and The Reward

In his research, Vegard approximates how a person’s life expectancy depends on their health behavior, income, and insurance coverage by using data collected from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey and the Health and Retirement Study. He then uses this data to quantify how tax and health insurance reforms will address the life expectancy gap between high- and low-income Americans by constructing theoretical models.

Vegard, who had initially started out as a Trade Economist says that he developed an interest in this topic during his third year here as a Ph.D. student. When his advisor, Timothy Kehoe asked him to be a research assistant for one his projects about understanding the macroeconomic consequences of rising health care costs and an aging population, Vegard hadn’t anticipated developing such a great liking for the field that he would alter his own research, to explore it more. “Originally, I was only planning to kind of help him as a research assistant, but I quickly just really, really liked that field, so I decided just to change my research entirely,” states Vegard. His passion for his research has led him to win the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship this year- a prestigious award that gives the Universities most talented Ph.D. students the chance to focus all their efforts on completing their research and finalizing a dissertation during the course of the fellowship year.

As a result of the rather small size of the Economics Department at the University, Vegard believes that graduate students benefit enormously from the direct contact with professors and other faculty members. This in addition to an “open door policy” practiced by the Professors in the department makes it easier for students to approach them with questions regarding research or for guidance in general. Moreover, the alliance between the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and the Economics Department at the University of Minnesota allows students to interact with world-leading Macroeconomists. “The Federal Bank of Minneapolis is such a

unique place it's probably one of the best places in the world to do macroeconomic research," says Vegard who has a desk at the Federal Bank of Minneapolis because of his position as a research assistant for Professor Timothy Kehoe.

Conclusion

Vegard hopes that through his research, he would be able to come up with policy advice that would allow for a reduction in the life expectancy inequality without other distortions. "I am fairly sure we have good evidence that giving people health insurance will have these positive spills over effects, but it remains to be seen if changing the tax schedule will have the same effect or if it will only be distortionary."

This story was written by an undergraduate student content creator in CLAgency. [Meet the team.](#)

TEASER TEXT

WEBSITE TEASER <i>This will appear in both the department newsletter and on the website.</i>	"In terms of health inequality, I think it's a really important question trying to figure out why we have such large differences in the life expectancy among people. So of course what I would like to achieve is to come up with policy advice on how you can lower these differences," says Vegard Nygard, a sixth-year graduate student and also this year's winner of the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship!
CLA FACEBOOK TEASER	"In terms of health inequality, I think it's a really important question trying to figure out why we have such large differences in the life expectancy among people. So of course what I would like to achieve is to come up with policy advice on how you can lower these differences," says Vegard Nygard, a sixth-year graduate student and also this year's winner of the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship!
CLA TWITTER TEASER <i>280 characters or fewer--URL and @/# count as characters</i>	"But of course it doesn't really matter if you get a few percent higher consumption every year if you know that your rich neighbor can live 15 years longer than you."-Vegard Nygard, a sixth-year graduate student and this year's winner of the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship talks about his research on "The Determinants of High and Rising Life Expectancy Inequality"!