

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA® – COLLEGE OF
PUBLIC HEALTH



*The College of Public Health
celebrates two decades*

2025 ANNUAL MAGAZINE

2025 marked a remarkable milestone in our shared journey—20 years since the University of Georgia established the College of Public Health and 20 years of standing with and for the people we serve.

Anniversaries invite us to pause. To look back with gratitude for the work of those who come before us, to take stock of our accomplishments and to look forward with purpose. Together, these milestones tell a larger story—how public health is shaped by courage, compassion, and community. It is a story written through crises and collaboration, through data and heart, through every moment when we chose to serve rather than stand still.

Over the past two decades, our public health systems have faced extraordinary challenges: the treatment of Ebola patients; persistent maternal mortality and mental health crises; and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. When the world shut down, public health did not. We tested, we vaccinated, we listened, and we showed up—for every community, in every corner of the state.

And now, we find ourselves navigating another kind of storm—a moment defined by uncertainty, shifting systems, and relentless pressures on our workforce and infrastructure. When funding is questioned, when responsibilities grow heavier, when needs outpace resources, we might ask: What are we to do?



But if the past 20 years have taught us anything, it is this: The public health community does not break. We innovate. We partner. We find a way.

We are the people who turn parking lots into clinics and data into action. We are the people who keep moving forward—steadfast, creative, and grounded in our mission to care for all people, no matter where they live.

As you read this 20th anniversary edition of our magazine, I hope you will see both the roots that were planted and the future we are building.

Inside these pages, you'll meet students conducting impactful research around the globe, faculty leveraging powerful tools for innovation right here on campus, and new programs that tap into the promise of data to shape smarter, healthier policy. These stories remind us not only of what we do, but why we do it.

Through it all—through the viruses, the storms, the uncertainty—we are still standing. And together, we will continue to stand for the health and well-being of every community we serve.

Marsha Davis



College of Public Health UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

The University of Georgia College of Public Health is committed to improving the health and well-being of all within our home state and around the world through innovative research, exemplary education and engaged service. Founded in 2005 as a response to the state's need to address important health concerns in Georgia, the College of Public Health is comprised of four academic departments and three research institutes.

Our dedicated faculty and students are working in and with communities to address the issues that matter to them, including aging, disaster preparedness, environmental science, infectious disease prevention, maternal and child health, obesity and shaping policy. As a fully-accredited College of Public Health, we are training future change-makers in public health to lead and serve.

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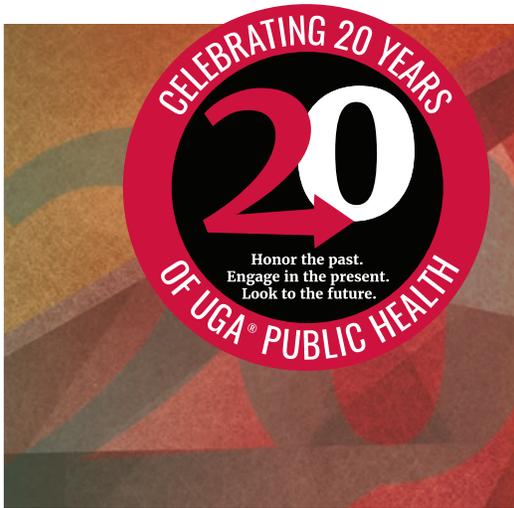
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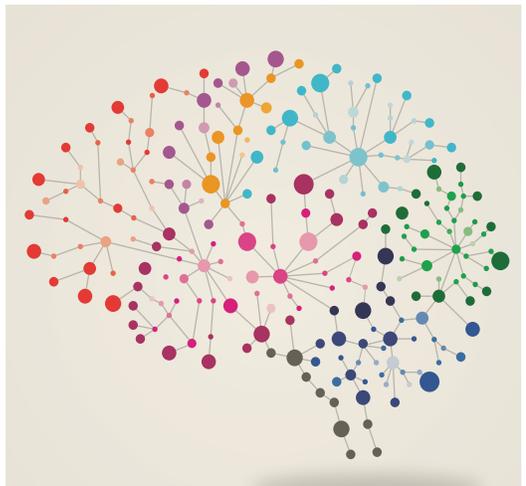


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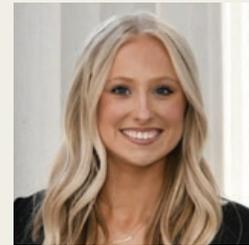
CLARKE MIDDLE HEALTH CENTER CELEBRATES NEW LOCATION

The College of Public Health is proud to take part in the collaborative effort behind the Clarke Middle Health Center. The health center moved into a new 4,000 square foot location in January. Students, families and staff can seek medical care at the facility without leaving school property.



NORMALTOWN HEALTH FAIR

CPH teamed up with students, faculty and staff from across UGA to host the first Normaltown Community Health Fair on Health Sciences Campus during National Public Health Week in April. “Our faculty and students were proud to share their work and connect with others—highlighting the critical role public health plays in preventing disease and promoting well-being at the population level,” said Dean Davis.



2025 PRESIDENTIAL FELLOW

Emily McDonald received the 2025 Presidential Award of Excellence, highlighting her outstanding academic achievement, strong extracurricular involvement, and service to and involvement in the College of Public Health. McDonald graduated in May 2025 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health with a minor in Genetics. McDonald plans to complete a Master’s in Genetic Counseling and work as a genetic counselor.

MARSHA DAVIS APPOINTED TO ASPPH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dean Marsha Davis has joined the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) Board of Directors. This prestigious appointment highlights Davis’s exceptional leadership and steadfast commitment to advancing public health education and research. Dean Davis will contribute to shaping policies and initiatives that will influence the future of public health across academic institutions.

“In this role, I look forward to working alongside colleagues from across our field, collaborating to advance academic public health by reimagining our institutional practices and training, ensuring that we’re equipped to tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time, from pandemics and environmental challenges to social injustices,” said Davis.





HANDEL NAMED ENDOWED PROFESSOR

Andreas Handel has been appointed to the UGA Foundation Endowed Professorship in Public Health. Handel is internationally recognized for his research, which is at the forefront of data analytics and modeling of infectious diseases. "This endowment will enable me to continue and expand my efforts to combat infectious diseases and protect public health," said Handel. The UGA Foundation funds more than 150 chairs and professorships across a wide variety of departments and disciplines at the university and is made possible through the generosity of donors.



GEORGIA FUNDER GOAL EXCEEDED

Thank you to everyone who supported the College of Public Health during the Georgia Funder campaign in February. Over the course of nine days, CPH alumni, faculty, staff and community members donated \$10,675 to the College of Public Health Student Emergency Fund. These gifts will go to CPH students struggling to cover basic living expenses due to temporary hardship.

This support shows the power held in our communities.

Scan this code to continue to donate to this fund and make an even greater impact.



Research Notes

RURAL ENGAGEMENT SCHOLARS

Three College of Public Health faculty were named to the 2025 UGA Rural Engagement Workshop. The award-winning interdisciplinary program leverages the community engagement experience of UGA's public service and extension faculty to support collaborative academic research that benefits rural Georgia.

The workshop delivers a comprehensive introduction to rural community engagement for academic faculty and equips them with the background, information, skills and knowledge essential for success. The primary aim is to enhance partnerships with communities throughout Georgia by fostering collaborative, rural-focused research and scholarship.

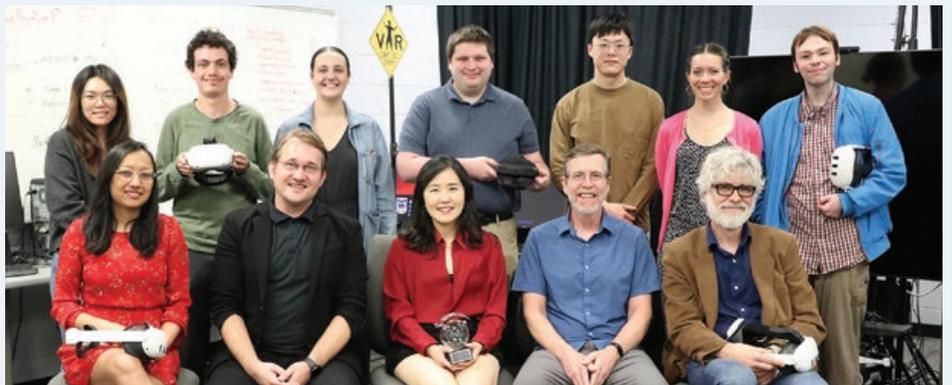
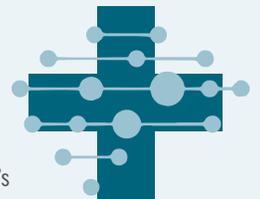
Through a competitive process, workshop participants are eligible to apply for seed grants funded by the Office of the Provost to support initial research that can be used to apply for external funding.



CPH faculty in 2025 cohort include (left to right): **Renato Ferreira**, **Leitao Azevedo**, **George Mois** and **Andrew Kiselica**.

EXPANDING AI RESEARCH

As part of the University of Georgia's Institute for AI's ongoing research, the Global Health Institute works to engage in interdisciplinary research. "Developing Multimodality Large Language Models for Telemedicine," a proposal from GHI Director **Juliet Sekandi**, UGA School of Computing's **Tianming Liu** and the College of Pharmacy's **Eugene Douglass**, received funding in the IAI's inaugural seed grant program.



CACHE RECEIVES PRESIDENTS' AWARD OF DISTINCTION

The Center for Advanced Computer-Human Ecosystems (CACHE) has received the Presidents' Award of Distinction from the Georgia Clinical and Translational Science Alliance. CACHE is a collaboration between the College of Public Health, the College of Engineering and Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. "The teamwork of CACHE challenges current approaches in preventive medicine and will have transformative effects on public health translational research over the next decade," said CPH associate professor **Allan Tate**.

CPH CELEBRATES FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS DURING HONORS WEEK

The College of Public Health had a lot to celebrate during UGA's 2025 Honors Week. This week was an opportunity to recognize outstanding students, faculty and staff, and to thank them for their dedication to the university, our community and our mission.

CPH Faculty Excellence Awards

- Excellence in Research Award: **Ye Shen**
- Excellence in Service Award: **Curt Harris**
- Excellence in Teaching Award: **Justin Ingels**
- Excellence in Online Teaching Award: **Kyle Turner**
- Award for Academic & Community Engagement: **Christina Proctor**
- Part-Time Faculty Award: **Edmond Maes**



Outstanding Teaching Assistants

Noah Hopkins, Erick Mollinedo and **Emily Townsend Vinson** (pictured left to right) have been named the 2025 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awardees.

The Center for Teaching and Learning administers the OTA award, sponsored by the Office of the Vice President for Instruction. This award recognizes teaching assistants who demonstrate superior instructional skills while serving in the classroom or laboratory.

CPH Outstanding Staff Awards

- Staff Academic & Community Engagement Excellence Leadership Award: **Nichole McCorkle**
- Outstanding Staff Award: **Wayne Crotts**



Cordero receives Outstanding Honors Professor Award

José Cordero has earned the Lothar Tresp Outstanding Honors Professor Award from the UGA Morehead Honors College. This award recognizes superior teaching and dedication to Honors students. Dr. Cordero brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom, inspiring students through his expertise in maternal and child health, epidemiology and disease prevention. This well-deserved award is a testament to Dr. Cordero's unparalleled dedication, leadership and commitment to student success.

Jenay Beer receives 2025 UGA Engaged Scholar Award

Congratulations to **Jenay Beer** who has received the 2025 Engaged Scholar Award for the University of Georgia. Dr. Beer, associate director of the Institute of Gerontology and co-director of the Cognitive Aging Research and Education Center, has dedicated her career to developing and evaluating technology interventions for individuals with dementia and their caregivers. This award celebrates Beer's unwavering commitment to integrating research, education and community service.



MASTER OF HEALTH ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM RECEIVES ACCREDITATION

The College of Public Health is excited to announce that the Master of Health Administration program has received a full four-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) Board of Directors.

“This accreditation is a testament to the outstanding team in our college’s Master of Health Administration program, and their dedication to students, education, and excellence,” said **Dean Marsha Davis**. “We have crafted a program that brings together theoretical knowledge, practical skills and experiential learning to provide students with the foundation they need to meet critical needs in health care.”

The College of Public Health launched its Master of Health Administration program in 2019 within the Department of Health Policy and Management.

The program is designed to prepare early-career professionals for leadership



roles in healthcare, offering a competency-based curriculum that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

“We have a saying at UGA: Bulldogs never bark alone,” said **Jessica Smith**, director of the MHA program. “Through our partnerships, we’ve built a foundation for something enduring, with a shared commitment to continuous improvement and preparing students to lead in healthcare. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished so far and even more excited to keep growing, learning and collaborating.”



CPH CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY WITH RESEARCH DAY

The College of Public Health kicked off its 20th anniversary celebration with a spotlight on research.

At the second annual Research Day, supported by Georgia Power, on March 28, students, faculty and staff from the college’s four departments and three research institutes embodied the 20th anniversary’s theme: Honor the past, engage in the present, look to the future.

“For two decades, this college has been at the forefront—advancing knowledge, training the next generation and tackling some of the toughest challenges in public health,” said **Dean Marsha Davis**.

“Today is a moment to reflect on the journey we’ve taken, the progress we’ve made and the bold steps we’ll take moving forward.”

The day kicked off with remarks from former **Provost Jack Hu**, who highlighted the College’s key campus partnerships, innovative practices and dedication to community.

“There’s no doubt that the College of Public Health is making a difference to campus, to our state, and helping fulfil the UGA land grant mission,” Hu said. “The College’s partnerships with state health departments and community organizations are helping to translate our research findings into tangible public health improvements.”

As the day continued, the college’s four departments and three research institutes presented key research, faculty accomplishments and more, concluding with student awards and poster presentations to highlight the next generation of public health.



RESEARCH *briefs*

GEORGIA'S PRE-K PROGRAM BOOSTS KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Ishtiaque Fazlul, assistant professor of health policy and management and international affairs at the College of Public Health and the School of Public and International Affairs, co-authored a study that shows Georgia's universal pre-k program gives children a strong start to kindergarten compared to their peers who didn't attend. However, those advantages faded by first and second grade, and by fourth grade, some attendees scored slightly lower than their fellow students.

"It doesn't mean pre-K isn't working, but it does raise important questions about how we sustain learning gains beyond early childhood," Fazlul said.



LONG COVID'S COST

Researchers have found that Long COVID-19 is causing financial challenges for many Americans, especially because of lost jobs or reduced working hours. The negative economic effects are present regardless of socioeconomic status.

However, **Ishtiaque Fazlul**, an assistant professor in both the College of Public Health and the School of Public and International Affairs, says Long COVID is particularly hard on the finances of individuals with lower incomes. Fazlul hopes the study encourages policy changes to protect jobs and health care coverage for Long COVID sufferers.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT A KEY ELEMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION

In a recent paper, researchers at the Institute for Disaster Management urge the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) to integrate disaster management as a core competency in all public health programs. Despite playing a critical role in emergency response, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, public health professionals often graduate with little to no training in disaster management.

Hands-on learning like simulations and drills can help build student confidence and readiness for high-pressure situations. Experts say this training is essential to building a resilient workforce equipped to handle future disasters.



UNDERSTANDING STRESSORS OF FEMALE FARMERS

Research led by health promotion and behavior clinical associate professor **Christina Proctor** sheds light on the stressors female farm owners and managers face. The study found women face traditional stressors like concern over injuries or illnesses, but they have additional key stressors, including animal mortality, succession planning for farms and the impact of gender roles and stereotypes. Proctor believes building community can alleviate some of these challenges.



“We need to ask ourselves, ‘How do we create programs or initiatives that ensure more women feel comfortable going into those spaces and represented within agricultural meetings, commodity meetings and more?’” asked Proctor.



NEARLY 6% OF PREGNANT WOMEN REPORT MARIJUANA USE

Mohammad Rifat Haider, an assistant professor in health policy and management, says there needs to be more education around the risks of marijuana during pregnancy. Haider says among 4,339 pregnant mothers surveyed in a study, 5.7% reported using marijuana during the last month. 70.9% perceived little to no risk associated with marijuana use during pregnancy, even though it has been associated with low birth weight, premature birth and neurodevelopmental effects.

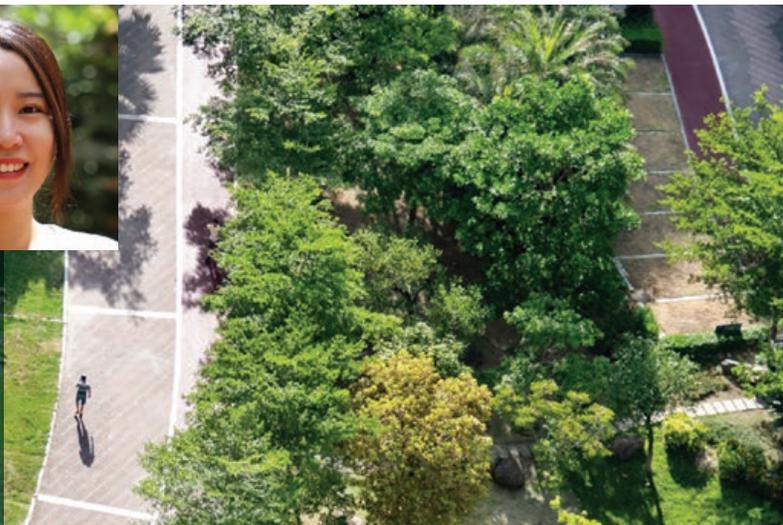
The study found pregnant women may have used marijuana to combat morning sickness or because of mental health disorders or major depressive episodes.



UNCOVERING DEMENTIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS

Our surroundings play a powerful role in shaping dementia risk. That's according to a study led by assistant professor of health policy and management **Suhang Song**.

Researchers found living near major roadways and exposure to fine particulate matter in the air—something that is generated by vehicles and industrial emissions—can increase the risk of dementia. Alternatively, green and blue spaces, like built and natural parks and bodies of water, walkability in a community and access to local amenities reduce risk. Song hopes this data can help inform urban planning to create communities to foster cognitive health.



RESEARCH *briefs*

HIGH LEVELS OF OMEGA-3, OMEGA-6 MAY PROTECT AGAINST CANCER

They can lower your cholesterol, keep your brain healthy and improve mental health, but omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids may also help ward off cancer. PhD student **Yuchen Zhang** says the findings suggest the average person should get more of these fatty acids in their diets. Participants with higher levels of omega-3s had lower rates of lung, colon, stomach and other digestive tract cancers. High omega-6 levels showed lower rates of 14 different cancers, including brain, malignant melanoma and bladder. However, researchers warn that high omega-3 levels could be associated with a slightly higher risk of prostate cancer.



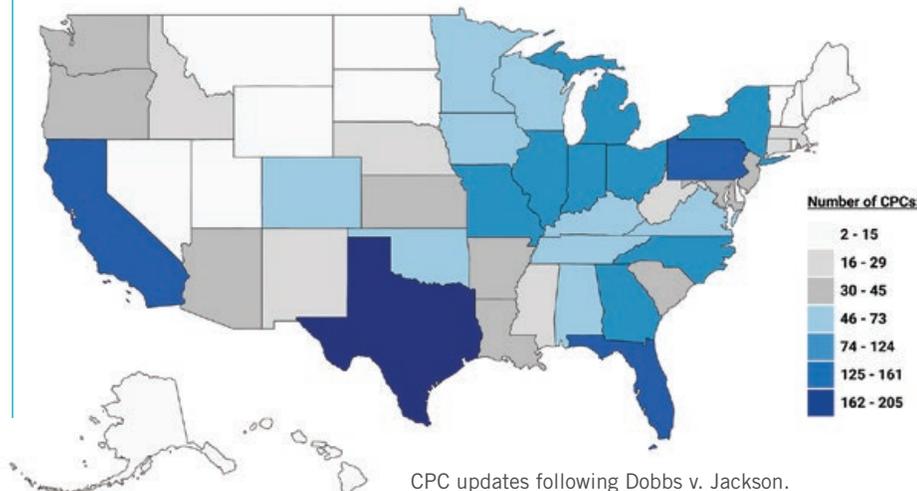
CURBING THE CNA WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

As the American population ages, the need for long term care facilities is growing. But an important part of those care facilities is in jeopardy.

A UGA study, co-authored by researchers at the Institute for Disaster Management and the Institute for Gerontology, explores why Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) are leaving the workforce at unprecedented rates and what can be done about it. Burdened by insufficient compensation, a lack of career advancement opportunities and the emotional and physical toll of direct patient care, CNAs are fleeing the field at unprecedented rates. The study lays out suggestions to address the staffing shortage, including improved pay, support, training and resources to improve retention.



STUDY HIGHLIGHTS CHANGING CPC LANDSCAPE



CPC updates following Dobbs v. Jackson. Courtesy of CPC map.

A new study published in the American Journal of Public Health highlights the changing CPC landscape following the 2022 Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson decision using updated Crisis Pregnancy Center Map (CPC Map) data.

Researchers at the College of Public Health found the number of CPCs across the country increased from 2,546 in 2021 to 2,633 in 2024, a net increase of 87. Increases were largest in the South, in states that banned or severely restricted abortion post-Dobbs, and in states that fund CPCs through dedicated grant programs.

"We undertook this study to see if CPCs changed locations or concentrated in states based on abortion access policies after Dobbs," said lead author of the study and assistant professor **Danielle Lambert**. "We found CPCs proliferated across the country and still operate in every state. The number of CPCs increased most in states that funded them and enacted abortion bans."

STUDY FINDS SMARTPHONES MAY BE UNDERUTILIZED TOOL IN MINIMIZING HIV TRANSMISSION

A new study is shedding light on how smartphones might help prevent HIV among people who inject drugs—a group that faces high risk and often has limited access to trusted health information.

Researchers explored Northeast Georgians' openness to a smartphone app featuring reliable HIV prevention information and support for using pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP. Georgia has one of the highest rates of new HIV diagnoses in the country, but uptake of PrEP, a medication that can dramatically reduce the risk of HIV, is still low, especially among people who inject drugs.

“The takeaway is we need to make them aware of their risk and show them relevant sites or information where they can have solid, validated information,” said study author **Mohammad Rifat Haider**. “If they have the information, they will be motivated to ask for more or change their behavior.”

INFORMATION KEY TO VACCINE UPTAKE

Four years after the release of the COVID-19 vaccine, College of Public Health researchers are still exploring what factors contributed to COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy—and how those factors remain at play today.

A new study, published in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, examines attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccination among African Americans in Albany, Georgia—one of the hardest-hit communities during the early waves of the pandemic.

About 85% of vaccinated respondents said they wanted to learn more about the vaccine and 88% were “willing to get vaccinated if my healthcare provider recommends [it],” compared to 70% and 66%, respectively, of non-vaccinated respondents. Among non-vaccinated respondents who identified themselves as willing to be vaccinated in the future, those numbers increased to nearly 82% and 70%, respectively.

“Providing more fact-based information was identified as a key vaccination promotion strategy, not just in the already vaccinated group, but also among those who had not yet been vaccinated but are willing to get vaccinated,” said doctoral student and lead author **Biplav Tiwari**.



COORDINATION FOLLOWING DISASTER

When disaster strikes a university campus, police and emergency services are ready to jump in and respond. But what occurs in the days that follow to get campus back on track?

That is the question a team of University of Georgia faculty, staff and administrators sought to address. In collaboration with the Office of Emergency Preparedness, the Institute for Disaster Management was contracted to write the first UGA University Assistance Center (UAC) plan.

This plan serves as a framework for a central, in-person resource hub that could be activated following a disaster which interrupts daily campus activity at UGA. If activated, the UAC would act as a one-stop shop for all information and services the UGA community may need to facilitate a smooth return to normal operations.

“It provides a blueprint for setting up a location where we can bring in some of the service providers from campus who are critical to supporting students, faculty and staff. This gives our community one place to go for resources and information.”

—ADAM FOCHE, INTERIM ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY, RISK AND RESILIENCY

COORDINATOR SERVES AS A MENTOR AND A GUIDE

Rebecca Wells helps students find their way forward

By Erica Techo



Rebecca Wells is committed to helping students find their way forward.

As a first-generation student who took a gap year before graduate school then went directly into a doctoral degree, she knows the importance of guidance in the sometimes overwhelming world of academia. And she knows that every student's journey looks different.

Now, as coordinator of the Master of Social Work/Master of Public Health (MSW/MPH) dual degree program at the University of Georgia, Wells aims for honesty to set students on the right path.

A WINDING JOURNEY

Her own path wasn't one she planned from the beginning. As an undergraduate sociology major, Wells knew she wanted to help others—maybe working in social services or otherwise supporting community health.

But a passionate mentor, Dr. Kanter, urged her to look into public health, a field Wells had never considered. That guidance, along with a funded opportunity to conduct community health research through Mercer University's School of Medicine, sparked something new.

"She was just very adamant about it," Wells said. "She was like, you either have to just do public health or you do public health and social work."

So she did both, earning her MPH and MSW from the University of South Carolina. She conducted research and outreach with the University Center on Excellence and Developmental Disabilities, connecting social work and

public health to better understand health services in specific populations. And her passion for research was confirmed.

"Through these disciplines, we have evidence to show what can improve quality of life and outcomes, and what can support human well-being, but we don't always do it," Wells said. "So, I decided to get a doctorate in public health, to change the world, to change policy."

DIFFERENT PATHS TO IMPACT

Over time, however, Wells recognized that improving health around her doesn't require following a single academic track. There are multiple routes to impact—some within academia and others in the broader world of practice. That personal journey continues to inform how she advises students.

"I want my students to recognize the many different pathways that can come out of a PhD and to consider: Would that decision place them out of some potential roles? Would it make them overqualified? So that's what I mean when I say I'm honest with people," Wells said.

That honesty also comes through in lessons. In an academic program, it can be easy to focus on the perfect environment or the textbook way to accomplish a goal. But in the real world, there are many more factors to consider.

"I try to set expectations a lot in classes. I acknowledge, 'OK, this is the ideal way to conduct an evaluation.' But I also say that sometimes you're not going to have the tools to do that," Wells said. "This way, they consider how to stay true to their professional values and ethics while working within the settings where they work."

“Students graduate with the ability to compare aspects of each discipline, selecting the best interdisciplinary approach.”

INTERDISCIPLINARY EXCELLENCE

She brings this practical lens to her spring course, Interprofessional Identity Development in Health and Social Sciences. The class is designed for dual degree students to explore what it means to be a multidisciplinary professional.

“We talk about framing your message, speaking a language that people can hear,” she said. “We also talk about different codes of ethics—a nurse might focus on a patient’s physical health, while a social worker might emphasize autonomy. The public health social worker has to consider both, and the community around them.”

Her interdisciplinary teaching philosophy encourages students to examine how public health and social work intersect and diverge—a valuable perspective in complex professional settings.

“Our students are able to take these disciplines and put them into conversation with one another,” she said.

Students graduate with the ability to compare aspects of each discipline, selecting the best interdisciplinary approach.

This dynamic, student-centered approach to teaching has reshaped her own view of impact. What began as a desire to change the world through research has evolved into a more personal, lasting form of influence.

“To me, I entered a PhD in public health thinking I was going to change the world by doing research,” she said. “And what I ended up realizing is I loved the teaching aspect, and I now am able to slowly change the world by teaching and mentoring our students.” ■



HRSA GRANT TO SUPPORT MATERNAL-CHILD HEALTH WORKFORCE

The University of Georgia College of Public Health is working to address the critical need for public health professionals specializing in the health of mothers and children.

Rebecca Wells has been awarded a Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Public Health Catalyst Program grant, which supports student recruitment and training to create the next generation of MCH public health professionals.

The grant enables Wells to develop course work, integrated learning experiences, a student-led organization and partnerships with community members. Up to 10 of these grants are awarded annually nationwide.

The first of two MCH online graduate courses will open in fall 2026, welcoming up to 30 students university-wide, including six Master of Public Health fellows per year.

Wells describes this grant as a building block, one that could eventually lead to more funding opportunities to support a long-term vision of a MCH certificate or concentration at the College of Public Health.

—Mackenzie Patterson

Photos by Peter Frey/UGA

UGA COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH CELEBRATES 20 YEARS



TWO DECADES OF INNOVATION, IMPACT AND HEART

What began as a call to action has proven to be two decades of discovery, service and resilience, all at the intersection of science and community. When the University of Georgia established the College of Public Health in 2005, it did so in response to a “compelling need to address important health concerns in Georgia.”

Since its founding 20 years ago, the College of Public Health has become a national leader in the areas of aging, disaster preparedness, evidence-based practice, global infectious disease and workplace health thanks to the groundbreaking research and outreach efforts of its faculty, staff and students,” said UGA President Jere W. Morehead. “I look forward to the bright future that awaits the College, and I am confident it will continue to be a crucial resource in the effort to improve outcomes for communities throughout Georgia and beyond.

From its first classrooms located throughout the university’s campus to its movement to the Health Science Campus, the College of Public Health’s growth reflects a story of momentum and collaboration.

Today, with more than 1,000 students, millions of dollars in active research funding and a network of thousands of alumni, the college continues to drive change in communities across the state, country and globe.

“Turning 20 invites us to reflect not just on what we’ve built, but on the people and communities who shaped us,” said Dean Marsha Davis. “As part of UGA’s flagship, land-grant mission, the college was created to stand alongside Georgia’s families, neighborhoods, and leaders to improve the public’s health. That commitment—rooted in education, research and community engagement—continues to propel us into the future.”

“Our mission to serve Georgia through research, education and engagement remains our unwavering focus.”

—DEAN MARSHA DAVIS

FROM VISION TO VITAL FORCE

The college’s roots trace back to 2001, when the Division of Public Health was created within UGA’s Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute. Within a few short years, that spark evolved into a full-fledged college.

The college was approved by the University Council in September 2004, with Founding Dean and Georgia Power Professor Phillip L. Williams at the helm. It was seen as an engine for change—a unit that could confront ongoing health issues, extend research and improve health across the state. Williams set a strong base for future growth, unifying departments and programs from across the university. This included the Department of Environmental Health Science (previously in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences), the Department of Health Promotion and Behavior (previously in the College of Education), the Institute for Health Management and Mass Destruction Defense (now the Institute for Disaster Management) and the Institute of Gerontology.

To complement these existing programs and round out core public health disciplines, the college added the departments of Health Policy & Management and Epidemiology & Biostatistics, as well as the Center for Global Health (now the Global Health Institute).

Now in its 20th year, the College of Public Health brings together four departments and three research institutes, all working to advance knowledge and improve health for all through research, community outreach and cross-campus collaborations.

TURNING RESEARCH INTO REAL-WORLD CHANGE

Public health experts know that real change comes from combined knowledge and action. It takes not only data analysis, but also community input, collaborative effort and innovative thinking.

CPH faculty have conducted projects to support the health of mothers and children, expand access to healthy foods in rural communities and improve the health of those with cognitive impairment. Their expertise spans aging and caregiving, infectious disease modeling, environmental exposure, social determinants of health and disaster management—fields that shape both Georgia’s health landscape and the global conversation.

“One of public health’s biggest strengths is that we understand that research isn’t siloed; it’s shared,” said Davis. “The College of Public Health connects faculty across departments and across campus, but we also partner with state agencies, rural communities and national organizations to make sure our research becomes actionable.”

The real-world impact of this research can be seen across the two decades of College of Public Health history. As public health crises arose, the college was ready with actionable solutions.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the college celebrates its anniversary, it moves forward with renewed purpose. CPH continues to expand its reach through new program offerings, online resources and ongoing research opportunities.

New initiatives are emerging around immunization modeling, rural health equity and Precision One Health—an approach uniting human, animal and environmental health. Faculty are partnering with communities to identify health priorities and shape the work that will create lasting, measurable change. Partnerships with UGA’s new Schools of Medicine and Nursing will further amplify these efforts and broaden our collective impact.

The UGA College of Public Health was founded on a promise—to understand and act. Two decades later, it stands as a powerful demonstration of that charge, shaping not only the future of Georgia’s health but the health of communities worldwide. ■

Pursue Understanding. Take Action.

A TIMELINE OF Response and Resilience

The past two decades have tested public health worldwide, and the college has grown stronger with each challenge. What follows is a snapshot of two decades of resilience and response.

Over time, the College's trajectory has mirrored the world's public health challenges. From the H5N1 avian flu to COVID-19 to worldwide vaccination efforts, the faculty, students and research stand at the forefront of knowledge creation and dissemination.

2012 Departments begin relocating to the Health Sciences Campus on Prince Avenue, marking a new era of collaboration and growth.

2014-2016 During the West Africa Ebola outbreak, CPH's Institute for Disaster Management (IDM) helps Georgia strengthen emergency preparedness statewide. Faculty members, including UGA Foundation Professor in Public Health Andreas Handel and UGA Distinguished Research Professor Christopher Whalen, also provided commentary on the death rate, quarantine requirements and other projections related to the outbreak.



Ebola Outbreak



José F. Cordero



2010 Enrollment reaches 900 students, representing 20 percent annual growth for the college's first five years.

2011 CPH's Office of Outreach hosts the first annual State of the Public's Health Conference, bringing together researchers, practitioners and community members to discuss the state's most pressing health issues.

2016 Under the leadership of Professor Grace Bagwell Adams, the Athens Wellbeing Project launched its community surveys, providing detailed data and analysis at the neighborhood level. This information has empowered community leaders and institutions and became an invaluable resource during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Athens Wellbeing Project

2015-2016 As the Zika Virus spread across the Americas, Gordhan L. & Virginia B. "Jinx" Patel Distinguished Professor of Public Health José Cordero worked to provide facts and educational information, drawing on his research and experience at the CDC. He was honored by the Biden Administration and received UGA's Excellence in Research Award.

2001 The Division of Public Health is established within the UGA Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute.

2004 The UGA Master of Public Health (MPH) Degree is approved by the University System of Georgia.



2005 University of Georgia College of Public Health (CPH) established. Globally, H5N1 avian flu and Hurricane Katrina underscore the urgent need for resilient health systems. Phillip L. Williams is named interim dean.

2006 Phillip L. Williams is named founding dean of the college.

2007 First cohort of DrPH students are enrolled.

2009 The H1N1 (Swine Flu) pandemic emerges. CPH earns its first five-year national accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), becoming the state's first accredited college of public health.



Hurricane Irma



Dean Marsha Davis

2017 When Hurricanes Irma and Harvey hit, CPH faculty and disaster management students are deployed to Georgia's State Operations Center in Atlanta and assist the Athens/Clarke County Emergency Operations Center.

2018 CPH and the Archway Partnership, a public service and outreach unit of UGA, received a national Award of Excellence from the University Economic Development Association for its work in rural Georgia to save a local hospital from closing and to improve medical service for community residents.

2019 Founding Dean Phillip L. Williams retires, and, after a national search, Associate Dean of Outreach and Engagement Marsha Davis is selected as the college's second dean.

Programs and research at the forefront of knowledge and understanding.



**Pursue understanding.
Take action.
Always forward.**



Erin Lipp



2020 The COVID-19 pandemic transforms life globally. CPH researchers become essential voices in Georgia's response.

Georgia Power Professor Erin Lipp implemented a novel wastewater-based testing platform to track SARS CoV2 transmission in Athens and established a public dashboard providing real-time data to the community on COVID levels.

Ernest Corn Professor Ye Shen utilized state-of-the-art analytical approaches in contact tracing, finding that timing of exposure and disease severity impacted the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Dean Marsha Davis serves on UGA's Medical Task Force alongside College of Veterinary Medicine and AU/UGA Medical Partnership Deans Lisa Nolan and Shelley Nuss.

2021 The Cognitive Aging Research and Education (CARE) Center is founded by Professor Jenay Beer and Lennie W. Poon Professor for Innovation in Public Health and Aging Lisa Renzi-Hammond, creating a unified hub for research, education and clinical services related to aging and dementia in Georgia. It provides a vital resource to patients and care givers across the state.

2023 CPH hired eight research-intensive faculty as part of the UGA Presidential Initiative in Precision One Health, advancing knowledge across AI, infectious disease, applied social science and more.

2024 CPH addresses the growing global crisis of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). Assistant Professor of Epidemiology & Biostatistics Amy Winter works to develop a new model to predict measles outbreaks.

The first student cohort is enrolled in the Online MPH program.

2025 CPH enrolls the first student cohort in the doctoral program in Health Services Research & Policy.

CPH's Master of Health Administration program receives full CAHME accreditation.

The Georgia High Obesity Program expanded to ten counties across the state, led by Professor Heather Padilla. The program implements nutrition and physical activity strategies to increase community access to healthy foods and active living opportunities.



Paying it Forward

TWO COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENTS SHINE AS MENTORS FOR INCOMING FRESHMEN



Brunelle (left) is a CPH student studying health promotion. Palmer (far left) is a CPH Double Dawg studying health promotion and global health.

By Mackenzie Patterson

Orientation Leader. It's a prestigious title for undergraduate students at the University of Georgia—one that two College of Public Health students can now add to their resumes.

In summer 2025, Katie Brunelle and Syerra Palmer—along with 18 other Orientation Leaders (OLs)—introduced incoming freshmen and their families to what it truly means to be a UGA student. They acted as mentors, shared their experiences, and served as sounding boards for new Dawgs who were nervous, excited and maybe a little overwhelmed by the start of this new chapter.

"Every student you meet is so different, and it's been rewarding to find ways to connect with them—whether through shared interests or just being someone they can relate to," said Brunelle, a fourth-year health promotion major. "It's so important for incoming students to have someone they can look to. This is where that connection starts."

For Palmer, a third-year health promotion major with a minor in global health, the chance to be a mentor is what drew her to apply to be an OL.

"We wouldn't be where we are without the people who poured into us. So, in a way, becoming an OL was me paying it forward," said Palmer. "My own transition into UGA was anything but easy. I was culturally shocked, overwhelmed by imposter syndrome and adjusting after retiring from a sport I

They acted as unofficial public health ambassadors throughout the summer—showing the newest batch of Bulldogs the impact public health has on their lives, their communities and the world.

had played my whole life, which left me feeling like I was in an identity crisis. My goal as an OL was to make everyone feel warm, welcomed and embraced as a member of our university community, whether they felt like they belonged or not."

Becoming an Orientation Leader is an extremely selective and competitive process. One that Brunelle didn't think she even qualified for except for the encouragement of one of her CPH professors.

"Dr. Katie Darby Hein was the person who nominated me to apply for Orientation Leader. Honestly, if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be in this position," said Brunelle. "The College of Public Health is such a tight-knit community, and the professors really care about us. They want us to succeed, and they're also pushing us to do better."

Brunelle and Palmer were pleasantly surprised to find that tight-knit CPH community extend into their time as orientation leaders.

"Coming into the OL experience, I didn't expect to share a major with any of my teammates since the College of Public Health is so small. It was such a joy and delight to connect with Katie over the summer—we share similar interests and values," said Palmer.



Clockwise, this page: Brunelle, known during New Student Orientation as Wild One, was encouraged by a CPH faculty member to apply to be an OL.

Palmer wanted to become a mentor to incoming UGA students—and achieved that goal as OL Stellar Seven.

Brunelle and Palmer joined 18 other OLs to welcome incoming UGA students in the summer 2025.

Brunelle and Palmer didn't just share their interests with one another. They acted as unofficial public health ambassadors throughout the summer—showing the newest batch of Bulldogs the impact public health has on their lives, their communities and the world.

"I tell my orientation groups that being a public health major was genuinely one of the best choices I ever made," Brunelle said. "My major has brought me more than just academics. It has brought me friendships, professional relationships and a deep passion for helping others."

Now, while the Class of 2029 may have settled in on campus and UGA begins to look ahead to next year, Brunelle and Palmer are planning their futures as well. Both equipped with new skills and resources thanks to their time as orientation leaders.

"I've grown so much as a leader, teammate, and person," said Palmer. "Some of my biggest takeaways have been improving my public speaking and facilitation skills, learning how to command a room, connecting with different types of people, adapting when things don't go as planned and having confidence—even when doubting myself."

"In my time with New Student Orientation, Katie and Syerra stand out as two of the brightest students I've had the privilege to work with," said Jansen Rouillard, director of new student orientation at UGA. "They came into their roles already polished in skills essential to this work—communication, self-advocacy, empathy, and attention to detail—and have only deepened and refined those abilities as Orientation Leaders."

Palmer has been accepted as a Double Dawg in the Master of Public Health Program and will take graduate-level courses alongside her undergraduate work. She's exploring which area of the public health field she wants to pursue, which may include another way to pay it forward.

"I could definitely see myself becoming a professor," Palmer said. "Education

has always been core to who I am. I want to continue mentoring and helping others while sharing knowledge I'm passionate about. "

As for Brunelle, her goal is to work with the special needs community.

"That's my biggest passion, alongside health promotion. This is an area where I could apply my skills to advocacy work to support this community and make their lives better," said Brunelle.

Regardless of where their careers paths lead, Brunelle and Palmer will carry with them the valuable skills, connections and experiences shaped by their time at UGA, as Orientation Leaders and as College of Public Health students. ■



FROM CLINIC TO COMMUNITY

A physician's mission to uplift underserved populations

By Erica Techo

Dr. Golam Sarwar began his career in medicine treating patients in Dhaka, Bangladesh—but over time, he realized that public health offered an even greater opportunity to reach those most often left behind.

His early work placed him at the frontlines of patient care, including at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), where he treated malnutrition, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS in low-income communities.

“I realized that their disease is not only just a medical condition, but also it relates to their social and economic factors, which encouraged me to go beyond clinical medicine and to switch my career to public health so that I can make a solution to the public health problems,” he said.

He chose to expand his knowledge through a Master of Public Health with a focus on epidemiology, in addition to studies in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

In 2014, Sarwar joined the HIV/AIDS Program of ICDDR,B, marking a turning point in his career.

“That is the first breakthrough in my professional career,” he said. “I was mentored by Dr. Sharful Islam Khan, who is a well-known social scientist and medical anthropologist in Bangladesh. He made me realize how social science and community-based research can be used to design better health programs, especially for those who are often left out of the mainstream health services.”

That realization pushed Sarwar to manage two first-of-its-kind interventions in Bangladesh—one promoting HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among sexual and gender minorities, and another using virtual tools to reach gay men in a highly stigmatized



Sarwar is part of the first cohort of the PhD in Health Services Research and Policy. Photo by Erica Techo.

“...social science and community-based research can be used to design a health programs, especially for those who are often left out of the mainstream health services.”

environment. He also led two research projects on sexualized drug use and TB-HIV co-infection among sexual and gender minorities in Bangladesh.

Now a PhD student at the University of Georgia College of Public Health, Sarwar is continuing his mission under the mentorship and supervision of Mohammad Rifat Haider, to address health inequities.

“Based on all these clinical experiences, my public health experiences, policy work and research, I felt that I needed another breakthrough and needed to take the next big step,” he said. “That’s why it led me to pursue the PhD in public health at the University of Georgia.”

His research, centered on marginalized and stigmatized groups such as transgender women, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and people living with HIV, explores not only individual health behaviors but the broader structural forces that shape them.

“I want to understand not just individual behavior, but also the bigger picture—that is how a person’s environment, social connections and systems around him affect health and well-being,” he said.

With support from two research awards from the UGA College of Public Health, including the Stuart and Renee Feldman Health Disparity Award, Sarwar is conducting two innovative studies in Bangladesh this summer. One uses social network analysis to explore how interpersonal relationships influence PrEP uptake and HIV risk behaviors. The other employs ecological momentary assessment (EMA), which prompts participants via mobile surveys to share real-time data about mental health and anti-retroviral therapy (ART) adherence.

“These are the new methodologies in terms of Bangladesh,” Sarwar said. “Though my work is based in Bangladesh, the problems I’m dealing with—PrEP, mental health, drug abuse—are global public health problems. So, the findings of this research, I expect, will not only impact the population of Bangladesh, but also inform the program and policymakers to devise a context-specific intervention for the underserved population in developed countries.”

These awards have provided more than financial support.

“This is a source of encouragement, motivation and confidence to take my research ideas from paper to the field,” he said. “This award helped me to believe in myself and validate my research capacities and my research projects.”

He credits the supportive environment at the College of Public Health for accelerating his growth.

“Before I came to UGA, I had quite a bit of experience, but then I felt that I need more academic training to enhance my work and to improve my skills,” he said. “The environment is super friendly and very open. What I found most interesting is that the classes are not traditionally theory-based, but they help us gain exposure to real-life issues that help me design research for the underserved populations. Moreover, my PhD advisor and mentor, Dr. Haider, has made a huge difference in this journey. He not only guided me through my research ideas and helped me write grants, but he has also been a constant source of motivation.” ■



Sarwar received the Stuart and Renee Feldman Health Disparity Award during the College of Public Health’s 2025 Research Day. Photo by Erica Techo.

“The classes are not traditionally theory-based, but they help us gain exposure to real-life issues that help me design research for the underserved populations.”

PRECISION ONE HEALTH PUTS PUBLIC

Health research at the University of Georgia can take many forms across several schools, colleges and programs, with the College of Public Health collaborating across campus on several health studies and initiatives.

Collaboration is a core principle at the college, driving community-oriented problem solving and breaking down silos to expand the reach of university research. This includes a role in the university's Precision One Health Initiative, which aims to bring faculty, researchers and students to the same table to bolster collaboration and streamline communication.

Precision One Health focuses on the intricate connections between genetics, the environment, and lifestyle factors and their effects on disease prevention and treatment. It combines human, animal and environmental health in order to find innovative solutions to health-related problems across populations. The initiative's approach also improves readiness for future disease outbreaks and community health issues, helping to safeguard individuals, public health, food supply, agriculture and the environment.

Environmental health is a foundational pillar of Precision One Health, as the initiative builds upon much of the work the College of Public Health has been doing since its inception.

"Everything that One Health is, that is what we do in environmental health sciences (EHS)," said Erin Lipp, associate dean for academic affairs, Georgia Power professor of environmental health and director of graduate studies for EHS. "It is that juxtaposition of what's happening in the environment, what's happening with human health, what's happening with animal health. That is what we do in environmental health."



Erin Lipp



Steve Correia

BUILDING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM

To drive the Precision One Health initiative, researchers across UGA rely on collective interdisciplinary expertise in four research core areas:

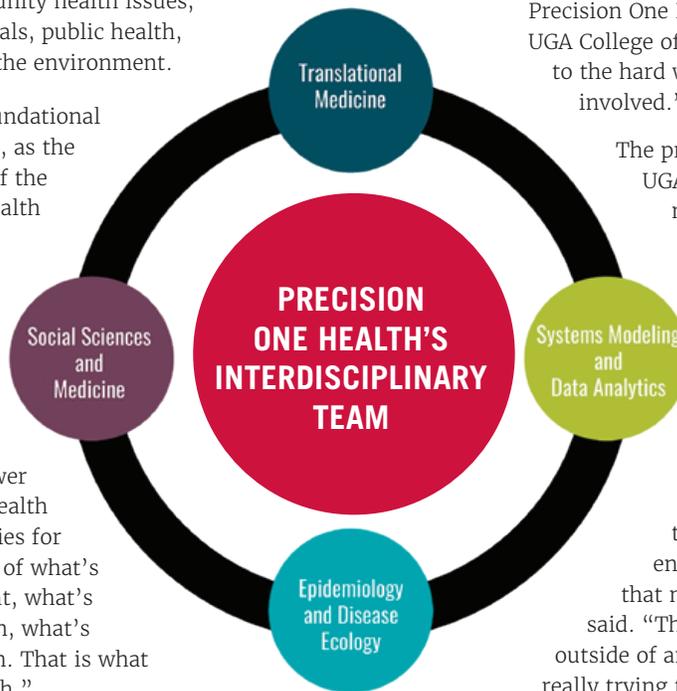
- Translational Medicine
- Systems Modeling and Data Analytics
- Epidemiology and Disease Ecology
- Social Sciences and Medicine

The interdisciplinary team at UGA consists of members from several colleges, schools, centers and laboratories, representing a wide range of disciplines such as public health, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, engineering, arts and sciences, music, agriculture, journalism and mass communications, forestry and natural resources.

"In just one year, we have achieved significant progress, now boasting nearly 24 faculty members, securing close to \$10 million of funding, and expanding to over 70 faculty across various colleges and units," said Dr. Jon P. Mochel, director of the Precision One Health Initiative and a professor in the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine. "It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved."

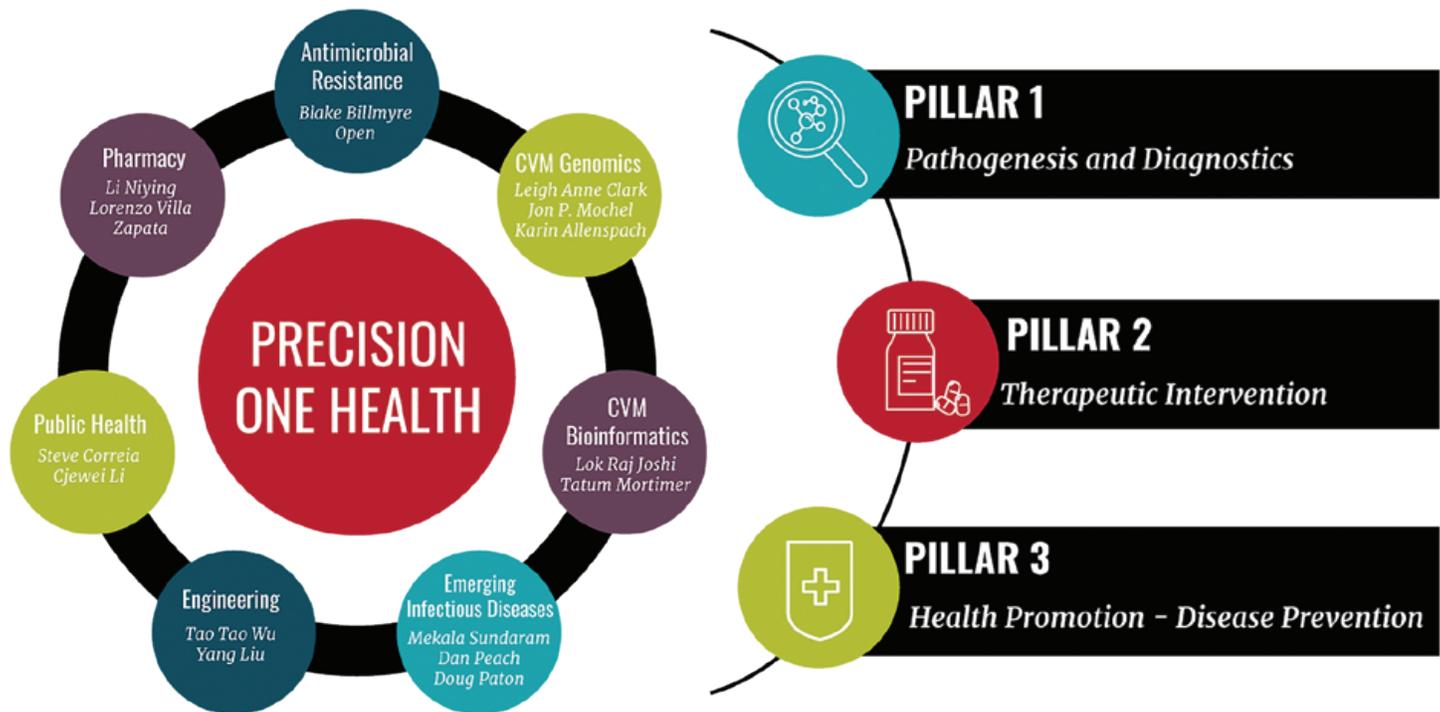
The program has generated a lot of interest at UGA, Lipp said, because of the university's many components. Having all of these research-centered schools and colleges on one campus is unique, setting UGA apart from other universities.

"There's a lot of interest in the fact that we're a university that has a school of medicine, a veterinary college, the College of Public Health, but also the fact that we're a land grant university, the extension component, and the engineering school—it's all something that not a lot of other places have," Lipp said. "There are also a lot of faculty on campus outside of any official institution or center that is really trying to build a place for One Health at UGA."



Precision One Health focuses on the intricate connections between genetics, the environment, and lifestyle factors and their effects on disease prevention and treatment.

HEALTH IN THE SPOTLIGHT



“This research approach breaks down silos in search of solutions.”

—TRAVIS GLENN

PUBLIC HEALTH A FOUNDATION FOR ONE HEALTH

Steve Correia, PhD, ABPP/CN, leads the Social Sciences and Medicine Core for One Health and also serves as an associate professor and director of neuropsychology and the Cognitive Aging Research and Education (CARE) Center. Looking at One Health through his brain health and gerontology lens, he sees opportunities across UGA to deepen the initiative, particularly across the state through its cooperative extensions.

“I think there’s a real way for UGA to do the things that a medical school does, like research into cancer and research into neuroscience and so forth,” Correia said. “But we can deploy that in a way that leverages the environment to maximize healthcare and doesn’t overlook it and uses that as an enhancing factor, not as just an add-on.”

“(Precision One Health) adds that as an enhancing factor and thinks about rural health, not as an obstacle to overcome, but as a resource to use to promote health and well-being of people in

their environment, in a place where they’re comfortable, and recognize that they have all these resources available for them. Let’s use them, and let’s use them in a healthy way.”

Environmental Health Science Department Head and Professor Travis Glenn has incorporated the ecology of infectious diseases into his lectures for the past two decades. Glenn takes his perspective gained from his environmental health studies to detail how broad and encompassing Precision One Health is.

This research approach breaks down silos in search of solutions, Glenn said.

“If you’re just doing the medical side of research, then you can miss out on these opportunities of collaboration or bringing more ideas to the table,” he added. “Precision One Health is that table that is forming these connections and opening these doors.” ■



Embracing INNOVATION

CPH faculty expand ideas and reach through UGA’s Innovation District

By Erica Techo

Innovation thrives at the intersection of research and collaboration, and two faculty members in the College of Public Health are showing what’s possible when those forces are combined.

As an inaugural Faculty Innovation Fellow, Jenay Beer is connecting her colleagues with the resources of UGA’s Innovation District. At the same time, Associate Dean of Research Charles Easley is translating years of lab discoveries into Fertilligen, a biotech startup developing new treatments for male infertility.

Together, their paths highlight how public health research can expand its impact through the right support system.

FORMING CONNECTIONS ACROSS CAMPUS

Beer’s two-year fellowship involves exploration of the Innovation District’s resources, including courses, funding, networking opportunities and more.

Her mission, she says, is simple but meaningful.

“My goal is to help people become a part of the Innovation District and to help people at the university turn their ideas into something sustainable and impactful,” said Beer, associate professor and associate director of the Institute of Gerontology.

A key part of this fellowship is listening and learning. Beer will spend the first year of the fellowship talking with faculty, staff and students to better understand what innovation looks like in the College of Public Health, as well as how she can help make it more accessible.

“It’s a discovery process,” she said. “I want to understand how folks define innovation, what draws them to the Innovation District—or keeps them away. There can be confusion over who to go to, for what, and when.”

As someone who has utilized the Innovation District in the past, Beer recognizes that a traditional definition of “entrepreneurship” may feel at odds with a service-oriented field like public health. But it is not limited to building a new product or company, Beer said. Sometimes it is as straightforward as making a program sustainable for the long-term.

“Commercialization may seem daunting, or not public health-oriented, but that’s false,” Beer said. “Finding a way to make public health innovation financially viable leads to sustainability and growth.”

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING, SUSTAINED IMPACT

The Innovation District can support researchers in the pursuit of funding and growth, including navigating industry partnerships, scaling projects and developing a plan that is economically viable, and Beer hopes to guide them to the right resources at the right time.

Those connections also helped Easley grow the impact of Fertilligen.

“Infertility is a growing issue, which has seen increased costs in recent years. The in vitro fertilization, or IVF, market is expected to reach \$37.4 billion in 2030, Easley said, and about 1 in 5 couples experience infertility.

“This is one of the few health issues that I know of that has increased significantly in commonality, yet awareness and open conversation have remained stagnant,” he said.



“My goal is to help people become a part of the Innovation District and to help people at the university turn their ideas into something sustainable and impactful.” —JENAY BEER



“Infertility is a growing issue, which has seen increased costs in recent years.” —CHARLES EASLEY

Through Fertilligen, Easley and his team are developing novel stem cell-based therapies to treat male factor infertility, while researching the effects of environmental exposures and lifestyle choices on male infertility.

Through Innovation Gateway, Easley was connected to experienced mentors, university-backed resources, and the practical tools he needed to get his company off the ground.

Easley was also connected with the Georgia Research Alliance, which provides critical support to university-based startups across the state. In addition to awarding Fertilligen a pilot grant to advance their early research, GRA matched initial investor funding and offered guidance on navigating the path from lab discovery to commercial application.

“The support from GRA has been huge,” Easley said. “They don’t just give you money. They help you think through your next move, connect you with the right people, and really validate your work in a way that builds credibility.”

That credibility matters now more than ever, Easley said, as Fertilligen prepares for its next chapter: raising capital, finalizing a clinical trial plan, and bringing its first treatment closer to patients. Easley knows there’s still a long road ahead, but he sees UGA as a place uniquely equipped to help faculty walk that path.

“What’s special about UGA is the culture. It’s not just that we have Innovation Gateway and the Innovation District. It’s that everyone there is genuinely excited for your success,” he said. “It’s the kind of place where if you have an idea, people say, ‘Let’s figure out how to make it happen.’ That’s not the case everywhere.”

As Fertilligen continues to develop, Easley remains deeply connected to his academic roots. His lab at UGA still plays a key role in driving research forward, and he sees the university as a critical partner in whatever comes next.

For faculty in similar situations, he said the Innovation District is a great starting place. And he’s glad they can do that through a CPH colleague.

“I’ve learned so much through my own experience with the Innovation District,” Beer said. “It’s made me a better collaborator and mentor. Now I want to help others feel more confident taking that big jump. This fellowship is really about unlocking the potential that already exists here—and making sure no one feels like they have to do it alone. ■

CHARLES EASLEY’S RESEARCH ISN’T JUST CONFINED TO THE LAB. IT RECENTLY MADE IT TO THE TEDXUGA STAGE. READ MORE AT [PUBLICHEALTH.UGA.EDU/TAKING-ON-THE-TEDX-STAGE](https://publichealth.uga.edu/taking-on-the-tedx-stage).

NEW PHD PROGRAM

Helps shape the future of health services research and policy

By Erica Techo

The University of Georgia College of Public Health is celebrating the first year of its doctoral program in Health Services Research and Policy. Years in the making, this program is designed to meet a critical need in health care policy and analysis, addressing the growing demand for experts skilled in leveraging big data to improve health care systems in the United States and globally.

This program stands out from the crowd due to its focus on quantitative analysis of massive health data sets—Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and more.

“The health care industry generates an enormous volume of data daily,” said Health Policy & Management Department Head and Professor Mahmud Khan. “But in the U.S., we don’t have enough skilled individuals who can actually analyze the data and come up with specific policy, program, and health system implications.”

The curriculum equips students to tackle critical questions, such as the effectiveness of payment mechanisms for health care providers and the efficiency of drug policies, all with the goal of improving outcomes without increasing costs.

“The question always comes up: How do we improve the use of resources in the health care sector?” Khan said. “That’s exactly what health services researchers answer. They work to use the same level of resources to produce improved outcomes.”

The College of Public Health’s interdisciplinary approach makes it uniquely suited to host this program, Khan added.

“You can’t think of any other college where there is this broad range of important issues being analyzed and discussed,” Khan said. “A similar type of data analysis can be taught in other programs, but they don’t always see the health aspects or human aspects. That’s what public health does.”

Students can tailor their electives across diverse fields, from social work to law, fostering collaboration with epidemiologists, biostatisticians and policymakers.



“You can’t think of any other college where there is this broad range of important issues being analyzed and discussed.”

—MAHMUD KHAN,
DEPARTMENT HEAD

“When we developed the program of study, we made sure to include electives as an opportunity for our students to gear toward their own area of interest,” said Janani Rajbhandari-Thapa, associate professor. “We expect there will be many diverse sets of research coming out of this program, and we want to provide the opportunity to follow them—whether it’s social work, courses in the business school, developing strategy for a for-profit hospital or other paths.”

As the country faces rising health care costs, this program can produce researchers who can understand how preventive services and policies impact health outcomes, Khan said. But even beyond the U.S., the program has global implications, Thapa added.

“Our health services researchers are going to be from diverse settings and diverse health care systems,” Thapa said. “And they’ll be ready to go back and serve those communities.”

In its first cohort, the program enrolled six students, all funded by faculty research grants.

Even though this is an ever-growing field, maintaining a small cohort size ensures personalized mentorship and rigorous training.

“We aim to maintain our quality and rigor in order to produce the best quality, not just highest volume, of researchers,” Thapa said. ■



Community-minded:

DISCOVERING A PASSION FOR ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND DEMENTIA EDUCATION

By Mackenzie Patterson

Allison Eaddy has always had a passion for teaching others. With a background in special education, she planned on working with children, but now she's a proud advocate for Alzheimer's disease and dementia patients—and their caregivers.

As a Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) Agent in McDuffie County, Eaddy is responsible for planning and conducting educational programs to support her community. Through an initiative with the College of Public Health's Institute of Gerontology and the Archway Partnership, Eaddy began working with the Cognitive Aging and Education (CARE) Center to help McDuffie County community members learn more about Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

"I found a passion for it that I didn't know I had," said Eaddy, whose title also includes County Extension Coordinator. "That drives me to want to work harder. It drives me to want to work with them more. And I find myself wanting to learn more to be able to educate more people to create a change."



Eaddy serves as the County Extension Coordinator and Family & Consumer Sciences Agent in McDuffie County, Georgia.

At the time, Eaddy was getting her master's degree in Agriculture Leadership, Education and Communication from the University of Georgia and decided to take a couple of gerontology classes to learn more. Those couple of classes led to enrolling in the certificate program with the Institute of Gerontology. She earned her Graduate Certificate in Gerontology in May of 2025.

"I fell in love with it," said Eaddy. "It's real-life applicable. They do such a great job of making it come to life for you. The program left me wanting more."

And it isn't just her. Eaddy says the CARE Center has made learning about Alzheimer's disease and dementia—topics that many people shy away from—such an impactful experience in her community that people are consistently requesting more education.

"The CARE Center is passionate about what they do. They're compassionate about how they deliver it, and they want to work with us," said Eaddy. "They're listening, they're hearing, and they're adjusting their education to those specific community needs."

Eaddy works closely with Lisa Renzi-Hammond and Jenay Beer, co-directors of the CARE Center.



“Working with Allison in so many contexts—as a lifelong learner, as a FACS agent, and as an engaged community member who wants to make a difference—has been such an incredible experience. Allison reminds us in so many ways of what is possible when we re-imagine what the classroom can look like, and who learners fundamentally are. We learn as much from Allison as she learns from us,” said Renzi-Hammond, Director of the Institute of Gerontology.

“Allison has really exemplified what excellence in engagement scholarship looks like in the CARE Center,” added Beer, who has worked alongside Eddy in McDuffie County since 2021. “Allison is such a driver for CARE programming and research data collection in her community, and she uses her new knowledge and vast experience to generate momentum in communities all over the state.”

Eddy now partners with the Alzheimer’s Association to lead an Alzheimer’s disease and dementia support group, supports College of Public Health faculty members with research, and is a certified trainer in Virtual Dementia Tour—a simulation that allows caregivers to experience the world from the perspective of a person with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia.

“At the College of Public Health, we seek to ‘pursue understanding and take action,’ and Allison’s story is a great example of that. She took a general interest and turned it into a positive force for her community,” said College of Public

Eddy earned her Graduate Certificate in Gerontology in May of 2025.

Health Dean Marsha Davis. “This is just one story of how our partners across campus and the state make a difference in the community.”

Eddy’s experience working with and learning from the Institute of Gerontology and the CARE Center is unmatched. She encourages her fellow FACS agents across the state to embrace the invaluable education opportunities that the CARE Center could offer their communities and the change that could follow because of that.

“When Extension partners with research, we turn knowledge into practical solutions that make a difference in the lives of people,” said Allisen Penn, Associate Dean of Extension and Outreach for the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. “As a FACS Extension agent, Allison exemplifies just how powerful these partnerships can be, bringing meaningful benefits to the community and the state.”

“It’s not only McDuffie County. It’s not only Georgia. We have a nation that’s craving more knowledge and more information because this is a disease that could be prevented,” said Eddy. ■

“She took a general interest and turned it into a positive force for her community.”
—DEAN MARSHA DAVIS

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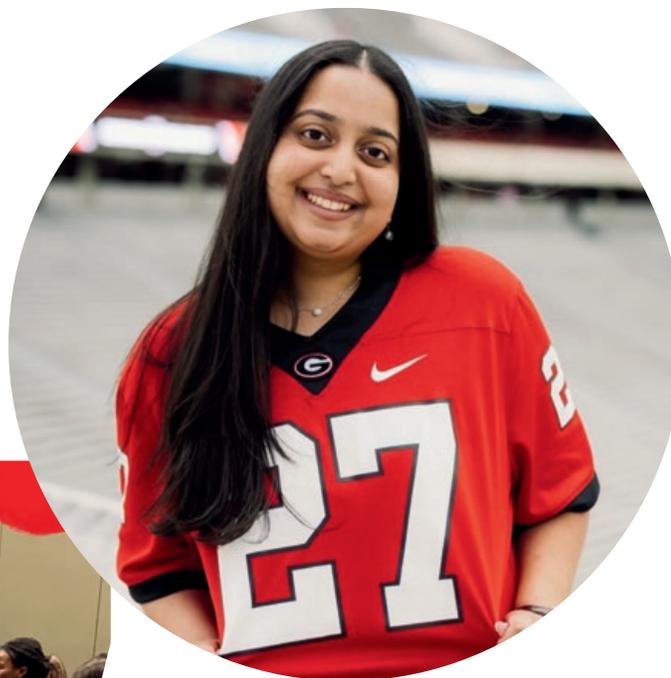


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Patience Mbakire (BSHP '23)
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Sneha Nimkar (BSHP '25)
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