

F A L L 2 0 1 8 N E W S L E T T E R

# Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research



Virginia Tech  
Center for Public Health  
Practice and Research

## What we do, who we are, who we serve

The **Center for Public Health Practice and Research (CPHPR)** at Virginia Tech engages interdisciplinary faculty, staff and students at Virginia Tech and community organizations to enhance public health practice and research in the region. The Center is housed in the Department of Population Health Sciences, Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

The Center supports community-based projects by collaborating with community partners to compete for and secure funding, as well as providing public health content and service expertise such as research studies, external evaluations, needs assessments and document writing. Through the Public Health Network, the Center partners with faculty, staff and students at Virginia Tech. The Center collaborates with university partners on grant writing, study design, implementation and evaluation and offers technical public health expertise.

The overarching goal for the Center is to enhance public health practice and research, particularly in Southwest and Southside Virginia, Central Appalachia and across the region.

## Workforce Development

Part of the mission of the CPHPR is providing workforce development throughout the region. Our faculty are available to work with your organization to design a training tailored to your needs. Possible training topics include communication, cultural competency, data management, program evaluation, grant writing and management, survey design, and more! We can provide a free training at your organization, which can range from an hour to a half-day. Please direct any questions or requests to CPHPR Project Coordinator, **Hannah Menefee** at [hmenefee@vt.edu](mailto:hmenefee@vt.edu).

## CPHPR at the American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting

CPHPR Associate Director Sophie Wenzel and Graduate Assistant Shelby Borowski presented the results of the evaluation of the Piedmont Community Services' Community Recovery Program at the APHA Annual Meeting on November 10, 2018 in San Diego, CA. Virginia Tech Master of Public Health students also attended to learn about nationwide public health research and practice and to showcase the VT Public Health program.



*Pictured above at the Public Health program booth (left to right): Sophie Wenzel, Taylor Holsinger, Shelby Borowski, Steven Black, and Kayla Septer*

## Some of our Current Projects

### **Sexual Health Needs Assessment in the New River Valley Jail**

The Center is collaborating with the New River Health District to conduct a sexual health needs assessment for incarcerated women in the New River Valley Jail. Findings will help inform educational sessions delivered by New River Health District educators.

### **Evaluation of the Expanded Community Recovery Program**

The Center is receiving funding from Piedmont Community Services to evaluate the expansion of the Community Recovery Program. This expanded program focuses on people with current substance use issues who cannot find a job, with the main goal being to find them treatment options and subsequently employment.



### **An Interdisciplinary Team Approach to the Study of Age Friendly Community Initiatives and Policies**

In partnership with colleagues in the Department of Apparel, Housing and Resource Management and the Center for Gerontology, the Center is assessing the impact of Age Friendly Cities and Communities designation on residents' quality of life and communities' planning strategies. This funding is available through an Institute for Society, Culture and Environment Scholars grant to Dr. Eunju Hwang, one of the Center's partners.

### **Building Healthy Families and Communities through Collaborative Strategies to Reduce Opioid Substance Use Disorder**

In partnership with the VT Institute on Policy and Governance and local communities, the Center is conducting research on the impact of substance use disorder on families, the community and employers. Utilizing a socio-ecological model, the Center is conducting research in two Virginia communities – rural Pulaski County and urban Roanoke City. This research will provide a foundation on which to build community-engaged collaborations and strategic approaches for the prevention and treatment of opioid and related substance use disorders. This funding is available through a Virginia Tech Vibrant Virginia Seed Grant.

## Obesity Prevention Projects

### **USDA Empowering Healthy Families**

The Center is partnering with the Baptist General Convention and Virginia Cooperative Extension to deliver the Healthy Children Healthy Families curriculum throughout the state. The long-term goals of the project are to:

- 1) prevent and reduce childhood obesity through improved parenting practices and home environment related to obesity;
- 2) expand Extension capacity for community-engaged research and collaborative programming with faith-based organizations;
- 3) enhance Extension strategies for recruiting and training community volunteers to extend Extension reach; and
- 4) train future health professionals to provide culturally appropriate collaborative community-based health programs.



### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: High Obesity Program - Petersburg, VA**

The Center is collaborating with Cooperative Extension, Virginia State University and the Crater Health District to empower people to lead healthy lifestyles and reduce obesity in Petersburg, Va.

## Opioid Abuse and Addiction Projects

Opioid abuse and addiction are affecting communities across the U.S. at alarming and sustained rates. There is a great need for research and interventions that address negative outcomes related to this crisis. Primary, secondary, and tertiary public health interventions in Virginia communities are all essential to combating the epidemic and supporting the health of Virginia residents. CPHPR is actively working to advance opioid abuse and addiction research and practice in Southwest Virginia and throughout the state through the projects highlighted below.

### Preventing Opioid Abuse in Rural Virginia (USDA/NIFA-funded)

The Center is partnering with Cooperative Extension, the VT Institute for Policy and Governance and the Virginia Rural Health Association on an opioid abuse prevention project in Grayson County and Martinsville/Henry County. The Center is evaluating the "PROmoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience" Model (PROSPER) which uses a community based approach to implement a family-level education program for adolescents and their families and a life skills intervention delivered through local schools.

### Helping Youth PROSPER and Avoid Opioid Misuse in Virginia (USDA/CYFAR-funded)



PROSPER will also be implemented in four Virginia communities by Virginia Cooperative Extension agents, with the goal of helping prevent opioid misuse. The Center is

Serving as the external evaluator on this project. The main outcome is that school aged youth will demonstrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for fulfilling contributing lives.

### Community Conversations on the Opioid Epidemic

On May 1, 2018, 71 higher education representatives from 23 colleges and universities from across Virginia and community representatives from Health Departments, Community Services Boards, and law enforcement gathered for a day of conversations on how to jointly combat the opioid epidemic.

#### Discussion points from the event included:

1. Identify ways to reduce stigma and change the narrative about opioid misuse and addiction.
2. There is a need for new evidence-based research that involves the community.
3. The community, including those in recovery, businesses, faith-based organizations, providers, peer support, etc. has a crucial role in helping to resolve the epidemic.
4. Identify ways to translate research to practice quickly and efficiently.
5. Keep social determinants of health/trauma informed care in mind (ACEs).
6. Increase collaboration across and within disciplines and institutions.
7. More treatment options are needed, with a focus on long term, holistic, chronic care.

This conversation has led to a research collaboration among several universities.

### Rural Opioids Technical Assistance through Virginia Cooperative Extension

This project will build upon the two projects above to expand training and technical assistance on opioid prevention through implementation of evidenced-based curricula targeting 6th grade students and their families and 7th grade students in middle schools to nine additional rural Virginia counties. The project is funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

### Evaluation of the High Risk Patient Education Program

The Virginia Rural Health Association has received funding from the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) to conduct opioid abuse prevention education with providers and high risk patients in rural hospitals throughout Virginia. The Center is conducting the evaluation of the program.



To learn more about current and past projects, visit our website at [www.cphpr.publichealth.vt.edu/](http://www.cphpr.publichealth.vt.edu/)

# Meet the CPHPR Graduate Research Assistants



**Shelby Borowski** is a Master of Public Health student in the Public Health Education concentration and a doctoral student in the Human Development and Family Science Program. At CPHPR, Shelby assists with evaluation procedures including implementing data collection measures, analyzing data, and disseminating evaluation findings via reports and presentations. When she graduates, Shelby hopes to work as a data analyst.



**Taylor Holsinger** is a second year Master of Public Health student in the Infectious Disease and Public Health Education concentrations. At CPHPR she is contributing to the development of Community Health Assessment Plans and Community Health Improvement Plans. Taylor has an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies from Roanoke College, and hopes to work on projects related to STD education and prevention in East Africa through the Peace Corps when she graduates.



**Madeline Murray** is a second year Master of Public Health student in the Public Health Education concentration. She is assisting with the USDA Empowering Healthy Families project. Madeline graduated from Virginia Tech in 2017 with a B.S. in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise and a minor in Psychology. She has interned with the FBI in Quantico and hopes to continue working with this population upon graduation.



**Rachel Burks** is a first year Master of Public Health student in the Public Health Education concentration. She is assisting with the Age Friendly Communities and Vibrant Virginia (opioid) projects. Rachel has a B.S. in Health and Wellness Promotion from UNC Asheville and has experience working as a Retirement Community Wellness Director.



## Welcome to Miebaka, CDC Public Health Associate!

**Miebaka Kalama** is a CDC fellow with the Public Health Associate Program who was recently placed with the New River Academic Health Department. He will be working with the New River Health District and with Population Health Sciences. He is working primarily on a Rabies One Health project in environmental health. Miebaka graduated from Stevenson University with a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry and Human Services in 2017, where he is also completing a Master's degree in Healthcare Management.



Sophie Wenzel,  
MPH  
Associate Director,  
CPHPR

## A Note from the Director & Associate Director

Thank you for catching up on what is happening at the CPHPR. The Center is now seven years old, and we are proud of its growth and accomplishments, many of which are highlighted in this newsletter. This work would not be possible without the support of our local and state partners. We thank you for the continued trust and support.

**If you are interested in hearing from us or working with us, please contact us.**

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