

Virginia Tech

Center for Public Health Practice and Research

Summer 2024 Newsletter

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. 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 contact Sophie Wenzel (swenzel@vt.edu) for more information

Recent workforce development activities

Through the New River Academic Health Department, faculty in Population Health Sciences held a Public Health 101/Certified in Public Health review for the New River Health District. Nine faculty held eleven 2-hour sessions with approximately 20 health department staff over the 2023-2024 school year. Those that are eligible will sit for the CPH exam over the summer.



**Senior project
associate Lisa
Homa presents at a
grant writing
workshop.**

On May 23rd, faculty from CPHPR traveled to Abingdon to conduct an in-service training on grant writing for Virginia Cooperative Extension agents. Representatives from the Office of Sponsored Programs co-facilitated the workshop. Approximately 25 agents gathered for the training.

Current Projects

EXCITE (Extension Collaborative on Immunization Teaching & Engagement), funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Extension Foundation

In close collaboration with Cooperative Extension agents around the state and Virginia State University, the Center is working to promote uptake of all adult vaccinations, including COVID-19, by increasing trust in the vaccines and decreasing vaccine hesitancy in rural areas. The Center was recently chosen by the funders as a pilot site to partner with the Virginia Rural Health Association to continue adult vaccine education outreach through community vaccine ambassadors in rural communities in Virginia.



Center research assistants Sydney Thompson and Samar Elsaadawy conduct education outreach at a recent event.

Piedmont Coalition Against Hunger

Piedmont Coalition Against Hunger (PACH) is using a Collective Impact Model to demonstrate the impact that food pantries in the group's catchment area have on food and nutrition security. PACH, as a backbone organization, and member organizations plan to expand the scale and scope of services and programs through providing Food is Medicine programs and other enhanced food and nutrition security activities. To support this enhancement, PACH is seeking to normalize data collection regarding how much food is provided to how many people. The Center is partnering with PACH to learn about current data collection and reporting on food distribution units, nutritional components, and people served. CPHPR will provide summary reports on interviews and findings to inform recommendations for data normalization and related support tools.

Current Projects, cont.

Southside Opioid Abatement Authority strategy planning (with the Southside Planning District)

The Center is working with community members in Mecklenburg, Brunswick and Halifax counties to identify and prioritize strategies related to addressing the opioid epidemic. After strategies are prioritized, we, along with the community, will develop a set of recommendations and a community implementation plan.



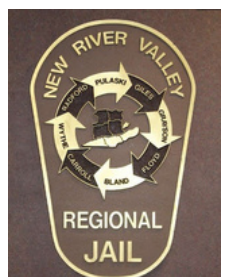
Research Associate Domenique Villani presents data at a community meeting in South Hill, Virginia.

Chronic Disease Self-Management program workshops (funded by the Virginia Department of Health, in collaboration with Virginia Cooperative Extension)

The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) is a six-week, interactive, peer-support program for people living with chronic diseases and their caregivers. The program aims to promote self-efficacy and improve health. We currently have nine workshops scheduled for 2024, including four in-person workshops to be held at various locations in Prince George and Dinwiddie County. If you, or anyone you know would be interested in attending a future CDSMP workshop, please register [here](#)! The workshops are offered at no cost. Questions can be directed to Elizabeth Caton, ecaton@vt.edu.

Interviews with female inmates at New River Regional Jail

In an effort to better understand events leading up to incarceration for female inmates at the New River Regional Jail, we are conducting qualitative interviews with incarcerated women, with a focus on intimate partner and family violence and substance misuse.



Current Projects, cont.

Empowering rural communities for action through evidence-based community engagement: Applying the SEED method to the opioid epidemic, funded by USDA/RHSE and Americorps

In partnership with colleagues in Cooperative Extension and at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Center is evaluating the implementation of the SEED community engagement method in rural Virginia communities to help identify strategies to address the opioid epidemic.

Farm to School

The Center continued to assist the Virginia Department of Education in preparing their annual Farm to School program report. The goal of the Farm to School program is to "increase equitable access to fresh, healthy, Virginia grown food while providing hands-on learning opportunities in a variety of educational settings" (Farm to School 2022-2023 Annual Report). This report assists the Virginia Department of Education and interested stakeholders in understanding the progress of this program towards it reaching its goals

Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships(PHOPs) Lite

PHOPs Lite supports the food access, nutrition education and market programs started during a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) High Obesity Program (HOP) grant and is being sustained in Petersburg, VA. The Market @ PPL (Petersburg Public Library) is an indoor farm retail store inside the library, which is a community hub serving a diverse population. The Market @ PPL is a Shop Smart Eat Smart food retailer in partnership with Virginia Family Nutrition Program. Together the partners promote healthy food options, nutrition education and literacy, and food resource management. PHOPs Lite continues to support the development of a local food system in Petersburg, VA and surrounding localities through grant writing (facilitating a Grants & Financing Work Group), project management, and evaluation services.

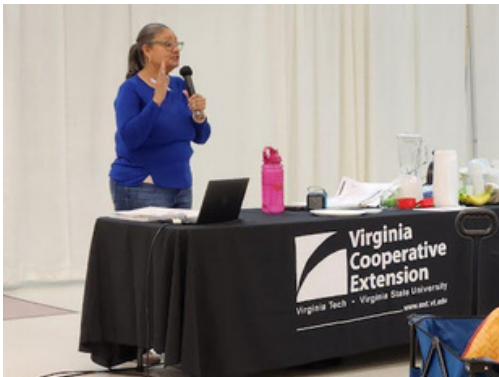


The Market@PPL

Current Projects, cont.

Balanced Living with Diabetes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is funding a two-year group-randomized control trial to evaluate their New Beginnings diabetes support program through the Virginia Cooperative Extension Balanced Living with Diabetes (BLD) program. Fifteen Extension agents will lead two BLD programs each, with one in each pair randomized to incorporate New Beginnings in during the eight-week period between the last BLD class and the reunion class.



Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent Jane Henderson leads a Balanced Living with Diabetes session in Richmond, Virginia



Balanced Living with Diabetes participants learn how insulin controls blood sugar levels.

Virginia Cooperative Extension Collaborative Opioid Prevention Education (VCE-COPE)

VCE provided technical assistance to rural communities through evidence-based programs and resources to prevent substance misuse and addiction for five years through the Rural Opioid Technical Assistance project, funded by the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. VCE received funding in 2023 from the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority to continue this work and to expand to urban areas based on community priorities and disease burden. Funds are available to train VCE staff and community members to implement the evidence-based programs including the Botvin LifeSkills curricula for schools and parents/caregivers, Mental Health First Aid, and Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Other Center news

International Opportunity

Center Associate Director Sophie Wenzel recently traveled to Ethiopia as a Global Opportunities Initiative fellow. GOI empowers faculty to deepen global awareness, form global networks, and successfully compete for global funding. The GOI theme this year was “community engaged research and outreach for impact.”

Presentations

CPHPR faculty and students presented on their practice-based research projects at several national conferences this year, including the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, the Virginia Public Health Association, the American Public Health Association, and the National Health Outreach Conference.

Center Faculty and Staff

A huge shout out and thank you to our dedicated team working on Center programs throughout the state!

Amelia Bandy, Maria Murillo-Valdez, Susan Dalrymple, Shannon Simpson, Lynn Margheim, Danielle Short, Tabitha Pagan, Solette Priest, Jennifer Gallagher, Samantha Edwards, Elisha Burke, Beverly Vaden, Jennifer Fichtorn, Angelina Hargrove, Lisa Homa, Kristina Jiles, Dominique Villani, Elizabeth Caton, Sophie Wenzel, Kathy Hosig

And all of our students featured below!



Sophie Wenzel participates in a challenge mapping exercise with Jimma University colleagues.



Recent MPH graduate Mols Kwitny presents their poster at the American Public Health Association's annual meeting in 2023.

Meet our new faculty



Elizabeth Caton

Elizabeth Caton has worked previously with the Center as Program Support Specialist for three years and is now enjoying her new role as Project Coordinator. She holds a master's degree in social work and has worked as a teacher and school social worker with Norfolk Public Schools. In her spare time, Elizabeth runs a native plant nursery with her husband and also rescues animals.

Dr. Angelina J. Hargrove

Dr. Angelina J. Hargrove brings a wealth of expertise and dedication to her role as a behavioral health scientist at the Center for Public Health Practice and Research. With a fervent commitment to health promotion, mental health awareness, and combating substance abuse, she stands at the forefront of addressing community health needs.

Angelina's background encompasses a blend of community-engaged research and implementation practices. She has played a pivotal role in a community-academic partnership aimed at tackling opioid use disorder through grassroots initiatives. Her skill set spans implementation science, outcome evaluation, and the design and execution of community lead research.

Currently, Angelina leads the Empowering Healthy Families (EHF) research project, a cornerstone initiative at the Center. Originally conceived to enhance healthy eating and financial management habits among families in Virginia, EHF has evolved under Angelina's guidance. Her team now investigates the impact of declining attendance in African-American churches, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, on the ability of these institutions to prioritize and engage in health promotion efforts.



Meet our graduate assistants

Brooke Rogers is from Norfolk, Virginia. She recently graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health and Minors in Sociology and Medicine and Society this past May. She will begin her second year of the Accelerated Master of Public Health degree program at VT in the Fall to graduate with an MPH in Spring 2025. At the Center, she works as a research assistant for a project funded by the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) aimed at addressing the opioid crisis in the Southside Health District in Virginia. In addition to her work with the Center, this summer she is working with the 757 Breastfeeds initiative as part of the Consortium for Infant and Child Health (CINCH) at EVMS for her MPH practicum.



Sarah Supplee is a rising second year Master of Public Health student with dual concentrations in Infectious Disease and Community Health Promotion and Social Equity. Sarah is also the Hokie Wellness Graduate Assistant, serving on the Sexual Violence Prevention Team, and a student researcher with the Center for Public Health Practice and Research. This summer Sarah is completing her practicum through the Virginia Department of Health Internship Academy at the New River Health District. Outside of class and work, Sarah enjoys hiking, running, and spending time with friends and family.

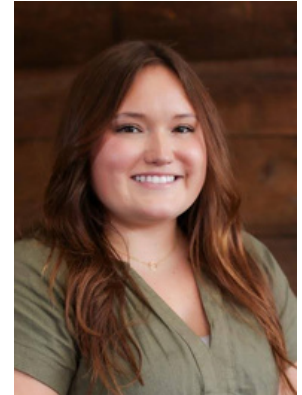
Victor Boahen is a registered dietitian and a doctoral student in Human Nutrition, with an MPH in progress in the Community Health track. His research focuses on examining the role of nutrition in chronic disease management. Additionally, his research integrates public health and community-based approaches to address health issues effectively. In his free time, he loves watching soccer and listening to music



Breana Turner just wrapped up her 3rd year as a PhD Candidate within the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health program. During the year she led a small team to complete focus groups for the Empowering Health Family's project. Also, she wrapped up her data collection for her dissertation research surrounding Black women's health and wellness! She loves reaching out to empower the next generation of women in STEM, and most recently spoke on the American Heart Association STEM Goes Red Panel.

Meet our graduate assistants

Gracie Akers is going into her second year as an MPH student concentrating in community health promotion and equity. She is also a NRV local with a passion of serving her community. She has had the privilege to work for the Center, assisting with a couple of projects and she is excited to continue to grow her public health skills through this opportunity!



Sydney Thompson is a Master of Public Health graduate student with a concentration in Community Health Promotion and Equity. She is interested in understanding and addressing social drivers of health. In her free time, she enjoys reading, traveling, and cooking new recipes.

Grayson Watson is a rising second year MPH student in the Infectious Disease track. He is originally from a small town in West Virginia and he received his B.S. Biology degree from West Virginia University. He is still exploring what he wants to do after getting his MPH next year but he is interested in epidemiology and infection control and prevention. In his personal life, he loves the outdoors and one of his favorite things to do is go on hikes and walks with his fiancée and their golden retriever Max!



Tylis Johnson, a native of Lynchburg, is a Radford graduate pursuing an MPH degree. She is keenly interested in chronic disease prevention, disease surveillance, and cultural respect. Apart from academics, Tylis enjoys Broadway, graphic design, and dancing. You can often find her with a cold brew, reading political science and Afrofuturism novels, studying Korean, or playing Animal Crossing. Currently, Tylis is assisting with Balanced Living with Diabetes project and focusing on elderly care. She aims to bring about positive change in her local community to better adapt to the needs of the aging population.

Meet our graduate assistants

Amanda Hensley is a PhD Candidate in the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health Program at Virginia Tech. She is a Graduate Research Assistant for the integrated Translational Health Research Institute of Virginia (iTHRIV) and a Fellow in the Interfaces for Global Change IGEP. Her doctoral research includes two systematic reviews: strategies to improve vaccine uptake, and recruitment strategies of underrepresented populations, respectively, and an evaluation of community-facing messaging on research participation.

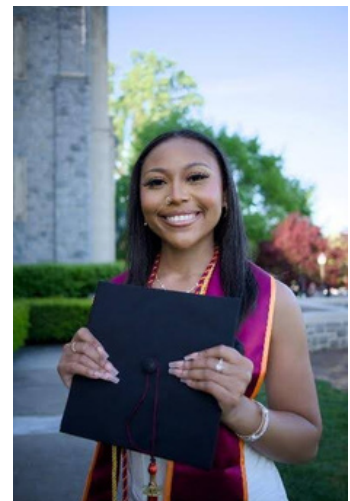


During her time with iTHRIV, Amanda has produced over a dozen community- and researcher-facing educational videos on topics such as clinical research participation and team science with community partners. She earned a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Georgia, a B.Sc. in Biology from Hollins University, and a Master's Degree in Healthcare Administration from Radford University Carilion. Amanda's research interests are in public health implementation science, infectious disease prevention, science communication, community engagement of health- and research-related topics and processes, and science-policy interfaces. Amanda enjoys spending all of her non-research time with her husband, children, and cats.



Emma Hare a 2nd year MPH student at VT with a bachelor's in public health from American University. She is passionate about mental health access and women's health and she is actively advocating for both in her current position as the GA at Cook Counseling Center. Her hobbies include reading and any outdoor activity, as well as spending time with her dog, Oshie!

Terryonna Smith just finished her first year as an accelerated MPH student. Recently, May of 2024, she graduated with a Bachelor of Public Health minoring in Health Communications. Next up, she plans to attain her Master's degree in Public Health concentrating in Community Health Promotion and Equity in May of 2025



Not pictured: Samar Elsaadawy, Kayla Mbanzendore

A note from Kathy and Sophie

It's been another wonderful public health-packed year! The Center is growing in new ways that continue to amaze and surprise us and we love it! Our projects are diverse and keep us on our toes. We are grateful for our dedicated team of faculty, staff and students who keep the work going. And of course, none of the work would be possible without the support and trust from our community partners. Thank you!



Sophie Wenzel, MPH, DrPH, CPH, CHES®
Center Associate Director



Kathy Hosig, PhD, MPH, RD
Center Director

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

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***A special thanks to Virginia Tech's Institute for Society, Culture and Environment
(ISCE) for continued support!***