

THE TRIBUNE

FEBRUARY 2024

Stepping Up

Career Ladder Reflects Value of Community Health Workers



Cause for Celebration

UAMS community health workers in Northwest Arkansas gathered in August 2023 to celebrate National Community Health Worker Awareness Week.

In a December presentation, UAMS' Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, recalled an employee telling her how much she had struggled on a community health worker's salary. She explained that she loved her job, but that she was not able to afford rent and had unstable housing and had to live in her car at times.

The employee discussed her experience after she completed UAMS' community health worker (CHW) training program, became certified, and received a promotion thanks to a new career ladder program implemented in 2023 by Krista Langston, MBA, McElfish, and their team.

McElfish directs the UAMS Office of Community Health & Research and co-directs the TRI-supported UAMS Rural Research Network. Langston is executive director of Community Programs at Community Health & Research.

When the new career ladder titles were implemented, the employee was promoted to a Community Health Worker Level 2, which increased her salary by about 36%.

Continued on page 2



Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of *The Tribune* we highlight a workforce that has become increasingly important to our focus on research in rural and underserved populations. Known collectively as community health workers, this group has demonstrated its value helping UAMS reach diverse populations across Arkansas. We witnessed their

impact during the tough years of COVID-19. As trusted members of the communities they serve, community health workers are critical conduits for UAMS' health and research efforts.

Recognizing their value, Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, and Krista Langston, MBA, led the establishment of a career ladder program that provides training and certification to support increased salaries and job retention. One advance includes a college credit program available through the University of Arkansas Community College at Hope-Texarkana for those who complete the UAMS training.

As we anticipate our next cycle of CTSA funding at TRI, new programs will expand opportunities for UAMS-affiliated investigators to work with community health workers to expand research opportunities to more individuals across Arkansas.

Finally, please mark your calendars for March 26 and join us for Research Day 2024! We promise a great day with enlightening presentations from TRI-funded researchers, keynote speakers and a poster session. See our story with registration information on page 3.

Sincerely,

Laura James, M.D.
Director, TRI
Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical and Translational Research, UAMS

“As much as community health workers help Arkansans they are often paid poverty wages,” McElfish said. “I’m excited we’ve been able to move community health workers into a livable wage with a career ladder. Of all the things that Krista and I have done, this may be the initiative that has the most impact.”

The minimum annual salary as part of the career ladder program was increased from about \$32,000 to \$44,500 for level 1, from \$40,000 to \$50,000 for level 2, and from \$48,000 to \$57,500 for level 3.

The Arkansas Community Health Worker Association (ARCHWA) sets the standards for the CHW certification process and approves curriculum. Three organizations offer approved CHW core competency training: UAMS, Tri County Rural Health Network, and Arkansas Rural Health Partnership.

Unique Value

CHWs serve a variety of roles, including health education, preventive care, and health care navigation, such as assistance applying for insurance and Medicaid. They bring unique value to their jobs as trusted members of the communities they serve.

“CHWs have community relationships already established,” said Anna Huff Davis, who chairs the ARCHWA Board of Directors and TRI Community Advisory Board. “Health care providers and research leaders have come to realize how valuable CHWs are.”

Community Health & Research established the Community Health Worker Training & Apprenticeship Program in 2023 to train and engage CHWs in underserved communities across Arkansas. A federal Health Resources and Services Administration grant led by Langston supports implementation of the career ladder and funds CHWs’ time as they go through the training and seek certification.

“We’re very excited about this,” McElfish said, noting that CHWs are trained to work on teams using community-based participatory research approaches to support and educate the community.



Huff Davis



Langston



McElfish



Pile

College Credit

Langston and McElfish further enhanced the training program by partnering with the University of Arkansas Community College at Hope-Texarkana (UAHT) to offer college credit for those who complete the UAMS training.

“Our hope and our goal is that many community health workers continue their work and others will have a path to additional higher education and become nurses or serve in other critical roles to address health disparities across the state,” McElfish said.

She said the achievements are a credit to the significant collaborations with TRI Community Engagement Core Director Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., Davis, ARCHWA, and the Tri County Rural Health Network.

Over the past two years, UAMS has trained and deployed 158 CHWs into 40 of Arkansas’ 75 counties, and 76 organizations supported and provided training for the integration of CHWs.

“We have secured and provided funding for every one of those community health workers and embedded them in community based organizations,” McElfish said.

Seeing the Light

The COVID-19 pandemic brought health providers and researchers numerous opportunities for grants that supported hiring community health workers. As that money has dwindled, provider organizations are finding ways to keep them on the payroll, Davis said.

“They saw the light,” she said. “They get the best impact when community health workers are incorporated into what they are doing.”

The number of CHWs in Arkansas increased from 128 in 2013 to 414 in 2023, based on employer surveys conducted by ARCHWA. The numbers are likely underreported because not all the surveys were returned, said Judy Pile, Ed.D., ARCHWA executive director. More than 350 of the state’s community health workers are affiliated with UAMS.

TRI Support

In addition to being an annual sponsor of ARCHWA’s Summit, TRI adapted its nationally recognized Community Scientist Academy for CHWs.

Pile praised TRI’s efforts to expand the role of CHWs into research. “ARCHWA has enjoyed a great relationship with TRI for many years,” she said.

Because of their lived experiences, community health workers are ideal for participating on TRI Community Review Boards, which are one-time meetings to provide feedback on a researcher’s project. They can also represent their communities as reviewers of grant proposals and collect data on community-based research studies.

Future TRI efforts will include developing strategies to teach investigators how to work with CHWs and developing opportunities for investigator-CHW partnerships so that CHWs are further integrated into TRI research.

Register Now for TRI Research Day - March 26!

Please join TRI for a day dedicated to showcasing innovative translational research **Tuesday, March 26, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.**, at the Little Rock Marriott Conference Center, 3 Statehouse Plaza.

The annual event will feature engaging oral presentations by selected TRI-supported investigators, offering insights into their diverse research projects. A poster session will exhibit an array of TRI-supported initiatives across its many funding and training programs.

We are also delighted to announce two distinguished keynote speakers:

- Susan D. Emmett, M.D., MPH, founder and director of the UAMS Center for Hearing Health Equity; associate professor of otolaryngology and epidemiology, College of Medicine and Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health

Presentation: "From Arkansas to Rural America: A New Paradigm for Healthcare"

- Al Richmond, MSW, executive director of Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, which was founded in 1997 with the mission to promote health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and academic institutions Presentation: "Advancing Equity through Partnerships"

Presentation: "Advancing Equity through Partnerships"

Please use the QR code to register.

Come see how we're translating research into health practice!

Contact: Christi Madden, cmadden2@uams.edu.



Scan Here

TRI Provides Consultations on Community-Engaged Research

TRI seeks to include community members in many aspects of translational research. TRI's Community Engagement Core leads this important role, including helping researchers conduct community-based participatory research.

UAMS-affiliated researchers and community partners interested in community-based research are encouraged to schedule a consultation with TRI's community engagement team, which will:

- Introduce investigators to community members and consult on developing collaborations and partnerships
- Advise on whether to utilize a study-specific community review board (CRB) for feedback on research questions, participant recruitment and retention, research implementation, and the dissemination of research findings
- Discuss the community engagement aspects of grant applications and conceptualizing studies that benefit from community engagement.
- Provide technical assistance to research staff on community engagement strategies
- Facilitate community input on specific projects, grant applications, manuscripts, etc.
- Establish a connection to the Faith Network, a diverse group of faith leaders from around the state.

Researchers interested in such consultations and technical assistance can make their requests through the TRI Portal at TRI.uams.edu.



Meet the TRI Community Engagement team: (Back, l-r), Jinger Morgan, Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., director, Keneshia Bryant-Moore, Ph.D., APRN, FNP-BC, associate director; front, Nicki Spencer, MHA, senior program manager, and Sarah Fountain, MPH, program manager.



Anna Huff Davis is the team's community liaison and chair of the TRI Community Advisory Board.

NIH R21 Supports KL2 Graduate's Study of Human-Computer Interaction, Influence on Heart Failure Patient Outcomes



Tremaine Williams, Ed.D.

A UAMS research team led by Tremaine Williams, Ed.D., has received a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant to better understand how nurses influence outcomes of heart failure patients.

The two-year, \$406,897 R21 award from the NIH National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) will focus on Black/African American heart failure patients, whose hospitalization rates are nearly 2.5 times that of white heart failure patients nationally.

His team is bringing a biomedical informatics approach that could potentially help nurses and other care team members fine tune risk stratification to ensure more personalized care for higher risk patients and better predict what types of care they need.

“It’s this intersection of human-computer interaction, how they’re working with these computational tools within the electronic health record to improve patient outcomes,” said Williams, an assistant professor in the College of Medicine Department of Biomedical Informatics.

Williams completed TRI’s two-year KL2 Mentored Research Career Development Scholar Award program in 2023. He said the program was essential for getting his research off the ground.

“The KL2 provided the protected time to generate the pilot data, protected time for my mentor, Kevin Sexton, M.D., to guide me, funds to cover the publication costs, and a structured plan for acquiring the knowledge and skills that I needed to conduct the R21’s research plan,” Williams said.