

THE TRIBUNE

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Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference Keynote: Networks Needed to Solve ‘Wicked’ Health Problems



Neal Halfon, M.D., MPH, speaks to attendees of the Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference.

Lifespan research may span cradle to grave, but for Neal Halfon, M.D., MPH, the top priority is addressing complex problems that often begin prenatally, preventing children from thriving and leading to long-term health issues.

A major thought leader in children’s health policy and health system change from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Halfon discussed his work as the keynote speaker at the Sept. 10 Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference, which drew more than 70 attendees. The second annual conference was sponsored by the Arkansas Children’s Research Institute (ACRI), UAMS Translational Research Institute, and the College of Medicine Lifespan Creativity Hub. Halfon’s presentation was titled, “Life Course

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Dear Colleagues,

In this issue of The TRIBUNE, we highlight the powerful presentation delivered by Dr. Neal Halfon at the recent Advancing Arkansas Lifespan Research Conference. His thought-provoking insights and groundbreaking work in life-course health development challenge

us to reimagine how we’re going to solve our seemingly intractable health issues in Arkansas and across the U.S.

I believe all of us who heard Dr. Halfon’s keynote address came away with a better understanding of how health trajectories are shaped over time by dynamic interactions between biological, social and environmental factors.

Dr. Halfon’s work at UCLA underscores the profound impact that early-life risk factors and interventions can have on health outcomes across the lifespan.

His focus on finding holistic approaches and solutions through his Life Course Translational Research Network extends beyond academic settings into communities and families. This work closely aligns with our goals as translational researchers. I believe we are uniquely positioned to explore the complexities of health development, particularly through cross-disciplinary partnerships that span genetics, systems biology, public health, and beyond. As we consider the path forward, let’s continue to build on our lifespan research efforts by fostering impactful collaborations that advance the well-being of Arkansans across all stages of life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura James, M.D." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Laura James, M.D.

Director, TRI

Associate Vice Chancellor for Clinical and Translational Research, UAMS

Health Development: A Sensemaking Framework for Translational Research.”

“The problems we face as a society are what are called wicked problems,” said the distinguished professor of pediatrics, public health and public policy, and founding director of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities. “They’re complex problems; they’re nonlinear; they’re emergent, complex, and multi-level problems. A single investigator is not going to solve that.”

He noted that despite remarkable medical advances that improve childhood morbidity and mortality, there have been dramatic increases in chronic health problems, a growing prevalence of mental health disorders, and an increasing number of children with multiple conditions, such as asthma, obesity and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In addition, there’s been an emergence of new disorders, including internet addiction disorder.

When it comes to such complex problems, he said, one person will solve it about 2% of the time, a team of people will solve it 25% of the time, and a network can succeed about 60% of the time.

“You need to have that collective intelligence,” said Halfon, also director of Maternal Child Health Life Course Interventions & Translational Research Networks at UCLA.

Halfon is working to tackle the systemic health challenges through the programs he leads, such as the Life Course Translational Research Network, which includes 125 researchers across 19 states and more than 40 institutions across the U.S.

The network includes seven research nodes focusing on adversity, ADHD, early childhood, family, maternal health, prematurity and schools.

Halfon and his colleagues published the “Handbook of Life Course Health Development” in 2018. The network’s collaborators also published 18 papers as a supplement to the journal *Pediatrics* in 2022, in which the authors discuss moving the network-developed concepts into practice.

Successfully addressing the country’s complex health issues will require transforming the health care system, with significant investments aimed at helping children to thrive, he said. Clinical and Translational Science Award institutions such as UAMS can play a big role.

“We think there are lots of touch points between what we’re doing and the clinical and translational science award (CTSA) institutions,” Halfon said. “We’re encouraging other CTSA to get involved with us.”

He noted that the network invites up to 10 junior faculty and Ph.D. students each year to participate in its two-year.

training program, with the scholars coming from clinical and translational science award institutions across the U.S.

During a discussion with attendees at the end of the day, Halfon complimented the other presentations and panel discussions.

“I found all the discussion today really, really fascinating,” he said. “This was quite a diverse group of topics.”

Other presenters represented research at UAMS, Arkansas Children’s Research Institute (ACRI) and the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS). The researchers and their presentation titles were:

Katy Allison, Ph.D., MPH, assistant professor, Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health Department of Health Behavior and Health Education; *The Role of Remote Patient Monitoring in Improving Perinatal Outcomes*

Elena Ambrogini, M.D., Ph.D., associate professor, College of Medicine; director, Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, Department of Internal Medicine; associate professor, Department of Orthopaedics; staff endocrinologist and research scientist, CAVHS; *Role of Oxidized Phospholipids in Bone Homeostasis*

Aline Andres, Ph.D., RD, professor, College of Medicine Department of Pediatrics; associate director, Arkansas Children’s Nutrition Center; *Perinatal Interventions to Influence Lifespan Health*

Colin Kay, Ph.D., professor, College of Medicine Department of Pediatrics; *Leveraging Nutrition Research Data for Supporting Precision Health*

David Matlock, M.D., assistant professor, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Neonatology; *Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia and Respiratory Distress Syndrome of the Newborn*

Lorraine McKelvey, Ph.D., professor, College of Medicine Department of Family and Preventive Medicine; *Following Baby Back Home: Examining Impacts of Home Visiting for NICU Graduates*

Dennis H. Sullivan, M.D., director of the VISN 16/CAVHS Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center; professor and vice chair, Donald W. Reynolds Department of Geriatrics, College of Medicine; *Select Aging-Focused Research at the VA*

Yong Zhu, Ph.D., professor of Epidemiology, Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, and associate director for Population & Translational Sciences, Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute; *Circadian Disruption and Human Health*

Researchers Rise to Summer Writing Challenge

Four UAMS researchers have been recognized for their prolific manuscript writing during this year's Summer Writing Challenge.

Sixty-three manuscripts were submitted by 19 researchers. Announced during Research Expo 2024 by TRI Director Laura James, M.D., those with the most manuscript submissions received certificates and a UAMS-branded cutting board.

UAMS-affiliated researchers who had received any TRI resources or support since 2019 were eligible to participate.

"Our researchers really stepped up again this year for another fantastic summer of manuscript submissions," James said. "Dissemination of study findings through publication is a key part of our mission, so their hard work is greatly appreciated."

The winners are:



Astounding Apprentice Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Assistant Professor (17 submissions): **Yong-Moon "Mark" Park, Ph.D., M.D., M.S.**



Sage Scribe Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Professor (2 submissions): **Elisabet Børsheim, Ph.D.**



Wise Wordsmith Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts for the Rank of Associate Professor (4 submissions): **Sara Landes, Ph.D.**



Stupendous Scholar Award: Most Submitted Manuscripts by Non-Faculty (4 submissions): **Adrian Williams, M.S.**

Early-Career Researchers Invited to Learn about and Apply for K12 Scholar Awards

Early career researchers are invited to attend one of two information sessions about TRI's K12 Mentored Research Career Development Scholar Award Program on **Oct. 15 and 28**, via Zoom.

The information sessions conducted by the K12 program's faculty leaders will provide the inspiration and information needed to help interested faculty develop a successful application for this prestigious training program.

The Oct. 15 session is from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., and the Oct. 28 session is from 4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Please scan the QR code to register for one of the information sessions.

With the goal of helping junior faculty become independently funded clinical and translational science investigators, the K12 program provides two years of didactic and mentored research training, including 75% salary support and \$25,000 each year for research related expenses such as supplies, travel, etc.

Letters of Application are due Dec. 16, 2024, at 3 p.m.

You can read the 2025 K12 Funding Opportunity Announcement by scanning the QR code.

Contact: Nik Berardi, NDBerardi@uams.edu.



Scan to register for information sessions.



Scan to view FOA.

TRI Community Engagement Team Joins PCORI-Funded, Multisite Collaboration



Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D.

TRI's Community Engagement Core is joining seven other community engagement teams across the United States on a research project to promote and strengthen institutional support for community-based research and patient/community leadership in research.

Funded for three years by a \$1.5 million award from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), the Engage for Equity PLUS (E2PLUS) project will test engagement strategies that foster community trust of academic research institutions and promote community leadership in research.

TRI Community Engagement Core Director Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., said the collaborative research project will help UAMS and other research institutions tackle community trust issues that make community-engaged research more challenging.



Anna Huff Davis

"I'm really excited about this project because it's an opportunity to address some of those barriers that are bigger than just the researcher," said Haynes, an associate professor in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, and assistant dean of Culture and Engagement in the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health. "We want to ensure that we have trusting relationships with our community partners, and we hope this project will help us and other academic institutions do a better job of that."

Haynes is the UAMS project lead on the project, and Anna Huff Davis, community liaison for TRI, is the community champion and will be leading the efforts to engage UAMS faculty, staff and partners in the project.

In addition to UAMS, the participating institutions are the University of Iowa, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Pennsylvania State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of New Mexico, University of Kansas, and University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus.

TRI's Community Engagement Core has spent more than a decade providing innovative leadership in the field. The University of New Mexico, which is leading the project, invited Haynes to participate.

To help address community-institutional trust issues, Haynes will invite relevant stakeholders, including researchers, institutional policymakers and community members to participate in trainings to be conducted by the University of New Mexico in 2025.

"We will bring to the table all the people who we think are part of the solution," Haynes said. "If we're able to effectively address some of these barriers, I think it's going to positively impact our ability to develop community partnerships. It's also going to help us inform and encourage more researchers to be a part of community-engaged research."