

# THE TRIBUNE

November - December 2024

## Community Partner Celebration TRI Honors Efforts to Address Critical Health Challenges



The Olly Neal Community Health Center, represented by (l-r) LaFay Broadway and Cassandra Franklin, received the Research Partner of the Year Award. Laura James, M.D., TRI director, and Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., director of TRI's Community Engagement Core, presented the award. (Photo by Evan Lewis)

The Ninth Annual TRI Community Partner Celebration on Dec. 6 brought attendees from across Arkansas to recognize the pivotal role of community partnerships in advancing research and improving health.

Organized by TRI's Community Engagement Core, the event at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center in Little Rock drew more than 80 attendees representing community and academic partnerships to address critical health challenges in Arkansas.

Laura James, M.D., TRI director, recognized attendees for their dedication to helping UAMS improve health through research. "I want to thank everybody for all of your contributions throughout the year to help us be successful as an institution," she said.

James and Tiffany Haynes, Ph.D., director of the Community Engagement Core, presented awards in five categories to those involved in community-based research.

*Continued on page 2*



Dear Colleagues,

As I reflect on the Ninth Annual TRI Community Partner Celebration, I am grateful and inspired by the incredible work we are accomplishing together with our many community partners.

This event is always a powerful reminder of the vital role community partnerships play in advancing health research and making a tangible difference in the lives of Arkansans. The stories shared during the celebration showcase the heart of our mission at UAMS: fostering collaboration to address critical health challenges across our rural state.

The nominees and awardees recognized during the event exemplify what can be achieved when communities and researchers join forces with a shared vision of health equity. All of our honorees inspire us with their commitment to improving the lives of those they serve.

The projects highlighted during the celebration demonstrate how community-driven solutions can address longstanding health disparities and inspire innovative research strategies.

At TRI, we remain committed to nurturing these partnerships and supporting the ongoing efforts to keep Arkansas' diverse communities at the forefront of health research. Together, we are building a foundation for sustainable, impactful change.

As we move forward, let us continue to celebrate our shared achievements and redouble our efforts to tackle the pressing health challenges facing our state. I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish together in the coming year.

Sincerely,

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

## Community Partner Celebration (continued from page 1)

The 2024 awardees are:

➤ Research Partner of the Year: **Olly Neal Community Health Center**

The Olly Neal Community Health Center, based in Marianna, Arkansas, was celebrated for its work in the Mississippi Delta, one of the state's most underserved regions. Cassandra Franklin and LaFay Broadway accepted the award on behalf of the center for their successful efforts recruiting participants for the research project "Home Food Delivery for Diabetes Management in Patients of Rural Clinics."

➤ Chancellor's Community Engaged Research Partner of the Year: **Boys, Girls, Adult Community Development Center**

The Boys, Girls, Adult Community Development Center (BGACDC) in Marvell was honored for its partnership with Tiffany Miles, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow in the UAMS College of Medicine Department of Neuroscience. Together, they are tackling obesity and diabetes prevention through a community-led research project developed during training in TRI's year-long Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Scholars Program.

➤ M. Kate Stewart Community Engaged Researcher of the Year: **Taren Massey-Swindle, Ph.D.**

Taren Massey-Swindle, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the College of Medicine Departments of Pediatrics and Family and Preventive Medicine. She has built strong partnerships with diverse communities across Arkansas and secured multiple national grants to help improve feeding practices in early childhood care and education settings.

➤ Community Engaged Student/Trainee of the Year: **Rachel Hale**

Rachel Hale is a Ph.D. student in the UAMS Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health in the college's Health Promotion and Prevention Research program. Her award stems in part from her project, supported by a pilot grant, "Climate Change and Health Risk Perceptions of Arkansas Small Farmers through the Application of the Health Belief Model."

➤ Community Engaged Research Staff Member of the Year: **Ason Mohammed**

Ason Mohammed is a senior data analyst at the Institute for Community Health Innovation (ICHI). He was recognized for his work on the research project "Comparative Evaluation of Telehealth Multi-Component Optimal Model of Postpartum Care among Rural, Low-Income, and Diverse Women." Mohammed manages databases and performs data analysis for multiple research projects, providing invaluable support to ICHI's research staff and principal investigators.

➤ Naomi L. Cottoms Community Advisory Board of the Year: **Barber Shop Talk Steering Committee**

With a new name this year, the award honors the memory of Naomi Cottoms, who died March 5. She was executive director of the Tri-County Rural Health Network based in Helena-West Helena and a longtime UAMS community partner. Cottoms was well known for her passionate work on behalf of underserved communities.

The Barber Shop Talk Steering Committee is providing guidance on the research project "Barbershop Talk: Reducing Excessive Alcohol Use among Black Men." The project focuses on reducing unhealthy drinking habits by bringing treatment to a more accessible location for black men. The steering committee helped shape the research project prior to its implementation and has been instrumental in the positive progress of the study.

The celebration included a keynote address by UAMS' Nakita Lovelady, Ph.D., MPH, and Joyce Raynor, who leads the Center for Healing Hearts & Spirits. They discussed their National Institutes of Health-funded hospital-based violence intervention program, UAMS Project Heal. Lovelady is a recent graduate of TRI's KL2 Mentored Research Career Development Award program, and she is an assistant professor in the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health. Raynor won the 2023 Chancellor's Community Engaged Research Partner of the Year, and Lovelady won the 2023 M. Kate Stewart Community Engaged Researcher of the Year.

UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, told the audience that their dedication embodies what UAMS is striving to achieve: a healthier, more equitable future for everyone in Arkansas.

"It's only through partnerships like these that we can move the needle on health outcomes, particularly in the rural and underserved communities that need it most," he said.



*Ason Mohammed won Community Engaged Research Staff Member of the Year.*

# TRI Announces 2025 Implementation Science Scholars



Paige Beck

TRI and the UAMS Center for Implementation Research (CIR) have selected three clinical faculty from UAMS and Arkansas Children's Hospital as the 2025 Implementation Science Scholars.

Using the principles of implementation science, CIR faculty will guide the scholars through dedicated coursework and provide oversight and mentoring for their experiential implementation science projects. The two-year program will provide 20% salary support.

The scholars and their project titles are:

**Paige Beck, M.D., Ph.D.**, assistant professor, College of Medicine Department of Family and Preventive Medicine

Project title: "Improving Awareness, Diagnosis, and Management of Chronic Kidney Disease"

**Tisha Deen, Ph.D.**, associate professor, Department of Psychiatry, Psychiatric Research Institute; director of Behavioral Health Integration, Primary Care and Population Health Service Line, College of Medicine

Project title: "Implementation of the Evidence-Based Behavioral Health Integration Practices in UAMS Primary Care Clinics to Reduce Disparities in Mental Health Care Delivery across Arkansas"

**Saritha Ranabothu, M.D.**, associate professor, College of Medicine Department of Pediatrics, UAMS and Arkansas Children's Hospital

Project title: "Standardizing the Use of Growth Hormone Therapy in Children with Chronic Kidney Disease and Kidney Transplantation with Growth Failure: Guideline Implementation"

Beck and Deen will utilize the TRI-supported UAMS Rural Research Network to help facilitate their projects.



Tisha Deen



Saritha Ranabothu

## KL2 Scholar Jure Baloh, Ph.D., Receives \$657,000 NIH Grant to Test Addiction Treatment Supervision Strategy

Jure Baloh, Ph.D., MHA, a 2022 graduate of the UAMS Translational Research Institute's (TRI) KL2 Mentored Research Career Development Scholar Award Program, is using a recent National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant to support his work related to addiction treatment.

Baloh, an assistant professor in the UAMS Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health's Department of Health Policy and Management, is developing and piloting a supervision strategy to support management and staff of addiction treatment programs.

The project is funded by a three-year, \$657,103 R34 grant from the NIH National Institute on Drug Abuse. Baloh said there is a straight line from his KL2 (now K12) award to the R34.

"My KL2 experience was foundational for the success of my NIH application," he said. "The mentorship, training, preliminary research and protected time over those two years allowed me to focus on this project and develop a truly competitive application."

The study will provide the foundation for a future large-scale test of the supervision strategy.

"We're trying to develop a system for addiction treatment facility supervisors to help support their counselors," Baloh said. "That way, supervisors and staff can feel empowered and have the tools to help them do their jobs well. We think this approach can also help reduce the rates of burnout. We want to solve those issues."



Jure Baloh is a 2022 graduate of TRI's KL2 (now K12) Mentored Research Career Development Award Program.



## TRI External Advisory Boards Meet with TRI Leadership



Visiting External Advisory Board members for TRI's UM1 award are (l-r, front row) Clara Pelfrey, Ph.D., from Case Western Reserve University; Rachel Hess, M.D., University of Utah, Michael Holinstat, Ph.D., University of Michigan; Olveen Carrasquillo, M.D., University of Miami, W. Robert Taylor, M.D., Ph.D. (back, fourth from left), and Jodi Lapidus, Ph.D. (second from right). Board members attending remotely were Julian Solway, M.D. (chair), University of Chicago, and Joel Tsevat, M.D., University of Texas Health San Antonio. TRI representatives in the photo are Laura James, M.D. (center, front), Christi Madden (l-r), Jessica Presley, Paula Roberson, Ph.D., (Lapidus/EAB) and Rick Owen, M.D. (Back row, l-r) are Nik Berardi, Tuhin Vermani, M.D., Ph.D., Mario Schootman, Ph.D., (Taylor/EAB), Paul Duguid, and Antiño Allen, Ph.D.

### EAB: TRI a 'Gem Activity' at UAMS

TRI earned high praise from its External Advisory Board (EAB) following a two-day review of the programs and goals for TRI's seven-year UM1 Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA). In its report, the EAB commended TRI's "astounding and extremely admirable growth" under the leadership of TRI Director Laura James, M.D., noting its unique strengths and collaborations with UAMS, its partners and other institutions.

The report, authored by EAB Chair Julian Solway, M.D., professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, lauded TRI as a standout among CTSA hubs, emphasizing that its contributions are essential to the CTSA Consortium, which includes about 60 institutions.

Locally, the board recognized TRI's critical role in advancing research at UAMS and its partner institutions.

While offering recommendations for further enhancements, the report called TRI a "gem activity" at UAMS.

### New K12 EAB Holds First Meeting

New this funding cycle, TRI has an External Advisory Board for its K12 Mentored Research Career Development Program. The board was formed following CTSA funding for the program in July and held its first meeting with TRI leadership in November.

During the meeting, the K12 EAB members offered insightful feedback and expressed enthusiasm and encouragement for the K12 program's success and impact.



Visiting K12 External Advisory Board members are (l-r) Alyson Eggleston, Ph.D., from Penn State University, Maureen Murtaugh, Ph.D., University of Utah, and Michelle Hernandez, M.D., University of North Carolina. Attending remotely were Doris Rubio, Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh, and Joel Tsevat, M.D., University of Texas Health San Antonio.