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# Science & Society

Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

December 2025



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PHOTO: MARA LAVITT

## DEAN'S MESSAGE

**A**S WE NEAR THE END OF 2025, I have to say: this has been some year. We have, collectively, faced challenges, chaos, and uncertainty. Yet I'm buoyed by the resilience and creativity I'm seeing, particularly here at the Yale School of Public Health, but also across the globe.

As dean, my commitment is to facilitate this linking of science and society, both within and outside of YSPH. We are not doubling down on outdated defenses. Instead, we are actively building better structures to measure, evaluate, preserve, and protect the health of our communities. So I'm pleased to share a few of the ways YSPH is creating paths forward in this December 2025 issue of "Science & Society."

This year, in addition to celebrating philanthropic and financial growth, we've launched novel public-facing programs like PopHIVE (democratizing population health data for all); stood up new communication initiatives (including a course on navigating the media ecosystem); and supported the translation of a marvelously varied body of faculty scholarship (as described in our Advances section).

Equally important is how, consistent with our strategic plan, we are equipping folks in the field to do great work. My own discussions with students and alums often converge on stories about hope and agency; the pages of this magazine highlight just a few of those tremendous efforts to empower communities with high-quality evidence. (To anyone considering a career in public health, these stories prove that the future is bright!)

Knowing that history is made by both honoring the past and envisioning the future, this issue also celebrates those who have paved the way. We're particularly thrilled to celebrate Dr. Curtis Patton, PhD, Professor Emeritus of Epidemiology (Microbial Diseases); his new portrait in the Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library will serve as an enduring testament to his influence on our school and our field.

I know the world feels uncertain. But every day, I feel the tremendous can-do energy of our scientists, students, staff, and partners at YSPH. I see emergent signs of trust and engagement in places where public health was not long ago viewed as an enemy. I hear new dialogues of respect and thoughtful inquiry into the health challenges that face us.

I hope this issue helps you feel, see, and hear all of this, too. As always, I'm grateful for your support and fellowship.

Here's to 2026!

**Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH**

*Dean, Yale School of Public Health*

*C.-E. A. Winslow Professor of Public Health*

*Professor of Emergency Medicine*

PS: If you don't already follow our incredible social media (Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, TikTok, and YouTube), please do – I promise that you will be entertained and informed.

**"To anyone considering a career in public health, these stories prove that the future is bright!"**

PHOTO: STEPH TAN, MPH '23



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# SCHOOL NEWS

By Jane E. Dee

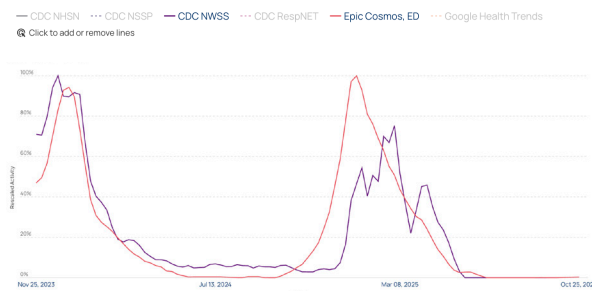
## PopHIVE Insights

YSPH recently debuted PopHIVE (Population Health Information and Visualization Exchange), a platform that puts near-real-time, reliable health data into the hands of researchers and the public. Co-developed by Drs. Dan Weinberger, PhD, and Anne Zink, MD, PopHIVE is designed to help people see and act on population health trends, as it did with a recent look at RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Writing on the PopHIVE Substack, the PopHIVE team explained how – when it looked at RSV, which can cause serious illness (many cases leading to hospitalization) in babies and older adults – the data revealed a hidden story.

The team expected to see early signs of the outbreak in wastewater data. Instead, they found “in many states, including Michigan, emergency department visits increased before the wastewater signal did.”

### Trends in respiratory viral activity in Michigan

Viral activity over time in the United States



## THE STORY BEHIND THE TREND

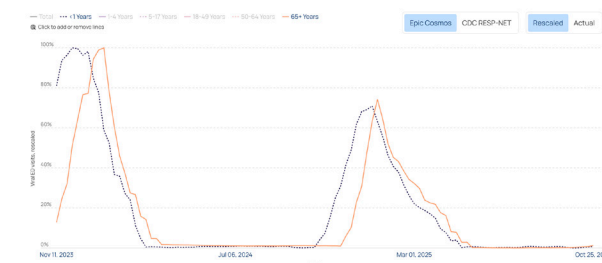
At first, this was puzzling – until the researchers looked at who was getting sick. Breaking down the emergency department data by age (see the example from New York) revealed the key:

- **Young children** were getting infected first (who are mostly in diapers, not contributing to sewage/wastewater data).
- **Older adults** followed several weeks later.

That timing explains that clinical activity is largely driven by the early increase in cases in young children, while the wastewater signal is being driven by what is happening in the adult population.

### Viral activity by age in New York

Variation in epidemic timing by age



This data platform gained national prominence during the government shutdown, and continues to expand.



FIND POPHIVE INSIGHTS AT  
POPHIVE.SUBSTACK.COM

## Building Community

Fostering interconnected, inclusive, and interdisciplinary public health communities within and beyond Yale is not just a strategic priority for the Yale School of Public Health, it's the mission of the school's new Office of Community & Practice (OC&P). The office serves as the central community hub at YSPH with the goal of improving health for all.

With this new office, the school is strengthening its work through a more unified and comprehensive approach, guided by new leadership roles, including Dr. Mayur Desai, PhD '97, MPH '94, the inaugural associate dean for community & practice, and Randi McCray, the inaugural associate director of school community & culture.

OC&P supports practice-based learning, skill development, internal and external community support, research partnerships, and public health workforce education. It fosters a culture grounded in mutual respect and shared humanity to make public health foundational to thriving communities everywhere.

## Data Across Disciplines

Building a community of PhD students working in interdisciplinary data science fields is the focus of the new Peter Salovey and Marta Moret Data Science Fellows Program. Launching in spring 2026, the program will offer mentoring, professional development, and outreach opportunities for an interdisciplinary cohort of doctoral students.

During the program's inaugural year, Dr. Bhramar Mukherjee, PhD, senior associate dean for data science at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH), will co-chair the program's steering committee with Dr. John Lafferty, PhD, the John C. Malone Professor of Statistics and Data Science in Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS). FAS will lead the program's community engagement activities including mentoring undergraduate students, organizing outreach events at local schools, and teaching in the Big Data Summer Immersion undergraduate summer program at YSPH.

**“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to help build an intellectually dynamic and socially aware community.”**

“I am thrilled to have the opportunity to help build an intellectually dynamic and socially aware community, practicing data science with rigor, ethics, and humanism,” Mukherjee said.

Jackson Higginbottom, MPH '20, program manager of YSPH's Public Health Data Science and Data Equity initiative (see related story on page 40), will serve as the program's assistant director. The program is named for former Yale President Peter Salovey, Sterling Professor of Psychology, and Marta Moret, MPH '84, Yale's former first lady. During his tenure as Yale president, Salovey supported data-driven research as a university priority. He also championed the decision in 2022 to make YSPH an independent school.

*Jim Shelton contributed to this report.*



PHOTO: ALLIE BARTON

Left to right: Dan Spielman, James A. Attwood Director, Yale Institute for Foundations of Data Science (Yale FDS); Lynn Cooley, dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences; John Lafferty, the John C. Malone Professor of Statistics and Data Science in FAS; and Bhramar Mukherjee, senior associate dean for data science in the Yale School of Public Health and co-chair of the program's steering committee with Lafferty.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK

## ADVANCES

By Michelle So

senior author. Gonsalves hopes the research can be used to reduce workplace COVID transmissions through, for example, better ventilation and leave policies to prevent sick workers from infecting others.

### Research on Autism and Tylenol

In Sept. 2025, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. issued a warning about a potential link between acetaminophen (Tylenol) and autism. Yale School of Public Health Associate Professor Dr. Zeyan Liew, PhD, MPH, has spent years investigating contributors to neurodevelopmental disorders. He says that there is no proven causal relationship between acetaminophen use and autism. While prolonged use of acetaminophen during pregnancy may potentially be a risk to the fetus, the dangers of untreated maternal fevers and pain may pose a greater risk to the pregnancy and child development. “While we continue doing research, we also should not scare women away from taking needed medications,” Liew said.



READ THE FULL STORIES AT [SPH.YALE.EDU/DEC2025MAGAZINE](https://sph.yale.edu/dec2025magazine)

### COVID-19 Keeps Causing Sick Days

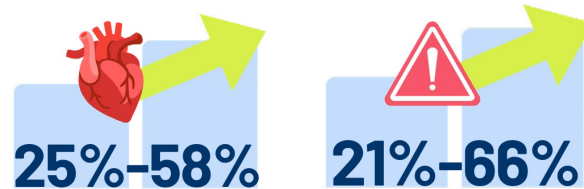
Well after the United States government declared the pandemic emergency over, COVID-19 continued causing about the same number of work absences every month as influenza does in its peak months. Looking to understand the virus’s lingering effects after the pandemic’s official end in May 2023, a team including Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) researchers studied week-long work absences for health reasons and workers who were out of the labor force the month after such an absence. “We were told COVID is over and we don’t have to worry about COVID anymore, but perturbations in the labor market are persisting over time,” said Dr. Gregg Gonsalves, PhD ’17, YC ’11, associate professor of epidemiology (microbial diseases) and the paper’s

## A New Level for the Food Pyramid

The latest information sheet from the Yale School of Public Health, on ultra-processed food, has been released. Although there is not yet a clear definition of ultra-processed foods, the information sheet helps to promote informed decision-making by translating science into clear, reliable answers to the key questions people have.

Here’s what you’ll learn about ultra-processed foods:

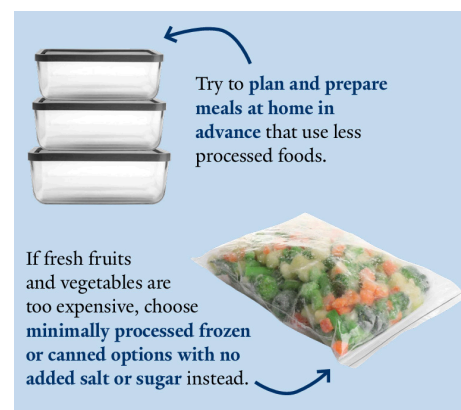
### HIGH ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD INTAKE HAS BEEN LINKED TO:



higher risk of health issues related to the heart and metabolism.

higher risk of mortality.

### WAYS TO REDUCE PROCESSED FOODS IN YOUR DIET:



VISIT [SPH.YALE.EDU/INFO-SHEETS](https://sph.yale.edu/info-sheets) TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS, CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS, FLUORIDE, AND MEASLES.

PHOTO: ISABEL CHENOWETH PHOTOGRAPHY



Alex Azar, JD '91

## Navigating Complex Health Topics

A new monthly webinar aims to help people navigate complex public health science. The webinar, “Health in the Headlines,” is produced by the National Academy of Medicine and hosted by Yale School of Public Health Dean Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH, and Alex Azar, JD '91, former secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and a member of the YSPH Leadership Council.

The webinar is taking on topics such as the role of ultra-processed foods in children’s health, and accessibility and safety of weight loss drugs, covering what is known, what is unknown, and why disagreements can occur, even among scientists. People can ask questions during an audience Q&A.

“So much of what people hear today is politicized or oversimplified,” said Ranney. “We want to pull back the curtain on how scientific knowledge is generated and applied, especially around issues that affect people’s lives every day.”

“Health in the Headlines” will be hosted on the second Wednesday of each month. The next one is in December: “Science, Values, & Trust: Improving How We Communicate in Health Policy.”

Learn more about Health Headlines at [nam.edu/product/health-in-the-headlines/](https://nam.edu/product/health-in-the-headlines/)



## A Boost for Breastfeeding

**B**reastfeeding is the responsibility of society and not only the responsibility of women, said Professor Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, an international expert on breastfeeding who co-authored a new National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report that calls for an evidence-based national strategy to increase breastfeeding rates in the United States. The report provides the U.S. government with a roadmap for strengthening the implementation of such a strategy with strong input from diverse communities. According to Pérez-Escamilla, breastfeeding boosts an infant's immune system and lowers the mother's risk of heart disease and diabetes. Although 85% of mothers in the U.S. choose to breastfeed, fewer than half manage to breastfeed for as long as they initially planned. Pérez-Escamilla's report suggests that implementing an evidence-based national strategy would be the most effective way to increase breastfeeding rates in line with recommendations.



## Higher Heat May Spur Overdose Deaths

**I**n the United States, extreme heat exposure has been linked to increases in premature deaths, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, suicide rates, and violent crime. A growing body of research additionally points to a connection between heat and fatal drug overdoses. People who use drugs may be especially vulnerable to the adverse health effects of heat exposure, said the study's lead author Julia Dennett, PhD, a postdoctoral researcher at YSPH when the study was conducted. Some drug use can directly increase body temperature and impair an individual's ability to recognize and respond to overheating. For example, respiratory depression associated with opioid use can disrupt the body's compensatory efforts to cool down. What's more, drug use can compound adverse effects of overheating. Both heat exposure and stimulant use, for instance, are independently associated with cardiovascular problems. Stimulant use in combination with heat exposure can exacerbate cardiovascular risk. Other co-authors were Dr. Daniel Carrión, PhD, MPH, assistant professor of epidemiology (environmental health), and Dr. Gregg Gonsalves, PhD '17, YC '11, associate professor of epidemiology (microbial diseases) and the paper's senior author.

## As Hospitals Buy Physician Practices, Patient Costs Rise

**A** report in the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper Series found that patient fees increased from 2008 to 2016 as hospital systems purchased more independent physician practices. This vertical integration has changed the structure of health care and, as a result, the ways in which insurers and patients pay for their services. Study co-author Dr. Zack Cooper, PhD, associate professor of public health (health policy); associate professor of economics; and associate professor in the Institution for Social and Policy Studies, spoke with Medical Economics about the findings. "There's really been a reshaping of the physician industry in the U.S.," Cooper said. "Over the last two decades, [you see] more than a doubling in the share of physicians working for hospitals. And the question is, what impact is that having?"



## Climate Week NYC Explores Sustainable Health Care

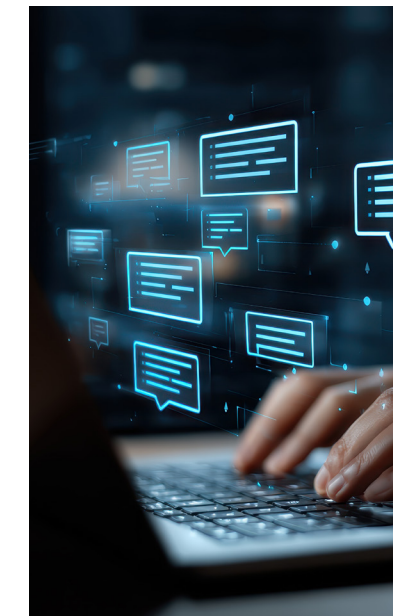
**O**ver 200 health sector and business leaders came together at the second annual Health Systems Implementing Climate Action event during Climate Week NYC 2025. The event featured 28 speakers across five panels hosted by the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health and the New York Academy of Medicine, and co-chaired by Dr. Jodi Sherman, MD, director of the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health's Program on Health Care Environmental Sustainability. Themes from the panels included applying ecological economics to health care, rethinking universal access to medicine, and tackling health care pollution and carbon emissions.



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## Chatbots Out Diagnose Doctors, But....

**C**hinese doctors were less accurate at diagnoses than three chatbots, notably the popular AI tool ERNIE (Enhanced Representation through knowledge IntEgration) Bot, a recent study found. ERNIE Bot had a 77.3% accuracy rate, far better than the 25% average for human doctors. The findings offer promise for improving access to care in regions where doctors and resources may be scarce. However, the study authors note that ERNIE Bot ordered unnecessary lab tests in 91.9% of cases and prescribed potentially inappropriate or harmful medications to 57.8% of patients. "Our findings suggest that integrating AI into health care requires much more than technical accuracy," said Dr. Xi Chen, PhD, associate professor of public health (health policy) at the Yale School of Public Health and a co-author of the study. "We must prioritize safety, equity, and human oversight if we want AI to strengthen global health systems."



## Connecticut Symposium on Climate and Health

**A**n event co-hosted by the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health (YCCCCH) and the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) in September explored evidence on climate risks, challenges posed to human health, and ways to protect residents at risk. YCCCCH Faculty Director Dr. Kai Chen, PhD, and DPH Director of Climate and Health Hannah Beath, MPH '23, discussed avenues for partnership and action in the face of a difficult federal political landscape. The various panels discussed building resilience in the face of extreme climate events, partnering with local health departments, and prioritizing support for individuals vulnerable to climate change.

PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK

Katelyn Jetelina, whose *Your Local Epidemiologist* on Substack has more than 400,000 subscribers, will teach a course in the spring term on communicating to general audiences.



# HOW TO TALK ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH

It's a social media world now. That means learning a whole new way of sharing information.

*By Michael F. Fitzgerald*

**C**HANCES ARE IF YOU ASKED someone about public health's communications crisis, they would say "which one?" Or, if they're being flippant, "public health communicates?"

It's never simple to talk about something that on its good days is invisible. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the mismatch between some public health recommendations and the public's actions created "a reckoning" for public health communications, said Dr. Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, assistant professor adjunct of epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH). That reckoning is partly due to the lack of emphasis on the importance of teaching students how to communicate, she said: "I was never taught one hour of one course on how to do communication when I was getting my master's and my PhD." The good news, she said, is that communications "can be easily incorporated into schools of public health and needs to be a huge priority."

And YSPH is leaning in. Jetelina will offer a new course at the YSPH in the spring term, "Navigating the Media Landscape for Maximum Public Health Impact," co-taught with Naria Halliwell, a former producer at ABC News. Jetelina and Halliwell's course will focus on skills development, both for traditional media, like writing op-eds and learning how to answer tough interview questions, and for new media, like crafting social media posts that could go viral.

Their course will reflect how the atomization of media sources affects which ideas get communicated, to whom, and how. Social media has become the biggest mass medium ever, used by 5.2 billion people across the globe, or 64% of the world's population. YouTube alone has 2.5 billion users, and 90% of U.S. youth say they use it (with 73% saying they use it daily). Few televised events reach this scale: globally, the Olympics or the World Cup soccer tournament, or in the United States, the Super Bowl, come close.

But during these televised events, all viewers are seeing the same thing. On social media, in contrast, people receive information across a number of networks and sources. Public health has had to scramble to have a credible presence in this realm – while the public's trust in social media increases. About 53 percent of people in the U.S. say they get news from social media at least some of the time, according to research released by Pew Research Center in October. The same research found that adults between 18 and 29 trust social media as much as they do traditional media. A



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS YSPH students are studying communications more regularly in the classroom.

Healthline/YouGov survey of U.S. adults found that more than half use the medium for health information, while just one-third ask their doctors.

One important difference between old media and new, is that social media demands a different tone and degree of personal connection. The markers of authenticity have changed. This can be uncomfortable for academia, which is used to relying on markers of expertise. Now, relationships matter as much as data. Jetelina, for example, launched her popular newsletter "Your Local Epidemiologist" during the pandemic to help her neighbors cut through confusing and contradictory messages about COVID-19. Her tone invites her readers to knock on her door and borrow a cup of expert knowledge, along with humble acknowledgment about what she doesn't know. That combo has drawn more than 400,000 subscribers.

Dr. Gregg Gonsalves, PhD '17, YC '11, associate professor of epidemiology (microbial diseases), said academic public health has run into the problem of having an institutional voice when it needs a street voice. "That's part of what's happening in public health right now – the institutional voice seems to really be falling flat." Gonsalves became one of the most visible social media presences in public health by using the same firebrand, "don't give a s\*\*\*" techniques he used as an activist in the 1990s with the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). These techniques were rooted in deep understanding of, and trust from, the people who ACT UP worked on behalf of. He's pleased to see the focus on communications education and thinks Jetelina and Halliwell's course will give students excellent grounding in new ways to transmit scientific

knowledge. He adds that students also must learn to think critically about false narratives. "Trust was purposely undermined. We have to fight to get it back."

Ranney calls social media a strong fit for public health, because the field understands how to engage authentically with communities, just as the best social media accounts do. Still, she said, "there is not a prescription, a 'yes, do this always' that we can provide [for public health communications]. Rather, it is an iterative learning process."

### COMMUNICATE CLEARLY, AND REPEAT

Public health as a field can continue to be shell-shocked or it can turn this crisis of communications into an opportunity. This imperative echoes lessons from a century ago, when the novel *Arrowsmith* (1925) skewered its public health protagonist, Martin Arrowsmith, for his top-down, one-way communications process, prone to disdain for people who don't follow his directives. He often finds himself ignored or sidelined, and his refusal to adapt to community input and needs proves tragic.

**"I was never taught one hour of one course on how to do communication when I was getting my master's and my PhD."**

The need to define new, nimble strategies was the main takeaway of "Training Health Communicators: A New Approach from the August New England Journal of Medicine" op-ed by Jetelina, Dean Ranney, Dr. Ted Melnick, MD, MHS, associate professor of emergency medicine at Yale School of Medicine and of biostatistics at YSPH, and Resident Physician and Yale Emergency Scholar Dr. Kristen Panthagani, MD, PhD, who writes the newsletter *You Can Know Things*.

YSPH is, correspondingly, creatively expanding communications education across the school.

In 2024, Dr. Marney White, PhD, MS '09, professor of public health (social and behavioral sciences) launched the skills-based "Health Communication and the Media," which she is teaching again in the spring term, with new updates to include more audio/visual skills development. White's course grew out of her experience participating in the Public Voices Fellowship at Yale, with its emphasis on making research understandable to the general public. She also wanted to draw on her previous career in advertising

and expertise in behavioral psychology. "I felt an obligation to provide education on what media provides and advertising provides, to get the attention of people, sustain the appeal and use communications psychology to educate, perform and persuade," she said. "That's been a shortcoming of public health – we believe that health should be valued; everyone wants to work toward their own wellness. We're wrong," White said, noting that people can be aware that something is "bad" for them but still do it, because of social or environmental rewards. Successful marketing and ad campaigns give immediate emotional rewards, she said. "The class aims to harness what we know about successful advertising and apply it to public health."

To further broaden the aperture of communication, YSPH is infusing both formal and informal aspects of communications into YSPH. Besides bringing Jetelina and Halliwell to teach, Ranney notes that many professors across YSPH are incorporating communications modules in their courses. New leadership courses taught by Senior Fellows Ashwin Vasani and Anne Zink include modules on crisis communications. Ranney also is proud of funding student internships with YSPH's Office of Communications and Marketing and "our unbelievably talented social media lead." (See page 16.) In February, YSPH will host a day-long event on Trust in Public Health that will bring different perspectives and frames on novel strategies for communication to campus.

### ENGAGE TO EMPOWER

Lots of people are focusing on myths and false narratives about health, which are being amplified by social media. But "the discussion around misinformation is a distraction," Ranney said, calling misinformation a symptom, not the underlying problem. To treat the underlying problem, we need to make sure that people's health needs are being met when, where, and by people whom they trust. Indeed, a recent survey from KFF found that social media users remain skeptical of the health information they see there: less than half of social media users say they trust most or some health information they get from social, and close to two-thirds think social media influencers are in it for the money. This skepticism is an opportunity for public health to step up – with stories, authenticity, and good quality evidence.

The overall goal is to create an approach to public health communications "that is hopeful and gives agency and is empowering," she said.

Ultimately, the key is teaching students a form of communication that is not top-down, but multi-directional, that involves listening more than telling and sharing experiences. Both the world and the workforce are changing, and YSPH is changing its educational approach to meet new needs.

# 5 TIPS FOR CREATING SOCIAL MEDIA "MAGIC"

**I**N 2019, THE YALE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH had a little under 37,000 followers across five social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube. Social media was something of an after-thought. Now it has more than 250,000 and maintains eight feeds – those initial five plus Bluesky, Threads, and TikTok.

*By Michael F. Fitzgerald*

Those channels might feature a student takeover, package research advances into a “hopescrolling” post, or feature a public health layer cake (*see page 27*). A recent 5-part series on Instagram and TikTok that encouraged people to “Ask your besties” about their public health personas drew 16.5 million views, was shared over 500,000 times, and gained the school’s Instagram account more than 10,000 new followers. Analytics showed a similar campaign had done well a couple of years prior, though not nearly so well as the updated campaign, which was developed by YSPH student worker Yasmin Hung, MPH '26.

“Sometimes people say, ‘just do your social media magic,’” said Kayla Steinberg, YSPH’s digital and social media strategist. “That kind of upsets me because it’s not magic. It’s a lot of experience over time.”



**Here’s how she’s built up one of the best social feeds in public health:**

- 

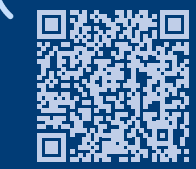
**1. SPEND TIME ON THE PLATFORMS**  
Study the channel or channels you want to be on. Note what does well and figure out how to translate that to your own work.
- 

**2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**  
If you want to talk to the general public, don’t use fancy science words.
- 

**3. KEEP IT SIMPLE, BUT ACCURATE**  
Figure out the most direct way to make your point while keeping the necessary nuance.
- 

**4. MEASURE YOUR CREATIVITY**  
Choose the right format, whether that’s a meme or a Bluesky post with a graph or whatever style best fits the platform. Then use analytics to see what seems to work, then try to duplicate successes.
- 

**5. DON’T MAKE ANYONE FEEL BAD**  
Mean posts could go viral but won’t bring people into the public health community.



SCAN TO ASK YOUR BESTIE WHICH CHILDHOOD VACCINE YOU ARE

EMPH student Kelsey Perdue, MPH '27.



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

# "This group will change the world"

By Jane E. Dee

**T**HE LUNCH CROWD in the Yale School of Public Health's student lounge in mid-October was filled with adult students dressed in business casual huddled in conversation, discussing decidedly non-academic topics: Ways to manage their medical practices since federal telehealth funding expired October 1, challenges posed by the federal government shutdown, and navigating school alongside work and family.

These students are mid-career professionals from a variety of industries. There are CEOs, elected officials, lawyers, educators, civil servants, and military professionals — a physician-trainee joined the group after days of inpatient hospital service. All of them are first-year students in the Executive MPH (EMPH) program, on campus for intensive in-person training in design thinking, a strategic approach to problem-solving and innovation. As they worked in small groups applying this method, eating became an afterthought.

Most adults cannot pause their career and relocate their family to pursue a two-year degree. The program combines these in-person, intensive classes with online evening

courses. "It has been remarkable to take on this program as a group, especially when juggling and maintaining full-time jobs as well as our personal lives," said EMPH student Gregory Jackson, who oversaw the country's response to mass shootings as deputy director of the White House Office of Gun Violence.

The EMPH students work through the program as a cohort; they learn, collaborate, and develop close relationships with peers who have different lived experiences, professional expertise, and political views drawn from communities across the United States as well as Mexico and Canada.

"I've established deep relationships amongst my classmates and am part of a team that is working through this program together," Jackson said. "Within our cohort there are doctors, librarians, health executives, nurses, teachers, parents, and policy leaders committed to making our communities healthier."

The cross-disciplinary structure of the cohorts is meant to foster new ideas and approaches. "This interdisciplinary relationship-building is helping me to think more creatively about how to solve big public health challenges,"

said EMPH student Dr. Kathryn Norman, MD, a clinical fellow in Medical Oncology and Hematology at Yale School of Medicine.

In addition to the cohort structure, YSPH's Executive MPH uses a hybrid learning format, with three in-person intensives and live discussions in every online course. The goal is to create opportunities for students to develop deeper relationships with their cohort, faculty, and expert instructors. "Community matters at Yale. Anyone who's been at YSPH knows this," said EMPH Program Director Dr. Abigail Friedman, PhD, pointing to the school's high faculty-to-student ratio.

EMPH student Priya Khimani, who works on digital health partnerships for a health care company, praised the emphasis on community, saying, "it has been fantastic to have others who truly understand the balancing act that is graduate school, and we are there to consistently support one another."

### EDUCATING DURING CHALLENGING TIMES

This difficult moment for public health is "a reason to double down" as educators, said Friedman, who is also an associate professor of public health (health policy). "We need to invest in people who are dedicated to serving their communities to strengthen the health of the public and ensure that we can prosper as a community and a population."

Offering a Yale-caliber, executive-focused education to a diverse group of students who can bring their knowledge back to their local communities helps to build trust in public health. "Not only are they gaining foundational knowledge and frameworks, but they're also gaining skills that help them to communicate and collaborate with people who might view things differently," Friedman said.

"I have gained the ability to apply core public health principles and practices to my day-to-day job working on digital health partnerships for a health care company," Khimani said. "This integration is one of my favorite parts of the program and makes learning feel tangible."

The EMPH students have a broad range of perspectives, which helps them practice difficult conversations with each other. The in-person lecture, "The Communication Skill Every Leader Needs," taught in October by Dr. Susan Nappi, DrPh, MPH '01, executive director of the Office of Community & Practice, and Randi McCray, associate director of school community & culture, emphasized using active listening, empathy, and storytelling to enhance trust.

"Providing opportunities to connect, collaborate, and form relationships across different life experiences prepares leaders to better advocate for people whose experiences are different from their own. As long as we make that a priority, we can equip our students for leadership roles, and Yale's a great place to do it," Friedman said.



James Leo, MPH '27, joined other EMPH students on campus in October for in-person, intensive training.

PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

### TRAINING PEOPLE WHERE THEY LIVE

Some MPH programs for mid-career students are offered entirely online with remote faculty contact but no in-person interaction. These programs are often self-paced without the consistent presence or support of other students. Other executive programs are entirely in person. "EMPH students don't need to be physically in the same place all the time for learning to be impactful and to be a resource for each other," said Friedman, who learned the value of remote learning during COVID when instead of teaching 80 students in an auditorium she taught on Zoom "where everyone sits at the front of the room."

The EMPH offers four tracks: health policy, health informatics, environmental health sciences, and applied analytic methods and epidemiology to allow students to focus on areas that best serve their professional goals. The program also just launched a volunteer professional mentorship pilot program. EMPH alums and expert instructors hold career mentorship office hours to talk with students about career paths in their sectors and provide insights informed by experiences outside academia.

EMPH student Dr. Vincent Carsillo, DO, a nephrologist at Albany Med Health System, noted that his cohort is "a diverse group of professionals who came together with a shared purpose to translate their new knowledge into action," adding, "This group will change the world."

And that's the program's point.

## EMPH SPOTLIGHTS



**PRIYA KHAMANI, MPH '26**  
Digital Health Partnerships

"I hope to use my EMPH education to drive equitable change empowered and enabled by technology and innovation. This means identifying and implementing strategies and interventions that are focused on reducing population gaps and promoting health outcomes using digital solutions. *Technology should not be a replacement but rather a tool to further enhance the programs we hope to deliver.* As I am also extremely passionate about food as medicine and nutrition, I hope to devote personal and professional time to pursuing projects in that space."



**DR. VINCENT CARSILLO, DO, MPH '27**  
Nephrologist

"The program's emphasis on equity, systems innovation, and policy aligns perfectly with my work in nephrology and population health. *Yale's commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and the flexibility to learn from faculty across the university opens the door for exploration and personalization.* I have found Yale to be a warm and welcoming environment filled with brilliant people who personify the motto *Lux et Veritas*, 'Light and Truth.'"



**GREGORY JACKSON, MPH '27**  
Former deputy director of the White House Office of Gun Violence

"In 2013, I was the victim of gun violence as I was shot in two arteries and came within 30 minutes of losing my life. Since that tragic moment, *I have dedicated my life to preventing others from experiencing the tragedy and trauma that I went through*—first as a survivor and then as an advocate fighting for a public health approach to violence that led to the first federal law on gun violence in 30 years, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act."



**DR. KATHRYN NORMAN, MD, MPH '27**  
Clinical Fellow

"I could not have imagined how valuable the cohort would be to my EMPH experience. I think it is incredibly unique to have the opportunity to build strong learning and working relationships with such a broad range of professionals. My cohort includes people who work in the pharmaceutical industry, law, architecture, policy, nonprofits, education, hospital management, and health care, with physicians, nurses, dentists, and physical therapists. *This interdisciplinary relationship-building is helping me to think more creatively about how to solve big public health challenges.*"



SCAN THIS QR CODE  
TO READ MORE ABOUT  
EMPH STUDENTS AND  
ALUMNI.



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

Joan K. Monin, PhD, and Michael Werner, JD, are co-teaching a new independent study on aging and health policy that puts students out in communities around Connecticut.

# From classroom to State Capitol: Students influence state's aging policy

By Jane E. Dee

**A**ge may be just a number, but the number of people who are aging is creating a need for new policies. A quarter of Connecticut's population is 60 and over, a 7% jump since 2021. "We are reaching the [baby] boom bubble," said Dr. Joan K. Monin, PhD, professor of public health (social and be-

havioral sciences) at the Yale School of Public Health.

While Connecticut's population continues to age, the state's workforce assigned to aging and health issues is shrinking. There is also uncertainty around funding for new and continuing programs to help older adults, adding urgency to the effort to educate and equip students to be

public health leaders in aging and health policy. So Monin launched an independent study about aging health policy that takes students out of the classroom and into Connecticut's communities and the wood-paneled rooms of the State Capitol.

From February to May, students will engage with legislative leaders and staff when the state's General Assembly is in session. They will write policy briefs, provide testimony at public hearings, and be invited to participate in committees related to aging health policy. The course is co-taught by Michael Werner, JD, lead aging policy analyst at the state Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, and administrator of the state's Long-Term Care Advisory Council.

As students practice translating complex research findings to inform policymakers and propose evidence-based solutions, they will also achieve another goal of the independent study: to "demystify the government," Monin said, by showing students how public health policy is made.

## AGING IN CONNECTICUT

The course examines the issues that people may encounter as they age, such as transportation, housing, and caregiving needs, and how existing policies in the United States shape the experience of aging.

Amanda King, MPH '26, said "I'm not quite sure where my specific niche in the field will be, but this course is exposing me to exciting work in research, advocacy, policy, and implementation."

Among the policies helping older adults in Connecticut are the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program that works to protect individual rights and improve the quality of care and life for residents in long-term care facilities like nursing homes and assisted living homes, as well as those who age-in-place at home in the community.

"Connecticut really seems to be a leader in many health policy areas," King said. "So far, I'm most passionate about the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program because it combines advocacy for systems-level improvements in care while providing resources and problem-solving support to individuals."

According to Werner, the state's aging policy was influenced by the 1999 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which required states to provide long-term care for people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. By 2003, Connecticut had established a "rebalancing goal" to have 75% of Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) recipients receive services at

**"This course is exposing me to exciting work in research, advocacy, policy, and implementation."**

home, Werner said. The remaining 25% of people would receive support in long-term care facilities.

"Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), like bathing and dressing, and medication management, would be provided for based on an assessment of needs and the self-determination of the resident," Werner said.

"These types of learning experiences can provide a larger context that permits students to identify areas where they can develop further," said Dr. Mike Honsberger, PhD, director of academic affairs at YSPH.

## NEW LEGISLATION

YSPH students have contributed to state legislation already through the Health Policy Practicum led by Professor Shelley Diehl Geballe, JD '76, MPH '95. Geballe's students recently contributed to the successful passage of Presumptive Eligibility legislation in 2024, intended to help adults in crisis who have urgent LTSS needs but who have not yet completed the lengthy application process. The public act addresses the creation of a presumptive Medicaid eligibility system to allow individuals to receive immediate, temporary health care coverage based on a preliminary assessment before their full Medicaid application has been processed and approved.

Monin and Werner's students learn to communicate effectively as they examine issues related to aging health policy at the state, municipal, and federal levels. "Our students need to learn multiple societal and discipline languages so they can push beyond the boundaries of academia to help make changes in the state, the country, and the world," Monin said.

King said she plans to continue the course next semester. "Students can approach the class topically, if they're only interested in aging, or structurally, if they're only interested in policy or public programs," she said. "They will likely end up interested in aging policy because it impacts all of us."



The portrait by Mario Moore, MFA '13, highlights the annual picnic that Dr. Comer and Dr. Patton began in the early 1970s to build community at Yale School of Medicine.

# Dr. Curtis Patton honored in double portrait

By Hannah Mark

**T**WO ILLUSTRIOUS YALE professors and friends are the subject of a double portrait honoring their careers. The painting of Dr. Curtis Patton, PhD, professor emeritus of epidemiology (microbial diseases), and Dr. James Comer, MD, MPH, Maurice Falk Professor in the Child Study Center, was unveiled in December in the Harvey Cushing/John Hay

Whitney Medical Library.

Patton, who retired in 2006 after 36 years at Yale, is celebrated in the portrait not only for his distinguished career in public health, but also for his continued advocacy and mentorship of Black students and faculty.

“This portrait will help tell a history that is extraordinarily important in creating an inclusive environment for everyone and uplift people who maybe

had not been seen before,” said Dr. Darin Latimore, MD, deputy dean for collaborative excellence and co-chair of the Program for Art in Public Spaces at Yale School of Medicine (YSM), which commissioned the painting.

## OPENING THE DOOR

Patton’s extensive career achievements include serving as division head of epidemiology of microbial diseases,

acting head of global health, director of international medical studies, and chair of the committee on international health. Patton was also an active researcher, studying trypanosomes and African sleeping sickness, work which is highlighted in the portrait with an image of a globe.

Outside of the laboratory and classroom, Patton pushed for a more inclusive environment at Yale. When he arrived at Yale School of Medicine as an assistant professor in 1970, he and Comer were among only a few Black faculty members at Yale. There were also few Black students: in the 1970s only about 2.5% of medical students in the U.S. were Black and YSM admitted a few Black students each year.

Patton and Comer were determined to open the door to more Black students and faculty. They mentored Black students and made themselves available to serve on key admissions and recruitment committees, Latimore said. “They helped ensure that highly qualified minority students and faculty had a real opportunity to come to Yale and thrive at Yale,” said Latimore.

Patton received the Edward A. Bouchet Leadership Award in 2004 for his mentorship.

Dr. Melinda Pettigrew, PhD '99, University of Minnesota School of Public Health dean, and former interim dean and Anna M. R. Lauder Professor of Epidemiology at YSPH, knows firsthand the power of Patton’s mentorship. “He was the reason I came back to Yale on the faculty,” she recalled.

The two met while Pettigrew was a PhD student at Yale, and Patton became her informal mentor. In 2001, he encouraged Pettigrew to apply for a faculty position at Yale, which she did. But then Pettigrew decided to withdraw her application.

Worried about disappointing Patton, Pettigrew decided to call him and explain her decision. “He answered and

**“They helped ensure that highly qualified minority students and faculty had a real opportunity to come to Yale and thrive at Yale.”**

listened patiently for 20 minutes while I rambled on about all my reasons,” she said. “At the end of the call, he said, ‘Dr. Pettigrew, if you don’t like Yale, you can fix it when you get here. I’m not telling the search committee we had this conversation.’ And then he hung up the phone on me,” she said with a laugh.

Pettigrew did not withdraw her application. She got the job. “Dr. Patton gives you that push, especially for people who don’t see themselves in those roles,” she said. “He is an outstanding mentor.”

When serving on leadership and development panels at Yale, Pettigrew heard that Patton had similarly encouraged others to apply for jobs and leadership positions. “I was struck by how many times I was on a panel, and people would start with, ‘and then I met Dr. Patton,’” Pettigrew said.

In addition to welcoming Black students and faculty, Patton pushed for Yale to acknowledge previously unrecognized Black students at Yale, including Dr. Edward A. Bouchet, Yale College’s first African-American graduate who in 1876 became the first African American to earn a PhD in the United States, and Dr. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Creed, MD, the first African-American graduate of Yale University. Patton was awarded a Seton Elm-Ivy Award for this work in 2019.

## LEGACY OF COMMUNITY

In the early 1970s, Comer invited Patton and YSM’s students of color to his home for an informal dinner, hoping students would be able to meet and connect with each other and faculty.

The dinner became an annual event, which today has evolved into the Minority Organization for Retention and Expansion’s James P. Comer and Curtis L. Patton Welcome Reception. Though no longer hosted at Patton’s or Comer’s home, the reception is still an important site of community building for people of color, including faculty, students, staff, and leadership from YSM, YSPH, and the Yale New Haven Health System, and others, drawing over 100 attendees each September.

Because the reception is emblematic of Patton’s and Comer’s legacy, it’s in the painting. “I wanted to have the picnic in the background because it’s something that they implemented and is theirs as a united thing,” said portrait painter Mario Moore, MFA '13.

Retirement hasn’t stopped Patton’s mentorship, nor his ability to bring people together for big gatherings. At Patton’s 90th birthday party over the summer, Pettigrew estimated that over 100 people showed up to celebrate. “There were people who had done postdocs with him. There were faculty he’d worked with in the ‘80s, ‘90s. It’s a very long, rich history and tradition,” she said. “He just touched numerous lives, and he continues to bring people together.”

**“He just touched numerous lives, and he continues to bring people together.”**

# Safety

of gun violence on  
children and communities



PHOTO: KAZ SASAHARA

## Finding common ground on firearm safety

By Meg Dalton

### CONTENT WARNING

*This article mentions topics related to suicide. If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, please know that there are resources available to help.*

*In the U.S., dial 988 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, text 741741 to the Crisis Text Line, or go to [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).*

*Outside the U.S., seek local resources and support networks.*

*Lock to Live, an online tool about ways to reduce firearm access in times of crisis, may help: [Lock2Live.org](https://Lock2Live.org)*

**A**LMOST TWO DECADES AGO, MEGAN RANNEY'S LIFE CHANGED.

It was a warm July night in Providence, Rhode Island, where she was working as an attending physician in an emergency department. And, as usual, she knew there was a good chance that someone who'd been involved in a violent situation might come through the doors.

That night was no different. The team got a call from EMS saying they were on their way with a "GSW," or gunshot wound, patient. Ranney, an emergency physician who is now dean of the Yale School of Public Health, had treated countless firearm injuries before. But when EMS arrived that night, the patient wasn't responding to treatment. They couldn't save him.

That patient wasn't a victim of community violence. He had shot himself with a family member's firearm in a moment of desperation. After his death, Ranney started thinking a lot about how society could have prevented this tragedy. Specifically, she asked herself why the public health tools used to prevent cancer, heart attacks, or car crashes couldn't be applied to firearm injury, a very common health problem in the United States.

"That case changed the course of my life, and it was really the moment where I started to dedicate an increasing proportion of my time to trying to understand and then

addressing the American epidemic of firearm injury," Ranney said.

Last year, nearly 47,000 people died from a firearm injury in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and, according to the best available estimates, another 100,000 or so people survived an injury related to firearms. That includes homicides, accidents, and suicides. But too often, she says, this data is obscured by political arguments and partisan divides. Treating firearm injury as a public health issue, rather than a political one, she says, opens the door to new possibilities for solutions.

In an interview, Ranney explains the importance of framing firearm injury as a public health problem, how it will help society find common ground on the issue, and how and why YSPH is moving forward on this problem.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO FRAME FIREARM INJURY AND PREVENTION AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

**Megan Ranney:** When we talk about firearm injury as a public health problem instead of as a criminal justice or political problem, it opens up a whole suite of potential solutions and approaches that we may not otherwise be aware of. It helps us figure out how to measure the problem — not just the physical injuries but also the emotional injuries and the ripple effects on survivors, their family members, and their community.

It helps us think about risk and protective factors a little bit differently. Instead of always focusing on firearm purchase, we can also think about reducing access to a firearm in a moment of hopelessness or anger. We can think about root causes of firearm injury and testing what interventions work to address these.

The beautiful thing about the public health approach is it creates a whole set of different types of interventions that go far beyond just legislation or policing. They're interventions that involve individuals, families, health care providers, and society at large, and they provide us with a path forward to get out of this epidemic in a way that doesn't necessarily force us to take sides.

**"When we talk about it from a public health approach, it opens up a suite of potential interventions that people can agree on."**

#### WHAT DOES A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO FIREARM INJURY AND PREVENTION LOOK LIKE?

**Ranney:** The public health approach really is four basic steps. First, you measure how common a health problem is. Second, you figure out what puts someone at risk of that health problem or what protects them from it happening. Third, based off that information, you develop and then evaluate potential interventions, or steps you could take to reduce risk or improve protection. The evaluation part is super important because you don't want to develop something, spend a lot of time and money putting it in place, and then find out it doesn't work, or worse, does harm. Fourth, you scale up what works. You take the things that you figured out in the first three steps, and you share them with communities across a county, a state, or a country.

When you take that four-step approach, it works over and over. We've used it for car crashes to decrease car crash deaths by more than 70% over the last few decades without, of course, taking cars away. We've used it to reduce deaths from HIV/AIDS and from opioid use disorder. It's a very standard set of steps that help us come to real solutions that help real communities.

#### FIREARMS CAN BE A POLITICALLY DIVISIVE TOPIC. HOW DOES A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH HELP PEOPLE FIND COMMON GROUND ON FIREARM SAFETY?

**Ranney:** The public health approach helps people find common ground around firearm safety in a couple of different ways. The first is by framing firearm injury as a health problem. It grounds it in something that we all care about: No one wants themselves, a family member, or a friend to be shot. The second part is when we talk about it from a public health approach, it opens up a suite of potential interventions that people can agree on, regardless of where they sit on political divides, regardless of whether they are firearm owners or not, regardless of where they live geographically. The third thing about the public health approach that helps us overcome political divides is that, at its core, all four of those basic public health steps are rooted in listening to and collaborating with the community. We

work with anyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, to advance their health. That approach helps us to sidestep some of those political barriers to creating change—as we demonstrated in our recent screening of the film, "The Tennessee 11." It might challenge some of your preconceptions about this issue! (See story on page 28.)

#### WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH?

**Ranney:** Community is at the center of the public health approach. You can't talk about the health of the public without including the public and without grounding your work in what folks care about, in what motivates them, and in how they perceive problems. You also, of course, have to understand what interventions are possible in a given community versus not. That's where local politics may play a role. But the local trusted messengers — the leaders in a community that can make a really big difference — are sometimes the real influencers. This is why we have a full-time community scholar (Nelba Márquez-Greene) as part of our Yale School of Public Health firearm injury prevention program and why our work always includes community members as co-equal partners. The community scholar helps us build trust amongst our partners that this work is being done both with and for them.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF LEGISLATION AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL?

**Ranney:** Legislation or regulations are, of course, part of the solution to almost any public health problem, including firearm injury. There have been some great studies showing that certain policies, like safe storage laws, laws around alcohol outlets, and red flags laws, can decrease the number of shootings or the number of deaths in a community. That legislation can be local, state, or national.

But legislation alone is never sufficient for fixing a public health problem. You can pass laws that don't get enforced, right? A great example is texting and driving. We have laws against that. But I challenge you to drive down the street and not see someone holding a phone in their hand.

Sometimes legislation is not even necessary. For example, our Firearm Injury Prevention program's scientific director, faculty member Chris Morrison, has shown that the arrival of ride-sharing services (like Uber and Lyft) can result in decreases in drunk driving crashes.

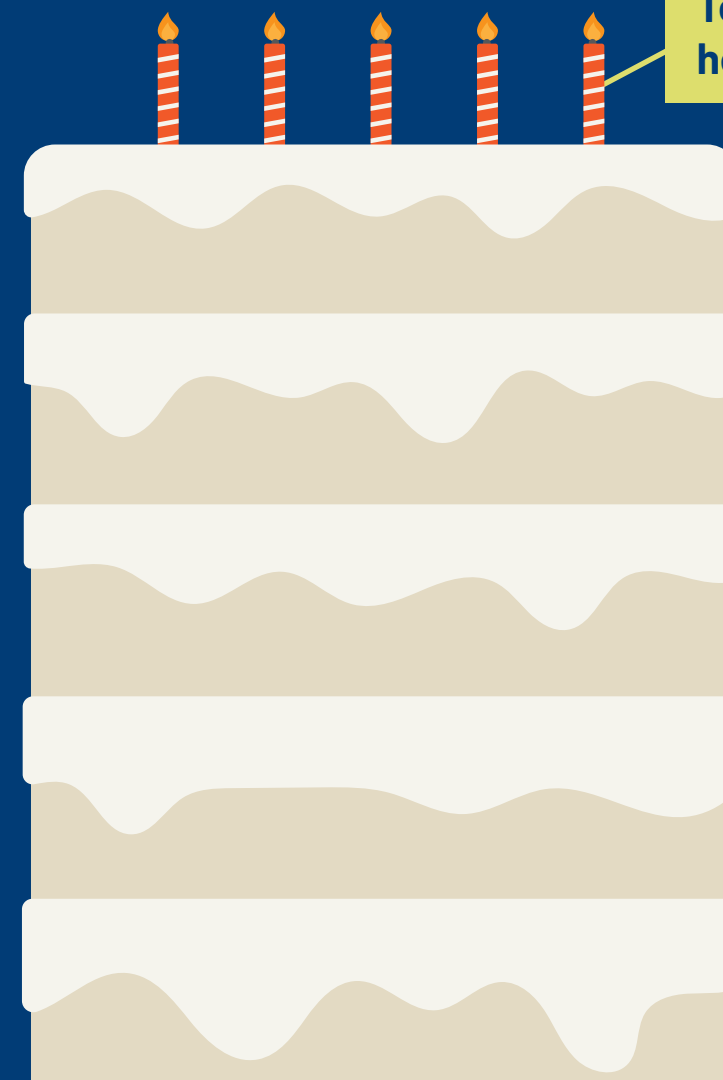
Similarly, our Firearm Injury Prevention program's executive director, faculty member Kerri Raissian, is working with others to incentivize safer firearm storage through messaging, partnerships, and insurance.

So you can imagine how non-legislative interventions can have a huge impact on firearm injury. We're excited to be working on all of these solutions here at YSPH.

# PUBLIC HEALTH: A LAYER CAKE

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& environmental  
factors**

**Vaccines**

**Treatment**

**Nutrition**

**Sanitation**



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# GLOBE TROTTERS

At the Yale School of Public Health, students gain hands-on experience, allowing them to transform public health science into meaningful local, national, and global impacts. Meet eight YSPH students who, in 2025, engaged in public health practice opportunities that linked science and society across the globe.

## 1 CAITLIN GOJUK, MPH '26

*Social and Behavioral Sciences; Maternal and Child Health*

*Ivy Child International, Concord Massachusetts*

My responsibilities included a combination of grant development, research, program support, and community engagement.

## 2 EMMA BEBARTA, MPH '26

*Social and Behavioral Sciences; Global Health Concentration*

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional office, Amman, Jordan*

My primary focus was on maternal, newborn, and child health, as well as community health worker strategies across the region.

## 3 MING CHENG YAP, MPH '26

*Health Policy; Climate Change and Health*

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York*

As a Leadership in Global Health Fellow, I focused on challenges to the development and implementation of climate-resilient sanitation.

## 4 PRANJALI GUPTA, MPH '26

*Social and Behavioral Sciences*

*United Nations Development Program (UNDP), New York*

My work focused on analyzing the impact of UNDP-supported health investment cases.

## 5 JOSELITO M. HERNANDEZ, MPH '26

*Epidemiology of Microbial Diseases*

*The Global Fund, Geneva, Switzerland*

As a Health Systems Analysis Fellow, I worked on a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation of Project BOXER (Build Oxygen for the COVID-19 Emergency Response), a centrally managed limited investment initiative.

## 6 PERPETUA BUADOO, MPH '26

*Social Behavioral Sciences; Global Health*

*People for Successful COrean REunification (PSCORE), Seoul, South Korea*

I taught English to North Korean defectors and worked on policy reports about the human rights issues they face.

## 7 OLIVIA MCCARTHY, MPH '26

*Social and Behavioral Sciences*

*Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Geneva, Switzerland*

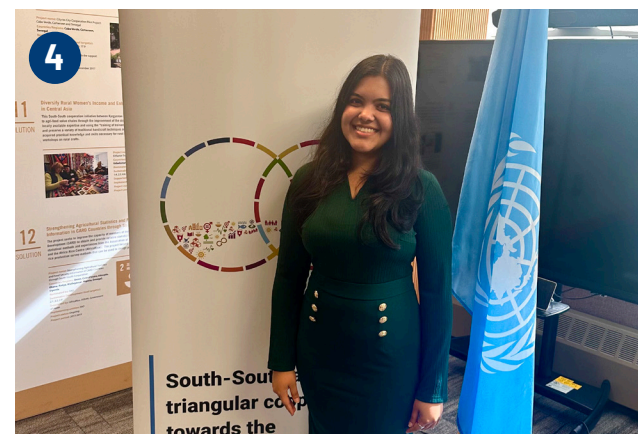
My role was to help align Gavi's public policy and engagement across the global sphere, particularly focusing on messaging for various forums and high-level meetings.

## 8 SHIVANI SALUJA, MPH '26

*Social and Behavioral Sciences; Maternal and Child Health*

*The Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, New Haven, Connecticut*

As a Yale President's Public Service Fellow, my role was centered around New Haven non-profit organizations, specifically SCDA where I performed research on sickle cell disease to better inform the public of this chronic issue.



# From surviving to thriving: A scholar's journey at Yale

By Eman Salih

PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS



**W**HEN I ARRIVED at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) in September 2023 as its first-ever Scholar-at-Risk, I was focused on survival. The war in my country, Sudan, had ruptured everything that once felt secure: my role in health system reform, my home, my community, and my trajectory. I stepped onto campus burdened by uncertainty and fear.

What I found here was a place that refused to let my story end at disruption. Yale as a place insisted I could thrive.

Soon after I arrived, my supervisor, Dr. Mayur Desai, MPH '94, PhD '97, professor of epidemiology (chronic diseases) and associate dean for the Office of Community & Practice, helped me design a structured plan for my time here. I audited the course Reforming Health Systems in LMIC, where I met Dr. Robert Hecht, YC '76, PhD, professor in the practice (microbial diseases). Based on my engagement and contribution to class discussions, Teaching Fellow Josiane Mumukunde Alix, MPH '24, recommended me to Dr. Hecht. He and I discussed my experiences with health system reform in Sudan and I am now serving as a teaching fellow for his course.

I have mentored more than 80 graduate and undergraduate students across YSPH, the Jackson School of Global Affairs, Yale School of Medicine (YSM), and Yale College. Students come to me not only with academic questions but to ask about leadership, careers, identity, and service. Supporting their growth has become a central part of my purpose, and in 2025, I was honored to receive the Yale Postdoc Mentor Award, a reminder that even in displacement I can help others find their direction. Last spring, I served as a guest instructor for Health in Humanitarian Crises with Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood, MPH '89, PhD '95, associate professor of epidemiology (microbial diseases). I am using my experience from Sudan—particularly in the research I am conducting with him on access to communicable disease care in Sudan amid the ongoing war.

My research sits at the intersection of conflict and continuity. I co-lead Strengthening Health Intelligence through Electronic Linked Data (SHIELD)—Sudan, a project that won a 2025 Hecht Global Health Faculty Network Award, working with colleagues in Sudan and the region to strengthen disease surveillance. I collaborate closely with Dr. Khoshnood, Dr. Hani Mowafi, MD, MPH, associate professor of emergency medicine at YSM, and Dr. Sheela Shenoi, MD, MPH, associate professor of medicine (infectious diseases) at YSM, on strengthening health systems in humanitarian settings for communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). I'm also working on NCDs in Uganda with Dr. Jeremy Schwartz, MD, associate professor of medicine (general medicine) at YSM and epidemiology (chronic disease) at YSPH. It is unlikely that such depth and reach of collaboration could have been realized had I not been here, within a community that actively bridges research, policy, and global engagement.

One project especially close to my heart is the study I'm working on with Dr. Shenoi and Dr. Julia Rozanova, PhD, associate research scientist in medicine (AIDS), about mental health and well-being for health care workers in humanitarian crises. Its goal is bold and overdue: to ensure that the people holding health systems together—even as their own worlds fall apart—are not forgotten in policy, research, or funding.

Throughout this journey, I have been guided by the exceptional mentorship of Dr. Desai. He has shaped not only my academic trajectory but the confidence with which I pursue it. His support has helped me refine my research questions, strengthen methodological rigor, and navigate the broader landscape of academic growth. He reminds me constantly that leadership is measured not only by what we build but by how we build others.

Beyond my formal academic and research roles, thriving at Yale has also meant finding and nurturing community. Guided by YSPH's vision of connecting science with soci-

**"What I found here was a place that refused to let my story end at disruption. Yale as a place insisted I could thrive."**

ety—both globally and locally—I became deeply involved in supporting New Haven's refugee and immigrant communities through my collaboration with Havenly, a nonprofit organization in New Haven. There, I mentor community health workers who are rebuilding trust and restoring dignity, one household at a time. Through this work, I have come to see how the boundaries between local and global health dissolve, revealing a shared resilience that transcends geography and circumstance.

I also serve on the Yale Postdoctoral Association's Professional Development Committee, helping create opportunities for young scholars—especially those navigating transi-

tions across countries. And through my role on the Scholars at Risk U.S. Steering Committee, I advocate for those whose academic lives are at risk of being extinguished. I know what it means to be one decision away from losing everything you've worked for—which is why defending academic freedom feels like defending futures.

None of this would have been possible without the extraordinary support of YSPH leadership, especially Dean Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH, and the school's faculty and students who welcomed me not as a temporary visitor but as a contributing member of the community. All of the people I've mentioned by name and many others saw not what I had lost to war, but what I still had to offer.

My journey here is no longer defined by survival but by expansion: of ideas, partnerships, impact, and hope. The war in Sudan only interrupted my path, it did not end it. From New Haven, I continue to work toward a healthier, more peaceful Sudan—and toward a future in which scholars are never silenced by the conditions they are trying to change.

I came here to survive. Yale empowered me to thrive—and to help others do the same.



## Alumni Day

### SAVE THE DATE

June 5, 2026 | New Haven Lawn Club



PHOTO: COURTESY OF KERRI RAISSIAN

Members of the YSPH Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative Team, from left to right: Danielle Poole, Sarah Lowe, Kerri Raissian, Nelba Márquez-Greene, Megan Ranney, Katrina Nelson, and Jennifer Leaña.

## Setting the stage for dialogue

During a discussion of "The Tennessee 11" documentary film, panelists discussed the barriers that have existed in addressing gun violence and the value scientific research can bring in fostering solutions.

**I**N AUGUST 2023, FIVE MONTHS after the deadliest school shooting in Tennessee history, 11 strangers with diverse views on gun rights spent three days together hashing out recommendations to the state legislature for lessening gun violence. Since then,

they've stayed connected through regular group texts and become a national model of collaboration in addressing one of the country's most divisive issues. Two members who represent opposing positions traveled to Hartford, Connecticut recently to talk about their experience—and what

others can learn from it—as part of a panel discussion on reducing firearm violence organized by the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) and UConn ARMS.

"We did something out of the ordinary. It's not very often you have people at different ends of the spectrum come together in a productive area," said college student Jaila Hampton, who lost her best friend and other friends to gun violence while growing up in Memphis.

Hampton is part of group known as The Tennessee 11, which became the subject of a 2024 feature-length documentary produced by the Builders Movement, a cross-partisan non-profit initiative working to move beyond "us vs. them" thinking to solve problems together. The 85-minute film follows Builders' Citizen Solutions program, which brings together people from across the ideological spectrum to find common ground on a pressing issue and build upon it with concrete solutions that represent the will of the majority.

Builders piloted the program in Tennessee after three 9-year-old children and three adults were killed in the March 2023 Covenant School shooting in Nashville. Following the shooting, the Tennessee legislature convened for a special session to debate potential new gun safety laws. The Tennessee 11, meeting while the legislature was in session, delivered five recommendations of which the state legislature adopted one—mandating firearm safety training at elementary, middle, and high schools.

The Sept. 25 Hartford panel discussion set the stage for dialogue with a screening of The Tennessee 11 documentary at Connecticut's Legislative Office Building. The Tennessee 11 panel included a college student, a firearms instructor, a clergy member, a teacher, a combat veteran and suicide prevention advisor, a retired law enforcement officer, and a mental health therapist.

YSPH Dean Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH, thanked Tennessee 11 member and combat veteran Jay Zimmerman for sharing in the film his story of a friend who took his own life by firearm. Ranney, an emergency physician, said she came to firearm injury prevention work after a young man was brought to her ER after fatally shooting himself with his parent's service weapon.

She decried the lack of scientific study of the causes of gun violence. "We apply science to so many health problems, and yet we have no science behind how to answer this one," Ranney said. People would be appalled if they showed up at the ER and their doctor didn't know how to diagnose whether they had appendicitis, she said. "We somehow ignore that basic strategy when it comes to violence."

During the panel discussion, Zimmerman said that before the Tennessee 11 convening he had "preconceived notions." In his family, hunting was a bonding experience spanning generations. After learning of Hampton's experiences, Zimmerman said he had to "take into consideration how her views are shaped and just find that common ground."

YSPH community scholar Nelba L. Márquez-Greene, a licensed marriage and family therapist, highlighted the commonalities that exist among parents and families within the firearm injury community regardless of what state they live in.

"I've heard lots of mothers cry when they lose their kids to gun violence," she said. "We all scream in the same way." Márquez-Greene said she was drawn into the firearm injury community "unwillingly" after her daughter Ana Grace was murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut along with 19 other children and six educators in 2012.

The panelists discussed the barriers that have existed in addressing gun violence and the value scientific research can bring in fostering solutions.

Connecticut State Rep. Renee LaMark Muir, D-Deep River, a former Hartford homicide detective, pointed out that in 1996, the U.S. Congress quashed federal funding for gun violence research. It remained unfunded for 25 years.

Ranney said science can provide society with guidance on how to prevent gun violence. "Science does not happen without society behind it," she said. "It happens because of conversations in the community. ... We can't talk about firearm injuries without talking about society."

Panel discussion organizers said they hope the lessons learned in Tennessee will inspire similar convenings in other states. At YSPH, educators are interested in employing "The Tennessee 11" documentary as a learning tool.

"We are looking for ways to integrate the film and discussions in our YSPH classrooms," said Dr. Kerri Raissian, PhD, a senior research scientist at YSPH and member of the YSPH Firearm Injury Prevention Team who moderated the panel. "Moreover, it's part of our larger mission to bring people together to have meaningful and productive conversations about this and other hard topics."

Hampton hopes people think of the Tennessee 11 like a blood sample used in research. She would like people to see each other's shared humanity and recognize that they still have so much to learn, adding, "We show this can be done everywhere."

# "I think the Yale School of Public Health is going places"



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

By Jane E. Dee

**A**S A FORMER VARSITY athlete and a board-certified primary care sports medicine physician, Dr. Kim Fulton, MD, knows something about how to gauge performance. And in her opinion, "I think the School of Public Health is going places," she said.

Fulton and her husband, Chris Michalik, wanted to help the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) as it entered its second year of independence, so they recently endowed a senior fellowship at YSPH. They were both Yale College graduates. Yale, Fulton said, "made a profound impact on our lives, in our educational trajectory, and our ability to be exposed to the world and have all sorts of opportunities."

Their gift is meant to help Dean Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH, bring prominent public health leaders to YSPH as fellows. The Kim Fulton '91 MD Senior Health Fellowship provides "a sustaining opportunity to make a real impact on the school," Fulton said, adding that "when you see something positive, like Megan steering this ship, you want to support it and take the opportunity to make a real impact on the school in its adolescence."

The inaugural fellowship holder is Dr. Anne Zink, MD, who Ranney appointed as lecturer and senior fellow in 2024.

Zink was Alaska's chief medical officer during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is nationally recognized for developing novel public health strategies

and implementing data-driven health care solutions. At YSPH, she is co-developer of PopHIVE, a platform that puts near-real-time, reliable health data into the hands of the public.

In the spring semester, Zink plans to teach a case-based Leadership Challenges in Public Health course, on "what I wish I knew working in governmental public health that emphasizes real-world problem solving," she said. Each class will feature an interview with a national public health leader sharing what they wish they had known and offering advice to the next generation of public health leaders.

Fulton appreciates that Zink's students will "put down their textbooks ... and start to figure out the real application of some of the material they're learning."

Zink, meanwhile, says having the opportunity to bring real-world experience to the fellowship "is everything." Combining her professional knowledge with "the amazing academic rigor and professionalism at Yale ... is leading to new, innovative, and exciting opportunities both for tenured Yale faculty and other professionals," Zink said. "But more than anything I think it is aligning our work to best serve people."

Fulton received her MD from Tufts University. Her husband is managing director at a private equity firm specializing in the health care services sector. Recently, they led the gift campaign for Yale's Lapham Field House at the Smilow Field Center. Chris

**Fulton appreciates that Zink's students will "put down their textbooks ... and start to figure out the real application of some of the material they're learning."**

Michalik played football at Yale while Fulton lettered in track and field all four years.

"Much like the fieldhouse opportunity, supporting YSPH was something that Chris and I both felt strongly about," said Fulton. "It matched the intersection of our love of Yale and our interest in health care."

The couple has chaired numerous reunion gift committees, including their upcoming 35th reunion. They serve on the For Humanity Campaign Committee and are members of the Parents Leadership Council. Fulton is vice chair of the YSPH Leadership Council and was on the board of the Breast Cancer Alliance in Greenwich where she advocated for a breast surgery fellowship. She wrote a health curriculum for the Peer Health Exchange about 10 years ago, which she considers her first foray into public health.

Fulton continues to look for ways to bolster public health. "I think the Yale School of Public Health has a great opportunity to come out on top," she said.

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# #2025202627

## #2

in grant dollars per faculty member and

## #4

in citations per faculty member

## \$550k

record amount raised for the Alumni Fund, which goes entirely to financial aid, in FY '25



## \$650k

goal for FY '26

## 959 gifts

of <\$25,000 equaled

## \$1.146 million

in FY '25

## \$12.4 million

in financial aid given to students in FY '25

## \$19.1 million

in donations given to YSPH in FY '25

## 95.6%

students receiving scholarship assistance in FY '25

## \$80 million

across

## 371

state, federal, and foundation grants



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

Jessica Federer, MPH '08, speaking at 2025 Alumni Day.

# Investing in women's health

By Jessica M. Scully

JESSICA FEDERER, MPH '08, remembers long being frustrated with how little medical research has been done on women and health issues that disproportionately affect women.

As chief digital officer at Bayer AG from 2014 to 2017, she saw that researchers had no clear answer to the question of why women experience adverse drug reactions nearly twice as often as men. And most studies didn't collect information about women's menstrual cycles or menopausal status. "Our industry had focused on treating men and women the same, treating them equally, not realizing that was the wrong goal," she said.

This imbalance remains a problem throughout the health and medical system, she said. "Sex as a biological variable

still isn't well integrated," she added.

Federer has been working to change that. She recently founded the Women's Health Fund: a fund of funds to spur investment in medical innovations that would improve women's health. A fund of funds invests in a portfolio of other funds, and the Women's Health Fund plans to invest 80 percent of its capital in high-performing life sciences funds, and 20 percent in companies within the fund's portfolios that are particularly promising. To get investment, the funds must have or agree to add women's health as a focus area. The Women's Health Fund uses the NIH definition for women's health: health areas that are unique to women or that disproportionately or differently affect women.

The Women's Health Fund invests in established funds with managers experienced in looking for companies with solid science behind them in different stages of developing pharmaceuticals, technologies, and diagnostics.

Supporters in founding the fund include the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women Venture Fund, the Society for Women's Health Research, 1843 Capital, Pontiva Healthcare Partners, Shaper Capital, the Society for Women's Health Research, Women's Health Access Matters, and Women's Health Research at Yale.

Federer emphasizes that women's health is a potentially huge market. Some common diseases, including Alzheimer's, affect women disproportionately: women are twice as likely to develop the disease as men. Other common

medical conditions affect only women. For example, about 10% of women of reproductive age have endometriosis, a chronic and often painful medical condition where tissue similar to the lining inside the uterus grows outside the uterus.

Federer aims to increase investment in women's health to where pharmaceutical companies consistently bring more products to market for women and leading venture capitalists actively seek out women's health companies. She believes growing the market to that point would dramatically benefit public health.

"The public benefits when 51% of it has better care and better health through faster diagnostics, improved therapeutics, and appropriate care," she said.

Federer has an extensive background in investment and health companies to draw on for her work with the fund. After she left Bayer, Federer moved into venture capital and served on Sage Therapeutics' board. Federer currently serves on the board of Angelini Ventures and is an external advisor to McKinsey & Company. She started the Health of Women Investor Summit, an annual gathering that brings together investors in venture capital, private equity, foundations, endowments, and government. The fourth annual convening will take place in March at NASDAQ in New York.

Federer maintains strong ties with Yale and the School of

Public Health. She serves on the Yale Institutional Review Board and is a member of a group that advises Dean Megan L. Ranney. She also serves on the advisory board of the Blavatnik Fund for Innovation at Yale. The fund helps advance promising early-stage life science research into important products. As an advisor, Federer has helped the fund's director, Dr. Morag Grassie, PhD, decide which companies should get support. She and Grassie also worked together to organize the Health of Women Summit, which brought together researchers at Yale across medicine, public health, and engineering.

Federer "combines deep sector expertise with a powerful network of investors and thought leaders, and she has a rare ability to spot opportunities where women's health innovation can truly advance," Grassie said.

"By prioritizing women's health, Jessica's fund will ensure that the best research and innovations receive the support they deserve—accelerating the development of new solutions and helping to close longstanding gaps in care and investment," Grassie added.

"I'm encouraged to see new investments in women's health research, an area that has long been overlooked despite its impact on half the population," said Dr. Basmah Safdar, MD, director of Women's Health Research at Yale and founding member of the advisory board for the Women's Health Fund.

# ALUMNIFIRE

The YSPH Office of Alumni Affairs invites you to join **Alumnifire**, an online community powered by alumni, for alumni.

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# Deep ties make sure OKC free clinic keeps making a difference

By Meg Dalton



PHOTO: EPHEMIA NICOLAKIS

Jackson Higginbottom, MPH '20



PHOTO: JACKSON HIGGINBOTTOM

**I**N 2014, JACKSON HIGGINBOTTOM was a pre-medical student in Oklahoma City and, to supplement his studies, he wanted to volunteer at a free clinic in the community. Higginbottom's classmates recommended the same place: Manos Juntas.

Manos Juntas, which means “hands together” in Spanish, is a nonprofit clinic in Oklahoma City providing free primary and specialty care to uninsured and underserved patients.

“This was my first experience working directly with people who came from different backgrounds, spoke different languages, and had different life experiences,” said Higginbottom, MPH '20, program manager of the Public Health Data Science and Data Equity initiative at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) and assistant director of the Peter Salovey and Marta Moret Data Science Fellows Program. “Working in these free clinics, you hear your patients’ stories and challenges.”

Now, Higginbottom is running the clinic where his passion for public health started – and using his experience at Yale as both a student and staffer to directly help the community he grew up in.

## HANDS TOGETHER

Manos Juntas first opened its doors in 1995. The nonprofit clinic was founded by Dr. Boyd Shook to help provide care to underserved members of the Oklahoma City community, including immigrants.

“Our clinic sees anyone, regardless of insurance status, financial status, or zip code,” Higginbottom said. “Those were beliefs of Dr. Shook, and I hold these same beliefs. The health of any one individual impacts the health of the community, and there are a lot of reasons why people don’t get health care. It may be because they don’t have insurance

or can’t afford it, but it could also be because of stigma.”

Each year, Manos Juntas helps more than 2,000 Oklahomans get medical care they wouldn’t be able to access otherwise. The clinic is open to patients every Saturday for primary care appointments, prescriptions, laboratory services, seasonal vaccinations, and diabetes management. There’s usually a line out the door, Higginbottom said.

“It’s important to me to make sure that the quality of care is no different than if you went to Yale New Haven Health or Yale Health,” Higginbottom said. “We need to be treating our patients with the same dignity and respect that we would all expect anywhere else.”

As its name implies, Manos Juntas brings many “hands together” to deliver that care. The clinic is run by volunteers, including its medical director and 15 volunteer providers. Each year, roughly 300 undergraduate students volunteer at the clinic. Over the clinic’s 30-year history, more than 4,400 people have volunteered, many of whom have gone on to become doctors, public health professionals, and other health practitioners.

Growing up in Pauls Valley, Oklahoma, Higginbottom had long aspired to work in medicine. When he began volunteering at Manos Juntas in 2014, he worked in the

**Higginbottom has expanded the clinic’s services to include specialty care in cardiology, women’s health, psychiatry, and endocrinology.**

medical laboratory as a phlebotomist, collecting blood samples from patients and preparing those samples for testing. But he soon realized he was drawn to public health and its potential to impact the health of a population, not just the individual.

Higginbottom applied to YSPH in 2017. Shook wrote his letter of recommendation.

## FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

In 2022, on Christmas Day, Higginbottom received a phone call. The clinic manager of Manos Juntas had sad and unexpected news: Shook had died.

At the time, Higginbottom was vice president of the clinic; he had been appointed to the position just six months prior. He was also 1,500 miles away in Connecticut, where he was working at YSPH – but he jumped in to handle many of Shook’s duties and responsibilities.

The big question, said Higginbottom, was: “How do we stay open?”

He decided to make a trip back to Oklahoma City to assess the clinic in person. The most pressing concern, he said, was its financial situation. The clinic often relied on financial contributions from Shook. Plus, Higginbottom didn’t have access to important financial documents, including the clinic’s bank accounts, articles of incorporation, and even its tax-exempt letter. To make matters worse, the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing, and many nonprofits were relying heavily on grants to stay afloat.

Higginbottom had to make some tough decisions. Those included temporarily closing the clinic as he searched for a new medical director.

Luckily, his experience at YSPH equipped him with two skills that proved critical during this time: evaluation and communications.

*Manos Juntas, which means “hands together” in Spanish, is a nonprofit clinic in Oklahoma City providing free primary and specialty care to uninsured and underserved patients.*

“Those are two things that you really need when you’re trying to court funders or donors,” he said. “We need to evaluate our programs to show the impact that we are having. Otherwise, why would someone donate to us?”

Under Higginbottom’s leadership, Manos Juntas raised \$27,500 that January to keep it afloat for the next few months. The clinic was able to reopen for prescription refills and then provider visits. Higginbottom has continued to lead fundraising efforts for the clinic, including securing grants that provide long-term support for the clinic.

## PAY IT FORWARD

As the board president and interim director of Manos Juntas, Higginbottom has overseen a full organizational transition at the clinic, all while working remotely from New Haven. At his day job, Higginbottom serves as the program manager for the Public Health Data Science and Data Equity Initiative and assistant director of the Yale Data Science Fellows Program, both led by YSPH Senior Associate Dean Bhramar Mukherjee, PhD. In these roles, he helps lead efforts to train the next generation of data scientists to tackle public health challenges with equity-centered approaches.

“Jackson’s work in his home state of Oklahoma exemplifies YSPH’s vision of ‘linking science and society,’” said YSPH Dean Megan Ranney. “He helps his community be healthier by melding good science with deep humanism. We are fortunate for his partnership with our Yale community as well as back home in Oklahoma.”

While most patients come to Manos Juntas for primary care, in the past three years Higginbottom has expanded

*(Continued on page 43)*

# YSPH alums delve into disparities at film screening

By Michelle So

**H**UMAN-CENTERED STORYTELLING conveys emotions that can transform moments into movies and movies about health disparities into a form of medical advocacy. Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) alums, inspired by two new documentary films, gathered for a night of storytelling and reflection on October 9.

In collaboration with NOVA, YSPH screened clips from the recently released documentary films “Critical Condition: Health in Black America” and “When Machines Prescribe.” The Emerging Majority Affairs Committee (EMAC), a planning organization of YSPH alumni, organized the screening.

Alicia Whittington, PhD, MPH '06, MS, attended a NOVA screening at Harvard Medical School and was inspired by the films. She collaborated with the NOVA team to bring them to Yale. “Critical Condition” investigates dramatic health disparities, revealing the factors behind the health crisis facing Black people in the U.S., while “When Machines Prescribe” examines the use of race in clinical algorithms.

Dr. Mayur Desai, MPH '94, PhD '97, professor of epidemiology (chronic diseases), described the films as “cross-disciplinary.” They bring “real expertise and perspective” to the topic, he said. “We have public health colleagues with medical school perspectives building this large community.”

Whittington was pleased to see her former instructors at the screening. “As an alum, it was heartwarming to see that some of my professors that taught me the fundamentals of public health were there to support me. It was a reminder that I chose a great school and career path,” said Whittington, assistant director of Engagement and Health Equity Research at The Football Players Health Study at Harvard University.

The screening was accompanied by a panel of Yale experts and one of the filmmakers. Dr. Trace Kershaw, PhD, department chair and Susan Dwight Bliss Professor of Public Health (social and behavioral sciences), moderated a dis-

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALICIA WHITTINGTON



From left: Panelists Aba Black and Ashley Nurse; moderator Trace Kershaw; alumni Maritza Minchala, Alicia Whittington, and Linda Bergonzi-King; and alumni and faculty member Mayur Desai.

cussion with Dr. Aba Black, MD, MHS, associate professor of medicine (general medicine) at Yale School of Medicine, Ashley Nurse, a PhD student at YSPH, and Llewellyn (Llew) Smith, director of “When Machines Prescribe,” Zooming in from his home in Boston.

For Black, “The educational initiative is so important, because it contextualizes why we talk about patients who are mistrustful of the health care system, as opposed to a health care system that is untrustworthy.”

## EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SEGREGATION

The sample clip from “Critical Condition” emphasized the impact of residential segregation, when racially steeped factors such as living conditions, diet, and stress can have detrimental health effects. Narrators included Martin Luther King Jr., who spoke out about the difficulties African Americans faced in obtaining housing.

After viewing the clip, Black commended the film. “I think it's incredibly important that, as we center these stories, we don't create a narrative of victimization, like, ‘Look at these poor people who have these terrible statistics,’” Black said. “[Rather] still tell stories in a way that allows people to share their stories authentically and in an empowering light, as opposed to kind of reinforcing some negative

(Continued from page 41)

the clinic's services to include specialty care in cardiology, women's health, psychiatry, and endocrinology. He has also been able to implement an Electronic Medical Record system – digitizing the paper charts that health care providers traditionally use to document patient care – at the clinic for the first time, an initiative supported in part by a Yale intern.

“I was surprised to hear that there were still clinics relying on mostly pen and paper in 2024,” said Michelle Zheng '25, who, as a clinical transformation intern at Manos Juntas during the summer of 2024, helped guide the EMR implementation. “It revealed to me disparities in the health care industry that I hadn't been able to see before.”

Higginbottom also developed a new volunteer structure. The tiered system now includes volunteer supervisors, a core team Higginbottom and the board of directors can delegate to; volunteer leads, who have experience working at the clinic and know the ropes; and entry-level volunteers, who require training and supervision.

Higginbottom emphasized that he couldn't have done this work alone, crediting his dedicated team of volunteer supervisors, the clinic's medical director Aneesh Pakala, and community partners – including the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, Direct Relief, AmeriCares, among many others – for making the clinic's progress possible.

stereotypes about poverty or disadvantages.”

Nurse also appreciated the film's narrative approach. “Storytelling is important because it provides a lot more context and details to the statistical-like representation and data,” Nurse said.

## USING RACE IN CLINICAL ALGORITHMS

The second film, produced by Llew Smith and Kelly Thomson, investigates the use of race in clinical algorithms. The main storyline followed the push to remove race as one of the criteria for organ eligibility, including in the estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate (eGFR), a calculation that measures kidney function. The formula considers age, sex, creatine levels, and historically, race.

Previously, the “Black/Not Black” checkbox fed an algorithm that made Black kidney failure patients seem healthier than they were. While gaining a few points seems inconsequential, the implications were broad; patients who had higher eGFR on paper were pushed down on the

Over the years, Higginbottom also relied on advice from Rachel Littman '91, Patrice Yang '97, Irving Ye '07, and other members of the Yale Alumni Nonprofit Association, a global community of Yale alumni, students, and friends committed to generating positive social impact.

“I'm deeply grateful to the Yale community,” Higginbottom said. “From colleagues who've shared their expertise to alumni who've offered encouragement and resources, their support has helped our clinic continue serving thousands of patients. I'd welcome continued advice and partnership from the Yale alumni community as we strengthen our work in Oklahoma.”

For Higginbottom, this work isn't just the culmination of years of experience working in public health. It's also deeply personal.

Growing up, he and his family struggled financially. They relied on Oklahoma's Medicaid program, called Sooner-Care, a health-coverage program jointly funded by the federal and state government. Since he started working at the clinic, his grandparents and mother have relied on Manos Juntas for care, as have thousands of fellow Oklahomans.

“I'm a product of Oklahoma,” Higginbottom said. “Being able to go back and continue trying to improve the health of Oklahoma while working at Yale has been great. It's been the best of both worlds.”

priority list for a kidney transplant. With Black Americans deemed “healthier” by the algorithm, many received delayed transplant care.

Black reacted strongly to the clip, citing her own experiences as a Black woman in medicine. “I graduated from med school in 2013. I remember learning about eGFR, and I never questioned it, as a black person,” Black said. “I trusted the people who were teaching me, even though, you know, I didn't really stop to think about it until I got here, and I was reading some of these papers. As a sociology major, I know that race is a social construct, but I never connected it because I just accepted what was being taught.”

Smith said in making the film, it was important to find a patient willing to open up. “The eGFR can sound like an abstract concept until you realize that this is about someone's life or death,” Smith said. “So, it's wonderful to take a human story and open up questions around how the medical field can often continue these racist ideas without knowing it.”

# Dispensing skin cancer prevention

By Yasmin Hung

**R**EGULAR USE OF SUNSCREEN is one of the most effective ways to prevent skin cancer, yet many people do not routinely apply or reapply as recommended. Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, MD, MPH '25, a graduate of the Yale School of Public Health's Executive MPH (EMPH) program, is interested in sunscreen dispensers as an innovative public health tool for skin cancer prevention.

During his EMPH Applied Practice Experience, Cohen brought the dispensers to the Connecticut communities of Guilford and Madison. Now he's championed having a dispenser on YSPH's campus at 60 College Street.

"These dispensers are a simple but visible reminder that sun protection is part of public health," said Cohen, an associate professor of dermatology, and biomedical informatics and data science at Yale School of Medicine. "Even if you don't use the sunscreen, seeing the dispenser reminds you to protect your skin from the sun."



PHOTOS: BRONWEN PAILTHORPE



Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, MD, MPH '25

Over the past 50 years, melanoma incidence has risen sharply, with more than 100,000 new cases expected in 2025. It is now the second most common cancer among individuals aged 15–29, and in the United States someone dies from melanoma every hour. This potentially lethal form of skin cancer originates in melanocytes, pigment-producing cells. Like many other cancers, melanoma arises through the uncontrolled growth of these cells. However, melanoma is highly treatable when detected early, making prevention and timely screening critical components in reducing mortality from this disease.

Regular use of sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher can reduce the risk of developing skin cancer by approximately 50%, while experiencing five or more sunburns over a lifetime doubles the risk of malignant melanoma.

By providing convenient access to sunscreen, Cohen hopes the YSPH dispenser will encourage routine application, while also serving as a reminder of the importance of daily sun protection in preventing skin cancer. Cohen hopes to expand the sunscreen dispenser program to additional locations in New Haven and throughout the state.

The dispenser is also a convenient resource to fill the gaps in sunscreen reapplication throughout people's day. Cohen partnered with Impact Melanoma, an organization dedicated to decreasing skin cancer incidence. The organization was instrumental in the rollout of the project, from sourcing the sunscreen to branding the dispensers.

Cohen recently developed an occupational sun exposure questionnaire to understand if individuals with high outdoor exposure, such as firefighters and fishermen, receive adequate education and protection against UV risks.

He hopes the new sunscreen dispenser at YSPH is a beneficial resource for the Yale community. Just as important, he believes that the dispenser location can serve as a symbol that sun protection is a worthy issue that deserves our attention and an indispensable part of public health.

**LIVIA COX, MPH '25**, was awarded the Winston Health Policy Fellowship, one of only two in the country to receive this prestigious award. The fellowship, based in Washington, D.C., helps fellows gain hands-on experience in health policy development by working directly with policymakers in both the public and private sectors.



**NABARUN DASGUPTA, PHD, MPH '03**, was named a 2025 MacArthur Fellow, winning a "genius grant" for creative and effective

harm reduction work. The MacArthur Foundation noted Dasgupta, an epidemiologist, combines science with community engagement in a way that lowers deaths and other afflictions from drug use.

In 2007, while working on his PhD at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health, Dasgupta co-founded Project Lazarus. The nonprofit cleared a path for doctors in Wilkes County, NC to prescribe naloxone, greatly reducing overdose deaths in the county. He became a senior scientist at UNC's Injury Prevention Research Center and in 2020 was named the first Gillings Innovation Fellow at UNC. That same year he co-founded Remedy Alliance/For the People, which has removed barriers to naloxone access and become a low- and no-cost wholesaler. Through his Opioid Data Lab, he has developed a nationwide network for checking the ingredients in street drugs.

Dasgupta, 46, said his time at the Yale School of Public Health (YSPH) "was instrumental" in setting him on the course he has pursued and in particular Dr. Robert Heimer, PhD '98 (pharmacology), professor of

## ALUMNI NEWS

epidemiology (microbial diseases) and of pharmacology, without whom "I would not be doing this work."



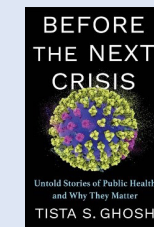
Hartwick College of Oneonta, NY, announced **WILLIAM EGER, MPH '21**, was named its Alumni Association's Outstanding Recent

Alumnus. Eger earned his Master of Public Health degree in epidemiology of microbial disease, global health. This award recognizes graduates who have demonstrated outstanding and sustained volunteer service to the college. Eger is a doctoral student in interdisciplinary research on substance use at the University of California-San Diego. He served as an adjunct professor at San Diego State University and the University of New Haven.



**CHERYL FATTIBENE, MPH '90, MSN '90**, recently published the book, "Successful Nurse Practitioner Role Transition – A

Practical Guide." The book covers the many factors to consider whether starting as a new nurse practitioner (NP) or as an established NP looking to make a change. The practical guide includes chapters on NP job search considerations, cover letter and resume writing, navigating the interview and negotiation process, credentialing, legal issues, career reassessment, and a special chapter on documentation, billing, and coding. The book includes examples of resumes, cover letters, and negotiation strategies to take the guesswork out of the job search process.



**TISTA GHOSH, MPH '04**, has released her first book, published by Columbia University Press. "Before the Next Crisis, Untold Stories of Public Health and Why They Matter" is

a mix of real stories and public health insights from across the country, including reflections on what went right (and wrong) during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how we can better prepare for future threats. The book features interviews with people from all walks of life – nurses, public health workers, police officers, grocery store managers – and is meant to be a call to action for a stronger and more equitable health system. Ghosh is a physician, epidemiologist, and award-winning health journalist. She has served as the chief medical officer for the state of Colorado, an Epidemic Intelligence Service officer, and an appointee to the U.S. Community Preventive Services Task Force.

Congratulations to **TASSOS KYRIAKIDES, PHD '99**, recently nominated for the 2025 Bank of Cyprus Man of the Year Awards in the category of Scientist. These awards, now in their 23rd year in Cyprus, reward those who have excelled and distinguished themselves in their field, both for their achievements and their spirit, ethos, and character as leaders. Kyriakides was also recently in the news for conducting a study for the North American Olive Oil Association. The initiative was the largest of its kind in the U.S. and looked at a sampling of 153 olive oils from leading brands to determine any instances of adulteration. His work revealed no instances of adulteration when tested against International Olive Council standards.

(Alumni news continued)

**JEANNEE PARKER MARTIN, MPH '83**, was appointed to the California Commission on Aging. Martin has been president and chief executive officer at LeadingAge California since 2016. She held several roles at The Corridor Group Holdings LLC from 1995 to 2023, including vice chair and principal of the Board of Managers, chief executive officer, president and owner. Martin is a member of the International Women's Forum and Women Business Leaders in Health Care.



**KESHIA POLLACK PORTER, PHD, MPH '02**, was recently appointed as the 12th dean of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

She joined the Bloomberg School faculty as an associate professor in 2006 and became a full professor in 2017. She directs the Institute for Health and Social Policy and served as the school's vice dean for faculty. She has also led the Health Policy Research Scholars, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, that trains doctoral students from various disciplines to effectively apply their research to help build healthier and more equitable communities. As chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management, she strengthened faculty mentoring and development and recruited faculty in key areas. "I am beyond honored to become the 12th dean of the Bloomberg School of Public Health," Pollack Porter said. "I am thrilled to partner with faculty, staff, students, alumni, the university, and the larger global and local communities to promote optimal health and well-being for all. The work that we do in public health is now, more than ever, critically important. I am confident that together we will build on the Bloomberg School's renowned history and continue to pioneer new research, translate and disseminate knowledge to inform policy and prac-

tice, and educate today's and tomorrow's leaders."

Provost Ray Jayawardhana, who led the search, stated, "Keshia is an eminent public health scholar, an admired teacher and mentor, and principled leader who brings deep knowledge of the opportunities and challenges facing the Bloomberg School as she takes on the deanship. Throughout the search process she impressed the committee with her wide-ranging curiosity, profound sense of mission, and eagerness to engage with new ideas and perspectives. Keshia radiates a concern for others and for ensuring that the work we do here improves lives beyond our campus."



**LINDA RABENECK, MD, MPH '90**, was recently appointed to the Order of Canada. The Order of Canada is presented by the governor

general and recognizes outstanding achievement, dedication to the community, and service to the nation. The citation states: "Gastroenterologist and University of Toronto Professor Linda Rabeneck is a leader in colorectal cancer screening and prevention. As Ontario Health's vice president of prevention and cancer control, she led the roll-out of ColonCancerCheck, the first province-wide colorectal cancer screening program in the country. Its success influenced the development of similar programs across Canada and around the world." She is both thrilled and humbled to receive this honor and has fond memories of her time at Yale.



**ANITA RAVI, MPH '05**, CEO and founder, PurpLE health Foundation, was recently named a 2025 L'Oreal Paris Women of Worth

Honoree. For 20 years this award

has honored women who uplift their communities through service. PurpLE Health Foundation (PHF), is an innovative nonprofit creating a new field of medicine—gender-based violence (GBV) care—focusing on women who have experienced domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault. PHF advances this work through a "Care and Share" model that turns lessons from its pioneering clinic into training clinicians worldwide.



When **ALEXANDER URRY, MPH '19**, enrolled at YSPH, he was searching for flexibility. Trained as a biochemist at Occidental College,

he craved a career that would bring him closer to people and have a more immediate and tangible impact. At YSPH, he found an interdisciplinary education that allowed him to explore health care management, policy, and community service all at once. That foundation proved essential when Urry arrived in Washington, D.C. as a Winston Health Policy Fellow in August of 2019. He joined the office of then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, advising on health, veterans, and nutrition issues. Today, he serves as Senior Policy Advisor to House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, where he manages portfolios spanning health care, agriculture, nutrition, and the federal budget. Looking back, Urry credits his health care management MPH with preparing him for the unexpected challenges of policy work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he was able to quickly brief senior leadership on epidemiology and vaccine science.

Urry returned to YSPH in September to speak with Dean Megan Ranney about his time at YSPH and experiences in Washington, D.C. as part of the Dean's Leaders in Public Health Speakers Series.

## IN MEMORY



**JAMES RAWLINGS, MPH '80**, died of natural causes on May 25, 2025. He was 81 and a devoted community elder.

Rawlings earned a BS in pharmacy from the University of Rhode Island and an MPH from Yale. He retired as the first African American assistant vice president and executive director of community health at Yale New Haven Hospital after a 35-year career. He pioneered Connecticut's first hospital-based adult AIDS and Sickle Cell programs, both of which received national recognition. He administratively oversaw hospital departments including the emergency department, laboratory medicine, and medical/surgical units.

He was a tireless advocate for equity and justice. He served as president of the Greater New Haven NAACP where he transformed the branch through data-driven strategies and elevated its community impact. Under his leadership, the branch launched New England's largest community health fair and the region's first Urban Career Fair for youth.

He served on the board of directors of the National NAACP and chaired its sickle cell disease committee. He also served as treasurer for the National Board of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America. He chaired the Connecticut Health Equity Commission and was health chair for the CT State NAACP Conference. His lifelong dedica-



**MARTINE ARMSTRONG, MBBS, MD**, senior research scientist emeritus of epidemiology (microbial diseases), died on October 23, 2025. She was 93.

Armstrong retired in 1997 after serving on the Yale faculty since 1968. Her career at the Yale University School of Medicine began in the department of microbiology and continued in the department of epidemiology and public health until her retirement.

Much of her early career focused on the study of retroviruses. With the emergence of a novel retrovirus—the AIDS virus—in the early 1980s, her research shifted toward the study of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, which, before the advent of retroviral therapy, was a common cause of death among AIDS patients. Her investigations centered on the

tion to health equity earned him national honors, including recognition by the National Civic League, an award given to only 35 individuals annually.

Until his death, Mr. Rawlings served as president and CEO of the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, CT Chapter (SCDAA.CT), where he founded Michelle's House, the first Sickle Cell Community Center in the Northeast. He championed academic support for students living with Sickle Cell Disease and spearheaded outreach programs for individuals unaware of their SCD and Sickle Cell Trait status. His leadership brought a unique partnership with CVS Health to advance equity in health care for the Sickle Cell community.

In 2014, he stepped down from his fourth term as NAACP branch president to focus on another lifelong passion, preserving Native American culture. An elder of the Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe, he worked diligently to ensure that his tribe's traditions and teachings would live on in New Haven and his tribal homeland.

He was also a respected global voice on public health. He most recently presided over his final Freedom Fund Dinner as NAACP president at the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale, where Mayor Toni Harp praised him as "a real blessing to our community... [who] has given the organization plenty of heart." He served as chairman of the board for Ella B. Scantlebury Senior Residence.

*in vitro* cultivation of *Pneumocystis carinii*, an opportunistic protozoan pathogen, and on delineating the pathogen's interactions with host lung tissue.

She served as chair of the Yale Animal Care and Use Committee from its inception in 1984 until her retirement. She also was a member of the Yale Biological Safety Advisory Committee from 1984 to 1991. She served as acting vice-chair of the department of epidemiology and public health from 1993 to 1995.

In 2015, Dr. Armstrong was inducted into the Winslow Centennial Honor Roll for Excellence and Service, established during the Yale School of Public Health's centennial year to recognize 100 alumni and faculty who made outstanding contributions to public health over the school's first century.

A memorial in New Haven will be held in early spring of 2026.

*(In memory continued)*

**RACHEL CAMPBELL ZORN, MPH '16**, passed away at Agrace HospiceCare from metastatic ocular melanoma. She graduated in 2011

from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a BA in biology and certificates in African studies and gender and women's studies. She studied abroad in Kenya, working to better connect marginalized communities with HIV services. Improving health care for underserved populations was a driving academic and professional interest throughout her life. She entered the Peace Corps in 2012, serving two years in Senegal, working in three languages to improve malaria prevention and treatment services in remote areas of Senegal, and to train incoming Peace Corps volunteers. In 2014, she was diagnosed with and treated for ocular melanoma shortly before she began her graduate studies.

She earned multiple honors for her leadership, innovation, and academic excellence despite losing her right eye to the disease in 2015. She completed her program on schedule with her cohort while teaching and serving as executive director of the HAVEN Free Clinic. She dedicated her career in health care technology to improving patient care and advancing health equity on local and global scales. Her work was guided by her dedication to collaboration, pursuit of excellence, and a tireless commitment to improving the lives of others.

She married Karthik Bala in 2020 in Washburn, WI, on a dock on her beloved Lake Superior. The couple has a son, Luka Zorn Bala.

Her life was in full swing when her disease metastasized in August 2023. The efforts of her devoted care team

helped her have another 16 months. She filled that time with as much love as possible for Luka, her family and friends, and with experiences (including the Eras Tour). She leaves us with the feeling that we should seize the day: make the trip, see the friends, take the risk. She is loved and she is missed.

**AGNES EDWARDS, MPH '89**, passed away at Arbor Landing at Pawleys in South Carolina. Born on July 12, 1936, she was committed to her community and served as a member for various organizations that included the National Association of Social Workers, League of Women Voters (South Carolina Board and Georgetown Board), Belle Island Book Club and Hopalong Cassidy Book Club. She held several positions on the Belle Island Board of Advisors and volunteered with the American Red Cross. She loved to volunteer in her community, entertain with friends and travel the world.

**SUSAN JENNINGS, MPH '81**, died at her home in Falmouth, Maine. She was born on March 11, 1947, in Evanston, IL. She graduated from New Trier High School in Winnetka, IL and continued her education at Carleton College, graduating magna cum laude in 1968. She received an MA from Washington University in Saint Louis in 1972 and a Master of Public Health and the Richard Weirman Fellowship from Yale University in 1981. She met Joel Kallich at Boston University in 1982 and they were married in July 1983. She completed her graduate studies at Boston University as a University Fellow, where she received her PhD in sociology in 1989. During this period, she worked at the American Institutes for Research, the Health Data Institute, and the Health Policy Institute of Boston University.

Recruited to Santa Monica-based Value Health Sciences in 1989, she was promoted to senior vice president and head of software development and services; she continued as the senior director of West Coast Operations after Pfizer purchased VHS. Upon retiring, she put her energy and creativity into volunteer work for community organizations. In California, she was president of the Malibu Creek State Park Docents, raising money, staffing the visitor center, and guiding hikes for city children. She worked and traveled around the globe. After she and her husband moved to Maine in 2013, they taught classes and programs at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute where she also served on the advisory board.

**CHARLES MACINTOSH, MPH '61**, died peacefully at Goodwin House, Baileys Crossroads, VA, at the age of 91. He was a great-great-nephew of Joseph Wright Taylor, founder of Bryn Mawr College. Born in Haverford, PA on August 15, 1933, he attended Haverford Friends School and The Haverford School. He was a 1956 ROTC graduate of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA, where he formed lifelong friendships and remained involved with alumni activities. He served in the U.S. Army from 1956 to 1958 and was deployed to Korea. After earning an MPH from Yale University in 1961, he held various roles in hospital administration including in Rochester, NY, Baltimore, MD, and Philadelphia, PA. Among his many interests were flying airplanes (small aircraft and gliders), running marathons, playing tennis and squash (into his 80s), playing the bagpipes, sailing, and painting watercolors. He was a member of the St. Andrews Society, the Merion Cricket Club, Pocono Lake Preserve, and the Valley Forge Gun Club.

**MARCIA MARSTED, MPH '88**, died peacefully with her husband and daughter by her side. She was born in Hartford, CT on May 30, 1943. She and her husband, Jeff, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary last June. Her deep love for her husband sustained her during many difficult years of health challenges. They loved to tell the story of when they met at a fraternity party at Williams College. Having just returned from Paris, she arrived in a beautiful brown suede coat as a blind date for someone else. Jeff noticed her across the room, went up to introduce himself, and that was that. They were inseparable ever since. They lived for over 55 years in Canton, CT where she created her Garden of Whimsy, which was included in garden tours. She volunteered and participated in many activities in Canton, including Roaring Brook Nature Center and Canton Garden Club, and she was a long-time member of the Gallery on the Green. She went to boarding school at the Northfield School in Northfield, MA. After a gap year at St. Clare's Hall in Oxford, England, she attended Bennett College in Millbrook, NY. She obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in biology from the University of Hartford, and a Master of Public Health from Yale University. She was chair of the science department at the Watkinson School where she taught biology. A two-time cancer survivor, she volunteered at the University of Connecticut Health Center and the American Cancer Society before working in the lab of Dr. Bijay Mukerjee at UConn as a research assistant. She wrote and photographed herself for "About My Hair" when she went through chemotherapy after her second bout with cancer and documented the experience of losing her hair. She later created the Cappelli d'Angeli Foundation to support women artists dealing with cancer.



**MARTYN R. SMITH, PHD '78**, a resident of Houghton and former Michigan Technological University professor, department head, and dean of

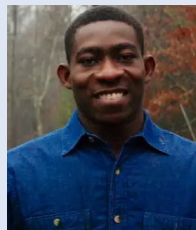
the graduate school, died at home after a long struggle with dementia. He received his BA in mathematics from Montclair State University and his PhD in biostatistics from Yale University. After four years in the Behavioral Sciences and Community Health Division at the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine, he joined Michigan Tech's Department of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, later serving as department head. He pursued research and taught courses in statistics and biostatistics. In 1989, he accepted an appointment as professor in the Mathematics and Statistics Department at Winona State University, where he was director of the Center for Applied Statistics and Process Improvement and pioneered many distance learning courses. He was also a consultant for Proctor and Gamble, Colgate, IBM, and the American Dental Association. He held a concurrent faculty appointment at the Mayo Clinic School of Health-Related Sciences in Rochester, NY, where he taught epidemiology and other courses. He returned to Michigan Tech where he was appointed dean of the graduate school, director of distance learning and summer school, and professor of biostatistics in the Department of Biomedical Engineering. He especially enjoyed working with and mentoring biomedical engineering and mathematics undergraduate and graduate students up to and after his retirement in 2015. His quick wit, unbridled enthusiasm for "mischief," and kind heart gave him a talent for bringing people together. He loved music and was a lifelong sailor. A hiker, cyclist, cross-country skier, and fisherman, he cared more about sharing moments with friends than catch-

ing fish. His passion for adventure took him to Australia, Greece, Turkey, the Netherlands, St. Kitts, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and South Africa. In 2016 he spent five memorable weeks walking the Camino de Santiago through southwestern France and northern Spain. His greatest joy was time spent with family, friends, and dogs in the water and on the beach at family camps on Little Traverse Bay.

**LEON VINCI, MPH '77**, a former innovative and progressive health director for the City of Middletown, CT, passed away after a lengthy battle with cancer. A distinguished figure in public and environmental health, he had dedicated more than three decades to advancing community well-being and public health preparedness across the United States. Born and raised in Middletown, CT, he earned his bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University, and a Master's in Public Health from the Yale School of Public Health. He later achieved a doctorate from the Medical University of South Carolina. He held leadership roles in local and county public health departments across Connecticut, Nebraska, and Kansas. His commitment to environmental health led him to participate in various national and international committees and task forces. He also taught at several universities including Drexel University, Yale University, and the University of Nebraska. He was recognized as a climate and health leader by ecoAmerica, received the 2020 A. Clark Slaymaker Honor from the Virginia Environmental Health Association, and served as a climate ambassador with the National Environmental Health Association. He was a fan of road trips, food, and sports, frequently combining all three on weekend trips with his children from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., New York City and the Midwest. You could catch him in his silver Jeep on the highway listening to his favorite Woodstock tunes, excited for his next adventure.

## AWARDS & HONORS

**DR. TERIKA MCCALL, PHD, MPH, MBA**, was selected as a panel speaker for SXSW EDU 2026. McCall's panel discussion, *Pride + Resilience: LGBTQ+ Youth in Online Spaces*, will focus on the needs of subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community, such as those in rural communities, trans and gender expansive youths, and Indigenous and Black youths. The panel will also discuss strategies for conducting youth-engaged research and supporting LGBTQ+ communities.



**DR. OLADIMEJI ALADELOKUN, PHD**, received the American Association for Cancer Research Scholar-in-Training Award. Aladelokun, a

postdoctoral associate in Dr. Caroline Johnson's Lab, was honored for the abstract, "Novel Sex-Specific Metabolic Phenotypes in Early Onset Colorectal Cancer."

**DEAN MEGAN L. RANNEY, MD, MPH**, and **DR. JASON L. SCHWARTZ, PHD**, have been appointed to a new Connecticut Department of Public Health advisory committee. The committee will advise the department's commissioner, Dr. Manisha Juthani, MD, on matters related to vaccines and other public health issues.

**DR. XI CHEN, PHD**, was elected as an advisory committee member for the Ageing, Longevity and Health Initiative at the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU). The Ageing, Longevity, and Health Initiative seeks to promote healthy aging and address current inequities in aging. His research areas include healthy aging, the economics of cognitive aging, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, aging-related policies, and the

impacts of environmental pollution and climate change on older adults.

**DR. NICOLA HAWLEY, PHD**, presented Yale's 21st C. Davenport Cook Lecture in International Child Health on Oct. 22. Hawley's presentation was titled "Beyond the Body: Life Course Approaches to Physical and Mental Health in Pacific Youth and Families." The lecture is presented annually by Yale School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics. Hawley's talk focused on her many years of work on adolescent mental health in American Samoa. She also presented a lecture on "A Life Course Approach to Obesity and Diabetes Prevention Among Samoans" as part of the University of Hawaii Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health's 2025 Dean's Speaker Series.

**NELBA MÁRQUEZ-GREENE, LMFT**, was selected as an honoree at The Denise D'Ascenzo Foundation's 2025 Human Spirit Awards Dinner. Honorees are chosen for exhibiting courage, kindness, and resilience that brighten the path for others. She also was elected to the board of directors of 4-CT, a Connecticut nonprofit that partners with community-based organizations across the state to empower individuals in need of improving their lives.

**DR. MICHAELA DINAN, PHD**, was the opening speaker for the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer event in Hartford. Making Strides is the nation's largest breast cancer fundraiser walk, which hopes to unite communities in a shared mission of ending breast cancer.

**DR. ALBERT KO, MD**, is president-elect of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the largest international scientific organization

of experts dedicated to reducing the worldwide burden of tropical infectious diseases and improving global health. His research interests include zoonotic diseases, infectious diseases, health equity, maternal and child health, and global health.

**DR. JASMINE ABRAMS, PHD**, was one of three Yale faculty to receive a 2025 Spark Award from the Yale Institute of Global Health. A research scientist in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Abrams was recognized for her work improving HIV prevention for Zambian girls. Other recipients of the Spark Award were Dr. Marwan Osman, PhD, a microbiologist and molecular epidemiologist with Yale School of Medicine, and Dr. Claudia Vallenggia, PhD, a Yale professor of anthropology.

**DR. MAYUR DESAI, MPH '94, PHD '97**, was selected as a 2025-2026 Faculty Fellow with the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning to engage in discussions on promoting equitable teaching practices and pedagogies.

YSPH Community Impact Lab Director **JASON MARTINEZ, MS**, completed New Haven's Community Leadership Program. Martinez also was elected to the board of directors of Loaves and Fishes serving the New Haven community.

**DR. BHARAMAR MUKHERJEE, PHD**, gave the Philip S. Brachman Memorial Lecture at the University of Michigan's Summer Session in Epidemiology. Mukherjee spoke about "Unveiling Bias: A Statistician's Quest for Data Equity in Health Research."

**DR. DONNA SPIEGELMAN, SCD**, presented at this year's International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Science in Kigali, Rwanda, considered

the world's most influential meeting on HIV research. Spiegelman presented on how the Learn-As-You-Go clinical trial model developed at YSPH optimizes public health interventions for real-world implementation.

**DR. SARAH LOWE, PHD**, was elected to the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS) board of directors. The ISTSS includes psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, researchers, clergy, and others with an interest in studying and treating traumatic stress.

**DR. KAI CHEN, PHD**, was named faculty director of the Yale Center on Climate Change and Health (CCCH). CCCH addresses the threat of climate change by using Yale's multidisciplinary expertise and global reach to train future leaders, provide a comprehensive educational program, and catalyze innovative research. Chen was previously co-faculty director with **DR. ROBERT DUBROW, MD, PHD**.

**DR. RAFAEL PÉREZ-ESCAMILLA, PHD**, was invited by the International Journal for Equity in Health to co-edit a special issue, "Migration and its Effects on Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition."

**DR. JEANNETTE ICKOVICS, PHD**, joined Yale President Maurie McInnis, PhD, in London for a For Humanity Illuminated (FHI) gathering. FHI is a live event series that invites speakers across Yale to engage the Yale community in conversations on how to expand our positive impacts.

**DEAN MEGAN L. RANNEY, MD, MPH**, was a keynote speaker at the 2025 Remembrance Conference hosted by the University of Buffalo's Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. Ranney highlighted the critical roles that medical professionals have in gun violence prevention efforts and emphasized that gun violence should be understood as a public health issue.

**DR. KAI CHEN, PHD**, was selected as a Kavli Fellow by the National Academy of Sciences, which is awarded to scientists under age 45 who have made contributions to science early in their career. Chen was recognized for his work on climate change.

**DR. MICHAELA DINAN, PHD**, and **DR. CARY GROSS, MD**, participated in a plenary session on impactful research using cancer surveillance data at this year's North American Association of Central Registries Conference.

**DR. RAFAEL PÉREZ-ESCAMILLA, PHD**, was jointly appointed by the Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Health Organization as a member of the newly established UN Expert Group on Food Security and Nutrition data and statistics.



**DR. GREGG GONSALVES, PHD '17, YC '11**, was named a fellow by the Infectious Disease Society of America. The fellowship recognizes distinguished clinicians and scientists whose contributions move the field forward. Gonsalves is an expert in policy modeling on infectious disease and substance use, as well as the intersection of public policy and health equity.

**DR. CHIMA NDUMELE, PHD, MPH**, participated in a panel discussion sponsored by the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The panel discussed proposed work requirements and their impact on assessing and maintaining safety net benefits in the U.S.

**KAAKPEMA YELPAALA, MPH '06**, spoke at the 2025 Healthcare Leadership Conference in Lagos, Nigeria. The conference is Nigeria's foremost platform for uniting health care leaders,

policymakers, and innovators to drive impactful transformation across the health sector.

**DR. MICHAELA DINAN, PHD**, was named a fellow in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) program at Drexel University College of Medicine. ELAM prepares women for senior leadership roles in schools of medicine, dentistry, public health, and pharmacy.

**DR. A. DAVID PALTIEL, PHD '92, MBA '85**, was an invited guest at the Choose Europe for Science event at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Paltiel was among the international experts and policymakers who participated in a panel discussion entitled "Defending Europe's Future: The Battle for Academic Freedom and Global Research Impact."

**DEAN MEGAN L. RANNEY, MD, MPH**, participated in several events at the Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Leaders Forum. Ranney took part in a panel discussion on leading during challenging times. She also served as moderator of a fireside chat with Dr. Anthony Fauci, MD, former director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases from 1984 to 2022, and the chief medical advisor to the U.S. President from 2021 to 2022.

**DR. JEFFREY TOWNSEND, PHD**, was recognized for his "outstanding guidance and visionary leadership" as a chair of the Cancer Evolution Working Group of the American Association for Cancer Research. Townsend was one of the founding leaders of the group and has served as a member of its leadership team for four years.

**DR. XI CHEN, PHD**, was appointed as a research associate for the National Bureau of Economic Research. Chen was recognized for his work on the economics of aging.

(Awards and honors continued)

**DR. BHRAMAR MUKHERJEE, PHD**, was elected a fellow of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS). IMS fellowships recognize exceptional research and professional achievements in the fields of statistics and probability. Mukherjee is Senior Associate Dean of Public Health Data Science and Data Equity and serves as president-elect of the Eastern North American Region (ENAR) of the International Biometrics Society, one of the world's most prominent biostatistics societies.

**DR. ANNE ZINK, MD**, was appointed to the steering committee for the Vaccine Integrity Project, a new initiative that seeks to safeguard vaccine use in the U.S. Zink served as the chief medical officer for Alaska from 2018 to 2024 and is nationally recognized for implementing data-driven health care solutions and advocating for health improvements at local, territorial, state, and national levels.

**DR. JASMINE ABRAMS, PHD**, delivered this year's commencement address at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine. Abrams is an internationally recognized behavioral research scientist. Her work centers on culturally grounded, community-led solutions to health challenges that disproportionately affect Black women and other underserved populations.

**DR. HONGYU ZHAO, PHD**, was named a fellow of the International Society for Computational Biology (ISCB). The ICBS fellows program recognizes excellence in computational biology, honoring individuals who have made outstanding contributions through leadership, research, and service.

**DR. IJEOMA OPARA, PHD, MPH**, received the Excellence in Interdisciplinary Studies Impact Award at Women in Wellness: Celebrating Leaders in Mental Health for her outstanding work with youth in Paterson, New Jersey and other communities in the state.

**DR. YUSUF RANSOME, MPH, DRPH**, spoke at the Harvard Kennedy School's Black Policy Conference, which provides a critical space for meaningful dialogue, actionable solutions, and community-driven change to address challenges and opportunities facing Black communities. Ransome's work explores the intersections of health equity, spirituality, and data-driven policy.

**DR. GARY GINSBERG, PHD**, was appointed to a three-year term on the National Toxicology Program Board of Scientific Counselors.



**DR. YIZE ZHAO, PHD**, received the IMS Thelma and Marvin Zelen Emerging Women Leaders in Data Science Award in recognition of her

fundamental contributions to analytical methods and applications in medical imaging, neuroscience, psychiatry, and mental health.

The Black Genome Project founder **DR. CHELSEY R. CARTER, PHD, MPH**, and her colleague Dr. Brett Maricque, PhD, were featured on the "Genetic Frontiers" podcast. The Black Genome Project uses impactful community-engaged methods to understand how the Black community in St. Louis views genetic testing and information.

**CHANDRA KELSEY, MPH, CHES**, was named to the board of directors of the Connecticut chapter of the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE). SOPHE is a nonprofit, independent professional association that represents a diverse membership of health promotion and health education professionals and students in the U.S. and several international countries.

**DR. MICHAEL WININGER, PHD**, was honored with a star on the Yaliewood Walk of Fame. Winger received the star for his biostatistics primer, a fully online, asynchronous course that prepares incoming MPH students for their academic courses at Yale.

**DR. SUNIL PARIKH, MD, MPH**, was one of three recipients of the 2025 Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA) Pilot Projects in HIV Research Program. This award funds Parikh's pilot project focused on detangling the interactions of HIV, G6PD deficiency, and diabetes in a malaria endemic setting.

**DR. RAFAEL PÉREZ-ESCAMILLA, PHD**, was honored as a Class of 2025 Distinguished Fellow of by the American Society for Nutrition (ASN). Also, **DR. DEBBIE HUMPHRIES, PHD, MPH, MA**, was honored as an Excellence in Nutrition Fellow of ASN, a new category recognizing professionals who have distinguished themselves through ongoing contributions to the field of nutrition.

**DR. VIRGINIA PITZER, SCD**, was named co-editor-in-chief of the journal PLOS Computational Biology.

**DR. LINDA DEGUTIS, DRPH '94, MSN '82**, is board chair of Grandmothers for Gun Responsibility. The non-partisan organization is committed to elevating the voices and experiences of older people to drive meaningful change. It aims to protect families, schools, and communities through evidence-based strategies that emphasize safety, accountability, and prevention.

**DEAN MEGAN L. RANNEY, MD, MPH**, delivered the 2025 Annual Lecture of the Medical Library Associates in Harkness Auditorium, speaking on "Gun violence as a public health problem: What we know, and where we are going."



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