PRESENTS AND PRESENCE

Like so many of us, I’ve been trying to get into the holiday spirit given the very intense semester we’ve had. But I’ve also been thinking about the importance of practicing presence and not just focusing on presents this time of year. This is always a moving target and may mean different things to you, but to me it means taking a pause, working to slow down, and actually seeing and being with what is happening around me.

For example, I often walk in the woods near my house, and I see many people walking with their earbuds in, looking down at the ground and missing the trees and birds or people all around them. Yesterday I was walking in the fields near my house and saw that a huge flock of Canada geese had settled on the turf farm near me. There must have been over 500 geese. Suddenly they all took off honking, and I could hear the wind moving through hundreds of wings. I stopped to look up and listen. I was so grateful they were there and that I could be there in that moment with them flying overhead.

Here are some things we can do to be present with all that is around us during this busy time:

Set Intentions: Start each day with a clear intention to remain present and mindful. It could be as simple as “I will be present and appreciate each moment today.”

Mindful Breathing: Take moments to focus on your breath.

When you feel overwhelmed or stressed, pause and take a few deep breaths. This simple act helps ground you in the present moment.

Gratitude: Reflect on what you’re grateful for each day. Consider starting a gratitude journal or verbally sharing moments of gratitude with family and friends. This helps shift your focus to the positive aspects of the holiday season.

Savor Moments: Pay attention to the small details, and enjoy each experience fully. Whether it’s savoring a delicious meal, enjoying a festive decoration, or appreciating laughter with loved ones, consciously soak in these moments.

Active Listening: When engaging in conversations, be fully present. Listen attentively to what others are saying without planning your response. This fosters deeper connections and understanding.

Embrace Imperfections: Sometimes things might not go as planned. Accept imperfections and embrace the moment for what it is rather than getting caught up in idealized expectations.

Cultivate Compassion: Practice compassion for yourself and others. Understand that everyone experiences stress during the holidays, so approach interactions with kindness and understanding. And practice being imperfectly perfect, remembering to give yourself time to rest and recover from this semester.

Cultivating presence is an ongoing practice that we can never master but one we can allow to fill our lives with moments of grace and beauty, enriching our holiday and everyday experiences and our overall well-being.

Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D.
Director and Principal Investigator

For Healthy Communities Under the Big Sky
CAIRHE COLLABORATES WITH UTAH CENTER ON CANCER RESEARCH

From MSU News Service

The Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity, or CAIRHE, in collaboration with a research center in Utah, has launched a new joint center that aims to address health inequities in areas struggling with persistent poverty, including populations in Montana and other states. The work is supported by a $9.6 million grant from the National Cancer Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health. MSU’s portion of the award is $2.4 million.

The new grant brings together the expertise of researchers at CAIRHE, the Center for Health Outcomes and Population Equity, or HOPE, at the Huntsman Cancer Institute, and the University of Utah to expand their impact through two primary research initiatives that address poverty as a fundamental cause of cancer-related inequities. The joint center is known as HOPE & CAIRHE 2gether, or HC2.

The grant is part of the National Cancer Institute’s Persistent Poverty Initiative. As part of this initiative, National Cancer Institute program officers and staff scientists provide expertise, data, and other resources to assist the university research teams. The initiative’s goal is to empower institutions, clinics, communities, and tribes to collaborate and develop a cancer prevention and control research program that focuses on and serves people living in persistent poverty. In addition to two primary research projects, the center maintains a pilot project program and an early-career faculty development program known as the HC2 Scholars.

The grant’s co-principal investigators are Alexandre Adams, M.D., Ph.D., director of CAIRHE, and David Wetter, Ph.D., senior director of cancer health equity science at the Huntsman Cancer Institute and director of the Center for HOPE.

“The poverty level for a family of four is an income of $30,000 a year at or below,” Wetter said. “Unfortunately, people living in poverty have a far greater likelihood of getting almost every type of cancer, and it’s critical to eliminate this inequity if we are to meaningfully reduce the pain and suffering due to cancer.”

One of HC2’s research projects is led by Emily Tomayko, Ph.D., assistant professor in MSU’s Department of Food Systems, Nutrition, and Kinesiology and a CAIRHE investigator. Tomayko’s project aims at lowering the risk of cancer in Indigenous populations across four states by studying the social factors that affect health and by promoting family wellness.

The project will culturally tailor the work that conducted under her ongoing four-year, $2.18 million R01 grant to address poverty as a fundamental cause of cancer-related inequities. The joint center is known as HOPE & CAIRHE 2gether, or HC2.

The second HC2 research project is led by Chelsey Schlechter, Ph.D., MPH, a researcher at the Huntsman Cancer Institute and assistant professor of population health sciences at the University of Utah. That project addresses the social factors of health related to tobacco use. Using tobacco greatly increases the risk of getting cancer, and its use is concentrated in areas where people are experiencing poverty and are medically uninsured, according to Wetter. CAIRHE’s Miranda Margetts, Ph.D., serves as co-investigator.

Wetter noted that both projects will benefit from the Montana-Utah interstate collaboration.

“We have Montana experts involved in our Center for HOPE tobacco use project and Utah experts involved in the CAIRHE project,” Wetter said. “Because of these collaborations, it gives us the opportunity to have a much greater impact with respect to reducing health inequities.”

The Montana Idea Community Engagement Core, led by Anne Bertagnolli, Ph.D., works with community engagement experts and pilot project leaders in both states. Meanwhile, CAIRHE investigator Monica Skewes, Ph.D., MSU professor of Psychology, co-leads the HC2 Developmental Core, which runs the pilot project initiative. And Nika Stoop, Ph.D., assistant director of the MSU Center for Faculty Excellence, co-leads the HC2 Career Enhancement Core, which runs the HC2 Scholars program.

HOPE & CAIRHE 2gether is a direct outcome of Adams’s NIH U01 and R01 research grants. Tribal nations in four states, including Montana, collaborate with CAIRHE on the new HC2 project.

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HC2 is funded by a five-year U54 grant (U54CA280812) that will conclude in April 2028.

From MSU News Service

JOHN-HENDERSON AWARDED 2ND R01 GRANT FOR WORK WITH BLACKFEET

She also found evidence that frequency of positive social interactions was inversely related to blood pressure and that average perceived social connectedness was inversely related to levels of immune system inflammation. Adults who reported more loneliness across a one-week period also experienced worse sleep during that time.

To measure the degrees of loneliness and social connectedness, the researchers use the short loneliness scale, which is a subjective report of an individual’s level of loneliness that takes into account the size of a person’s social network and number of contacts within that network in a given week. The researchers also measure each person’s social participation, or “attendance,” in activities identified by Blackfeet community members, including church, powwow, or other traditional ceremony attendance. Participants also report how integrated they feel into the larger Blackfeet community.

“His work is inspired by a focus on resilience and understanding the psychological, social, and behavioral factors that help community members thrive and achieve optimal health despite challenges or adversity they may face,” John-Henderson said. “We hope to use the data we collect to inform future research and to acquire funding to support interventions that work to reduce health inequities.”

The new study is the first of its kind to comprehensively measure patterns of psychologic and physiological responses to challenge in American Indian adults and to investigate whether these patterns are shaped by trauma exposure and indices of social connectedness,” she said. “We predict that trauma may have implications for these responses, and that social connectedness may offset the health risks typically associated with trauma.”

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CAIRHE IS ONE PART OF LARGE AHA GRANT EXAMINING RURAL HEART HEALTH

Researchers at the University of Washington (UW) School of Medicine have begun a $20 million initiative aimed at better understanding barriers and opportunities to improve heart health in rural communities. People who live in the rural United States are 40 percent more likely to have heart disease and to die of heart disease compared to those living in urban areas. These people's challenges include individual risk factors, social determinants of health, and the lack of access to health care. People who live in the rural United States are 40 percent more likely to develop heart disease and have a 30 percent higher risk of stroke than urban-area residents, according to AHA data.

The UW School of Medicine is the coordinating center for the entire cross-country network. Its efforts will be led by Chris Lon- grenecker, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor of medicine and director of the UW Global Cardiovascular Health Program. Longrenerick also leads the program, GROW-RURAL, which is a shortened form of “A Rural to Global Innovation Network to Adapt Evidence-Based Cardiovascular Interventions to Context.”

The UW project will study people with health challenges living in rural areas of the United States, including Indigenous and Latino populations. The team will look into how geography plays a role when long distances to the nearest doctor can limit access to care. They also will explore whether new ways of delivering health care in other countries may be adapted in the rural U.S. Their goal is to discover barriers as well as opportunities to improve heart health care and then let local health workers and patients design programs to test new innovations in their communities.

If the network as a whole will generate evidence for strategies to reduce persistent rural health inequities in the United States,” Lon- grenecker said. “We will use technologies like mobile health, drones, and artificial intelligence–guided heart ultrasound, and we’ll build capacity among health professionals such as pharmacists, emergency medical service providers, and community health workers.”

In addition to its role as a partner in the UW study, CAIRHE has agreed to host the second annual meeting of the entire Rural PRO-CARE Network in Bozeman in the Spring of 2025. MSU’s Mark and Robyn Jones College of Nursing will also be involved in leading a rural nursing workforce development program during the event.

ADAMS RECEIVES FULBRIGHT FELLOWSHIP TO NEW ZEALAND, BEGINNING IN JANUARY

CAIRHE Director Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., has been se- lected as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar in 2023-2024 for New Zealand. Adams received the notification from the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Program in April. Fulbright Scholar Awards are prestigious and competitive fel- lowships that provide unique opportunities for scholars to teach and conduct research in countries or regions that are central to U.S. diplomatic, economic, and political priorities. The awards also play a critical role in U.S. public diplomacy, establishing long-term relationships between people and nations. Alumni include 62 Nobel Laureates, 89 Pulitzer Prize winners, 78 MacArthur Fellows, and thousands of leaders who will influence our world. Adams will spend several months across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

CAIRHE and Adams will lead Aim 3 of the project, which will adapt service delivery models for cardiovascular disease prevention and treatment implementation in rural clinical practices in Montana and other WWAMI states. That Aim will begin in Year 3, with a July 2025 start.

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CAIRHE SUBMITS FINAL COBRE RENEWAL, WITH APPLICATION SCORE DUE IN MARCH

In September CAIRHE submitted its final renewal application for its Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) grant, which has funded the Center since its inception in September 2014. A third and final phase of the COBRE grant, awarded by the

National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National In- stitutes of Health, would extend CAIRHE’s NIGMS funding from 2024 through August 2029.

CAIRHE now awaits the review and score from the assigned study section, which meets on March 12, 2024. Provided that the score merits further consideration, the NIGMS Advisory Council would issue its recommendation in May, followed by an official funding decision from the NIGMS Director. The new P30 grant would begin September 1.

“We have every confidence that our application will be suc- cessful,” said Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., CAIRHE’s director since 2016. “Planning for Phase 3 and the application writing pro- cess itself have been important to our thinking about how to make CAIRHE sustainable for the long term. The next five years will be a transition period when we prepare for reliance on a whole menu of funding sources to keep our work going—not just one or two very large NIH grants. Donors and foundation funding, for example, will be increasingly important to the work we do.”

COBRE Phase 3 will have several important differences compared to earlier phases of the funding mechanism, Adams said. First is the fact that the grant itself is half the size, with the five-year award touting “only” $3.75 million. Multi-year research projects will no lon- ger be supported, though CAIRHE will maintain its longtime pilot project program. That program’s latest Request for Proposals has already been published (see p. 8), with applications due next April.

In addition, the Center’s Advisory Committee will expand to include not only the external independent experts who have served CAIRHE since its inception, but also an MSU administrator and faculty member not directly affiliated with CAIRHE—Elizabeth Shanahan, Ph.D., and Mark Quinn, Ph.D., have agreed to serve in those roles.

“We have so much crucial work left to do in our state and re- gion that the COBRE funding alone would not be enough. Our current NIH grant and our center structure will look slightly different, the community-based health equity mission of CAIRHE and our dedication to advancing our faculty investigations will be the same. Our hope is that an entirely new cohort of funders and philanthropists will see the im- portance of what we do and want to get behind us. We have a lot of exciting years ahead.”

CAIRHE PRESENTS SUCCESSFUL PIRL WORKSHOP IN NOVEMBER, ITS FOURTH

In November CAIRHE and its partners at Arizona State University and the National Institutes of Health hosted 15 investigators from across the United States at Promoting Indigenous Research Lead- ership, or PIRL, a three-day workshop designed to promote the re- search careers of Indigenous and other early-career faculty working with Native communities. The workshop was held in Tempe, Ariz., for the first time.

Faculty participants traveled from the East and West coasts, the Southwest, and the Midwest to attend the event, held November 13-15 on the ASU campus. Participants assembled each day in cam- pus facilities of the Labrina National American Indian Data Center, located in the ASU Library.

Nine senior mentors from across the country—each with a track record of funding success with the NIH and other agencies—gave presentations on various career and grant-writing topics and en- gaged in one-on-one and small-group mentoring with the invest-igators.

CAIRHE Director Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., CAIRHE External Advisory Committee member Donald Ware, M.D., MPH, and ASU’s Angela Gonzales, Ph.D., served as the workshop’s co-chairs. Ware is co-di- rector of the Johns Hop-kins Center for Indigenous Health, and Gonzales is the interim director of ASU’s Center for Indian Educa- tion. CAIRHE Program Coordinator James Bur- roughs is director of PIRL.

“PIRL has really become something special,” Adams said, “with the end of the three days, there is such a positive feeling of be- longingness and community, and the sense that these early-career scholars have finally received vital support and mentoring that many aren’t getting at their institutions.”

This year’s participating investigators represented 12 different universities or research organizations, including ASU, the University of North Carolina, Johns Hopkins University, the University of North Dakota, Michigan State University, Lehigh University, and San Francisco State University. Among them were Julie Gammone, Ph.D., former MSU doctoral adviser of Monica Skehes, Ph.D., and now a research scientist at the University of Texas Health Sci- center at Houston.

The workshop was made possible through generous institutional support from Alison Harmon, Ph.D., and the MSU Office of Re- search and Economic Development; the National Cancer Institute; and several ASU offices that provided hospitality funding. Six NIH
**CAIRHE NEWSLETTER • FALL 2023**

**CAIRHE RESEARCH IN PRINT**

**Here are select recent publications resulting from CAIRHE-supported research.**


**CAIRHE FEATURED IN APHA-TV FILM**

CAIRHE was among 22 public health programs featured in short films produced for the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) held in Atlanta on November 12-15. The association’s media marketing arm, APHA-TV, approached CAIRHE about the opportunity earlier this year and created the film on location.

An international film company working for APHA-TV, WebEdge, designed the concept and conducted on-site video shoots at MSU during the week of October 23, including interviews with CAIRHE Director Alexandra Adams, Community Research Associate Emily Salois, faculty members Emily Tomayko and Scott Monfort, and graduate research assistant Anna Whitting Sorrell. Titled “Respect, Relationships, and Reciprocity in Community-Academic Research Partnerships,” the film provides a 6-minute overview of CAIRHE’s community-based participatory research mission, with examples including the Turtle Island Tides program, the Protecting Our Communities COVID home-testing study, and the Mondfort Lab and its osteoarthritis research among Montana farmers and ranchers.

“This film was a great opportunity to introduce CAIRHE to the largest public health gathering of its kind in the country,” Adams said. “We can continue to use it locally and throughout our region as a way to connect with potential new partners and donors who will be important to our sustainability in the years ahead.”

At the APHA meeting the film was broadcast on television screens throughout the venue and on a dedicated television channel in select meeting hotels downtown. It will be featured on the APHA website and YouTube channel for one year after the meeting. Meanwhile, the film is now also posted on CAIRHE’s own YouTube channel and website, and it is currently promoted on the Center’s home page.

**DR. JULIE BALDWIN JOINS CAIRHE’S EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Earlier this year CAIRHE added a fourth member to its longstanding External Advisory Committee (EAC). Julie Baldwin, Ph.D., is a Regents’ Professor in the Department of Health Sciences and the Executive Director of the Center for Health Equity Research at Northern Arizona University. She joins existing EAC members Dennis Donovan, Ph.D., Donald Warne, M.D., and Jack Westfall, M.D., who have served in their roles for up to seven years each.

Baldwin’s own research has focused on both infectious and chronic disease prevention, with a consistent program of applied research addressing HIV/AIDS and substance abuse prevention among American Indian youth and their families. As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, she has made a lifelong commitment to serving Indigenous and diverse communities and to advocating for health promotion programs for children, adolescents, and families. She was elected to the National Academy of Medicine in 2022.

For the past two years, Baldwin has also served as a mentor and presenter at the Promoting Indigenous Research Leadership (PIRL) workshop presented by CAIRHE.

Julie is a renowned scholar and center leader and a fine human being, and we are truly fortunate to have her guidance as CAIRHE moves into its next phase,” Director Alexandra Adams said.

**BRONSTON NAMED “EVERYDAY HERO”**

Maya Bronston, CAIRHE’s grants management specialist, was recognized with an “Everyday Hero” award at a May 2 campus event, “Celebrating the Role of Research in the Land Grant Mission,” presented by the MSU Office of Research and Economic Development. The new award recognizes individuals who routinely support successful research, creativity, or economic development activities at Montana State.

Bronston has served in her present role at CAIRHE for seven years. This was well-deserved recognition for Maya, who is so important to the success of our projects. It’s hard to single her out as providing fiscal management and other grant-development support,” said CAIRHE Director Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D.

**CAIRHE ADDS PROJECTS FOR 2023-24**

CAIRHE has welcomed two new project leaders for the 2023-24 year, its 10th year of existence.

Though no strategy for CAIRHE, Miranda Margetts, Ph.D., leads a new one-year research project this year that builds on her previous two years of pilot project support. Her study, Investigating Health Care for Rural Females with Complex Gynecological Conditions, continues work examining health care and outcomes for rural females with congenital uterine anomalies (CUA). Margetts and her team will engage with the Billings Clinic CUA patient community in focus groups, assess Mountain West health system administrative records to reveal the prevalence and extent of interstate travel required to receive care for CUA and to stratify gynecological cancer risk for women with CUA; and examine the financial barriers and insurance barriers connected to CUA-related health care procedures.

Margetts joins existing research project leaders Lauren Davis, Ed.D., and Brandon Scott, Ph.D., who are each in the last year of their projects. The final phase of CAIRHE’s COBRE grant, beginning in September 2024 once awarded, will not support multiyear research projects.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Johnson, Ph.D., RN, joined CAIRHE as its newest pilot project leader. Johnson, assistant professor in the...
CAIRHE REQUESTS PROPOSALS FOR PILOT PROJECTS, WITH APRIL ‘24 DEADLINE

CAIRHE has again issued its annual Request for Proposals for one-year pilot projects from MSU faculty engaged in community-based public health research. Proposals should be consistent with CAIRHE’s mission of reducing health disparities in Indigenous and rural communities, and they should have a high likelihood of leading to independent funding from external (non-MSU) sponsors. Funding usually ranges from $20,000 to $50,000 in direct costs for the project year, beginning September 1, 2024. The deadline for a required letter of intent is February 1, 2024, with an application deadline of April 1.

“CAIRHE is a multidisciplinary center, so we’re again reaching out to faculty in departments across campus,” said James Burroughs, CAIRHE program coordinator. “For health researchers who may don’t yet have a well-funded research agenda of their own, our pilot projects offer the benefit of NIH funding with application review and project administration all handled here locally by your peers at MSU.”

In addition to funding from the National Institutes of Health, being a CAIRHE project leader offers faculty a range of support services from the Center, including mentoring by senior investigators and collaboration with a community of scholars who share similar research interests, Burroughs said.

For complete details and instructions, visit the CAIRHE RFP website. Burroughs welcomes inquiries and one-on-one information sessions with interested faculty.

OTHER CAIRHE FACULTY HONORS...

Kaylin Greene, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, was one of two recipients of the new Excellence in Integration Award, which recognizes MSU faculty members who have demonstrated student engagement in valuable learning processes that integrate teaching, outreach, and research activities. The award from the College of Letters and Science was presented at its April awards ceremony.

Scott Monfort, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, received tenure and promotion at the May 9 Tenure and Promotion Celebration Dinner.

CAIRHE Director Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., presented the final lecture in the 2022-23 Provost’s Distinguished Lecturer Series on April 11. Her talk, “Reimagining Wellness: Learning from Partnerships with Indigenous Communities,” described her work with Indigenous partners across the country over two decades.

CAIRHE MENTORS
Jason Carr, Ph.D., Baylor University College of Health and Human Sciences
Suzanne Herd, Ph.D., Department of Health and Human Development
Ron June, Ph.D., Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering
Elizabeth Rink, Ph.D., MSH, Department of Health and Human Development
Molly Secor, Ph.D., Mark and Robin Jones College of Nursing
Sarah Shamon, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Mark and Robin Jones College of Nursing
Monica Skewes, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

COMMUNITY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES
Erika McKee-Hunter, MPH, MSIG
Emily Matt Salois, MSW

EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Julie Baldwin, Ph.D., Northern Arizona University
Dennis Coonan, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, University of Washington
Donald Wade, M.D., MPH, Johns Hopkins University
Jack Westfall, M.D., MPH, Consultant

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