

Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

Weekly Newsletter

MARCH 23-27, 2026



UMass Chan
MEDICAL SCHOOL

CONGRATULATIONS

Notice of Awards



PI: **Melissa Goulding, PhD**

Source of support: American Heart Association

Award Number: 26CDA1613115

Primary Place of Performance: UMass Chan Medical School, Worcester MA

Project/Proposal Start and End Date: 4/1/2026 – 3/31/29

Total Award Amount: \$230,131

Type: Career Development Award



PI: **Catarina Kiefe, PhD, MD**

Source of support: National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences

Award Number: 1K12TR005450-01

Primary Place of Performance: UMass Chan Medical School, Worcester MA

Project/Proposal Start and End Date: 4/1/2026 – 3/31/31

Total Award Amount (including Indirect Costs): \$949,994

Title: 2/3 CTSA K12 Program at University of Massachusetts

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, March 23, 12:00 PM, Zoom



Presenter: Catherine Dubé, EdD, Professor, PQHS

Title: Getting Started: Qualitative Research Methods

Thinking about a publication-quality qualitative research project and not sure where to start? This session will review the initial steps and quality guidelines that can be used to plan your qualitative project. The focus will be on projects that will employ a thematic analysis approach. Click [here](#) to register.

Tuesday, March 24, 11:00 AM, AS9.2072 or Zoom



PhD Oral Qualifying Examination

Presenter: Narayani Ballambat, MPH

Mentor: Rajani Sadasivam, PhD

Title: Exploring Social-Environmental Predictors of Electronic Nicotine Devices (ENDS) and Cannabis Co-Use Among Workforce-Bound Young Adults

Narayani Ballambat will present her proposed dissertation research examining e-cigarette and cannabis co-use among workforce-bound young adults. Her work focuses on how social and environmental influences, such as peers, family, and digital media, shape co-use behaviors in this overlooked population, with the goal of informing targeted and effective public health interventions. Click [here](#) to join.



Tuesday, March 24, 1:00 PM, AS9.2072 or Teams

PhD Oral Qualifying Examination

Presenter: Binoy V. Shah, MBBS, MPH

Mentor: Apurv Soni, MD, PhD

Title: Leveraging multimodal data to evaluate enrollment, adherence and retention in the RURAL Heart and Lung study

Click [here](#) to join.

Friday, March 27, 11:30 AM EST, AS9.2072 or Teams



Presenter: Ana Saeedi

Mentor: Bruce Barton, PhD

Title: Bayesian Modeling of Digital Health Intervention Effects in the Fitbit Care Randomized Trial
This study evaluates the overall effectiveness of a Fitbit-based digital intervention on physical activity and related health outcomes over time using longitudinal Bayesian mixed-effects models. It further assesses whether the intervention effect varies across key participant subgroups by estimating differential treatment effects within a hierarchical modeling framework. Finally, it investigates the mechanisms underlying the intervention by examining mediating pathways, such

as engagement and behavioral changes, using Bayesian structural equation modeling.

Click [here](#) to join, passcode qR7ZC7qh

Friday, March 27, 3:00 PM EST, AS9.2072 or Teams



PhD Oral Qualifying Examination

Presenter: JT Harvey, MPH

Mentor: Kate Lapane, PhD, MS

Title: The ANCHOR Study: Antidepressant Nursing Home Comparative Health Outcomes Research
Antidepressants are commonly prescribed to long-stay nursing home residents, yet evidence comparing the safety of SSRIs versus SNRIs in this vulnerable population remains limited. This dissertation proposal will use national Medicare claims linked with MDS 3.0 assessments to examine comparative safety outcomes including falls, fractures, and major bleeding events. Recognizing that

nursing home residents vary widely in their risk profiles, this study will also develop clinical risk prediction models to guide individualized treatment decisions. Click [HERE](#) to join, password [fk7z6ES9](#)

Tuesday, March 31, 10:00 AM, AS9.2072 or Zoom



PhD Dissertation Defense

Presenter: Nathaniel David Glassy

Mentor: Bo Wang, PhD, **Co-Mentor:** Jeroan Allison, MD, MS

Title: Modeling Developmental Trajectories of Multi-Domain Adolescent Risk Behaviors: Impact of Social-Ecological Risks and Cognitive-Motivational Appraisals

Introduction: The Caribbean bears a disproportionate HIV burden, and prevalence in The Bahamas is among the region's highest. Although HIV incidence among Bahamian adolescents declined from 2015 to 2019, it has plateaued since 2020. Since delinquency, substance use, and sexual risk-taking

co-occur and heighten HIV vulnerability, prevention requires approaches that identify heterogeneity in co-developing risk. This dissertation aimed to characterize sex-specific, multi-domain risk trajectories, evaluate social-context predictors and joint-exposure effects on trajectory membership and assess Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) constructs and threat and coping indices as correlates of trajectory membership. Findings support HIV prevention that prioritizes adolescents facing clustered social risks, aligns motivational targets to domain-specific risk escalation, and highlights where prevention content may require supplementation to reach adolescents most likely to remain high risk through high school.

Click [here](#) to join, password 848134

Tuesday, March 31, 2:30 PM, PDC N1-1100 or Zoom



PhD Dissertation Defense

Presenter: Gretchen K. Weaver, MPH

Mentor: Apurv Soni, MD, PhD

Title: Age, Telehealth, and COVID-19 Care: An Examination of Visit Type, Oral Antiviral Prescription, and Patient Preference

Introduction: Telehealth emerged as a healthcare innovation during the pandemic and is beneficial in the care of adults, especially older adults. Age may be related to technology use, and other areas of telehealth remain underexplored in the post pandemic era. This dissertation used an access-to-care lens and employed COVID-19 outpatient care as use case to assess three facets of telehealth. The specific aims examined the associations between 1) age group and visit type, 2) visit type and oral antiviral prescription, and 3) age group and care delivery preference for COVID-19 or flu.

Click [here](#) to join, password 221592

Wednesday, April 1, 10:00 – 11:00 AM

Research Methods Meeting

Presenters: Mara Meyer Epstein, ScD, Associate Professor, Division of Health Systems Science, Department of Medicine, Co-Director, Cancer Population Health Sciences Program, UMass Cancer Center

Mayra Tisminetzky MD PhD MPH, Associate Professor, Division of Geriatric Medicine and, Population and Quantitative Health Sciences, Director of Research in the Division of Geriatrics, UMass Chan Medical School

Title: Challenges in measuring multimorbidity for epidemiological research

Abstract: Multimorbidity, or the presence of two or more chronic conditions, is increasingly common in older adult populations. In this talk, we will discuss different methods used to measure multimorbidity in epidemiological research, including simple counts, dyads and triads, and the most common measuring indexes and approaches, and the pros and cons of each. We will also discuss several examples from our own research, including using electronic health records, claims data, and the All of Us Research Program to study multimorbidity in older adult populations



Bio: Mara Epstein, ScD, is a cancer epidemiologist and an Associate Professor in the Division of Health Systems Science in the Department of Medicine at UMass Chan. Her research addresses questions across the cancer care continuum, with a focus on hematological and prostate cancers, cancer screening, and studying the impact of multimorbidity on cancer care. She has also developed algorithms to identify cancer and precancer endpoints in electronic health data to facilitate population-based research in these areas.



Bio: Mayra Tisminetzky, MD, PhD is a clinical epidemiologist in the Division of Geriatric Medicine at UMass Chan Medical School, her research focuses on examining the magnitude, management, and clinical outcomes of older adults with multiple chronic conditions. Dr Tisminetzky recently completed a NIA-funded R01 grant where she investigated treatment patterns and the net benefits versus harms of selected therapies in patients with heart failure and multiple chronic conditions using data from the Cardiovascular Research Network. She has a particular interest in identifying innovative methods to assess multimorbidity burden in different vulnerable populations and investigate the association of multimorbidity with relevant clinical outcomes.

Click [here](#) to join.

The **Child Health Equity Center (CHEC) x Collaborative in Health Equity (CHE) Health Equity Working Group** is an open, welcoming community for anyone interested in engaging with and advancing health equity scholarship. We invite colleagues from any department or discipline who seek a supportive space to learn, collaborate, and deepen their work in the health equity space.

We meet weekly and follow a structured monthly cycle designed to promote progress, build skills, and strengthen connections: Our Monthly Cycle

- **1st Thursday – Works in Progress (WIP):** A collaborative forum where members share early-stage ideas or analyses and receive constructive, collegial feedback.
- **3rd Thursday – Skill Building:** Interactive sessions led by invited experts who introduce new methods, analytical approaches, and emerging issues in health equity.

Upcoming Schedule

April 2026

1st Thursday - **Works in Progress: April 2, 2026**

3rd Thursday - Skill Building: April 16, 2026

May 2026

1st Thursday - Works in Progress: May 7, 2026

3rd Thursday - Skill Building: May 21, 2026

June 2026

1st Thursday - Works in Progress: June 4, 2026

3rd Thursday - Skill Building: June 18, 2026

How to Participate

Whether you want to advance health equity but don't know where to start, learn new skills, or discuss a specific project with colleagues, please join us via the link below:

Zoom Link: [Join Meeting Here](#)

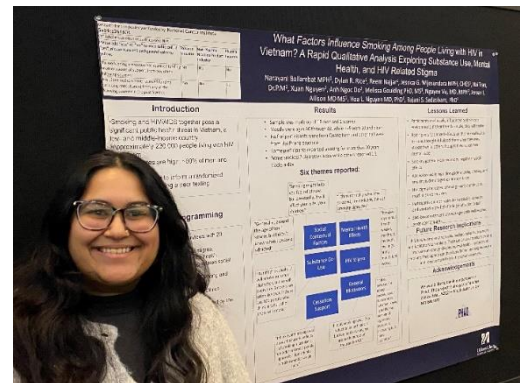
For more information, you can scan the QR code on our flyer or send any questions to CollaborativeinHeathEquity@umassmed.edu. If you would like to receive calendar invites, please email Samantha.Doxsey@umassmed.edu.

Child Health Equity Center & Collaborative in Health Equity

SHOUT OUT

Narayani Ballambat, a graduate student working with Raj Sadasivam and Elise Stevens in HIIS, presented two posters and an oral presentation at the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) Annual Meeting 2026 in Baltimore, MD, held March 3–7.

- Ballambat N, Lee DN, Patterson F, Robbins R, Rigotti NA, Klerman EB, Stevens EM. *Sleep onset timing partially mediates the association between impulsivity and e-cigarette use among young adults.* **Poster**
- Ballambat N, Rice D, Najjar R, Wijesundara J, Larkin C, Liu A, Nguyen Y, Tran H, Nguyen X, Do AN, Vu N, Goulding M, Allison J, Nguyen H, Sadasivam R. *What factors influence smoking among people living with HIV in Vietnam? A rapid qualitative analysis exploring substance use, mental health, and HIV-related stigma.* **Poster.**
- Ballambat N, Stevens E, Wang B, Wijesundara J, Balakrishnan K, Najjar R, Frisard C, Pbert L, Sadasivam R. *Feasibility and engagement of a peer-driven mobile intervention for adolescent e-cigarette cessation: A cluster-randomized pilot study.* **Oral presentation.**



UMASS REMINDER

Use Your Excess Vacation Leave by June 27, 2026

As we get closer to fiscal year end, we want to remind you of the maximum accruals outlined in the [UMass Chan Holiday, and Personal and Vacation Time Policy](#) so you can plan accordingly.

As of the last full pay period of the fiscal year, the maximum number of vacation hours employees may carry over into the next fiscal year is 240. During the fiscal year, employees are allowed to accrue hours over



240. Hours over this accrual limit are automatically re-set in the payroll system to the accrual maximum. This year, **the relevant pay period ends Saturday, June 27, 2026**. You are encouraged to use any vacation balances that exceed the 240-hour maximum before that date. To avoid the loss of accrued vacation hours, review the following recommendations:

- Take all vacation over 240 hours before Saturday, June 27, 2026. Keep in mind that the vacation accrual for the pay period ending on that date that will not appear on your paycheck.
- Any hours over the cap will automatically be reset to 240 and will appear on your paycheck **on Friday, July 3, 2026**.
- If you are approaching 240 hours of accrued vacation time, talk with your manager about planning time off before June 27 and make sure it is approved by them.
- Ensure your vacation time has been entered into the Time Reporting system **by June 27, 2026**.



HOLIDAY

— SCHEDULE —

- ✚ Patriots' Day – Monday, April 20th
- ✚ Memorial Day – Monday, May 25th
- ✚ Juneteenth National Independence Day – Friday, June 19th
- ✚ Independence Day – Friday, July 3rd (observed)
- ✚ Labor Day – Monday, September 7th
- ✚ Indigenous Peoples' Day – Monday, October 12th
- ✚ Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 11th
- ✚ Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26th
- ✚ Day After Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27th
- ✚ Christmas Eve – Thursday, December 24th
- ✚ Christmas Day – Friday, December 25th

PQHS Weekly will be sent to all members of PQHS on Monday mornings. The intent is to provide a snapshot of what is going on that week in PQHS and to share our faculty and staff activities with the department. We depend on you to provide the items we need to share. Please send suggestions of events, faculty invited seminars & talks, honors, student thesis presentations, and news – new babies born! – to Judi (judi.saber@umassmed.edu) & Sarah (sarah.yeboah@umassmed.edu) by Friday each week.