

Department of Health Services
Policy and Management

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

**UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA**





2024 2025

BY THE NUMBERS

At the Department of Health Services Policy and Management (HSPM), we are passionate about making a difference in the lives of others and contributing to a better and more equitable world.

We share a collective desire to make a real-world impact on health and healthcare systems, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations. We are also dedicated to training the next generation of public health and healthcare leaders, practitioners, and health services researchers with the competencies needed to contribute towards a more effective and equitable healthcare system.

130

Articles published by
our faculty and students

62

Active awards
led by HSPM faculty

27

Unique sponsors, led by
NIH and PHS agencies



▲
\$2,494,839

Total amount of
newly funded awards
through August 2025

▲
8

Spots our MHA program
climbed in national rankings
(now #33)

24

Graduates from our PhD,
MHA, and MPH programs

100%

Job placement within
3 months of graduation

43

Total students supported
by HSPM faculty as RAs

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A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Brad Wright
Chair

As we embark upon a new academic year, I am pleased to share the Department of Health Services Policy and Management's 2024 – 2025 Annual Report with you.

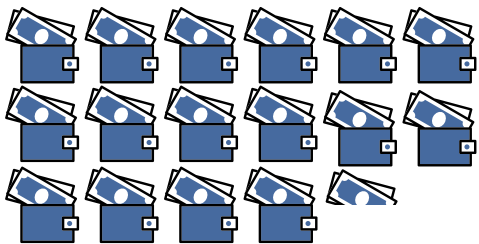
I must admit that when I first sat down to draft this letter, I struggled with what to say. Notes like these typically strike a celebratory tone, but the last year has been challenging for both higher education and public health, and we sit at their intersection. Despite this sobering reality, as I reflected upon all that we have accomplished over the last year, I was struck by just how much we have to celebrate.

For starters, we updated our doctoral program curriculum and helped the Arnold School reach \$54.2 million in extramural research funding. Last year also marked both the arrival of our new Dean, Dr. Tara Sabo-Attwood, from the University of Florida and the start of the Arnold School's 50th anniversary (1975 – 2025). Several of our alumni have been featured in the school's "50 Careers for 50 Years" series, and additional updates from HSPM alumni are featured in this annual report.

Our MHA program climbed 8 spots in the U.S. News & World Report rankings to reach #33, and MHA executive track student, **Martha Selmon**, received the inaugural CAHME / Nancy Rosenthal Scholarship at ACHE Congress. The leaders of our Rural Health Research Center continued to shine as **Dr. Peiyin Hung** won NRHA's Researcher of the Year award and **Dr. Elizabeth Crouch** was named editor of the *Journal of Rural Mental Health*. Last, but not least, we organized the 16th annual James E. Clyburn Health Equity Lecture, with keynote speaker Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter—Dean of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health—and hosted Dr. Paul Shafer from Boston University in our departmental seminar.

These are just some of the highlights. One of the great things about an annual report is that it allows us to step back, see the bigger picture that emerges from the steady work we do day in and day out, and appreciate all we have accomplished together through our research, teaching, and service. I am especially proud of the way our faculty, staff, and students have persevered in the face of adversity and uncertainty—it is because of their hard work that HSPM is a place *where differences are made*.

Awards



\$16.3 MILLION

Funding awarded to HSPM over this reporting period, of which \$15M was awarded by NIH



Top IC by Awards	NIAID - 13 awards				
Top IC by Funding	NICHD - \$3.5M				
Total ICs	19	Number of R01s	23	DHHS Awards	7

Collaborators

168

Number of institutions and organizations with which we proudly partner



12

International collaborators and partners representing...

8

Institutions across Germany, New Zealand, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, the UAE, and the UK.



57 of our collaborators are based in our home state of South Carolina.

Top Collaborators by State

NORTH CAROLINA 28

WASHINGTON 11

TEXAS 8

Top 5 Partner Institutions

1

UNC Chapel Hill

2

University of Washington

3

Duke University

4

Brown University

5

Johns Hopkins University

Research

The awards listed below are those newly secured between August 16, 2024 and August 15, 2025 with HSPM faculty contributing as key personnel.

<i>PRIDE-CARES Center: Patient-Responsive Initiatives for Diverse Engagement - LGBTQ+ Community Action in Research to Eliminate Substance Use Disorder Center</i>	\$1,007,753
R24 • NIDA/NIH • Nabil Natafqi (PI), Christina Andrews (co-I), Jan Ostermann (co-I)	
<i>The ANTENATAL Study: An ecoNomic evaluaTION of pERiodontal treatmeNt in pregnAnt women and identification of responders to Treatment using mAchine Learning</i>	\$423,601
R01 • NIDCR/NIH • Brian Chen (co-I)	
<i>Facilitating Health System Implementation of Physical Activity Screening and Referral to Community-Based Programs: Exercise is Medicine Greenville</i>	\$387,104
R01 • NHLBI/NIH • John Brooks (co-I)	
<i>Long COVID, Economic Outcomes, and SSA Program Participation</i>	\$234,244
Social Security Administration via University of Wisconsin • Nicole Hair (site PI)	
<i>Methodology and Advanced Analytics Resource Center 2.0</i>	\$181,989
UM1 • NIDA/NIH via the University of Chicago • Christina Andrews (site PI)	
<i>A Systems Theory Approach to the Study of Colon and Lung Cancer Health Disparities using Novel Data Linkages</i>	\$93,707
R01 • NCI/NIH • Elizabeth Crouch (co-I)	
<i>Personalized Auricular Point Acupressure Self-Management for Chronic Pain in Rural Populations</i>	\$89,953
UG3 • NCCIH/NIH via the University of Texas at Houston • Peiyin Hung (site PI)	
<i>Measuring Changes in Medicare Part D Plan Offerings and Enrollment</i>	\$43,000
PCMA Foundation via the University of Colorado • David Anderson (co-I)	
<i>Improving Intrapartum Infection Diagnostics and Treatment</i>	\$15,000
Prisma Health • Brian Chen (PI)	
<i>The ARCHIV Study - Assessing the Completeness of EHR data in Capturing Prescription and Non-Prescription Polypharmacy Burden in People Living with HIV</i>	\$14,957
Prisma Health • Brian Chen (PI)	
<i>State Maternal Health Innovation & Data Capacity Program</i>	\$3,711
South Carolina Department of Public Health • Nabil Natafqi (co-I)	

Publications

The list below reflects a selection of our **faculty** and students' works published between August 16, 2024 and August 15, 2025.

Andrews CM, Hall W, Humphreys K, Marsden J. Crafting effective policy responses to the movement to liberalize psychedelics: what can be learned from the case of cannabis? *Addiction*. 2025;120(2):201-206.

Beets MW, Burkart S, Pfledderer C, Adams E, Weaver RG, Armstrong B, **Chen B**, McLain A. Free summer programming and body mass index among school-children from low-income households: a randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2024;178(12):1252-1259. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.3693.

Benavidez GA, Blackwell S, **Hung P**, **Crouch E**. Geographic disparities in availability of hospital-based cardiac services across the United States. *Circulation*. 2025;151(1):123-124. doi: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.124.071778.

Boswell EK, Brown MJ, Donelle L, Yell N, Farrell T, **Hung P**, **Crouch E**. Geographic disparities in unpaid caregiving. *J Rural Health*. 2025;41(2):e70039. doi:10.1111/jrh.70039.

Coleman D, **Anderson DM**, Biener A, Zewde N. Basic health plans: a promising alternative amidst marketplace subsidy decreases. *Health Aff Forefront*. 2025 May 7. doi:10.1377/forefront.20250505.432816.

Giannouchos TV, Pirrallo RG, **Wright B**. Is frequent emergency department use a complement or substitute for other healthcare services? Evidence from South Carolina Medicaid enrollees. *Health Serv Res*. 2025;60(3):e14430. doi: 10.1111/1475-6773.14430.

Hung SH, **Xirasagar S**, Cheng YF, Chen CS, Lin HC. High prevalence of diabetes mellitus among patients with Fabry disease. *BMJ Open*. 2025;15(5):e099735. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2025-099735.

Wright B. In pursuit of a better hospital quality metric for Medicare. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2025;8(7):e2524138. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.24138.

Yelverton V, Gass SJ, Amoatika D, Cooke C, **Ostermann J**, **Natafagi N**, **Hair NL**, **Olatosi B**, Owens OL, Qiao S, Li X. Telehealth or in-person HIV care? Qualitative study findings on decision-making from people with HIV and HIV care providers in South Carolina during the COVID-19 pandemic. *PLOS Digit Health*. 2025;4(4):e0000812. doi: 10.1371/journal.pdig.0000812.

88

Number of unique journals
in which our faculty and stu-
dents were published

51

Number of articles on which
our faculty and students were
first authors, out of 130 total
articles published

Featured Stories



I Am Public Health: Ibitein Okeafor

After completing a Master of Public Health in Field Epidemiology, **Ibitein Okeafor** began looking into doctoral programs. She chose the Arnold School's Ph.D. in Health Services Policy and Management (HSPM) program due to the department's reputation for producing health policy leaders and the program's focus on strengthening health care systems and providing personalized attention.

[READ MORE >>](#)



I Am Public Health: Maushmi Patel

Since enrolling in the HSPM doctoral program in 2023, **Maushmi Patel** has developed research interests in patient engagement and evaluation, particularly the assessment of digital health technologies. It's the perfect fit for her graduate assistantship, which involves working with HSPM assistant professor **Nabil Natafgi** in the Patient Engagement Studio.

[READ MORE >>](#)



Palmetto Power: The link between health care access and outcomes for people with substance abuse disorders

Substance use disorder has become one of the greatest public health challenges nationwide, and the problem is particularly pronounced in South Carolina. **Christina Andrews** is working to change that through two grants from the National Institutes of Health, totaling \$5 million.

[READ MORE >>](#)

50 Years of the Arnold School

To celebrate the school's 50th anniversary in 2025, the Arnold School of Public Health is profiling distinguished alumni who have made positive impacts on public health research, education, policy, and practice. This sample of HSPM graduates serves to reflect the impressive impact that all our alumni have had on the field of public health over the last half century.

[READ MORE >>](#)

'00

Determined to help his community and state, **Jay Hamm** (MHA '00) decided to build on his seven years of clinical experience by enrolling in the MHA program.



'14

HSPM's MHA program prepared **Sara Ballentine** (MHA '14) for the world of health care management, offering numerous educational and practical opportunities at some of the best health care settings in the state.



'15

After graduating from the MPH program, **Sara Goldsby** (MPH '15) joined South Carolina's Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services as a project manager and moved into the director role just one year later.



'18

"My public health degrees helped me understand the landscape of communities and what matters to people," says three-time USC alumna **Ashley Hrubala Umbriano** (MPH '18).



HIV care has shifted from treatment of the condition itself to managing aging patients, ... who are experiencing accelerated and elevated risks for age-related chronic diseases.

Brian Chen

HSPM Associate Professor and Principal Investigator

Five projects supported by Prisma Health Research Seed Grants will be led by Arnold School researchers in 2025, who each received up to \$20,000.

An expert in health policy/services, HSPM associate professor **Brian Chen** will assess the completeness of electronic health records in capturing prescription and nonprescription pharmacy data among

patients.

Specifically, his team will look at the polypharmacy (i.e., use of five or more non-HIV drugs, including nonprescription drugs such as over-the-counter medications, supplements, and substance use) and its impacts among people living with HIV.

"HIV care has shifted from treat-



Written by Erin Bluvias, January 30, 2025.

Prisma Health Research Seed Grants provide pathways to improve health in the state

ment of the condition itself to managing aging patients, 50 percent of whom are now 50 years of age and older, who are experiencing accelerated and elevated risks for age-related chronic diseases,” Chen says.

“People living with HIV and co-occurring other conditions, such as diabetes and hypertension, often require the use of more drugs than the general public, putting them at two to three times greater risk of experiencing adverse drug events.

“Moreover, people living with HIV also have a higher prevalence of substance use such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other non-prescription drugs.”

Unfortunately, there is limited clinical guidance on how to navigate the use of multiple prescription and nonprescription drugs for people living with HIV due to several limitations. Most electronic health records do not document over-the-counter drugs and other substance use (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, marijuana).

Further, people living with HIV are mostly excluded from clinical trials that alert providers to adverse drug interactions.

Chen’s project will assess the completeness of these records compared to data they collect from a subset of patients while also shedding more light on the prevalence

and patterns of these events for this population.



Chen will be working with HSPM associate professor **Jan Ostermann** (Arnold School of Public Health) and pharmacist **Caroline Derrick** (Immunology Clinic, Prisma Health).



Featured Events



▲ In July, **Bankole Olatosi** presented at the 13th IAS Conference on HIV Science held in Kigali, Rwanda, on the ways systemic racism and social determinants of health influence HIV diagnoses and care across US regions.



▲ Executive MHA students broadened their perspectives through the Global Health Systems course, traveling to the UK to study the National Health Service firsthand. The week-long experience includ-

ed site visits in England and Scotland, where students engaged with health system leaders and compared US and UK approaches to healthcare delivery, policy, and management.



16th Annual James E. Clyburn Health Equity Lecture

This prestigious lecture series was created to honor Congressman James E. Clyburn for his support and partnership in advancing health equity in South Carolina and across the nation.

This year's lecture was held April 4, 2025, at the Pastides Alumni Center at USC. Keynote speaker Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter, Bloomberg Centennial Chair and Bloomberg Centennial Professor of the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, delivered a lecture entitled *"Advancing Health Equity through Health in all Policies."*

The lecture is hosted by HSPM and the Arnold School of Public Health, with the generous support of our sponsors: the South Carolina Department of Public Health, the USC Collaborative for Health Equity Research (CHEER) Center, the USC Office of Civil Rights History and Research, the USC Division of Access, Civil Rights, and Community Engagement, the USC FIRST FIIRRE Program, and the USC Rural Health Research Center.



> **Nabil Natafghi** was awarded the Emerging Leader in Public Health and Health Disparities Research award at the 2025 Clyburn Lecture.

[FULL AWARD LIST >>](#)



MHA Program



Nabil Natafji

Nabil Natafji
Program Director

It is an honor to serve as Interim Director of the MHA program following Dr. Melinda Merrell's transition to a professional role outside higher education in August 2024. We thank her for her dedicated leadership and lasting contributions to our program.

I also thank our very own **Dr. Bankole Olatosi**, who this past year served as Chair of the National Board of CAHME, representing USC on the national stage.

This year, our program climbed eight spots in the U.S. News & World Report rankings to reach #33 nationally. We are also proud to celebrate Executive Track student **Martha Selmon**, recipient of the inaugural 2025 CAHME/Nancy Rosenthal Scholarship, recognizing her as a promising national leader.

In May 2025, nine students graduated across our tracks, and all secured full-time employment prior to graduation. Importantly, 100% reported satisfaction and said they would choose our MHA program again.

Beyond the classroom, our executive MHA students expanded their horizons globally through a study tour of the UK, where they examined the National Health Service and engaged with health system leaders in England and Scotland.

Our alumni remain central to our mission. I encourage you to explore our 50 Careers of Impact series (arnoldschool.org/50careers),



which highlights exceptional MHA alumni nationwide.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to welcome 17 new students across both tracks for academic year 2025–2026. With their energy, and the continued support of our alumni and partners, the future of our MHA program is bright.



Graduates

Alana Barton
Matthew Bottone
Kiley Clark
◀ Sidney Earley
Catherine Millender

Joseph Noehring
Kiersten Owings
Will Owings
◀ Ruta Patel



Leaders in Action

In 2024-2024, our students were active well beyond the classroom. Through their student-run Health-care Leadership Association, they combined professional development with community service, volunteering locally while sharpening leadership skills. The program supported all first-year students to attend the annual ACHE Congress in Houston, where they networked with health system leaders from across the country. ❶

Notably, eight of nine students secured program assistantships, affirming both their talent and commitment to the profession.

They also represented USC at the OSU ❷ and UAB ❸ health administration case competitions, showcasing their analytical and leadership abilities on a national stage.



Awards

**ACHE Albert W. Dent
Graduate Student Scholarship**
Makiyah Lewis

**ACHE Foster G. McGaw
Graduate Student Scholarship**
Catherine Millender
Ruta Patel

ASPH Access & Collective Engagement Award
Will Owings

CAHME Nancy Rosenthal Scholarship
Martha Selmon

**Susie B. Yates Award
for Excellence in Scholarship**
◀ Will Owings



[HSPM] educators share a common mission: ... to give their students the tools they need to succeed professionally. I am proud to have been shaped by such a passionate and dedicated group of faculty members.

Will Owings, MHA '25

[READ MORE >>](#)

MPH Program



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Crouch".

Elizabeth Crouch
Program Director

We remain deeply grateful for your ongoing support of our students and academic programs. Your encouragement and involvement make a lasting impact on the success of our Master of Public Health (MPH) program, including our traditional and distance learning tracks, as well as our dual degree options with the Master of Public Administration (MPA) and the Master of Social Work (MSW).

Many of our incoming students heard about the program from alumni and friends like you—thank you for spreading the word! Your support helps us showcase how our curriculum prepares graduates to manage public health programs and lead population-based health improvement efforts. Our students gain valuable skills in operations management, budgeting and public health finance, health economics, public health law, and health policy development.

This year marked my third as Director of the MPH program, and it has truly been a career highlight to work with such talented and committed students. Our Spring 2025 graduates completed their Applied Practice Experiences across a variety of important public health areas, including rural health, access to care, cancer prevention, and nursing. These experiences would not have been possible without the generosity of our alumni and partners who hosted and mentored our students across Columbia and the Southeast. We are deeply grateful for your continued collaboration and support.

We are proud to announce that all ten graduates from Spring 2025 secured employment upon graduation. Furthermore, every student in the traditional program who sought a graduate assistantship successfully obtained one.

Looking ahead, we are excited to welcome 15 new students to the MPH program this fall. Among them are one student enrolled in the MPA/MPH dual degree, two in the MSW/MPH dual degree, and twelve students in either the traditional or distance learning tracks. These incoming students will join our 16 continuing students, bringing energy and enthusiasm to the program. We received 43 applications for Fall 2025 and extended admission to 32 outstanding candidates—recruitment continues to be a priority for us in the year ahead.

As always, we are grateful for your continued engagement with our program. Please consider sharing information about the MPH program with colleagues, friends, or prospective students who may be interested in pursuing a career in public health.



Graduates

Tanya Ambrose
Lindsey Barr
Kayla Beczynski
Danasia Brown
Anne Brownfield
Katelyn Coker
Jenna Hartman
Tilia Powell
Sarah Sherrill
Jane Teszler

Recognitions



Jenna Hartman
MPH Candidate

Michael D. Jarrett Scholarship
Award for Leadership Potential
in Public Health Administration



Chynna Phillips
MSW, MPH

Michael E. and Sandra P. Samuels
Distinguished Alumni Award

Practicum Sites

Tanya Ambrose, Medical University of South Carolina
"Improving Access to Perinatal Psychiatric Care: A Community Engagement and Policy Approach"

Lindsey Barr, Lexington Medical Center
"Competitive Market Assessment"

Kayla Beczynski, Wholespire
"The HYPE Project"

Danasia Brown, Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE)
"Strategic Planning and Systems Analysis for Public Health Advancement at CARE"

Katelyn Coker, Medical University of South Carolina
"Evaluating the Relationship Between the Use of Telehealth in Rural Inpatient Settings and Patient Outcomes / Patient Satisfaction"

Sarah Sherrill, South Carolina Office of Rural Health (SCORH)
"Improving Community Engagement and Outreach in Rural SC in Collaboration with the South Carolina Office of Rural Health"

Henry Taylor, South Carolina Institute of Medicine & Public Health
"How Diabetes, Hypertension, and Access to Prenatal Care Affects Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in South Carolina"

Jane Teszler, South Carolina Department of Public Health (SCDPH)
"Strengthening Public Health Services within the Bureau of Clinical Services at SC DPH"

The mission of our PhD program remains steadfast: to equip doctoral students with the vision, knowledge and skills required to make a substantive impact on health services, health policy, and healthcare management through teaching, research, and policy leadership roles.

To that end, we have continued to refine and strengthen our apprenticeship model, which pairs students with faculty advisors from the outset to support their academic progress and provide them with hands-on research experience.

In exchange, all incoming PhD students receive two years of guaranteed support, including tuition, fees, insurance, and a competitive stipend.

In response to the evolving landscape of health services research, we've also updated program competencies, streamlined admissions, and designed new courses and concentration areas.

This momentum is paying off.

We received a record number of applications this past cycle and welcomed a total of eight exceptional students into the program in Fall 2024 and Fall 2025. Our students regularly lead or co-author publications with faculty, present at national conferences, and receive awards in recognition of their work.

Our alumni are also an essential part of our story—past, present, and future. Your successes help demonstrate the value and impact of an HSPM education. Through

mentoring, guest lecturing, or sharing your journey with current students, your engagement enriches the entire HSPM community. Thank you for your ongoing support and the excellence with which you represent our program. Please stay connected with us!



Brian Chen
Program Director

The history of public health is strong, and sometimes world-changing lessons were learned by accident. I was interested in using my curiosity to better the health of the community.

Tony Brown, PhD '25

READ MORE >>

PhD Program



Meet our current students!

(Top) **Anirban Chatterjee**, **Maushmi Patel**, **Mojtaba Kazemian**. (Middle) **Shehirbano Akhtar**, **Skylar Gross**, **Abigail Cirincione**, **Olivia Hinds**. (Bottom) **Sarata Ngack**, **Emma Boswell**, **Taryn Farrell**. (Not pictured) **Salomé-Joëlle Gass**, **Sumaiya Khan**, **Ashok Khanal**, **Ibitein Okefor**.

Awards

Salomé-Joëlle Gass was awarded the *Trustee Fellowship Award* and the *C.C. Royal Fellowship* from the USC Graduate School and a *SPARC Graduate Research grant* from USC.

Olivia Hinds was awarded the *Presidential Fellowship* from the USC Graduate School, the *Dean's Student Travel Award*, and the *ASPH Travel Award*.

Ibitein Okefor was awarded a *SPARC Graduate Research grant* from USC and won the *Graduate Student Award* at Discover USC 2025.

Graduates

Tony Brown, PhD

"Usual provider continuity and its association with viral suppression rates and antiretroviral adherence for individuals newly diagnosed with HIV"

Tianchu Lyu, PhD

"Assess and Predict Preeclampsia Incidence Using Machine Learning and Integrated EHR Data From All of Us"

Zixiao Nan, PhD

"Disease Self-Management Behaviors and Self-Rated Health Status among the U.S. population with T2DM and Chronic Metabolic Conditions"

Sophia Negaro, PhD

"Utilization of Psychedelic Substances and Unmet Need for Mental Health Services in the United States: A Nationally Representative Study"

Nicholas Yell, PhD

"Examining Factors Predicting the Percentage of Registered Nurse Vacancies in Hospitals in the United States"

Our People



Christina Andrews, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Andrews' research focuses on public financing for substance use disorder treatment, with a particular focus on Medicaid. She is currently leading two national studies funded by the National Institutes of Health.



John Brooks, PhD
Professor and South Carolina SmartState Endowed Chair

Dr. Brooks is a health economist with a focus on estimating treatment effectiveness using observational healthcare databases. He is presently the Director of the Center for Effectiveness Research in Orthopaedics (CERortho).



Brian Chen, JD, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Chen's research centers on the economic evaluation of legal, policy, and programmatic interventions to reduce the burden of lifestyle-related chronic illnesses due to obesity, smoking, or addiction.



J. Alton Croker, III, PhD
Assistant Professor

Dr. Croker researches surgical interventions for back pain using national HCUP data, commercial cannabis use among special populations, and impacts of tobacco control on young men and boys.



Elizabeth Crouch, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Crouch is Co-Director of the University of South Carolina Rural Health Research Center. In 2023, she was recognized with the Outstanding Researcher Award from the National Rural Health Association.



Nicole Hair, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Hair's research focuses on the intersections of poverty, health, and human capital development, with particular emphasis on early-life environments, socioeconomic inequality, and public policy.



Peiyin Hung, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Hung specializes in rural health, maternal/child health, healthcare access, and telehealth policy. Her research focuses on geographic disparities in hospital services and quality of health care. She is also Co-Director of USC's Rural Health Research Center.



Nabil Natafqi, PhD
Assistant Professor

Dr. Natafqi's research focuses on telehealth, patient engagement, and mixed-methods approaches to improve healthcare delivery. He also serves as Scientific Director of the Patient Engagement Studio.



Bankole Olatosi, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Olatosi's research interests are in the fields of health analytics, HIV/AIDS, and COVID-19. Currently, he is funded by NIH to study HIV treatment gaps, viral suppression, and COVID in South Carolina. He co-leads the National Big Data Health Science Center.



Jan Ostermann, PhD
Associate Professor

Dr. Ostermann is a global health researcher with 25+ years experience improving health care and outcomes in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. His expertise is in child wellbeing, vaccinations, HIV, telehealth, rural-urban disparities & workforce policy.



Lauren Workman, PhD
Research Assistant Professor

Dr. Workman is a community-engaged researcher and evaluator using qualitative methods, implementation science, and evaluation frameworks to strengthen family and community health.



Brad Wright, PhD
Professor and Chair

Dr. Wright studies inequities in health care delivery, with a focus on health centers, hospitals, Medicare, and Medicaid. He teaches courses on health policy analysis and the US health care system.



Sudha Xirasagar, PhD, MBBS
Professor

Dr. Xirasagar has published over 140 research papers on colorectal cancer screening/prevention, stroke care, sexually transmitted diseases, clinical epidemiology, and chronic metabolic disease prevention.

Meet the New Faculty



David Anderson, PhD
Assistant Professor

Dr. Anderson is fascinated by individual choice health insurance markets. Specifically he studies the intersection of policy, economic incentives applied to insurers, risk selection, and choice behaviors made by individuals as they navigate complex and opaque insurance and financial products. He has ongoing work on the Affordable Care Act's individual health insurance markets, Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage, and Medicaid managed care.



Joshua Sellner, PhD, MSPH
Clinical Assistant Professor

Dr. Joshua Sellner is a Clinical Assistant Professor and a Senior Consultant with the South Carolina Department of Public Health. He previously served as Division Director of Population Health Surveillance for the state, leading statewide analytic initiatives in chronic disease, maternal and child health, injury surveillance, and COVID-19 response. His research focuses on improving population health through data-driven public health strategies.

Staff

Audrey Auen, MPH
Program Coordinator

Sandra Rhyne, MEd, GCDF
Academic Programs Specialist

Sharon Gary
Administrative Assistant

Katherine Tse
Grants Coordinator

April Osteen, BS, MEd
Admin Coordinator (CERortho)

Dantz Woodberry, BS, MBA
Business Manager

Emeriti

Roger Amidon, PhD
Distinguished Professor Emeritus

Sandra Glover, PhD
Distinguished Professor Emerita

Samuel L. Baker, PhD
Professor Emeritus

Janice C. Probst, PhD
Distinguished Professor Emerita

Adjunct Faculty & Instructors

Mark Barnes, CFO/COO
SC First Steps to School Readiness

J. Ira Bedenbaugh, Principal
Bedenbaugh Healthcare Advisors

Ed Bell, Jr., Director
CEEUS, Inc.

Tommy Cockrell, Past CFO
South Carolina Hospital Association

Brad Cole, Director
USC Brain Health Network

Matthew Dowdey, Manager
Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina

Cindy Dreher, Past Director
Palmetto GBA

Tim Fitzgerald, AVP
Lexington Medical Center

Rupinderjit Grewal, Director
South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Jay Hamm, VP
Lexington Medical Center

Kelli Kenison, Research Associate
USC Center for Applied Research and Evaluation

Sara McCartha, General Counsel
Lexington Medical Center

Melinda Merrell, Director
Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina

Kolby Redd, Asst. Professor
Anderson University

William Render, Partner
RCH Benefits Advisors

Chelsea Richard, VP
Central Carolina Community Foundation

Frank Shepke, President/CEO
Lutheran Homes of South Carolina

Amanda Williams, Director
South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Awards & Recognition



Brad Wright was invited to join the editorial board of *Health Services Research*.

He was also invited to serve a 3-year term as a distinguished peer reviewer for *JAMA Network Open*, starting in 2025.



Peiyin Hung won the 2025 Outstanding Researcher of the Year award from the National Rural Health Association (NRHA).

This award is conferred annually at the NRHA Annual Meeting to one rural health researcher in recognition of exceptional research activity.

[READ MORE >>](#)



Katherine Tse was featured in the Staff Spotlight series for her role in grants administration.

“Contributing to [the importance of our Pls’ research] in a tangible way is really rewarding,” she says of supporting HSPM faculty.

[READ MORE >>](#)

If you're an alum, we'd love to feature you! Please email hspm-rcpt@mailbox.sc.edu with your name, graduation year, and the personal or professional news you would like to share.

Alumni Notes

Class of 1998

Traci Hardin (MPH)

As the founder of Breathe Well SC, LLC, a Certified Asthma Educator Specialist, and now a nationally certified Community Health Worker, Traci's journey has been a story of purpose, passion, and powerful transformation.

Traci knew she was called to serve at a deeper level. That calling brought her to the nonprofit sector, where she led Project Breathe Easy through Family Connection of South Carolina, partnering with CHWs statewide to help families manage childhood asthma.

Later, when her son was born, Traci stepped away from full-time work, but not from her mission. She launched Breathe Well SC in 2008, focusing on training, curriculum development, and content creation for national organizations like the Association of Asthma Educators.

Her proudest accomplishment has been leading the creation of a national asthma training curriculum for CHWs, which has output more than 1,300 CHWs.

Class of 2012

Ashley Vertuno (MHA)

A Robert S. Hudgens Memorial Award for Young Healthcare Executive of the Year and Baldrige Foundation Award for Leadership Excellence winner (both in 2024), Vertuno says her degree has been instrumental in every step of her career – from the foundational education to the strategic mindset needed to navigate complex health care environments.

Class of 2013

Jamiko Cooper (MHA)

A proud double alumna of the University of South Carolina, she currently serves as a Data Management and Program Analyst at the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA). She also serves on the Executive Committee for the Gwinnett County Board, advocating for equitable public health policies.

Class of 2014

Whitney Tucker (MPH)

Whitney currently works as Director of State Fiscal Policy Research at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, where she leads a team of policy analysts in designing and promoting more inclusive and equitable state tax and budget policies. Her work shapes policy debate by informing lawmakers, advocates, and members of the media of the impacts of various policy decisions on low- and moderate-income residents.

Class of 2015

Adam Mayer (MHA)

Adam currently serves as the Associate Chief Financial Officer for the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Health System and Chief Financial Officer for MUSC Community Physicians. He was named in “104 Healthcare Leaders to Know” by *Beckers Hospital Review* in 2023 and was also featured by *American Healthcare Leader* in their spotlight entitled “Adam Mayer Is the Youngest Leader You Know.”

Class of 2018

NiAsia Hazelton (MPH)

“Since graduating from the MPH program, my journey has been anything but ordinary. My career has taken me from leading community health initiatives as a Community Outreach Coordinator at a Federally Qualified Health Center to driving impact in higher education through my work with the Center for the Advancement of Teaching & Learning, all while running my own branding and marketing agency that helps organizations tell their stories and reach the people who need them most.”

Class of 2021

Oluwatosin Momodu (PhD)

Oluwatosin is building clinical experience before starting a medical residency in the US.

Class of 2022

Yuqi Wu (PhD)

After graduation, Yuqi worked as a predoctoral and postdoctoral fellow at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine in Rochester, MN, before accepting a position as an assistant professor (tenure track) at the University of North Florida, beginning 2025.

Class of 2024

Nicholas Yell (PhD)

Nicholas is currently working as a postdoc for the Rural Health Research Center and the Center for Applied Research and Evaluation at USC.

Class of 2025

Zixiao Nan (PhD)

Zixiao now works as a statistical analyst for Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina.

Support our students! Your gift will help fund their scholarships and professional development opportunities.

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PIONEERING PERSPECTIVES

Master of Health Administration alumnus Gary Cooper looks back on the Arnold School in the 90s, plus lessons from a career in health care

Gary Cooper has reached a stage in his life and career where he has wisdom to share, and he's fought hard to earn it. A serial entrepreneur who has bought, sold and led multi-million-dollar health care organizations, the Master of Health Administration (MHA) alumnus ('96) says that his success almost cost him his life.

After hitting his lowest point eight years ago, when his doctor told him he had a month to live, Cooper has since started his second act. Now his life is focused on putting patients, employees and family first, and the growth of his relationships and businesses have thrived as a result.

Today, Cooper is the Chairman of Palmetto Infusion, a Pawleys-Island based, Southeast-wide (40+ clinics and growing) organization that allows patients to skip the hospital to receive their lifesaving treatments in outpatient settings. He's also a devoted husband of more than 30 years and the proud father of four kids.

Paradoxically, he can trace the roots of both his challenges and his salvation back to his childhood and the early days of his career.

From farming to pharmacy, a health care legacy begins

Cooper's dad grew up on a sharecropping farm near the coast and then attended pharmacy school.

An entrepreneur and a people-person, he didn't want to work in a retail drug store and loved being around patients. He launched a health care company so he could travel around the state providing pharmaceutical services to residents at nursing homes.

Throughout the 70s and 80s, Cooper and his three siblings spent many Saturdays watching their father work. He remembers the facilities as sad places where little old ladies were tied down because care providers didn't have the knowledge or tools to help calm them, and he vowed to do something with his life to provide another path for their care.

As a student at Wofford College in the Upstate, Cooper struggled with pre-med classes but excelled in business and began thinking about his next steps. Though watching his wife study for her law courses at USC helped him eliminate that vocation, he wasn't entirely certain that the school of public health's MHA program was the best fit either.

Cooper's reservations melted away when his first semester began, and he was immersed in the familiar topic of health care. "This is everything I know," he thought to himself, and he knew he was in the right place.

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“

Having an MHA in my field has been one of the best things that has happened to me. The networking opportunities afforded by being an alumnus of USC are some of the most long-lasting and impactful benefits I've experienced in my career.



Health Services Policy and Management

Arnold School of Public Health

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

915 Greene Street
Columbia, SC 29208
(803) 777-18326

