



Virginia Tech Center for Public Health Practice and Research

What we do, who we are, who we serve

The Center for Public Health Practice and Research (CPHPR) at Virginia Tech engages interdisciplinary faculty, staff and students at Virginia Tech and community organizations to enhance public health practice and research in the region. The Center is housed in the Department of Population Health Sciences, Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

The Center supports community-based projects by collaborating with community partners to compete for and secure funding, as well as providing public health content and service expertise such as research studies, external evaluations, needs assessments and document writing. Through the Public Health Network, the Center partners with faculty, staff and students at Virginia Tech. The Center collaborates with university partners on grant writing, study design, implementation and evaluation and offers technical public health expertise.

The overarching goal for the Center is to enhance public health practice and research, particularly in Southwest and Southside Virginia, Central Appalachia and across the region.

Workforce Development

Part of the mission of the CPHPR is providing workforce development throughout the region. Our faculty are available to work with your organization to design a training tailored to your needs. Possible training topics include communication, cultural competency, data management, program evaluation, grant writing and management, survey design, and more! We can provide a free training at your organization, which can range from an hour to a half-day. Please direct any questions or requests to CPHPR Project Coordinator, Hannah Menefee at hmenefee@vt.edu.

Recently Completed Projects!

We recently completed our work with the Virginia Department of Health and the Cancer Action Coalition of Virginia on their [2023-2028 Comprehensive Cancer Plan](#).

We also recently finished working with the Tobacco Free Alliance of Virginia on their 2023-2028 Strategic plan- be on the lookout for it soon!

Current Projects

EXCITE (Extension Collaborative on Immunization Teaching & Engagement), funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

In close collaboration with Cooperative Extension agents around the state, the Center is working to promote uptake of all adult vaccinations, including COVID-19 by increasing trust in the vaccines and decrease vaccine hesitancy.

As part of this project, Associate Director Sophie Wenzel and Graduate Assistant Natalie Martin worked with Craig County residents to create a story tree to celebrate community resilience. They also organized a photovoice project with Craig County youth.



Craig County Fall Festival



Story Tree



Photovoice Project

The Center continues to work closely with Piedmont Community Services Board on several projects:

- Evaluation of a tobacco prevention project in Martinsville, VA
- Evaluation of the Drug Free Partnership grant in Franklin County, VA
- Evaluation of the Partnership for Success grant in Martinsville and Henry County, VA
- Evaluation of the Community Recovery Program

Current Projects, cont.

Empowering rural communities for action through evidence-based community engagement: Applying the SEED method to the opioid epidemic (funded by USDA/RHSE and Americorps)

In partnership with colleagues in Cooperative Extension and at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Center will evaluate the implementation of the SEED community engagement method in three rural Virginia communities.

Using health behavior theory and relative risk information to increase and inform use of Alternative Transportation

The Center is working with the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) and the Virginia Tech office of Sustainable Transportation on a project to promote safe alternative transportation use among university students, staff and faculty. The project is funded by the national SAFE-D (Safety through Disruption) program. Focus group discussions with Virginia Tech students, faculty and staff informed development of an online education program guided by the Transtheoretical Model of behavior change and the Health Belief Model. The educational program is currently being evaluated with students in a Spring 2023 MPH course (PHS 5034: Health Education and Health Behavior).



Welcome to the Alternative Transportation at Virginia Tech!

Alternative transportation is the use of modes of transportation other than private vehicles. Alternative transportation includes public transportation, carpooling, biking, walking, scooting, skateboarding and more. Alternative transportation can be both passive or active.

After completing this program, you will be familiar with:

- Alternative transportation options and resources at Virginia Tech
- The health benefits of alternative transportation
- The connection between the environment and alternative transportation
- How to safely use alternative transportation

Adolescents' exposure to and interactions with messages about ENDS in diverse social media formats

Dr. Rose Wesche, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech, is principal investigator for a project funded by the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth to explore how social media messages related to electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) are associated with adolescents' ENDS-related attitudes and behaviors. Kathy Hosig is a co-investigator on the project and is building on CPHPR's connections with schools and communities to help recruit adolescents to participate in the study. If you know a young person aged 13 to 17 who may be interested in talking with our team about what they see on social media about ENDS, [please give them this website](#) or have them text (540) 744-2609.

Current Projects, cont.

Healthy Brain and Child Development Study

Virginia Tech is one of 25 sites in a consortium of universities that will recruit 300 pregnant women at each site and follow their babies for 10 years to better understand brain development, beginning in the perinatal period, and extending through early childhood, including variability in development and how it contributes to cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional function. CPHPR's connections in southwest Virginia are crucial to recruitment and retention of participants. Kathy Hosig is one of three multiple principal investigators for the study. The other two principal investigators are Dr. Brittany Howell, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science and Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at VTC, and Dr. Martha Ann Bell, University Distinguished Professor of Psychology. The link to this study is found [here](#).



NSF funded project on Pandemic Prediction and Prevention

CPHPR is providing expertise in community engagement for a project funded by the Predictive Intelligence for Pandemic Prevention (PIPP) program of the National Science Foundation. T. Murali, Professor of Computer Science, leads a multi-disciplinary team of faculty from across Virginia Tech to develop innovative, transdisciplinary strategies to predict and prevent future pandemics. Kathy Hosig and Kristina Jiles will train team members on community-engaged research and conduct community-engaged studios to facilitate conversations between researchers and members of communities that are likely to be affected by the research. For more information, [please click this link to see the story in the VT News](#).

Current Projects, cont.

West Piedmont Health District community health assessment surveys

Four MPH students are conducting surveys in Franklin County, Henry/Martinsville and Patrick County for the Community Health Assessment/ Community Health Improvement process this Spring.

We are still hard at work on several multi-year projects:

USDA Empowering Healthy Families (USDA – VCE partnership)

Helping Youth PROSPER and Avoid Opioid Misuse in Virginia
(USDA – VCE partnership)

Rural Opioid Technical Assistance Through Virginia Cooperative Extension
(SAMHSA – VCE partnership)

iTHRIV Clinical and Translational Science Awards (partnership with Inova Health Systems, Carilion Clinic and University of Virginia)

Petersburg Healthy Options Program (CDC – VCE partnership)

Read more about these projects in our [2019 Newsletter](#).

Meet the CPHPR Graduate Assistants



Domenique Villani is a Master of Public Health student studying infectious disease and public health education. Outside of the MPH program, she is also a registered nurse and received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Villanova University. At the center, Domenique is assisting in the development of a health education program based on health behavior theory to increase the use of alternative transportation. Upon graduation, she hopes to continue working on community driven projects and solutions that connect hospital resources to population health initiatives.

Natalie Martin is an accelerated Master of Public Health student in the Public Health Education concentration. At the Center she is contributing to the CDC funded EXCITE program. She especially enjoyed meeting the Craig County community during her recent trip to the Craig County Fall Festival and working with students from Craig County to create their photovoice project. She graduated with a B.S.P.H. from Virginia Tech in 2022. When she graduates, Natalie hopes to move to Washington D.C. to pursue a career in public health.



Meet the CPHPR Graduate Assistants, cont.



Stephanie Hernandez is a second-year graduate student pursuing her Master's in Public Health with a concentration in Public Health Education. She is currently serving as an evaluator for the Martinsville tobacco project at the Center for Public Health Practice and Research, where she updates the logic model and evaluation plan, creates evaluation tools, implements and analyzes them, and attends monthly meetings with stakeholders. Upon graduation, Stephanie hopes to continue contributing to public health education. She is committed to using her skills and knowledge to improve health outcomes for underserved communities and is excited to explore different avenues for achieving this goal.

Breana Turner is currently a second-year PhD student studying Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health concentrating in Public Health Implementation Science. She is under the mentorship of Kathy Hosig and is working on the USDA-funded qualitative study with Black churches across Virginia. Her research interests align with improving Black women's health outcomes through sociocultural relevance and competent public health interventions.



Samantha Edwards is a Master of Public Health student in the Community Health Promotion and Equity and the Infectious Diseases concentrations. At the Center, she has assisted in multiple data analysis projects for topics such as stigma reduction around substance use disorder and alternative transportation. She currently assists in two systematic reviews focusing on vaccine hesitancy and research practices in under-represented populations. She is also helping conduct surveys in Martinsville and Henry County for the Virginia Department of Health. Samantha is a first-generation student that graduated from Virginia Tech in 2022 with a B.S. in Biology and Biomedicine. When she graduates, she hopes to gain her Ph.D. and conduct research in Appalachia.



Jennifer Gallagher is a first year Master of Public Health student in the infectious disease concentration. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2016 with a B.S. in Biochemistry. Currently she is working as a research assistant for the West Piedmont Health Department to help them conduct their health assessment surveys for residents living in Martinsville and Henry County. Jennifer's goal after she graduates is to find work that benefits both animal and human health. To that end she is aiming to go into infectious disease epidemiology with a focus on zoonotic diseases, though she is also debating on applying to vet school.



Meet the CPHPR Graduate Assistants, cont.



Uka Onwuka is a first year Master of Public Health student in the Infectious Disease and Public Health Education concentration. He is conducting surveys for the West Piedmont Health District. He graduated with a B.S. in Public Health and B.A. in Chemistry from East Carolina University in 2021.

Dollie Gravley is a first year Master of Public Health student in the Infectious Disease concentration. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2022 with her B.S. in Dairy Science/Pre-Veterinary studies. At the Center she is contributing to several projects: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Community Recovery Program, and the Helping Youth PROSPER and Avoid Opioid Misuse in Virginia. Upon graduation, she plans to use her background in veterinary medicine to aid One Health approaches in research for zoonotic disease transmission and outbreaks.



Tara Long is an Accelerated Master of Public Health student in the Infectious Disease concentration who earned her B.S. in Biological Sciences from Virginia Tech in 2022. At CPHPR, she has assisted with qualitative research projects in partnership with the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, particularly those with a focus on veterinary nutrition and communication. After graduation, Tara will attend veterinary school, and she is very excited to pursue a career as a small animal veterinary practitioner.

Amanda Hensley is a PhD Candidate in the Translational Biology, Medicine, and Health Program at Virginia Tech. She is a Graduate Research Assistant for the integrated Translational Health Research Institute of Virginia and a Fellow in the Interfaces for Global Change IGEP. She is currently working on systematic reviews for strategies in vaccine uptake as well as recruitment of underrepresented populations in research, and the creation and evaluation of community-facing messaging about clinical research participation. She earned a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Georgia and a B.S. in Biology from Hollins University in 2016. She received a Master's Degree in Healthcare Administration from Radford University Carilion in 2019. Amanda's research interests are in public health implementation science, infectious disease prevention, science communication, community engagement of health- and research-related topics and processes, and science-policy interfaces.



Meet the CPHPR Graduate Assistants, cont.



Ryan Stanley is a first year master of Public Health student in the Infectious Disease and Community Health Promotion and Equity concentrations. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 2021 with B.S. in Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise. She is currently working on a team that is partnered with the West Piedmont Health District and is surveying priority populations in Martinsville and Patrick County to contribute to a community needs assessment. When Ryan is not surveying, taking classes, or teaching undergraduate students about biology, you'll probably find her hiking, kayaking on the New River, or grabbing a bite to eat at her favorite restaurant in Blacksburg, Greens!

Meet the new CPHPR faculty



We are excited to introduce **Dr. Kristina Jiles!** She is a Research Assistant Professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences. She is also a Public Health Specialist for Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). Kristina has a PhD in Human Nutrition Foods & Exercise and an MPH degree from Virginia Tech in addition to an MS degree in Biology from Hampton University. She was even a graduate research assistant for the Center during her PhD/MPH programs! Her doctoral dissertation research and MPH practicum and capstone experiences were with the Balanced Living with Diabetes (BLD) program. BLD is jointly administered through the Center and VCE. Kristina's experience with both the Center and VCE enable her to support the ever strengthening partnership between CPHPR and VCE. Her expertise in qualitative research and her passion for mentoring public health students and graduate students across disciplines will be invaluable as we continue to grow in supporting the research, education and outreach aims for our department and Virginia Tech.

A note from the Director & Associate Director



Sophie Wenzel,
DrPH, MPH
Associate Director,
CPHPR

Thank you for catching up on CPHPR happenings. It's been a while since we published a newsletter, and we apologize for the silence. As you all know, it's been a few wild years working in public health! We love what we do, and we love our community partners- thank you for your continued trust and support and your devotion to the health of your communities.

If you are interested in hearing from us or working with us, please contact us.

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Kathy Hosig,
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Director, CPHPR

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