

Gillings School of
Global Public Health

IMPACT REPORT

FALL 2026 | A COMPLEMENT TO CAROLINA PUBLIC HEALTH MAGAZINE

Gillings School of
Global Public Health

Dean: Nancy Messonnier, MD
Associate Dean for Communications and Marketing: Matthew Chamberlin
Managing Editor: Meg Palmer
Design and Production: AdrialDesigns.com
Comic Illustrator (p. 36): BrittainPeck.com

Send correspondence to:
UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health
Communications and Marketing
Campus Box 7400, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7400
or email sphcomm@unc.edu.

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PICTURED ON COVER:
Three Gillings School student athletes show off their Gillings merch during the Public Health Foundation Board Meeting in April 2026.

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View this report online with extra stories and the full Manoncourt interview: go.unc.edu/impact2026

FROM THE DEAN

PROUDLY *PUBLIC*



No. 1 PUBLIC SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE U.S.

Though the public health landscape has experienced significant challenges over the past few years, the Gillings School has reinforced its commitment to training leaders who are equipped to face this complex environment head-on.

Our students see the importance of the health challenges their communities face and are rising to the occasion. They are building careers, advancing new research and innovation, and stepping into leadership roles in both the local and global communities who need them most.

In this year's Impact Report, we will demonstrate the Gillings School's commitment to ensuring success inside and outside the School's walls. I am proud that our students continue to secure employment after graduation and report high satisfaction with their education at the Gillings School. Our academic programs provide the high-quality instruction expected of the **No. 1 public school of public health in the United States**. And the expanded offerings of our Career Services team have helped students and alumni access opportunities that strengthen their resumes and develop skills to become competitive candidates in the public health workforce.

While we are the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, that global leadership starts with our responsibility to the state and communities that fund us. In this Impact Report, you will also see how our faculty, staff and students are making a difference right here in North Carolina, leading on AI in health care, improving public trust through communication and responding to the environmental factors that are critical to our well-being.

We are a proudly *public* school, and we hope this report demonstrates the value of your continued investment in public health education.



Dean Nancy Messonnier, MD
Dean and Bryson Distinguished Professor of Public Health

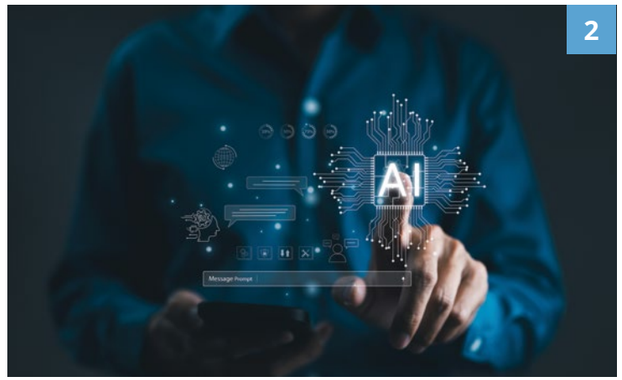
3 OUR THREE PRIORITIES

This year, the Gillings School's focus is on three priorities that reflect urgent needs and extraordinary opportunities.



The State of North Carolina

From the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Outer Banks, our experts work across the state to improve health through research, education and community partnerships. Our work is helping underserved communities reach critical health care services, improving maternal and child health, developing methods to address harmful chemicals in the air and water, improving public health preparedness, and so much more.



Generative AI

Gillings is advancing the use of artificial intelligence through its Center for Artificial Intelligence and Public Health (CAIPH) and other expert research. We are applying ethical approaches to AI to challenges in climate and environmental health, disease tracking, health care delivery and more, and we're equipping students with the skills they will need to use AI confidently, ethically and in partnership with communities as they enter the public health workforce.



Trust in Public Health

Working with communities on health improvement requires mutual trust and a deep understanding of community values, experiences, assets and needs. We are developing strategies that include training focused on improved public discourse, faith-based partnerships, collaborative policy engagement and community-centered communication approaches that foster mutual confidence between public health systems and partner communities.

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

2,084
STUDENTS ENROLLED, FALL 2026

231
NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WELCOMED 2026

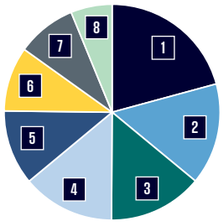
867
GRADUATES PER YEAR

223
PERMANENT FACULTY

98%
GRADUATES WITH A JOB OR CONTINUING EDUCATION

365
PERMANENT STAFF

STUDENTS BY DEPARTMENT



1 HPM **433 (20.8%)**
2 NUTR **317 (15.2%)**
3 EPI **294 (14.1%)**
4 BIOS **289 (13.9%)**
5 PHLP **234 (11.2%)**
6 HB **202 (9.7%)**
7 ESE **186 (8.9%)**
8 MCH **129 (6.2%)**

STUDENT PROFILE

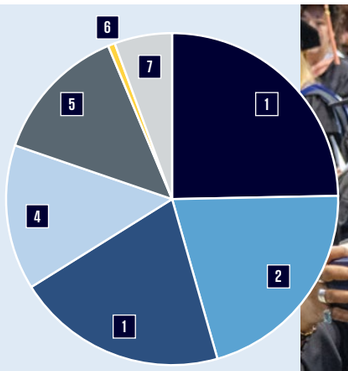
- NC residents: **57.6%**
- Students from non-white communities: **45.1%**
- International students: **11.9%**
- Distance learners: **23%**
- Domestic students from underrepresented non-white communities: **24.3%**
- Domestic MPH@UNC students from underrepresented non-white communities: **42.8%**

MPH PRACTICUM

- **265+** practicum partner organizations
- **730+** practicum products produced
- **59%** of practica primarily benefited populations in North Carolina
- **90%** of practica addressed historical and systemic factors contributing to poor health outcomes in communities.
- **83%** of practica worked to reduce disproportionate health burdens among economically or socially marginalized communities.
- **88%** of practica provided resources to economically/ socially marginalized communities

GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT AREAS (2026)

1 For-Profit Organization **255 (24.7%)**
2 Health Care Organization **216 (20.9%)**
3 Academic Institution **212 (20.5%)**
4 Non-Profit Organization **146 (14.1%)**
5 Government Agency **139 (13.5%)**
6 Self-Employed **7 (0.7%)**
7 Not reported **58 (5.6%)**





Students and faculty celebrate at the Gillings School Spring 2026 Commencement ceremony.

This year, the Gillings School focused on expanding our academic partnerships with other UNC-Chapel Hill schools, as well as other UNC-system institutions, to ensure a more robust pipeline into all of our degree programs. We saw exciting undergraduate student growth across all majors, including in our newest major in Community and Global Public Health, as we welcomed a class of 231 new students. Additionally, all departments worked collaboratively to design new introductory public health courses and expand the availability of existing courses to students from all majors. These efforts align with the University's goal of growing undergraduate education over the next five years.

Our master's programs maintained strong residential enrollment, including our flagship MPH program. Experiential learning remained central. The School hosted another successful Practicum Day and MPH@UNC immersion for online students, giving them meaningful opportunities to connect with peers, faculty and staff.

We also continue to train the next generation of public health scientists, academics and researchers. Gillings doctoral students won two of the ten university-wide Impact Awards in 2026, in recognition of research that benefits the people and communities of North Carolina. A health behavior student was honored for the application of photo voice, a collaborative photography initiative in which Black women described how they navigated mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a doctoral student in environmental sciences and engineering was recognized for their research on arsenic exposure through well water and its association with diabetes in N.C.

Recognizing artificial intelligence's growing role in the field, we committed to preparing faculty to strengthen how AI is taught across the curriculum. We received grant funding to support training faculty in ethical use of the technology in both their teaching and practice with plans to thoughtfully integrate its use across our curricula over the next academic year so that our graduates are prepared for the workplace.

In response to feedback from last year's student survey, the Gillings School expanded career services offerings and strengthened collaboration across student affairs, academic departments and alumni engagement teams to enhance the student experience. These investments delivered measurable results: in this year's survey of more than **850 students**, satisfaction with academic advising increased from **87% to 91%**, while satisfaction with career services rose from **85% to 91%**.

Working closely with faculty, staff and departmental leaders, the Student Affairs unit introduced new advising committees, expanded student success programming and launched career development initiatives that reached students across the School. This year's survey also highlighted students' desire for greater engagement with alumni. In response, Student Affairs is partnering with alumni and academic departments to create more opportunities for networking, mentorship and career exploration, strengthening connections that support students during their time at the Gillings School and throughout their public health careers.

The School has also advanced several important faculty, staff and community initiatives. This year's Staff Professional Development Day engaged approximately **80 staff members** and received strong evaluations, establishing a foundation for future annual programming. The Community Strategic Plan moved from approval to implementation through faculty, student and staff working groups that identified priorities around mentoring, psychological safety and Climate Study implementation. The Faculty and Staff Affairs unit strengthened schoolwide well-being efforts by expanding partnerships, supporting the Well-being Collaborative and Think Tank, developing dialogue facilitators, promoting psychological safety and creating structures to embed well-being more fully into the culture and operations of the School.

ADVANCEMENT

BUILDING A HEALTHIER NORTH CAROLINA TOGETHER

... with a little help from our friends, including First Lady Anna Stein



First Lady Anna Stein and Dean Nancy Messonnier

In September 2026, public health leaders from across North Carolina attended a "From One Woman to Another" reception at the Governor's Mansion in Raleigh. N.C. First Lady Anna Stein, MPH, who the Gillings School is proud to count as an alum, welcomed guests for an evening focused on the health of women, families and communities. Dean **Nancy Messonnier** joined the conversation, emphasizing that public health moves forward not only through research and institutions, but also through trusted voices in homes, workplaces, schools, nonprofits and neighborhoods. "If there are 100 women in this room, and each of you influences just five more people, that is 500 lives touched," she said. "That's how public health spreads."

The evening also included conversation circles with Gillings School faculty on topics including maternal and family health, nutrition and food security, environmental health, AI and the changing needs of North Carolinians.

We thank First Lady Anna Stein for convening this group of thinkers and leaders and for opening the Governor's Mansion for an evening focused on building healthier communities together, conversation by conversation.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AI IN PUBLIC HEALTH



Faculty expertise is helping the Gillings School shape the future of artificial intelligence in public health.

Alessandra Bazzano, PhD, MPH

Artificial intelligence is creating new possibilities in public health, along with new challenges. Drug discovery, disease outbreak modeling and health communication are among the many areas where artificial intelligence is rapidly expanding what is possible. But these promises are accompanied by important questions about safety, privacy and equity.

Members of the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health faculty are helping shape how AI is developed and applied in the health sciences. Their aim is to harness its power to improve health and strengthen learning and research, while protecting safety, privacy and data security.

Alessandra Bazzano, PhD, MPH, professor and chair of maternal and child health, is at the forefront of AI and public health. She is investigating how artificial intelligence can be used responsibly to improve public health practice, communication and education.

Her work explores how AI can benefit health information, disease surveillance and health system management while ensuring communities remain at the center of decision-making. She is working to harness AI's ability to generate new insights while applying a public health lens to its development and use. That means examining ethical questions, engaging communities in decision-making and addressing risks such as bias, misinformation and unequal access.

Bazzano believes public health perspectives are essential as AI becomes more widely adopted.

"Public health has an important role to play in ensuring that the capabilities of AI are put to use for positive impact," said Bazzano.

Bazzano's work is part of a broader effort across the Gillings School to explore how artificial intelligence can advance research, education and public health practice while maintaining strong ethical safeguards.

Together, these efforts reflect a major emerging priority at the Gillings School: helping shape the ethical application of generative AI and other emerging technologies to improve public health.

As AI becomes increasingly embedded in everyday life, public health perspectives will play an important role in ensuring these technologies serve communities, reduce rather than reinforce inequities and support better health outcomes. Through research, teaching and cross-sector partnerships, the Gillings School is shaping how these technologies are developed and applied for the public good.

ALUMNI

TO TACKLE GLOBAL CHALLENGES, MANONCOURT STARTS WITH COMMUNITIES



Whether leading UNICEF's global social mobilization efforts, responding to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa or mentoring Gillings students, Erma Manoncourt, PhD '86 (health behavior and education), has built her career around understanding people and the communities they inhabit. We spoke with the global health leader about her unconventional path into public health, the value of listening to local voices and the passion that has guided her work for more than four decades.

This year, Manoncourt established the Erma Manoncourt Global Public Health Practicum Fund, which supports Gillings students pursuing global public health practice experiences.

Erma Manoncourt, PhD '86

"How can communities help people move forward? How can groups support positive change?"

Before we talk about your doctoral studies and eventual work with UNICEF, I'd like to go back a bit. What first led you into counseling and social work?

I don't know that I can point to one thing. I think my initial calling to social work was really the community aspect of the work. I had grown up mostly outside the United States and came back for undergraduate school. Re-entering American culture made me interested in communities and how people function within them. After I finished my bachelor's degree, I wanted to do something that focused on community.

I discovered clinical social work once I got there, but it was really the community piece that drew me in originally.

And you ended up working in mental health and addiction services?

Yes. I worked in a program for people who suffer from dependency on alcohol and other drugs. It was rewarding work, but it was also difficult. After about two years, seeing the relapse rates and challenges people faced, I found myself wanting to focus on something more positive. I still wanted to work in health but not necessarily mental health.

I became interested in health education because it allowed me to continue working on behavior, attitudes, values and decision-making. Instead of responding to problems after they occurred, I could focus on helping build healthier communities.

Part of what interested me was understanding the context in which individuals live. In mental health, you're often working with the individual in the context of something else. I wanted to better understand that larger context.

Community support is incredibly important. Programs like Alcoholics Anonymous work because people support one another. That got me thinking more broadly: How can communities help people move forward? How can groups support positive change?

Is that what eventually brought you to public health?

Yes. Going to a school of public health broadened my view enormously. I was exposed to epidemiology, biostatistics, management and all these disciplines I really hadn't encountered before. Health education was the piece I already knew, but public health introduced me to a much bigger framework.

It expanded my perspective. I realized there were many different ways to understand and improve health beyond individual counseling or clinical practice.

What happened after completing your doctorate at UNC?

My first position was teaching at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. I taught there for two years.

After that, I got married and moved to Mali in West Africa. I freelanced and worked with nongovernmental organizations, including CARE International.

I had already begun consulting for the Peace Corps while pursuing my doctorate, conducting in-service training programs for volunteers throughout West Africa. Even while I was teaching at Tulane, I continued that work during the summers.

You mentioned growing up overseas. Where did you spend your childhood?

My father was in the military, so we moved constantly. I finished high school in Turkey. We lived in Puerto Rico and Cuba. I attended elementary school in Hawaii before it became a state. The last place I lived with my family was Taiwan.

How did UNICEF enter the picture?

While I was at Tulane, we established an International Communication and Education Center. At the time, I was heading a unit within the department because the regular chair was away on assignment in what was then Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We hired a director for the center who had previously worked for UNICEF. After I left Tulane, he encouraged me to apply for a UNICEF position. They were looking for someone to lead what was then called Program Communication and Social Mobilization, what today would be called social and behavior change.

I applied largely because he encouraged me to. At the time I was living in Paris and honestly didn't expect to get the job. I assumed there would be an internal candidate. I was surprised when they offered me the position.

What was that role?

I joined UNICEF headquarters in New York as the global lead for Program Communication and Social Mobilization. I spent seventeen years with UNICEF altogether.

During the first five years, I oversaw policy, planning frameworks, standards and programming related to community engagement, community participation and behavior change. Our team was responsible for developing the policies and frameworks that guided this work globally.

After that, I moved to India, where I became deputy representative for programs. At the time, India was UNICEF's largest office in the world. I oversaw programming across sectors, including health, water and sanitation, education, and child protection, and worked to ensure those efforts functioned together as a coherent country program.

After five years in India, I became UNICEF's country representative in Egypt, a position I held for six years.

What stands out about that work?

One thing I learned was that international organizations have to be careful not to replace governments. You can go in and do everything yourself, but that's not the role of organizations like UNICEF.

The real challenge is engaging governments in ways that strengthen their capacity to serve their own citizens. We should be complements, not replacements. It's about helping governments build systems and gain ownership of the work.

Read the rest of our conversation with Erma Manoncourt online, including lessons from Ebola response in West Africa, reflections on mentoring future public health leaders and advice for finding your passion in public health: go.unc.edu/impact2026

CELEBRATING FACULTY EXCELLENCE AND PHILANTHROPY

8

This year, the Gillings School announced **eight faculty appointments** to endowed and distinguished professorships, including four inaugural Joan Heckler Gillings Endowed Professors. School leadership is thrilled to celebrate these exceptional faculty members and deeply grateful to the donors whose generosity has made these prestigious professorships possible.

JOAN HECKLER GILLINGS ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIPS

Four faculty members from the Gillings School have been awarded the inaugural Joan Heckler Gillings Endowed Professorship. This professorship is funded through an estate gift from the late Joan Heckler Gillings, whose vision, leadership and generosity reflected her profound admiration for UNC Gillings School faculty, students, research and programs. Full-time, tenure-track assistant and associate professors whose primary appointments are in the Gillings School are eligible for this three-year, term-limited professorship.



Jess Edwards, PhD ’13, MSPH ’10

Professor of epidemiology

Edwards’ research focuses on developing and refining quantitative methods to inform public health decisions on infectious disease when using imperfect data sources, particularly those prone to missing information or measurement error.



Anna Kahkoska, MD ’21, PhD ’19

Assistant professor of nutrition

Kahkoska’s research focuses on identifying new strategies to leverage nutrition alongside other aspects of diabetes self-care to improve the health and wellness of people who live with diabetes.



Leah Frerichs, PhD

Associate professor of health policy and management

Frerichs’ research integrates systems science, community collaboration and innovative approaches to improve public health outcomes, particularly in underserved communities.



Musa Manga, PhD

Assistant professor of environmental sciences and engineering

Manga’s research uses environmental engineering and microbiology tools to identify low-cost, scalable and sustainable ways to interrupt transmission of diseases from human waste to protect public health and well-being.

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORSHIPS

Four distinguished professorships have been awarded to faculty members who exemplify Carolina’s standards for excellence in scholarship, teaching and service. These professorships strengthen the faculty’s ability to address the world’s most pressing public health challenges through groundbreaking research and ensure that future generations of scholars benefit from enhanced mentorship and opportunities for discovery.



Joe Brown, PhD ’07, PE

Don and Jennifer Holzworth Distinguished Professor

Brown, professor of environmental sciences and engineering, has been named the Don and Jennifer Holzworth Distinguished Professor. Brown’s work focuses on infrastructure and technology for water and sanitation, including how these systems influence the spread of pathogens and support public health. His current research explores the use of wastewater in public health surveillance. Brown also serves as director of the UNC Water Institute, which convenes scholars whose work in water is essential to global development, safety and well-being.



Suzanne Maman, PhD

Jo Anne L. Earp Distinguished Professor in Health Behavior

Maman, chair and professor of health behavior, has been named the Jo Anne L. Earp Distinguished Professor in Health Behavior. For more than 20 years, Maman’s work has focused on HIV and violence prevention in sub-Saharan Africa. Her collaborations with the World Health Organization, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other partners have advanced programs that address the interconnected effects of violence and HIV prevention, diagnosis and treatment among women.



Rhonda Stephens, DDS, MPH

R. Gary Rozier and Chester W. Douglass Distinguished Term Professor in Dental Public Health

Stephens, professor of the practice of public health leadership and practice and adjunct assistant professor of pediatric dentistry and dental public health, has been named the R. Gary Rozier and Chester W. Douglass Distinguished Term Professor in Dental Public Health, a professorship shared jointly by the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and UNC Adams School of Dentistry. Stephens brings deep experience in dental public health — including service within a federally qualified health center in Indiana and the North Carolina Division of Public Health — and a strong record of securing and administering federal grant funding, much of it supporting workforce development across North Carolina. Her current work focuses on integrating oral health into broader efforts to improve individual and population health.

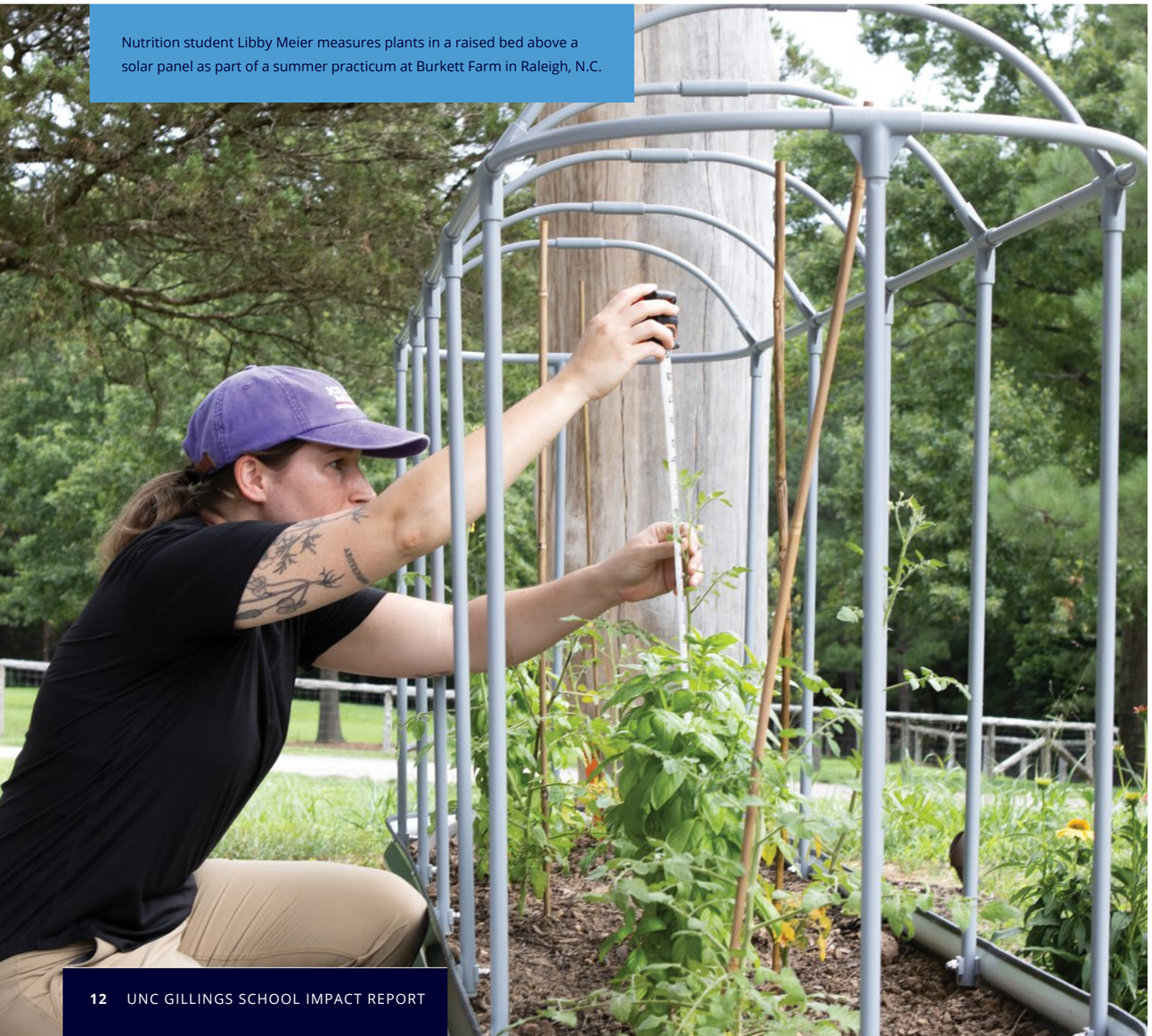


Melissa Troester, PhD ’01, MPH ’06

Barbara Sorenson Hulka Distinguished Professor in Cancer Epidemiology

Troester, professor of epidemiology, has been named the Barbara Sorenson Hulka Distinguished Professor in Cancer Epidemiology. Troester was selected for this honor based on her research into why breast cancer affects people differently across populations. Her work spans biological factors, including genes and cellular markers, as well as social and structural factors such as access to medical care.

ADVANCING HEALTH THROUGH RESEARCH



Nutrition student Libby Meier measures plants in a raised bed above a solar panel as part of a summer practicum at Burkett Farm in Raleigh, N.C.

Researchers at the Gillings School generate the evidence, tools and partnerships that form the foundation for better public health within North Carolina and across the world. Our work helps identify urgent needs, develop and test successful health interventions, and incorporate technology from data science to AI-enabled tools that strengthen decision-making and expand reach. By working closely with affected populations and communities, we ensure solutions are relevant, trusted and responsive to real-world needs. In a rapidly changing environment, our researchers remain nimble and responsive while holding steady to our shared goal: improving health for all.

We are especially grateful to the funding agencies and donors who continue to make this research possible.

$138.4M
TOTAL GRANTS AND CONTRACTS AWARDED TO SCHOOL FACULTY

$97.2M
SCHOOL-ADMINISTERED FUNDING (6.4% FROM STATE FUNDS)

423
AWARDS

$790.9K
FUNDING PER FACULTY PI

Check out some of the ways Gillings School researchers are addressing local health challenges while maintaining a strong global presence.

BIOSTATISTICS

Detecting and treating early signs of heart disease

PREEMPT: Prospective RandomizEd Evaluation and Management of Premature aTherosclerosis
Principal investigator: ***Kevin Anstrom, PhD***

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

Caring for first responders

First Responder Safety and Well-being Amid the Hurricane Helene Response
Principal investigator: ***John Staley, PhD***

EPIDEMIOLOGY

Improving maternal health through perinatal care

From Timing to Quality: Defining quality perinatal care that improves maternal health outcome using data from the LIFE-2 Study
Principal investigator: ***Jaime Slaughter-Acey, PhD***

HEALTH BEHAVIOR

Better data for healthier hearts

Measuring demographic variables across groups to understand cardiovascular health among US adults
Principal investigator: ***Deshira Wallace, PhD***

HEALTH POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

Reducing barriers to ovarian cancer care

Assessing Inequities in Ovarian Cancer Access and Quality Using Big Data
Principal investigator: ***Mya Roberson, PhD***

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

AI to improve maternal health care in Rwanda

Improving CHW provision of MCH using digital/AI tools in Rwanda
Principal investigator: ***Bethany Hedt-Gauthier, PhD***

NUTRITION

Personalized support for healthier diets

Optimizing dietary adherence in a mobile behavioral weight loss intervention for adults
Principal investigator: ***Brooke Nezami, PhD***

PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERSHIP AND PRACTICE

Connecting faith to public health

Public Health and the Faith Communities Curriculum
Principal investigator: ***Karl Johnson, PhD***

UNC CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND SUSCEPTIBILITY RECEIVES $7.7M FROM NIEHS



A walkway spans part of the Crabtree Creek greenway in Raleigh, N.C.

CEHS has three major focus areas, centered around priority areas of strength at UNC-Chapel Hill:

ENVIRONMENTAL CANCER

Understanding how environmental exposures contribute to cancer risk and identifying opportunities for prevention

CARDIOPULMONARY HEALTH

Studying the effects of air pollution, allergens, and heat- and flooding-related exposures on heart and lung health

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND AGING

Investigating how environmental factors influence children's development, pregnancy outcomes, brain health and healthy aging

$7.7M

FIVE-YEAR AWARD FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENCES

The Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility (CEHS) has received a 5-year, $7.7M award from the United States National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). This grant supports research and community engagement to improve environmental health and well-being for people in North Carolina and across the nation.

For 25 years, CEHS has led N.C. research to understand and improve environmental health, including PFAS, air pollution, toxic metals in well water and more. Housed within the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, CEHS is a UNC-Chapel Hill collaborative center that brings together researchers, physicians, public health professionals, educators and community partners from schools, centers and institutes across campus to address pressing environmental health challenges. The center receives institutional support from the Gillings School, UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center and UNC School of Medicine, helping accelerate interdisciplinary research that translates scientific discoveries into improved health for families and communities.

CEHS research spans cutting-edge science – such as using advanced imaging and artificial intelligence to understand how environmental exposures affect health – to hands-on work that directly benefits communities, including helping N.C. respond to environmental disasters like Hurricane Helene.

CEHS serves as an essential hub for environmental health sciences, leadership development and community engagement, with partnerships with more than 20 community organizations. CEHS also trains public health professionals (more than 350 trainings in the past five-year cycle). By continuing this work in the next five years, CEHS will further strengthen collaboration among researchers across UNC-Chapel Hill and with community partners statewide to create healthier communities and a stronger future for generations to come.



"The importance of the environment for human health only grows with each passing year. North Carolinians have unique exposures nationally – from extreme weather to specific types of water and air pollution – and our center works with community stakeholders to design research that responds to statewide priorities."

Melissa Troester, PhD, professor of epidemiology and pathology and laboratory medicine, and director of CEHS



"Standard funding mechanisms cannot move quickly to respond to emerging environmental problems because grant application and funding processes are slow. Through this funding award, CEHS can be nimble and adaptive to changing needs. We can fund rapid responses to disasters or invest in cutting-edge technology that keeps UNC researchers competitive in the national landscape."

Stephanie Engel, PhD, professor of epidemiology and deputy director of CEHS

25

YEARS LEADING N.C. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH

20+

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PARTNERS

350+

TRAININGS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN THE PAST FIVE-YEAR CYCLE

GLOBAL IMPACT IN ACTION



5
CONTINENTS IN WHICH WE WORK

21
COUNTRIES IN WHICH WE WORK

$17.69M
FUNDING FOR RESEARCH WITH GLOBAL COMPONENTS

47
COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN REPRESENTED

42
STUDENTS RECEIVED TRAVEL AWARDS TOTALING $90K+

247
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

42
STUDENTS WHOSE PRACTICUM HAD GLOBAL IMPACT

75
COUNTRIES REACHED THROUGH MPH PRACTICUM WORK

PICTURED Health policy and management student Khadija Lulu Muhammad stands outside the CFK Africa gender desk office during a summer practicum in Nairobi, Kenya.

As **global public health challenges** continue to evolve, the Gillings School remains steadfast in its commitment to improving health and well-being around the world. Through innovative research, transformative partnerships and impactful training opportunities, our faculty, staff and students are advancing solutions that improve lives globally. By engaging with communities and partners across the world, we not only help address pressing health challenges abroad, but also gain insights and lessons that can inform policies, practices and innovations that strengthen public health here in the United States.

This year, we are pleased to welcome **Vivian Go, PhD**, as the new associate dean for global health. Go has spent more than two decades building global research partnerships and advancing evidence-based interventions to address HIV, mental health and substance use challenges around the world. She replaces **Suzanne Maman, PhD**, who this year stepped into the role of chair for the Department of Health Behavior.

Here are just a few snapshots of the Gillings School's impactful work in global health this year.

GLOBAL RESEARCH IMPACT

Inspired by his military experience with permethrin-treated uniforms, **Ross Boyce, MD**, partnered with colleagues in Uganda to adapt the same technology for traditional baby wraps. The result was a remarkable 65% reduction in malaria cases among young children, offering a promising new tool in the fight against one of the world's deadliest diseases. For his groundbreaking work, Boyce was honored with the "Distinguished Clinical Research Achievement Award" by the Clinical Research Forum.

GLOBAL FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Myron Cohen, MD, Yeargan-Bate Eminent Distinguished Professor of Medicine, Microbiology and Immunology at the Gillings School and UNC School of Medicine, was recognized with a Faculty Award for Global Excellence from UNC Global. The award honors his decades of scientific leadership, groundbreaking discoveries and enduring contributions to global health that have improved lives worldwide while elevating Carolina's global reputation. After founding and leading the Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases at UNC for nearly two decades, Cohen also stepped down as director this year, leaving a legacy of groundbreaking HIV research and global health leadership.

PARTNERSHIP AND TRAINING IMPACT

Sustaining and collaborating partnerships with organizations like CFK Africa is key to preparing the next generation of global health leaders. CFK Africa works alongside slum communities in Kenya to transform health systems, empower youth and build local leadership. Over the past several years, CFK Africa has provided in-country training opportunities for more than 10 Gillings students and partnered with our Humanitarian Health Initiative and Bachelor of Science in Public Health in Community and Global Public Health program to engage students in addressing real-world public health challenges. The impact of this partnership is truly bidirectional. For students, training with CFK Africa has strengthened cross-cultural communication skills and reinforced the importance of community-centered approaches in designing sustainable solutions. For CFK Africa, collaboration with Gillings School students has enhanced their capacity for evidence-based programming, informed decision making around nutrition interventions, and provided tools to support program expansion, track activities and strengthen fundraising efforts. Together, this partnership demonstrates how meaningful global collaboration can both enrich student learning and strengthen the health of communities around the world.

IN PICTURES

A YEAR AT GILLINGS

1 Gillings World Fest highlights student cultures from around the world. 2 Health policy and management faculty participate in the Pie-a-Professor event. 3 Dean Nancy Messonnier celebrates at the Gillings Gala. 4 Gillings School representatives talk with community leaders at the Region 5 Academic Health Department meeting. 5 The UNC Pharmacoepi Group gathers at a group event. 6 Gillings School staff get their groove on at the Gillings Gala. 7 The Gillings School community celebrates the retirement of Emeritus Professor Andy Olshan. 8 Gillings School students participate in the Pie-a-Professor event.

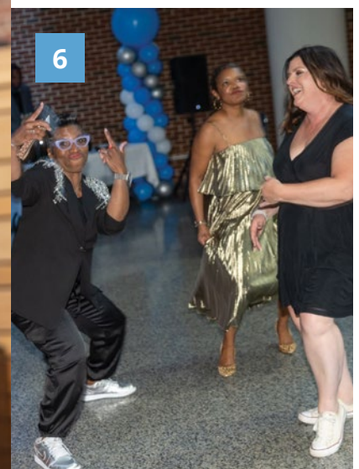


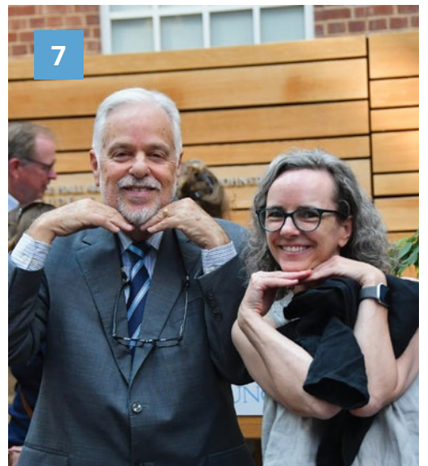








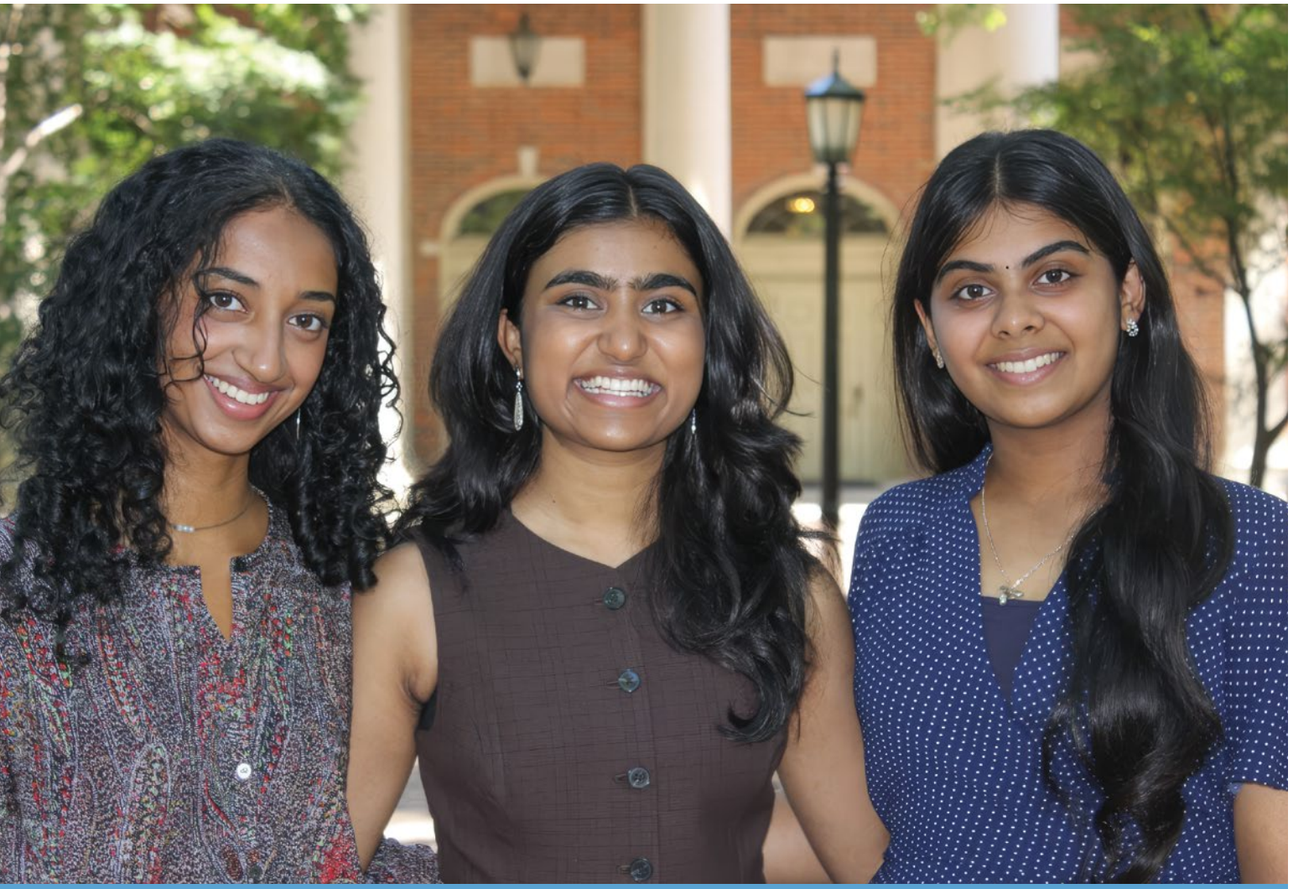






INNOVATION

FROM IDEAS TO IMPACT



The Sensible team: Vrutika Soneji, Nandini Kanthi and Vaishnavi Kode *(Photo by Sirenna Scott, Innovate Carolina)*

Innovation@Gillings brings people and ideas together to advance public health solutions with real-world impact. These efforts are supported by a schoolwide commitment to valuing translation as an essential part of scholarly work. This year, that scholarly commitment helped move discoveries toward application through new licenses, multiple patent filings and the formation of new startups. This included the conclusion of five Gillings Innovation Labs (GILs) focused on generative AI in public health that generated three invention disclosures, a new startup, 15 publications and more than $12 million in external follow-on funding. These projects advanced clinical, community and environmental applications. Student innovators are also contributing to this momentum: Two years after winning the 2024 Gillings Pitch Competition, Sensible (Nandini Kanthi and Vrutika Soneji) has secured more than $175,000 in prize funding, including first place in the ACC InVenture Prize, and begun raising pre-seed investment to grow their venture. We are excited to see what this year's 2026 Gillings Pitch Competition brings in November.

$12M+
EXTERNAL FOLLOW-ON FUNDING FROM FIVE GILLINGS INNOVATION LABS

15
PUBLICATIONS FROM THE GENERATIVE AI LABS

$175K+
PRIZE FUNDING WON BY STUDENT VENTURE SENSIBLE

5
NEW PATENTS FILED

LICENSE ROYALTIES

Couplet Care Bassinet

Royalties now delivered to maternal and child health
Inventors: ***Kristin Tully, PhD***; ***Catherine Sullivan, MPH***; ***Alison Stuebe, MD*** *(MCH); Carl Seashore, MD*

LICENSE ROYALTIES AND FDA APPROVAL

AI-enabled ultrasound technology

Royalties now delivered to biostatistics; FDA approval received
Inventors: ***Jeff Stringer, MD*** *(EPI);* ***Ben Pokaprakarn, PhD*** *(BIOS); Juan Prieto, PhD*

NEW LICENSE

CollectiveGood

Intellectual property licensed to CollectiveGood
Inventor and founder: ***Sean Sylvia, PhD*** *(HPM)*

NEW STARTUP

Blue Nova Group

Will Vizuete, PhD; ***Rebecca Fry, PhD***; ***Julia Rager, PhD*** *(ESE)*

NEW PATENTS FILED

Five patents

Kun Lu, PhD (ESE): four; **Will Vizuete, PhD** (ESE): one

PILOTS

Sorbenta

Patented technology piloted in N.C. municipal drinking water plants and European industrial remediation
Founders: ***Orlando Coronell, PhD*** *(ESE), and Frank Leibfarth, PhD*

GILLINGS INNOVATION LABS CLOSED IN FY26

LLMs for HIV prevention counseling
Lauren Hill, PhD *(HB)*

Gen AI for mobile health messaging

Brooke Nezami, PhD; ***Carmina Valle, PhD***; ***Deborah Tate, PhD*** *(NUTR/HB)*
Reinforcement learning for primary care AI
Sean Sylvia, PhD *(HPM)*
Air quality modeling with AI
Will Vizuete, PhD *(ESE)*

Transforming brain disorder treatment

Hongtu Zhu, PhD *(BIOS)*
Together: three invention disclosures, one startup and large follow-on funding secured.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI MEETS PUBLIC HEALTH



A team works together on Day 3 of the CAIPH Datathon.

Gillings School leads inaugural 'Datathon' to explore new ways AI can generate public health solutions

This spring, the Center for Artificial Intelligence and Public Health (CAIPH) at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health led its first ever AI and Public Health Showcase and Datathon. This three-day event united industry experts, academic researchers, students and local community members through a single challenge: transforming sets of public health data into potential areas of research and innovation using artificial intelligence (AI) to accelerate future health solutions.

The event was a demonstration of what AI can provide, according to CAIPH director **Michael Kosorok, PhD**, W.R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of biostatistics. "With AI, you can ask analysis questions and learn about data in very flexible – almost limitless ways. We're collaborating with people across industry and other spaces to make sure AI is used well to improve health."

"We're not just talking about AI," said **Nancy Messonnier, MD**, dean and Bryson Distinguished Professor at the Gillings School. "We're using it to improve lives in our communities. The datathon reflects enthusiasm of our folks to roll up their sleeves and really see how this technology can be used."

3
DAYS OF SHOWCASE AND DATATHON

6
TEAMS WORKING WITH LARGE PUBLIC HEALTH DATA SETS

2027
NEXT DATATHON, APRIL 8-10

Held at the Gillings School campus, the first day of the event featured opening comments from Chancellor Lee Roberts and a showcase of insights from industry leaders like Chuck Robbins, CEO of Cisco Systems, Amir Rubin, CEO and founding managing partner of Healthier Capital, and Karen Libby, value and transformation lead at Amazon Web Services. Each spoke about the promise that AI holds to improve the public good in collaboration with experts who can approach its use in thoughtful and responsible ways.

"This is a defining moment for global public health, and it's incredibly exciting to see Carolina leading the way," Robbins said in his opening remarks. "I'm so encouraged to see Gillings' commitment to emerging technology to address humanity's most urgent health challenges today and in the future. But with this opportunity and power also comes a critical responsibility to ensure technology is used both ethically and responsibly."

"AI is here whether we want it to be or not," said Kosorok. "It can affect health whether we want it to or not. So, it's our role to make sure it does a good job helping us with that."

Speakers also included Gillings School Dean Nancy Messonnier and UNC Chancellor Lee Roberts, as well as Gillings School faculty who were using AI in their own research and practice, including **Bethany Hedt-Gauthier, PhD**, **Didong Li, PhD**, **Lindsey Smith Taillie, PhD**, and **Noel Brewer, PhD**.

The second and third days of the event saw six teams of participants use selected large public health data sets to approach significant public health challenges using team members' collective expertise and AI tools that could help them accelerate a solution. The two-day challenge, led by CAIPH chief data scientist **Vincent Toups, PhD**, included support from mentors and industry-standard technical resources provided by AWS and the Gillings School. It wasn't just an opportunity to learn and hone AI skills but also an opportunity for many participants to work with teammates from different academic disciplines and training, professional roles, and life experiences.

Kosorok explained that teams used AI to quickly yet thoughtfully analyze data to answer important research questions and to design potential public health solutions. "Today's AI tools allow researchers to move more efficiently, testing various sophisticated questions against the data in novel ways. All of our teams did real science, asking and answering real and important research questions about things like COVID-19 policy impacts, how neighborhood features shape the health of residents of those communities and how to help people understand key factors that significantly affect their health. One team even used AI to help build a functioning mobile app that, in theory, could help individuals find tailored local resources to reduce risk for certain serious health outcomes."

CAIPH, established at the Gillings School in late 2024, has a broad goal to become the premier center for innovation in global public health through AI. The center's interests span multiple domains, with particular attention given to climate and environmental health, health behavior and education, health policy and economics, and precision health. The Datathon is just one example of how the center is taking unique approaches to public health through AI.

"CAIPH is a milestone for the School," said Messonnier. "It was established just over a year ago, and we're really excited that today, with faculty, students, staff and alumni present, we are moving the work forward with tangible examples of how AI is helping us to improve public health, promote individual well-being and eliminate health inequities in North Carolina and around the world."

Mark your calendars! Next year's CAIPH Datathon is scheduled to take place on April 8-10, 2027.

WHERE DO I DO PUBLIC HEALTH

RHODA CERNY

*Take a peek into the office of the multi-talented **Rhoda Cerny**, executive assistant to the chair in environmental sciences and engineering and leader in promoting well-being at the Gillings School.*



1 PLANTS ARE THE BEST MEDICINE T-SHIRT

I ordered this t-shirt from the website of a well-known nutritionist to wear at the plant adoption event we hold twice a year for Gillings students, faculty and staff. I am a big fan of biophilic design and interior plantscaping, as well as maximizing vegetable intake. Plants are the best medicine, inside and out!

2 ADORABLE SLOTH

This is to remind me to slow down, rather than rush or react on emotion or false urgency; a touchstone whose eyes tell me, "Breathe. Take your time. Don't rush. Very little is as urgent as you think. Nothing is more important than your well-being. You only have one life; make it last." It also makes me laugh when I think of the sloth rolling down the window of the red sportscar in Zootopia 2. Laughter is the best medicine, too!

3 MINI MEDITATION DRUM

A pleasant sound to redirect my energy when I realize I am working too frantically without a break. My way of changing the dynamic of my current state through sound by concentrating only on that for a few minutes, followed by a few minutes of whatever kind of self-care I need in that moment.

4 STRING OF PEARLS SUCCULENT

A gift from Angela Lyght, former employee engagement specialist and wellness champion at the School of Pharmacy, in return for leading a mindful meditation session for their staff well-being day. It started out as a tiny cluster of pearls in a 2" pot. This is the first time I have been successful keeping one of these stringy succulents alive and I am so proud of it.

5 PAINTING OF CLAUDE MONET'S BORDIGHERA

This 1884 masterpiece reminds me never to give up on the possibility of achieving my wildest dreams, whether it's having a home high up on a cliff, overlooking the ocean down below in Italy, France or Greece; writing a novel and a memoir; or singing the Mozart Requiem in a massive choir (a dream I had for years and finally achieved twice this year); or anything else that stirs my imagination and my heart.

PRACTICE

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, LASTING IMPACT

The Practice Unit made significant progress in 2026, strengthening practice infrastructure, community partnerships and applied learning opportunities. With **Dorothy Cilenti, DrPH**, stepping into the role of associate dean for practice, the Gillings School continued advancing its vision for practice. Across the school, faculty, staff and students strengthened long-standing and emerging partnerships with communities throughout North Carolina, creating new opportunities for collaboration, workforce development, technical assistance and experiential learning. The Practice Unit also coordinated cross-school engagement related to the N.C. Rural Health Transformation Program, bringing together faculty, staff and partners to identify how the Gillings School can best respond to community priorities.

Together, these efforts exemplify our commitment to turning evidence into action, with active projects now reaching 99 of North Carolina's 100 counties.

99

OF NORTH CAROLINA'S 100 COUNTIES REACHED BY ACTIVE GILLINGS SCHOOL PROJECTS

30+

ACTIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH THE PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIP HUBS

10

COUNTIES WHERE THRIVING HEARTS WORKS TO REDUCE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IN PREGNANCY

2028

THE PRACTICE STRATEGIC PLAN CONCLUDES, WITH THE PCC AND PAC GUIDING PRIORITIES UNTIL THEN

Looking ahead to 2027, the Practice Unit will engage the Practice Committee Council (PCC) and Practice Advisory Committee (PAC) to review progress and guide priorities through the Practice Strategic Plan's conclusion in 2028.



ABOVE Dr. Vaughn Upshaw speaks with community faith leaders during the "Building Bridges Between Faith and Public Health" event.



RIGHT Health policy and management student Emma Llewelyn completed a summer practicum with Durham County Public Health.

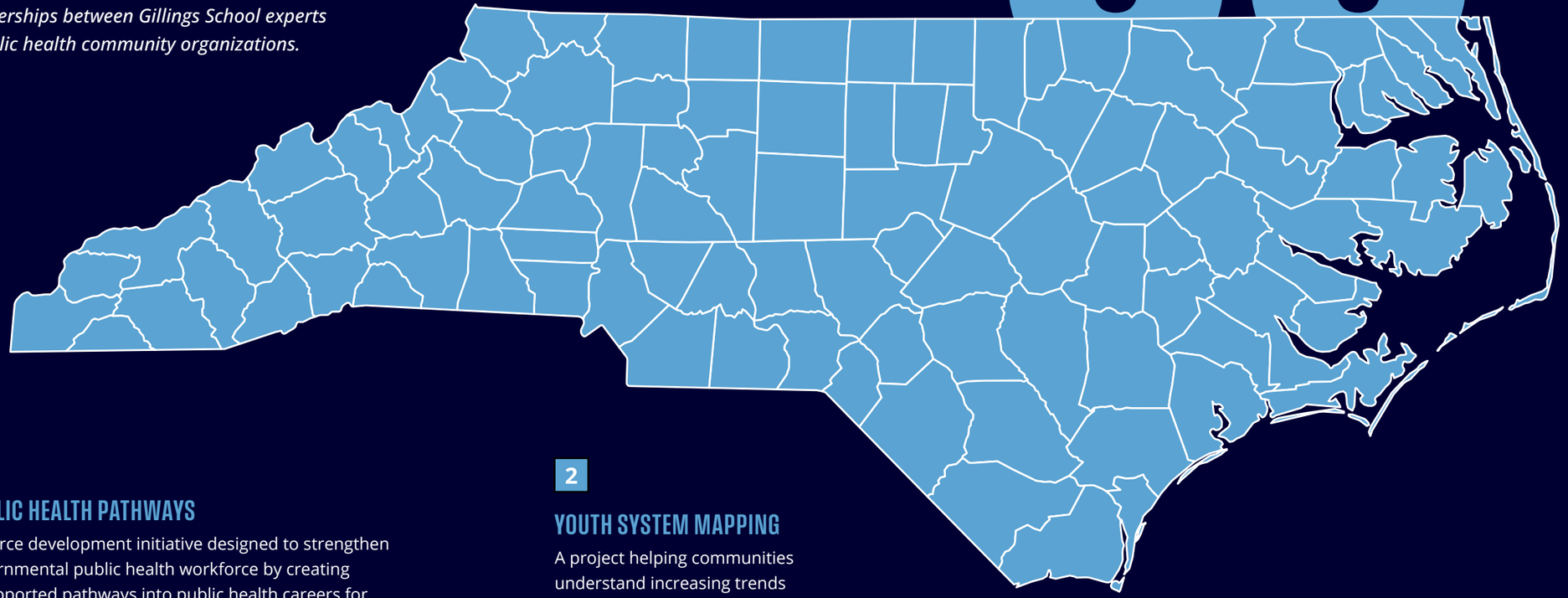
PRACTICE

OUR WORK IN NC

From the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Outer Banks, our work is improving public health across the Tar Heel State. Here are just a few examples of partnerships between Gillings School experts and public health community organizations.

99

OF NORTH CAROLINA'S 100 COUNTIES REACHED BY ACTIVE GILLINGS SCHOOL PROJECTS



1

NC PUBLIC HEALTH PATHWAYS

A workforce development initiative designed to strengthen the governmental public health workforce by creating clear, supported pathways into public health careers for students, recent graduates and early-career professionals.

Led by the N.C. Institute for Public Health and the N.C. Division of Public Health

ALAMANCE • ALLEGHANY • ANSON • ASHE • BEAUFORT • BERTIE • BRUNSWICK BUNCOMBE • BURKE • CABARRUS • CAMDEN • CASWELL • CATAWBA CHATHAM • CHOWAN • CUMBERLAND • CURRITUCK • DARE • DAVIDSON DURHAM • EDGECOMBE • GATES • GRANVILLE • GREENE • GUILFORD • HALIFAX HERTFORD • HYDE • MADISON • MARTIN • MECKLENBURG • NASH NEW HANOVER • NORTHAMPTON • ONSLOW • ORANGE • PAMLICO • PASQUOTANK PERQUIMANS • PERSON • PITT • RANDOLPH • ROCKINGHAM • STANLY TRANSYLVANIA • TYRRELL • VANCE • WAKE • WASHINGTON • WATAUGA

2

YOUTH SYSTEM MAPPING

A project helping communities understand increasing trends in adverse childhood events (ACEs); this work is a foundation for opioid settlement funds strategic planning and is now helping with evaluation.

*Led by **Kristen Hassmiller Lich, PhD**, **Jess Simon, MSW** (HPM), and the Surry County Office of Substance Abuse Recovery*

SURRY

3

GILLINGS SCHOOL + NC FIELD

Community engaged research with organizations struggling with exposure to pollution and limited access to resources, including health care.

*Led by **Elizabeth McClure, PhD** (EPI), **Laura Villa Torres, PhD** (PHLP), **Deshira Wallace, PhD** (HB), **Courtney Woods, PhD** (ESE), and NC FIELD*

DUPLIN • SAMPSON • BLADEN

4

PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIP HUBS

A community engagement initiative that connects Gillings School faculty, staff and students with local public health partners. Through more than 30 active community partnerships, the Hubs advance community-driven public health solutions and provide thousands of hours of student experiential learning.

*Led by **Dorothy Cilenti, DrPH** (MCH), **Meghan Lassiter**, **Katie Hutchinson**, **Nicole Beckwith** and **Kelsey White** (Practice)*

CUMBERLAND • DURHAM • JACKSON

5

THRIVING HEARTS

A local health department-led program to create conditions for pregnant women and moms in N.C. to not only survive pregnancy, but to thrive. Our goal is to reduce rates of high blood pressure in pregnancy in ten N.C. counties.

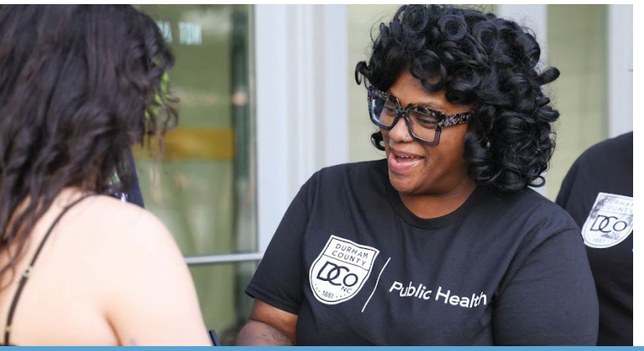
*Led by **Alexandra Lightfoot, EdD** (HB), **Lindsey Yates, PhD** (MCH), **Daniel Westreich, PhD** (EPI), and **Arrianna Marie Planey, PhD** (HPM)*

CHATHAM • ALAMANCE • CASWELL CUMBERLAND • GUILFORD • DURHAM JOHNSTON • ORANGE • FORSYTH • PERSON

COMMUNITY

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH







Mackenzie Christensen, Dr. Makala Carrington, Dr. Melissa Haithcox-Dennis and Dr. Kim Ramsey-White attend the Interfaith America Leadership Summit.

Public trust in science and public health is under strain. Shaped by political polarization, misinformation and real frustrations with how health institutions engage communities, this erosion of trust disproportionately harms communities that already feel unheard, limits the uptake of evidence-based solutions and weakens public health impact.

CAROLINA HEALTH COLLECTIVE

Led by Gillings School faculty **Lindsey Smith Taillie, PhD**, professor of nutrition, and **Karl Johnson, PhD**, assistant professor of public health leadership and practice, the Carolina Health Collective is a cross-campus initiative designed to strengthen connections across diverse communities, policymakers and public health practitioners to rebuild trust and address pressing public health challenges. This initiative is grounded in the belief that rebuilding trust demands humility, honest dialogue about where public health has fallen short and more meaningful engagement across political, ideological and cultural divides. By integrating expertise across public health, communications, policy and civic discourse, the Carolina Health Collective aims to position UNC as a national leader in civic-engaged public health.

The Collective has identified four pillars to support their approach:

- Listening to and partnering with diverse communities (community engagement),
- Actively translating public health science to communities (communication)
- Training students on effective advocacy and policy (policy engagement), and
- Fostering honest discussion about the health challenges shaping our future (public discourse).

This year, the Collective is leading several listening and discussion events across campus, developing several new cross-school courses, and supporting student practicum opportunities.

PRACTICE-IN-PLACE

These efforts reflect a broader commitment at Gillings to strengthening community-engaged public health practice. Alongside the Carolina Health Collective, Practice-in-Place offers another model for translating that commitment into sustained partnerships with communities across N.C. Through Practice-in-Place, students build relationships with community organizations and apply their public health skills in ways that respond directly to community-identified priorities.

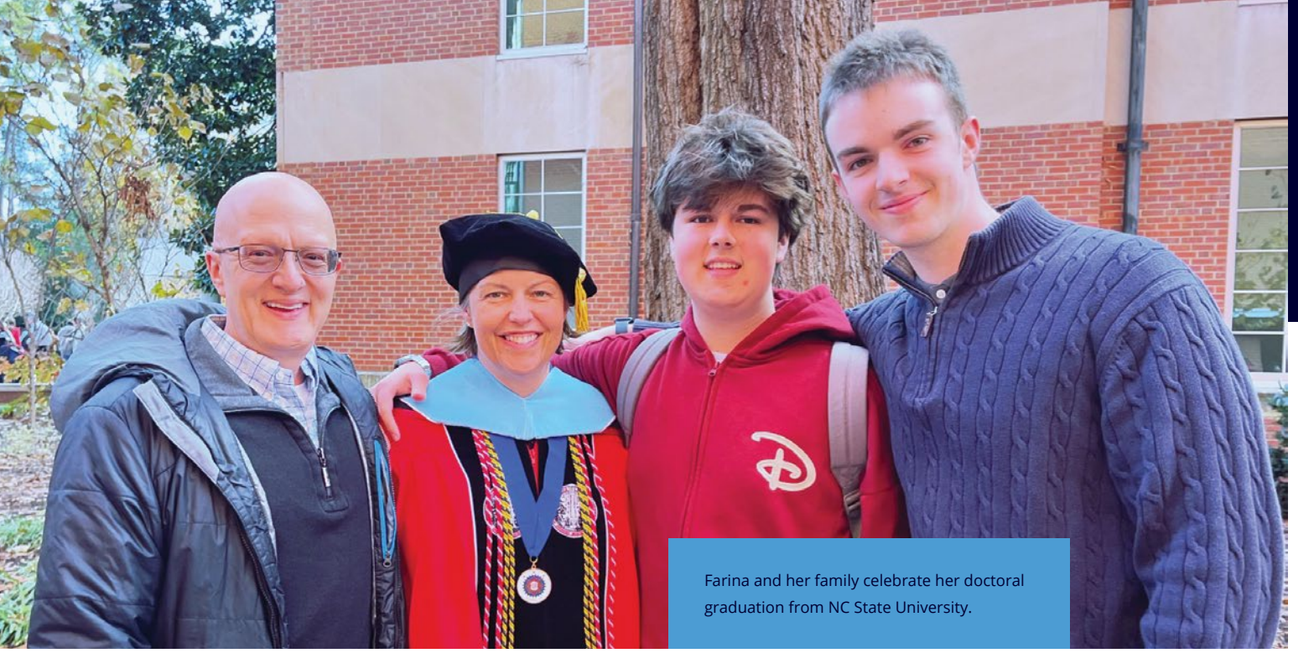
This summer, students from the Gillings School took their learning beyond the classroom through Practice-in-Place, a community-engaged practicum experience developed through the Gillings Public Health and Faith Communities Initiative. Supported by a Faith in Health Professions Campus Grant from Interfaith America and led by **Makala Carrington, DrPH, MDiv, MPH**, director of the Public Health and Faith Communities Initiative, the program strengthens student learning while deepening partnerships with faith and community organizations across N.C.

Rather than asking students to enter communities with predetermined solutions, Practice-in-Place emphasizes partnership, listening and responsiveness to priorities identified by community organizations themselves. Students work alongside faith leaders, nonprofit organizations, community partners and other local stakeholders to apply public health skills while contributing to projects with practical value for the communities they serve.

During Summer 2026, students engaged in projects spanning food access and nutrition, behavioral and mental health, rural community health, social determinants of health, and religious and spiritual literacy in health care and public health practice. Their work included community assessment, qualitative inquiry, resource and toolkit development, curriculum and educational material development, program planning, communications, stakeholder engagement, and other forms of applied public health practice.

PARTICIPATING STUDENTS INCLUDED

- **Maliya Simmons-Marshall** with the North Carolina Council of Churches
- **Isaiah Royal** with Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church
- **Mackenzie Christensen** with Fayetteville State University
- **Morgan Woodard** and **Bella Thomas** with the N.C. Rural Center



Farina and her family celebrate her doctoral graduation from NC State University.

TIFFANY FARINA FINDS CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO KEEP THE GILLINGS SCHOOL RUNNING SMOOTHLY – AND WITHIN BUDGET.

WHAT'S YOUR ROLE IN PUBLIC HEALTH?

I serve the Gillings School as the lead for finance and human resources. In this role, I get to support faculty, staff and students on their professional journeys. I also get to be involved in many aspects of our School's mission, because money and people are needed for virtually everything that we do! Especially now in this time of austerity.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FOCUS AREA IN ONE SENTENCE?

I am a problem solver.

At this point in my career, I don't get involved in transactional work regularly. Most days, people seek out my counsel because they're at a crossroads with a business or personal matter, and they don't quite know how to solve it. I listen to understand the situation and the problem that they are trying to solve, the goals that they have in mind, and then I figure out how I can help in any way possible.

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO PUBLIC HEALTH?

In 2018, my husband and I decided to relocate to N.C. At the time, I worked for the University of New Hampshire. They decided to keep me on through a remote position in which I worked about 15 months. (This was long before remote work was prevalent around the country.) After about a year, I decided it was probably best that I look for a job locally, and there happened to be a director of finance position open at the North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) and the then-Public Health Leadership Program (PHLP). I applied, and I have to say it was one of, if not the, best career move that I have made to date!

I stepped into my current role after my longtime mentor, Katie Thornsvard, left. From the beginning, she coached and counseled me in a way that would help me continue to move along my career path within Gillings. But starting with NCIPH and PHLP was the best possible way to be successful in my current role, because I got to see firsthand the day-to-day operational and strategic issues that individual units and departments face as they're trying to make business decisions.

The Gillings School is and will always be my favorite place on campus. One of the things that I love about the School is that we are very entrepreneurial. Most of campus receives a precisely set budget, and they are managed closely in terms of the job positions they're authorized to recruit for. The Gillings School is not that way. We have figured out how to make do with the budget that we have, and we apportion it in the fairest, most equitable way possible. It's really up to the directors of institutes and the chairs of departments to figure out how to make that money work and how to stretch it. NCIPH is a prime example of that entrepreneurial spirit and the challenges they face — of course, I have a very good understanding of their mission! So, when they and other units come to the School with a problem, I get what they're trying to accomplish and can help fill in the gaps from a strategic School perspective.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU'VE PIVOTED IN YOUR PUBLIC HEALTH CAREER?

The past year seems like it's been nothing but pivoting! The state of higher education is like nothing I've ever seen in my career to date and certainly nothing that I ever thought I would experience. We've navigated significant changes to our financial model, like the ways in which we recruit and retain faculty and staff; our admissions and financial aid processes — those are just the first examples that come to mind. But underpinning all of these issues and all of the pivoting that we've had to do is the strong community that comprises the Gillings School. Supporting one another and remembering why we're here is at the forefront of what I do on a daily basis.

I also recently received my Doctor of Education degree from NC State University. I heard about the degree from our former vice dean, Dr. Taya Jackson-Scott, and I started doing some research into it. Getting a doctorate was never something I thought I would do, but when I learned about the practical application of that type of doctoral program, I knew it was the one for me. I am energized in a classroom, and I love being with people who are motivated and want to think outside the box and better themselves.

It was a ton of work, but I learned so much from my cohort for those three and a half years. And I can't say enough about NC State and its program. They really make it easy for working professionals. The best part is that my doctoral program was focused on community college leadership which enabled me to learn about the Great 58 in N.C. Our community college system is one of the best in the country. They graduate amazing students and we need to figure out how to make it easy for them to transfer to the Gillings School and UNC.

WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME?

I'm a wife, a daughter and a mom to two teenage boys — soon to not-be-teenaged!

Both personally and professionally, I remain very curious about everything. I'm always reading and researching new topics of interest. I like to daydream about different entrepreneurial endeavors, and I may have drafted several different business plans over the years just to see what's possible.

I'm also, affectionately, a Disney adult! I love planning our next trip to the parks. And I have my guilty pleasures, too. I enjoy my share of TikTok and binge-watching the latest series on Netflix.

THE PIVOT

"I AM A PROBLEM SOLVER."

TELLING THE STORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Alana Austin, Khalanie Taylor (Gillings School communications fellows), and Ariella Tal (Gillings School communications graduate research assistant) attend the 2026 Minority Health Conference, "Uniting Words and Worlds."

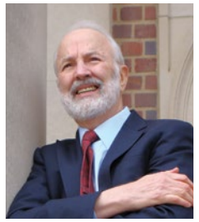
The communications landscape is a fast-moving and ever-shifting one as new tools come online and the popularity of platforms can ebb and flow. This year, we have focused on the growth of our social media channels as well as the creation of agentic AI tools that not only streamline our work, but can also enable researchers to talk about their own work. We have also broadened our efforts to recruit more students pursuing bachelor's degrees in public health, because we've seen that the skills they learn serve them well no matter where their career paths may lead, and being a good communicator is a key to career success.

GILLINGS EXPERTS WERE QUOTED OR MENTIONED IN NEARLY 300 MEDIA ARTICLES ON MANY TOPICS IN 2025 AND 2026, INCLUDING HEALTH POLICY, INFECTIOUS DISEASE, ULTRAPROCESSED FOODS, DIETARY GUIDELINES, OPIOID USE, AGING AND MORE.

300

TOP ARTICLES

The stories with the highest audience views.



The Washington Post

What causes obesity? A major new study is upending common wisdom.

***Barry Popkin, PhD**, quoted*
The Washington Post, July 15, 2025



npr

The MAHA plan for healthier kids includes 128 ideas, but few details

***Lindsey Smith Taillie, PhD**, quoted*
NPR, September 9, 2025



TIME

What Comes After Fentanyl? In a 'Period of Hyper-change,' a New Opioid Is Emerging

***Nabarun Dasgupta, PhD**, quoted*
TIME, September 12, 2025



The Atlantic

The Only Thing That Will Turn Measles Back

***Noel Brewer, PhD**, quoted*
The Atlantic, February 5, 2026



ADVANCEMENT

$24.8M

RAISED IN FY26: $24,775,380. YOUR SUPPORT HELPS ADVANCE PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH, PRACTICE AND EDUCATION!

1,225
DONORS IN FY26

295
FIRST-TIME DONORS IN FY26

$854K
TOTAL UNRESTRICTED GIFTS IN FY26: $853,989

25
NEW FUNDS CREATED: 17 ENDOWED, 8 EXPENDABLE

15
NEW SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS, STUDENT SUPPORT FUNDS

2
NEW PROFESSORSHIPS AND FACULTY SUPPORT FUNDS

Gillings School of
Global Public Health

The best way to provide overarching support for the Gillings School is to make a gift to the Dean's Acceleration Fund.

Make a gift today to support continued excellence in public health education, research and practice at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health.

go.unc.edu/Acceleration

READ THE LATEST CAROLINA PUBLIC HEALTH:

"TAKE CARE"

Across North Carolina, our faculty, students and partners are strengthening trust, expanding access and meeting communities where they are. These stories show what's possible when care is intentional, collaborative and rooted in the needs of people and places.

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