

Virginia Public Health Association

Virtual Annual Conference & Student Research Day

Presenter Biographies



Gov. Ralph Northam, MD

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam has served as the 73rd Governor of Virginia since January 2018. Governor Northam is a native Virginian and received his undergraduate degree from Virginia Military Institute and his MD from Eastern Virginia Medical School. He served as a Major in the Army Medical Corps. Prior to being elected Governor of Virginia, he served in Virginia Senate and as Lieutenant Governor of Virginia.



Margaret Kitt, MD, MPH

Dr. Margaret Kitt is the Deputy Director at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the United States. She shares with the NIOSH Director the responsibility for the Institute's research and program operations. She also oversees the NIOSH Global Health Programs. Dr. Kitt is an Occupational Medicine Physician and has worked for NIOSH since 2002. She was a Senior Flight Surgeon in the U.S. Air Force, serving for 14 years and then spent 16 years in the United States Public Health Service, retiring in 2018 at the rank of Rear Admiral.



Meagan Doran, MS, MPH

Since September 2020, Ms. Doran has served as the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) COVID-19 Coordinator, where she has worked to meet logistical challenges building the VA MRC internal team. In her role, she has on boarded over 35,000 volunteers, equating to an organizational growth of over 300% in 12 months, and has deployed volunteers to over 75,000 individual COVID-19 support missions. Ms. Doran completed Master's degrees in Public Health from George Washington University and International Relations and National Security from Troy University. She has 13 years of experience in healthcare and public health roles including clinical management, quality improvement advisement, and public health specialization.



Dave Bluey, MEd

As a Professor of Practice in the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech, Dave Bluey teaches classes in strategic management, innovative strategies, and various foundational business classes. He has held several senior-level management positions acquiring extensive administrative, management, and leadership experience within the business, public, and non-profit environments. Previously, Dave was an executive for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, holding positions within departments such as marketing, sales, integrated/managed healthcare systems, new product acquisition, strategic planning. He also led the development and implementation of collaborative innovation teams involving pertinent value chain positions in the corporation.



Stephanie Wheawill, PharmD

Dr. Stephanie Wheawill is the Division of Pharmacy Director for the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and has held this position for 3 years. She has led pharmacy efforts in the COVID-19 response, supporting the critical functions within the Virginia Emergency Support Team and the Unified Command for VDH. Prior to being Pharmacy Director, she served as Assistant Director within VDH Division of Pharmacy Services, and has had a total tenure at VDH of over 10 years. Prior to her role at VDH, she worked for several years at VCU Health System in the Ambulatory Care Center, Stony Point Clinic Pharmacy, and Dalton Oncology Pharmacy. She completed a Pharmacy Practice Residency with emphasis on Ambulatory Care in the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. She is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy and Virginia Tech.



Marshall Vogt, MPH

Marshall Vogt serves as the Senior Epidemiologist for the Virginia Department of Health's Division of Immunization. He is responsible for oversight of vaccine-preventable disease surveillance and control activities across the state. During the VDH response to COVID-19, Marshall has served leading the expansion of Virginia's case investigation and contact tracing efforts and the implementation of new data systems for contact tracing. Marshall earned his Masters of Public Health with a concentration in Epidemiology from the University of Georgia. Prior to his current position, Marshall completed an Applied Epidemiology Fellowship with the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists and held jobs in local and state-level public health and hospital infection prevention.



Callie Yakubisin, RD

Callie Yakubisin is a Registered Dietitian with the Dairy Alliance in Richmond, where she provides education to health professionals and consumers on dairy nutrition, the dietary guidelines, and sustainability. She manages partnerships with programs that support hunger relief initiatives in the region and works with media outlets in VA and NC to promote health-related nutrition topics. In her seven years of experience as an RD, she has done extensive nutrition counseling, taught nutrition classes, and worked in clinical settings providing medical nutrition therapy.



Abby Hamilton

Abby Hamilton is a nonprofit Executive with more than two decades of experience developing and empowering high-performing teams to drive transformational social change. She is currently serving as the President and CEO of United Way of Roanoke Valley, and prior to that, the Vice President for Community Impact since 2011. Her life's work has been focused on collective impact, specifically building and growing collaborations among multiple organizations to achieve community-wide outcomes on key issues; and empowering communities to be part of that grassroots effort. Abby has a Master in Nonprofit Management from Regis University in Colorado and a Certificate in Leadership from the Hollins University - Batten Leadership Institute.



Nancy Welch, MD, MHA, MBA

Dr. Welch has served as a public health director in Virginia since 1976. Currently, she is the Director of the Chesapeake Health Department. Her major professional focus is utilizing data analysis as a persuasive motivator for individuals and communities to actively engage in healthier lifestyle habits. She received her degree in Medicine at Duke University and MBA at Old Dominion University. She also completed her Pediatric Residency and Master's of Health Administration at the University of Colorado. She is board certified in both Pediatrics and Public Health/ Preventive Medicine. Dr. Welch is also a Retired Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and has received numerous awards of distinction, including being conferred the Honorary Degree of Doctorate in Science from Lynchburg College in 2014. Dr. Welch's book, "Healing Emotional Wounds—A Story of Overcoming the Long Hard Road to Recovery from Abuse and Abandonment," chronicles the story of her adoption of two Ukrainian children and their struggles to overcome emotional and behavioral challenges.



Lynda Underwood

With 25 years of experience in healthcare administration, Lynda Underwood now serves as the Director of Clinic Operation, Quality, and Risk for the Community Health Center of the New River Valley. She has been with the Center for seven years, working with the mission to implement programs that will promote the highest quality care and services while ensuring the safety and well-being of some of the most vulnerable populations in NRV, especially the past year working in the COVID-19 pandemic. Lynda also serves as the Women's Health Program Coordinator; this program helps expand screenings, preventative services, and awareness for women, emphasizing populations who are less likely to receive routine and preventive care. Lynda is a 1992 graduate of New River Community College's Licensed Practical Nursing program and graduated from Southern New Hampshire University in 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Administration and a minor in Patient Safety and Quality Improvement.



Beth O'Connor, MEd

Beth O'Connor has had the privilege of living and working in rural areas almost her entire life. She earned a Master's Degree in Health Promotion and Education from the University of Cincinnati – the only two years she has lived in a major city.

Ms. O'Connor has had the opportunity to work at a camp for persons with disabilities, a county health department, and a small town transit service. Since 2005 she has served as the Executive Director of the Virginia Rural Health Association (www.vrha.org). A dedicated advocate, she is a past chair of the National Rural Health Association

Government Affairs Committee, has served on the NRHA Board of Directors, and has been selected as the 2021 NRHA President-Elect.



José Ramón Fernández-Peña, MD, MPH

Dr. Fernández-Peña is the director of Health Professions Advising at Northwestern University, where he leads the university's efforts to support students interested in pursuing careers in the health sector. Previously, Fernández-Peña was an associate professor (now Emeritus) and the associate chair in the Department of Health Education at San Francisco State University. His work focused on health workforce diversity and cross-cultural communication in health. Prior to this, he worked at Mission Neighborhood Health Center in San Francisco as director of Health Education, where he managed the health education programs in the HIV, Adult Medicine, Women's, and Teen clinics. Before arriving in California, he was an associate director for quality management at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York City. He is also the founder and executive director of the Welcome Back Initiative, a program to assist immigrant health professionals already living in the U.S. through the necessary steps to enter the U.S. health workforce. He has advised the White House Domestic Policy Council on the economic integration of foreign-trained professionals and has served as an expert panelist on this topic at national and international fora.

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In 2011, he received the "Champion of Health Professions Diversity" award from The California Wellness Foundation and was recognized by the White House as a "Champion of Change" for his work on immigrant integration. He is an active APHA member and has served, among other roles, as Executive Board chair. In 2012, he received the Henry J. Montes President's Award from APHA's Latino Caucus for his work with the Latino community.

Fernández-Peña earned his medical degree from the National Autonomous University of Mexico and his Master's Degree in Public Administration from New York University.



Jeanine D. Guidry, MS, MPS, PhD

Jeanine Guidry is an assistant professor at the Robertson School of Media and Culture at Virginia Commonwealth University, as well as the Director of the Media+Health Lab. Dr. Guidry's research focuses on the use of visual social media and mobile technology in health, risk, and crisis communication and message design. She received her PhD in Social and Behavioral Sciences at Virginia Commonwealth University, her MS in Health Sciences from Maastricht University in the Netherlands, and an MPS in Strategic Public Relations from George Washington University.



Natalie Pennywell, MPH

Natalie Pennywell received her Master of Public Health in health promotion, education, and behavior from the University of South Carolina in 2010. She currently works at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) as the Director for the VCU Health Hub at 25th in the east end of Richmond, Virginia. As the Director, she provides operational and programmatic oversight to the inaugural Health Education and Wellness Center. To deepen and accelerate VCU and VCU Health System's work in promoting health equity and addressing the social determinants of health,

she works collaboratively to help lead the planning, launch, and operation of the Health Hub. She previously worked as the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Division of Community Nutrition in the Virginia Department of Health and as a Community Health Educator in the Crater Health District.



Michelle Rockwell, PhD, RD

Michelle is a Research Assistant Professor with the Fralin Life Sciences Institute at Virginia Tech and a Research Associate with the Department of Family and Community Medicine at Carilion Clinic. Her research focuses on preventive health services, low-value healthcare, and nutrition. She has 20 years of experience as a Registered Dietitian and is a Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics. Carilion School of Medicine, Virginia Tech.



Jeff Stein, PhD

Jeff Stein is an assistant professor in the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at Virginia Tech Carilion. Dr. Stein holds a PhD in Psychology from Utah State University and a Master of Arts in Applied Behavioral Science from the University of Kansas. Dr. Stein is an internationally recognized researcher in health behaviors and lifestyle-related diseases.



Julie Gerdes, PhD

Julie Gerdes is an assistant professor of technical and professional writing and rhetoric. She works at the intersection of technical communication and global public health. Her research examines methodologies for understanding and implementing inclusive risk communication, particularly during public health emergencies. Prior to joining Virginia Tech, Dr. Gerdes spent five years working in global health with the U.S. Agency for International Development based in Washington, DC. There, she was a technical advisor for the Zika response in Latin America and the Caribbean. Dr. Gerdes's research on international risk communication earned the Horne Professors Graduate Achievement Award from Texas Tech University, where she completed her PhD in technical communication and rhetoric. She also holds a master of arts in rhetoric and composition from the University of South Florida.