



## CENTER FOR TRANSLATIONAL BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



### CLINICAL CATALYST AWARD

Dr. Julia Sheffler and colleagues received a **\$50K Clinical Catalyst Award from the Office of the Vice President for Research** to support a new project improving nutrition care for older adults. The team will test how the ICAN (Improving Cognitive Aging through Nutrition) program can be built into everyday care at the Nancy Van Vessem Center for Healthy Aging and examine its effects on patient health. Congratulations to Drs.

Sheffler, Andrea Lobene, Joseph Watso, and Kyle Smith, with special thanks to clinic partner Dr. Cielo Rose for advancing lifestyle-based approaches in geriatric care.

### IDEA GRANT RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to our fantastic students who were awarded a competitive IDEA Grant from Florida State University to support their summer research projects. This grant will support their individual research projects. **Copeland Frazee** and **Jonathan Michel** will be developing their project with Dr. Julila Sheffler in the Integrative Science for Healthy Aging program and **Ariana Chu**, a new volunteer, will be working with Dr. Laura Marks in the GROWTH Lab.



*Left to right: Jonathan Michel, Copeland Frazee, & Ariana Chu*

## Mid-Career Award for Excellence! Dr. Laura Reid Marks



Dr. Marks received the Mid-Career Award for Excellence in Counseling Health Psychology from the Division 17 Health Psychology Section. This recognition highlights Dr. Marks' outstanding contributions to the field of counseling health

psychology and her dedication to advancing research and practice that improve health and well-being.

## Student Spotlight! Jacob Perez

Jacob Perez has been working under the mentorship of Dr. Laura Marks and was recently accepted into the **American Psychological Association's Doctoral Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (MHSAS) Program**.

This highly selective program offers specialized training and is designed to advance professional development in mental health and substance use services.



## TEAM CERTIFICATIONS

### Congratulations to Andrea Cheshure, MS, and Brenda Echeverri, MS



**Andrea Cheshure** and **Brenda Echeverri** earned their Program Evaluation Graduate Certificates from the Florida State University College of Education. Their training strengthened skills in mixed-methods evaluation, data-informed decision-making, and evaluation planning. Brenda will continue to support the NIH ORBIT Institute's evaluation efforts through program assessment and continuous improvement.

### Certified Community Health Worker (CCHW) - Naomi Frederic!



**Naomi Frederic** earned her Certified Community Health Worker (CCHW) credential. This certification strengthens her work at the Center and the Integrative Science for Healthy Aging Program by enhancing her capacity to support culturally responsive, community-oriented research and connect participants with health and social services. Congratulations, Naomi!



## Top Abstract Award at the University of Florida Digital Health Symposium

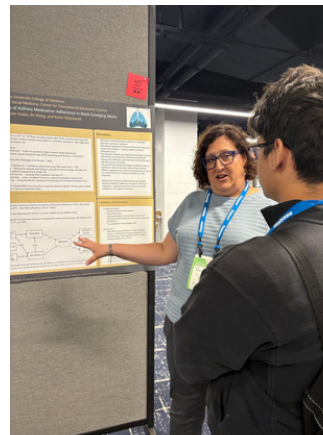
Dr. Laura Marks team's poster titled, "Lessons Learned: Launching a Behavioral Health Micro-Randomized Trial", won the Top Abstract Award "Program Abstract/Descriptive" at the Digital Health Symposium at the University of Florida!



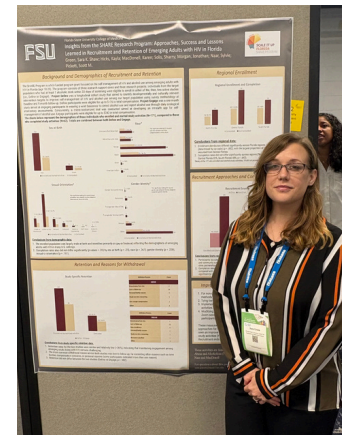
## Society of Behavioral Medicine 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL



Amy Hall and Karen MacDonell



Karen MacDonell & Joe Claudio



Sara Green

**Dr. Amy Hall** and **Dr. Karen MacDonell** presented research at the Society of Behavioral Medicine's 47th Annual Meeting examining factors that influence asthma medication use among Black emerging adults, with a focus on motivation and mental health.

**Sara Green, MSW**, shared findings from the SHARE Program on how to better recruit and retain emerging adults with HIV in Florida, highlighting practical strategies to support engagement.

## Public Health Professions Conference at FSU

**Sharry Anne Solis, MPH**, moderated a dynamic panel on public health advocacy featuring Dr. George Rust, Dr. Shamarial Roberson, and Keisha Jenkins. Great example of leadership in fostering meaningful dialogue and elevating public health service. Well done, Sharry!



## Kentucky Conference on Health Communication in Lexington, KY



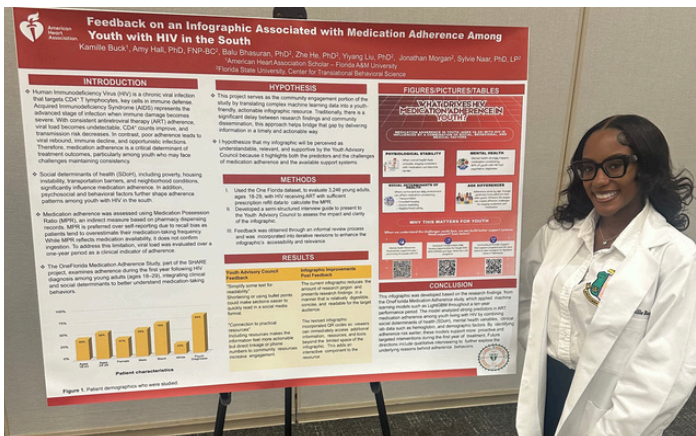
**Sharry Anne Solis, MPH,** presented alongside **Dr. Pooja Ichplani** on community-based participatory re-search approaches to uplift mother survivor stories in Florida.

Outstanding work representing our team and advancing community-based research!



*Pooja Ichplani & Sharry Anne Solis*

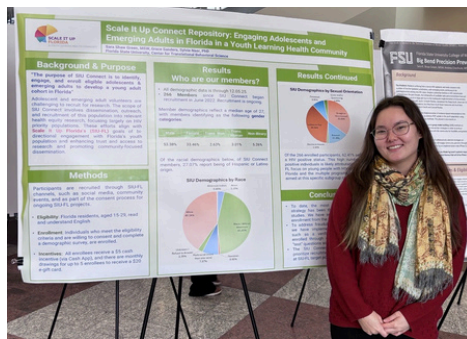
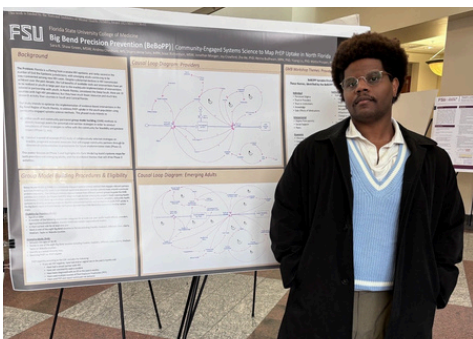
## American Heart Association Poster



**Kamille Buck**, an **American Heart Association Fellow**, presented her research at the **AHA Scholar Program Conference** in Atlanta. Mentored by Dr. Amy Hall and Dr. Sylvie Naar, Kamille used machine learning to better understand HIV medication adherence among young adults in the South, highlighting the role of mental health and access to resources. Congratulations to Kamille and her mentors on this meaningful contribution and on being part of the AHA's 10th cohort.

## FSU College of Medicine 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Research Fair

We are proud to recognize Scale It Up Florida (SIU-FL) team members **Jonathan Morgan** (right), **Isaac Richardson, MSW** (left) and **Grace Sanders** (center) for presenting posters at this year's **FSU College of Medicine Research Fair**. Their presentations highlighted projects focused on improving health outcomes for adolescents and emerging adults across Florida. Poster development was led by Andrea Cheshure, MS, and Sara Green, MSW, with guidance from faculty mentors as well.



## ISL 2026 Student Poster Day

**Dr. Julia Sheffler** participated at the ISL 2026 Student Poster Day hosted by the Institute for Successful Longevity. She joined a distinguished career panel alongside fellow faculty to share insights on building interdisciplinary research careers, securing funding, and creating meaningful impact in aging and longevity science.



## 2026 Southeast Regional Clinical & Translational Science Conference

**Dr. Julia Sheffler** also presented on “Dietary Impacts on Cardio-metabolic and Cognitive Risks for Dementia in Older Adults” at the Southeast Regional Clinical & Translational Science Conference during the Nutrition and Lifestyle session, highlighting the critical intersection of nutrition, cardio-metabolic health, and cognitive aging.

## IN THE COMMUNITY

### CTBScience at the Capital Area Healthy Start Grand Opening

CTBS Community Engagement Specialist **Mama Yata (Trishay) Young** attended the **Capital Area Healthy Start Grand Opening**, representing FSU Health Community Engagement. The event marked the organization’s expanded space and new location, shared with the community.



A highlight of the program was the

dedication of the community room in honor of Ann Graham Davis, recognizing her lasting impact and service. The new space includes a resource area providing essential supplies for mothers, such as diapers.

### CTBScience at Wisdom Adult Care Services



The **Wisdom Adult Care Services** welcomed team members from **Dr. Julia Sheffler**’s program for a meaningful day of service playing bingo with their seniors. The team, including **Naomi Frederic**, **Trinity Sims**, and five other research assistants, spent time engaging with seniors, reminding us how impactful small moments of joy and presence can be for the older adults in our community. Thank you to all volunteers for representing our center so thoughtfully!

## Scale It Up (SIU) Florida, AIDS Walk “Walk a Mile in their Shoes”

Proud to see the **SIU Florida team** come together for the **26<sup>th</sup> annual Tallahassee AIDS Walk: “Walk a Mile in Their Shoes.”** Team members showed up in support of our community, walking alongside partners and advocates to raise awareness and stand in solidarity with those impacted by HIV. Their participation reflects a commitment to reducing stigma, strengthening partnerships, and continuing this important work.



*Ajegbu Okeke*



*James Easton & Jonathan Morgan*



*Left to right: Isaac Richardson, Jonathan Morgan, Andrea Cheshire, Grace Sanders, and Sharry Anne Solis.*

The event also highlighted outstanding community leadership. **Congratulations to Dr. Ajegbu Okeke of Bond Community Health Center** for receiving the Robert “Bobby” Wilson Humanitarian Award in recognition of his dedication and service. **Jonathan Morgan** presented this year’s Special Recognition Awards, a meaningful celebration of James Easton and Larenza (“Zay”) for their contributions through their commitment, compassion, and impact in our local community and beyond.

We are grateful for a team that shows up with purpose, compassion, and commitment to the communities we serve.

## CTBScience Team Updates

### Welcome new team members!

**Rafael Beltroy** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Ariana Chu** *GROWTH Lab*  
**Joseph Claudio** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Giancarlo Felix** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Jada Hewitt** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Maria Mankin** *Integrative Science for Healthy Aging*  
**Alexandra Rea** *Integrative Science for Healthy Aging*  
**Velan Thanasekar** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Sharon Warrior** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Dinuki Wickramanayake** *Integrative Science for Healthy Aging*

### Thank You & Farewell!

**Jayda Bass** *Integrative Science for Healthy Aging*  
**Jordan Patrick** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Svannah Gayle Phillips** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Abhinav Ankem** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Kiari Johnson** *Young Adult Health Program*  
**Emily Marie Barlow** *iRACE Lab*

## CTBScience Publications Highlights

### Motivational Interviewing Training for HIV Counseling

Researchers are developing and testing an interactive online training program called iMI4HIV to help HIV counseling support staff strengthen their motivational interviewing (MI) communication skills. MI is an evidence-based approach that helps individuals explore and strengthen their motivation to make positive health-related changes, such as engaging in HIV care and adhering to treatment.

The study includes the development of training videos, interactive learning activities, and gamified components designed to support skill-building in real-world HIV care interactions. In a pilot randomized controlled trial, the research team will evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary impact of the program on participants' MI skills. If successful, the program could provide an accessible and scalable way to enhance communication and support services across HIV care settings, with the long-term goal of improving patient engagement and care outcomes.

**Balán IC, Brewer OR, Kutner BA, Giguere R.** Interactive Internet-Based Motivational Interviewing Training for HIV Counseling Support Staff to Improve Health Communication in HIV Care Interactions: Protocol for Training Development and a Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial. *JMIR Res Protoc.* 2026;15:e82241. Published 2026 Jan 7. Doi:10.2196/82241



Click the citations to see full article.

### Aging, Nutrition and Brain Health

This study explored how obesity may influence brain health, gut health, and cognitive function in older adults. Researchers examined adults ages 55–85 who participated in a 10-week dietary education program focused on either a Mediterranean Diet or a Modified Mediterranean-Ketogenic Diet. The study investigated how body composition, gut bacteria, and metabolism were connected to memory and thinking abilities.

Participants with obesity had less healthy gut bacteria patterns and performed worse on tests related to memory and thinking skills. For those with obesity, losing body fat was linked to improvements in memory and mental flexibility. In older participants, gaining muscle mass was also connected to better cognitive performance.

Overall, the study suggests that diet, body composition, and gut health may all affect brain health as people age. The findings highlight the potential importance of maintaining healthy nutrition, muscle mass, and gut health to support memory and cognitive function in older adulthood.

Patoine, C., **Sheffler, J.**, Sims, T., Gutierrez, V., Park, G., Mayonu, M., ... Nagpal, R. (2026). Obesity-associated gut microbiome influences diet-induced metabolic and cognitive outcomes in older adults. *Gut Microbes Reports*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/29933935.2025.2605879>



## CTBScience Publications Highlights (cont.)

### Youth-Centered HIV Self-Management and Care Innovations

Young people with HIV were able to successfully use a mailed home test kit to collect blood samples for viral load monitoring. Most found it easy and acceptable. Support from clinics, clear instructions, insurance coverage, and reliable mail services helped participation. Barriers included housing instability, cost concerns, and mail delivery issues. Overall, home testing shows promise for making HIV monitoring more accessible, especially through virtual care models.



Gurung, S., **MacDonell, K.**, Sizemore, K. M., Ferraris, C. M., & **Naar, S.** (2026). An Examination of Perceptions and Usage of Dried Blood Spot Biosampling Technology for HIV Viral Load Collection Among Youth with HIV. *AIDS and behavior*, 10.1007/s10461-026-05154-x. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-026-05154-x>

### Adolescent Health & Cardiovascular Disease Risk

This study looked at how substance use during the teenage years may affect heart health later in life. The team found that substance use among teens was fairly common, with about one in four reporting binge drinking or smoking, and a smaller portion using marijuana. Additionally, teens who used substances were more likely to face a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (heart disease) as adults. The findings suggest that substance use during adolescence doesn't just have short-term effects, but it can also impact long-term heart health.



**Addo PNO**, Brown MJ, Gupta RD, Apreku A, Xavier Hall CD and **Naar S** (2026) Substance use in adolescence is associated with future cardiovascular disease risk: findings from the national longitudinal study of adolescent to adult health. *Front. Nutr.* 13:1808382. doi: 10.3389/fnut.2026.1808382

Another study by Dr. Prince Addo examined how poor sleep, depressive symptoms, and substance use during adolescence may affect the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD) later in adulthood. Using data collected over several years from a large national health study, researchers found that adolescents with poor sleep health who also used substances had a significantly higher risk of future cardiovascular disease compared to those with poor sleep health alone. The study suggests that sleep problems and substance use together may have long-term effects on heart health. Early prevention efforts focused on improving sleep and reducing substance use in adolescents could help lower future cardiovascular disease risk.



**Addo, P.N.O.**, Liese, A.D., Zhang, J. et al. The association of adolescent sleep health, depressive symptoms, and substance use with future cardiovascular risk: a marginal structural model analysis. *Discov Public Health* 23, 528 (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12982-026-01719-2>