

# Spotlight on Mental Health

Lister Hill Center for Health Policy, Fall 2021

## Overview

The mission of the Lister Hill Center for Health Policy (LHC) is to connect and support those seeking to improve health outcomes through policy. Our aims include enhancing opportunities for policy collaboration through education, creating opportunities for dissemination of information, providing reputable data sources for academic research, and empowering students and community leaders to affect policy change. In 2019 the LHC hosted its first Semester Spotlight, a semester-long seminar series centered around a particular topic at the intersection of public health and public policy.

With Semester Spotlight, we provide public health professionals, students, policymakers, and community members with the opportunity to explore a public health issue and its policy implications. Our most recent Semester Spotlight – Fall 2021 – centered around mental health. Together with our partners, the LHC hosted eight events focusing on mental health and policy. Below is a summary of each event, followed by engagement statistics for each event.

## Mental Health Events

### August 31, Reporting Back: The COVID-19, Race, and Students and Postdoctoral Fellows Mental Health Study (Part One)

The COVID-19, Race, and Mental Health Study conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups with UAB students leading up to and during the 2020-2021 academic year. The study sought to uncover how students are coping with the pandemic and social issues around race and identify how UAB might better support the mental health of students. Drs. Robin Lanzi, Lisa Schwiebert, and Angela Stowe presented some of their initial findings.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/yoYCaUuLPjg>

### September 8, Exploring Mental Health

Program Manager Sean McMahon sat down for a conversation with Amber Martin, national certified counselor and PhD student in the department of Health Behavior, about the different facets of mental health and wellbeing.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/5mXiPDBIDek>

### September 22, Okanagan Charter & UAB's Role as a Health Promoting University

In 2020, UAB became the first institution in the United States to adopt the Okanagan Charter and become an internationally recognized Health Promoting University. Health Promoting Universities are an international community that aspires to transform the health and sustainability of current and future societies, strengthen communities, and contribute to the well-being of people, places and the planet. Dr. Rebecca Kennedy, Assistant Vice President for Student Health and Wellbeing, presented on what the Okanagan Charter means for UAB.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/-8j5yQFDHjw>

### October 12, EACC Resources

Attendees learned more about the mental health resources available to UAB employees!

### October 26, Head Trauma and Brain Health, Protecting the Mind for Years to Come

Thirty years ago, it was not uncommon for children and adults to have head injuries in which they lost consciousness only to “wake up” and be told to walk it off. Today we know these concussions can lead to issues with cognitive function and mental health into adulthood. There are many ways to ensure the brain will stay healthy as we age, and we covered what is currently known about the science of maintaining strong cognitive health.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* [https://alumni.uab.edu/head\\_trauma](https://alumni.uab.edu/head_trauma)

### October 27, Lay Health Worker Approaches for Addressing Mental Health Challenges in Populations Affected by HIV in Kenya

Dr. Ongeru is a Medical Research Scientist in the Centre for Clinic Research with Kenya Medical Research Institute. In this webinar, she shared her experiences working in the mental health field in Kenya.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/aPsbXKc5pko>

### November 16, Reporting Back: The COVID-19, Race, and Students and Postdoctoral Fellows Mental Health Study (Part Two)

The COVID-19, Race, and Mental Health Study, supported mainly by a back-of-the-envelope award from the School of Public Health, conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups with UAB students leading up to and during the 2020-2021 academic year. The study sought to uncover how students are coping with the pandemic and social issues around race, and identify how UAB might better support the mental health of students. Join us to hear more about the study, and its implications for UAB policies, from Drs. Robin Lanzi, Lisa Schwiebert, and Angela Stowe shared more about the study and its implications for UAB policies.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/Y4ByQ64fEJK>

### November 17, Identifying & addressing mental health disorders among adolescents in Lusaka, Zambia

Dr. Carolyn Bolton Moore is a South African physician who has been living and working in Zambia since 2004. Dr. Moore is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Infectious Diseases at the UAB School of Medicine.

*Link to Recorded Webinar:* <https://youtu.be/1KlfnzmGlb0>

## Mental Health Publications

### Student Mental Health at UAB

*Excerpt:* The mental health of college students has been of growing concern in the past couple of years. A survey conducted by Dr. Sarah Ketchen Lipson in 2020 revealed that half of the students that were surveyed presented symptoms of depression or anxiety and at least 83% said that their mental health

was negatively impacting their academic success (McAlpine, 2021). With increases in mental health issues in students across college campuses, it is necessary for university administrations to implement policies, programs, and services which address this.

Link to Article: <https://www.uab.edu/listerhillcenter/publications/blog/168-student-mh-uab>

### Incorporating Mindfulness in Schools

*Excerpt:* Being mindful about your day and your emotions helps you become more aware of your thoughts. Researches Tang, Holzel, and Posner have shown that mindfulness practices contribute significantly towards improving physical and mental health; it also helps us improve our cognitive processes. It has also further shown that meditative practices promote awareness, attention, emotion regulation, and self-awareness. Not only does meditation improve these functions, but it also causes physical changes in the brain. Furthermore, the “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Change in Health Related Behaviors” study found the impact of mindfulness on health behaviors has shown that mindfulness enhances dietary choices, physical activity, and sleep quality. Not only does mindfulness promote mental health, but it also positively influences healthy behaviors.

Link to Article: <https://www.uab.edu/listerhillcenter/publications/blog/172-incorporating-mindfulness-in-schools>

### Policy Review: Medicaid Expansion's Impact on Mental Health

*Excerpt:* Medicaid Expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) allowed for more people to be considered eligible for Medicaid. The expansion would ease some of the guidelines that would make Medicaid more inclusive and increase the number of people who qualify for Medicaid. However, Alabama remains one of twelve states who have yet to expand Medicaid even as most states in the northeast and west and adopted and implemented the expansion already.

Link to Article: <https://www.uab.edu/listerhillcenter/publications/blog/174-policy-review-medicaid-expansion-s-impact-on-mental-health>

## Engagement Statistics

On average, each spotlight event had 32 attendees, with a total of 253 participants across the eight events. The table below provides data on the number of registrants, attendees, and YouTube views as of November 19. Attendee reports are available upon request.

Date	Event (short title)	Registered	Attended	Post-event Views
8/31	Reporting Back Part 1	76	48	43
9/8	Exploring Mental Health	62	34	71
9/22	Okanagan Charter	41	23	55
10/12	EACC Resources	8	n/a	n/a
10/26	Head Trauma	205	88	43
10/27	Mental Health in Kenya	21	9	7
11/16	Reporting Back Part 2	35	26	1
11/17	Mental Health in Zambia	37	20	4