

OPUS II Workshop Day 1 Speaker Bios

October 9, 2024

Keynote Speaker



Erin Hennessy, PhD, MS, MPH, is dean for research strategy, associate professor, and director of ChildObesity180 at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Dr. Hennessy is an action-oriented behavioral nutrition scientist who has focused her career on helping all families and children, especially those most in need, eat better, move more, and achieve a healthy weight. As director of ChildObesity180, Dr. Hennessy and her team conduct innovative research through multisector partnerships and deep community engagement to address the complex drivers of child health and promote nutrition equity. Before being appointed to the faculty at Tufts, Dr. Hennessy was a senior behavioral scientist at the

National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health. During her tenure at NIH, Dr. Hennessy received numerous awards for her excellence in research and leadership. Dr. Hennessy has significant cross-sector experience ranging from industry to government to academia and uses this perspective to inform her research.

Engaging Communities Through Collaborative PSE Strategies



Juliana Cohen, ScD, MSc, is a professor of nutrition and director of the Center for Health Inclusion, Research, and Practice at Merrimack College and an adjunct professor of nutrition at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. Dr. Cohen is an internationally recognized expert on school nutrition policies and interventions, with nearly two decades of experience collaborating with diverse school districts. Her research centers on the identification, evaluation, and dissemination of effective school nutrition policies and initiatives to address diet-related disparities and reduce the risk of obesity among children. Her school-based research has been used by the U.S. Community

Preventive Services Task Force to develop recommendations for school meal policies, and was cited as evidence in the United States Department of Agriculture's proposed rules for the updated school meal standards. Dr. Cohen has a doctorate in nutrition from the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, where she also received a master's degree in society, human development, and health.



Jessica Stroope, PhD, MPH, is the Healthy Communities physical activity specialist and research associate for the Louisiana State University AgCenter. She works with Extension agents and community coalitions across Louisiana to improve walkability and increase access to physical activity opportunities. Dr. Stroope serves on the state Complete Streets Advisory Council, which provides accountability for the implementation of the Louisiana Compete Streets policy. She has an MPH from Baylor University and a PhD in kinesiology from Louisiana State University, with research focused on active transportation and community participation. She's a bike commuter and can be heard discussing curb cuts with her children and husband on a regular basis.



Yvonne D. Greer, DrPH, RD, CD, is an adjunct professor at Mount Mary University, a field experience preceptor for Milwaukee Area Technical College's Nutrition and Dietetic Technician Program, and an annual guest lecturer at Marquette University. She also leads Milwaukee County Organizations Promoting Prevention, a multidisciplinary health promotion coalition, and functions as Milwaukee director of community engagement for two multiyear CDC grants. Dr. Greer is owner of Y-EAT Right, Nutritional Consultant for Healthy Living. She is credited with 32 peer-reviewed abstracts and additional publications that span her 45-year career. Dr. Greer is a graduate of the Milwaukee Public School System and has earned a BS in dietetics and experimental foods from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and an MPH in public health nutrition from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Most recently in 2022 after a 22-year career as chief nutritionist for the City of Milwaukee Health Department, she completed her DrPH through Walden University.

Building Bridges Across Sectors: Integrating Whole of Community Actors in PSE Interventions



Jamie F. Chriqui, PhD, MHS, is senior associate dean and professor of health policy and administration in the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She also directs health policy research for the Institute for Health Research and Policy at UIC. Dr. Chriqui has over 33 years of experience conducting public health policy research, evaluation, and analysis. She is considered a national expert on policy surveillance and on evaluating laws and policies and their impact on communities, systems, and population health with an emphasis on chronic disease issues including obesity, nutrition,

physical activity, substance abuse, and tobacco control. She currently co-directs the CDC's Physical Activity Policy Research and Evaluation Network and is an advisor for numerous federal, foundation, and nonprofit organizations. Dr. Chriqui holds a BA in political science from Columbia University, an MHS in health policy from Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, and a PhD in policy sciences with a health policy concentration from the University of Maryland in Baltimore County.



Brian E. Saelens, PhD, is a professor of pediatrics and psychiatry & behavioral sciences at the University of Washington and principal investigator at Seattle Children's Research Institute. He is the associate head of research in the Division of General Pediatrics at UW and co-leads the Integrating Special Populations program as part of the Institute of Translational Health Sciences. Dr. Saelens is trained as a child clinical health psychologist. His research interests include obesity treatment and prevention, with a focus on family-based pediatric weight management interventions and the examination of policy, systems, and environmental influences on healthy eating and active living. He is interested in the application of equity frameworks to research and to policy, systems, and environment change implementation.



Deborah Parra-Medina, PhD, MPH, is executive director of the Center for Health Equity and professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Dr. Parra-Medina's areas of expertise and experience span over 25 years in health promotion, public health epidemiology, health disparities in chronic disease, participatory research methods, and community-based interventions among underserved and minoritized populations. She has disseminated her research in over 120 published articles and has presented extensively at national and international conferences. In 2016, she was inducted as a Fellow of the American Academy of Health Behavior. She received the 2013 American Public Health Association Mayhew Derryberry Award for outstanding contributions to research in the behavioral sciences. Dr. Parra-Medina currently serves as editor-in-chief for the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* and is an editorial board member for several scholarly journals. She received a BA from the University of California Berkeley, an MPH in health promotion from San Diego State University and a PhD in epidemiology from the University of California, San Diego.



Melissa Laska, PhD, RD, has spent the past two decades leading a multifaceted research portfolio with the goal of realizing our potential to support communities – particularly those that have been historically under-resourced – in their autonomy to make healthy choices, including healthy food choices. Her interdisciplinary work has been supported by NIH, CDC, and USDA, and she has co-authored nearly 200 peer-reviewed publications to date. Dr. Laska’s work has been cited more than 8,000 times in scholarly journals published in 28 languages from researchers in more than 120 countries. Her published work has been used in key recommendations and reports from

organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, American Public Health Association, Office of the Surgeon General, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The University of Minnesota Office of the Vice President and Provost awarded Dr. Laska with the 2019 Sara Evans Faculty Woman Scholar and Leader Award in recognition of her accomplishments. In 2020 she was named Distinguished McKnight University Professor.

Keynote Speaker



Amy Carroll-Scott, PhD, MPH, is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Community Health and Prevention at the Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health. Her research focuses on understanding and addressing urban health inequities and underlying social inequities, consisting of social epidemiological and mixed methods studies applied to the lived experience of urban neighborhoods and schools. She serves as an investigator on multiple projects, including the Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative and three NIH-funded studies. She received her MPH from UC Berkeley, her PhD from UCLA, and was a postdoctoral fellow at Yale School of Public Health,

where she was the director of research for the Yale Community Alliance for Research and Engagement. She founded the annual Day of Action of the American Public Health Association and co-leads the Maternal and Child Health Program at Drexel School of Public Health, the cross-institutional Philadelphia Maternal and Child Health Collaborative, and the Drexel Community-Engaged Research Working Group.

Making it Happen: Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating PSE Interventions



Laurie Whitsel, PhD, is a recognized leader in policy, research, and translation. Currently she serves as the national vice president of policy research for the American Heart Association, where she helps to translate science into policy at a national level in the areas of cardiovascular disease and stroke prevention and health promotion. She is also the senior advisor to the Physical Activity Alliance. She has served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations and currently serves on the board of directors for the American Council on Exercise. Dr. Whitsel has published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles on public health, cardiovascular health, and health promotion. In 2023,

Dr. Whitsel was recognized as one of “The Most Influential Women Leaders in Health Promotion” and was recently given the Mark Dundon Research Award by the Health Enhancement Research Organization. Her PhD is from Syracuse University, and she is a fellow and member of the AHA’s National Scientific Council on Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health.



Brian Elbel, PhD, MPH, is an associate dean at Research Mission at NYU Langone Health and professor of population health and health policy at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. He also directs the section on health choice, policy and evaluation at NYU Grossman. Dr. Elbel examines how policies and the environment influence health and health behaviors, particularly obesity and chronic disease, for children and adults. Throughout his research, he seeks to understand how social determinants create differences in outcomes across race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and how policy can be leveraged to reduce these differences. His research has been funded

by the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Science Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. His work has been featured in national television, radio, and print media. Dr. Elbel earned his BA from The University of Texas at Austin, and MPH and PhD in health policy/health economics from Yale University.



Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, PhD, is professor of public health, and director of the Office of Public Health Practice, the Global Health Concentration, and the Maternal Child Health Promotion track at the Yale School of Public Health. He is also the PI of the Yale-Griffin CDC Prevention Research Center (PRC). He has published over 360 research articles, 3 books/monographs, and numerous journal supplements, book chapters, and technical reports. He was elected to the U.S. National Academy of Medicine in 2019 and was honored by the Universidad de Guadalajara with the title of Doctor Honoris Causa in 2016. He has been a senior advisor to maternal-child community nutrition programs as well as household food security projects from

organizations such as the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the World Bank. He obtained his BS in chemical engineering from the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and an MS in food science, PhD in nutrition, and postdoc in early childhood development from the University of California at Davis.



Angela Trude, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University. She is a nutritional epidemiologist with strong training in community-based interventions. Dr. Trude generates and tests culturally inclusive, theory-informed interventions for a more equitable food system that supports healthy diets and food security, improves obesity-related outcomes, and ultimately ensures the thriving of children and their families, irrespective of their socioeconomic background and cultural identity. Her research extends beyond conventional nutrition education by not only addressing individual-level behaviors but also

delving into household-, community-, and policy-level interventions acknowledging that healthy food access and acquisition play an important role in food and nutrition security and the prevention of diet-related chronic diseases.

Critical Reflections on the Future of PSE Intervention Methods



Allison E. Karpyn, PhD, is a professor at the University of Delaware and co-director of the Center for Research in Education and Social Policy (CRESP). An accomplished author, she has written two books on food and food policy topics and is recognized for her extensive research in public health, nutrition, and education policy. Her work often focuses on improving access to healthy food and translating research into actionable policy initiatives. She also maintains strong community connections and engagement in the communities where she works. In addition to her position at the University of Delaware, she is a fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Public Health Initiatives. Dr.

Karpyn earned her BA in public health at Johns Hopkins University and her doctorate in policy research evaluation and measurement at the University of Pennsylvania.



Bill Dietz, MD, PhD, chairs the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness and the STOP Obesity Alliance at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. He is the director of Research and Policy of the Global Food Institute founded by José Andrés at George Washington University. Previously, he served in leadership roles at the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at CDC, Tufts University School of Medicine, and Floating Hospital of New England Medical Center Hospitals. Dr. Dietz has also worked with organizations such as the American Society for Clinical Nutrition; the North American Association

for the Study of Obesity; Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee; the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism, and Diabetes of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research; and the Lancet Commission on Obesity. He received his BA from Wesleyan University, his MD from the University of Pennsylvania, and a PhD in nutritional biochemistry from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is the author of over 300 publications in the scientific literature and the editor of five books, including *Clinical Obesity in Adults and Children* (4th edition) and *American Academy of Pediatrics Nutrition: What Every Parent Needs to Know*.



Christina Economos, PhD, is the dean at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, where she is a professor and the New Balance Chair in Childhood Nutrition. Dr. Economos currently serves as the principal investigator on multiple large-scale, community-based interventions that examine childhood nutrition and physical activity with the goal of improving the health of all of America's children. Her bio-behavioral research studies are interdisciplinary and include theory-based obesity prevention interventions, cutting edge systems science, and partnerships with

diverse populations in urban and rural communities in schools, out-of-school environments, childcare centers, and restaurants. She has authored more than 200 scientific publications. She serves as vice chair of the Roundtable on Obesity Solutions (ROOS) at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine in Washington, D.C., a multisector group tackling obesity. Dr. Economos received a BS from Boston University, an MS in applied physiology and nutrition from Columbia University, and a PhD in nutritional biochemistry from Tufts University.