

UConn
HEALTH

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
HEALTH SCIENCES

March - May

PUBLIC HEALTH HAPPENINGS

Preparing Leaders for a Healthier Tomorrow

Healthy Minds, Summer Vibes

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Note from... **THE DIRECTOR**



As we wrap up another academic year, things are moving incredibly fast. Between finishing up projects, wrapping up research, and watching practicum experiences come to life, March through May always feels like a whirlwind. It is an exciting stretch, but it moves so quickly that it is easy to start staring at what's next on the horizon before we've even had a second to appreciate where we are right now.

Looking back at the last few weeks, we have celebrated some really meaningful milestones together. At Commencement, we got to recognize the sheer grit, hard work, and growth of our graduates. Our student speaker, Michael Raizin, gave fantastic remarks that hit on exactly what defines public health, things like resilience, service, and an actual, genuine commitment to making people's lives better.

We also got to clear our heads and catch our breath at the graduation dinner. That night felt especially meaningful this year because we welcomed our first student speaker for the event, Lucinda Felix. The evening was a great reminder that while degrees and accolades are important, the real value is in relationships, the late-night mentorship, and the community we build along the way. Public health has always been about people, and moments like these reinforce that our program is strengthened not only by what we achieve individually, but by how we support one another collectively.

Spring always brings a lot of talk about "renewal" and "growth," but honestly, when you're stuck in the middle of the semester, you usually don't feel like you're growing; you just feel busy. We are used to measuring our success by big, loud milestones: a finished thesis, a presentation, a new job, or a degree. But a lot of the real growth in this program happens quietly. It happens when you survive a tough conversation, stick with a project when you want to quit, step up to lead, or just keep showing up for your peers when things get stressful.

Before we all scatter for the summer and dive into whatever comes next, I hope you'll take a beat to look back at how much you've actually done. Progress is rarely a straight line, and it doesn't always look dramatic, but it is happening.

Summer Semester 2026

Mon, May 11 - Fri, Aug 28	Summer Spanning term
Mon, July 13 - Fri, Aug 14	Summer Session 2
Thu, June 11	Deadline to apply for graduation and to submit Final Plan of Study for conferral of a Summer 2026 degree
Mon, Aug 10	Last day to upload final Master's thesis or Doctoral dissertation to the university-supported repository and submit related paperwork to Degree Audit (degreeaudit@uconn.edu) for conferral of a Summer 2026 degree. It is recommended that students defend at least two weeks prior to this deadline to allow for revisions. Doctoral dissertation defense must be announced two weeks prior to defending. Plan A master's students are not required to announce their defense.
Mon, Aug 24	Conferral date for Summer 2026 degrees. Final examinations for Plan B Master's students must be completed by this date.
Fri, Sep 4	Last day for Degree Audit (degreeaudit@uconn.edu) to receive the approved Plan B Master's Report on the Final Exam form.

Fund the Future, One Student at a Time.

Donate today.



DEPARTMENT NEWS



CPHA CONFERENCE 2026



The Connecticut Public Health Association Annual Conference, held on March 10th at University of Saint Joseph, centered on the theme Public Health Matters: People. Purpose. Progress.

The Department of Public Health Sciences reflected this message by distributing a garden-to-table cookbook, seed packets, and starter kits to attendees, highlighting how public health grows through community investment and everyday healthy choices.

The department was well represented throughout the conference, with 10 public health students presenting 14 posters alongside presentations from MPH alumni, current students, faculty, and researchers who shared valuable public health insights with the community.

Watch the highlight video!



2026 CPHA CONFERENCE

UCONN PHS PLANTING SEEDS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



DeLita Rose-Daniels

Armando Jimenez

Katia Ruesta-Daley

Gretchen Shu





FACULTY & RESEARCH UPDATES



The Decline of Teen Sleep: A Public Health Issue We Can't Ignore

A new study by **T. Greg Rhee**, published in JAMA, found that teens today are sleeping significantly less than in previous years. More than half of adolescents report getting fewer than five hours of sleep per night, increasing risks for emotional, cognitive, and physical health concerns. Since 2007, the percentage of teens meeting the recommended eight hours of sleep has sharply declined across all demographic and behavioral groups. Researchers suggest that broader societal factors, including school schedules and increasing evening demands, may be contributing to the trend and emphasize the need for population-level public health interventions.

[Read the article here](#)



CPES Research Highlighted by Pew: Promoting Public Health via Cross-Sector Data Sharing

Research and expertise from the **Center for Prevention Evaluation and Statistics**, led by **Megan O’Grady**, were recently featured in an article by The Pew Charitable Trusts highlighting Connecticut’s leadership in cross-sector data sharing to improve public health policy and prevention efforts.

The article spotlights the State Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup (SEOW) Prevention Data Portal, developed through collaboration among Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, CPES at UConn Health, and the Connecticut Data Collaborative. The portal provides free, publicly accessible data resources on topics including substance use, mental health, and suicide prevention to help guide policy and improve health outcomes across Connecticut.

This national recognition reflects CPES’s continued commitment to data-driven prevention, collaboration, and advancing healthier communities through accessible public health research.

[Read the article here](#)



Advancing the Treatment of Depression

New research from **T. Greg Rhee** and collaborators, recently published in *JAMA Psychiatry*, explores new approaches for treating treatment-resistant depression. The studies examined intravenous ketamine and combinations of antidepressants with antipsychotic medications, finding that some therapies may provide rapid symptom relief for patients who do not respond to conventional treatments.

Researchers also found that ketamine-based treatments may help quickly reduce suicidal thoughts in high-risk patients. The work highlights promising new strategies for improving care and outcomes for individuals living with severe depression. (today.uconn.edu)

[Read the article here](#)



Improving The Use of Long-Acting Injectable Medications for Opioid Use Disorders

Dr. Megan O'Grady, Associate Professor in Public Health Sciences, was awarded a new NIH/NIDA R34 grant titled "Measurement-Based Care as an Implementation Strategy for Long-Acting Injectable Medications for Opioid Use Disorders in CCBHCs". This 3-year project is a collaboration between UConn Health, UConn Storrs (School of Pharmacy), and Community Health Resources Inc (a community-based behavioral health services provider) to improve use of long-acting injectable medications for opioid use disorders in Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics.



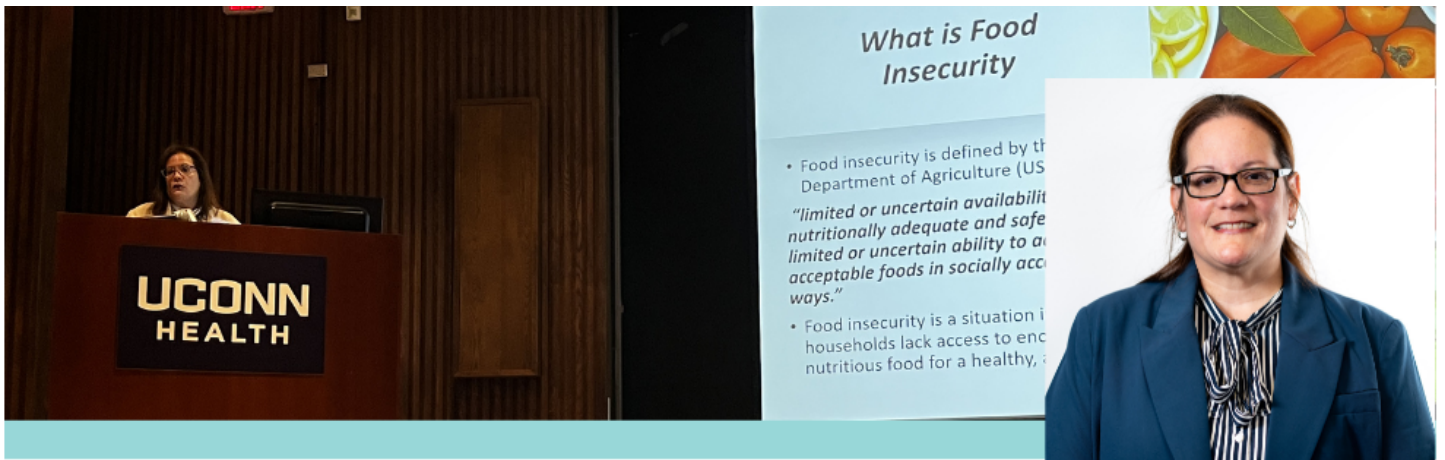
Dr. Misti Levy-Zamora’s Research Team Publishes National STEM Lesson on Clean Air

Dr. Misty Levy-Zamora and her research team have made great strides in environmental health. This initiative focuses on empowering students and teachers to improve their own classroom environments using low-cost, do-it-yourself air filtration systems known as Corsi-Rosenthal boxes. These devices are constructed from a box fan and MERV-13 filters, and our research has shown them to be highly effective at reducing the concentration of viruses, wildfire smoke, and other harmful particulate matter.

The newly published NSTA lesson plan, “How can we clean our classroom’s air?”, provides a comprehensive framework for middle school students to engage in hands-on STEM learning.

Students define air quality as an engineering challenge, build their own purifiers, and analyze the resulting data. This project not only teaches critical scientific principles but also results in a tangible improvement to the health of the school community.

[The full lesson plan can be accessed here](#)



Dr. Bermúdez-Millán: Keynote Speaker at CT High School Science and Humanities Symposium.

We were proud to have **Dr. Angela Bermúdez-Millán**, Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences, serve as the keynote speaker at the 63rd Connecticut High School Science and Humanities Symposium hosted by UConn Health.

Dr. Bermúdez-Millán shared her work in public health nutrition research, highlighting the impact of social determinants of health and food insecurity while inspiring students to pursue community-centered, equity-driven research. Thank you for empowering Connecticut's future STEM leaders through your passion and commitment to public health.



UConn
WOMEN'S
CENTER

2026 Women's
Advance Conference
May 15, 2026

Dr. Stacey Brown Keynote Speaker at 2026 Women's Advance Conference

Dr. Stacey Brown was invited to deliver the keynote address at the UConn Women's Advance Conference. Her presentation, *Leading While Human: Authenticity, Courage, and the Small Acts That Change Us*, encouraged attendees to think differently about leadership, emphasizing connection, courage, visibility, and the everyday interactions that shape people's lives.

Through stories drawn from public health, education, and personal experience, Dr. Brown explored how meaningful leadership often emerges through the willingness to take risks before feeling fully ready. The keynote also challenged perfectionism, particularly among women leaders, and highlighted the importance of creating spaces where people feel seen, valued, and empowered to grow. Attendees participated in reflection activities centered on bravery, belonging, and leading with humanity.

Helping MPH Students Succeed Without Fear of Statistics

In a recent installment of the Public Health Sciences Faculty Interview Series, **Dr. Scott Wetstone** reflected on his more than 40-year career at UConn Health and his approach to teaching epidemiology and biostatistics.

The conversation explored the importance of evidence-based decision-making, encouraging students to ask “why,” and helping future public health professionals build confidence in quantitative methods. Dr. Wetstone also discussed preparing students to think independently and adapt to an ever-changing public health landscape.



IN THE COMMUNITY

SPRING CLEANING DONATION DRIVE



Drop-off dates:
July 8th & August 12th

Drop off Locations:

Academic Entrance Lobby
195 Farmington Ave. Suite 2100

Most Needed Items:

- ✓ Monetary Donations
- ✓ Non Perishable Food items
- ✓ Personal Care & Hygiene Items
- ✓ Baby Supplies
- ✓ Clothing & Backpacks
- ✓ \$5 Gift Cards to Fast Food Restaurants & Bus Passes



Your donations support these organizations →



About Community Service Officers & Officer Jim Barrett

[Learn about Officer Barrett here:](#)



Community Service Officers work directly within Hartford neighborhoods, building relationships, attending community events, and addressing quality-of-life concerns. Officer Jim Barrett, the city’s homeless outreach officer, goes above and beyond to support unhoused individuals. His compassionate work has been recognized locally and nationally.

About Hands On Hartford (HOH)

[Support their work here](#)

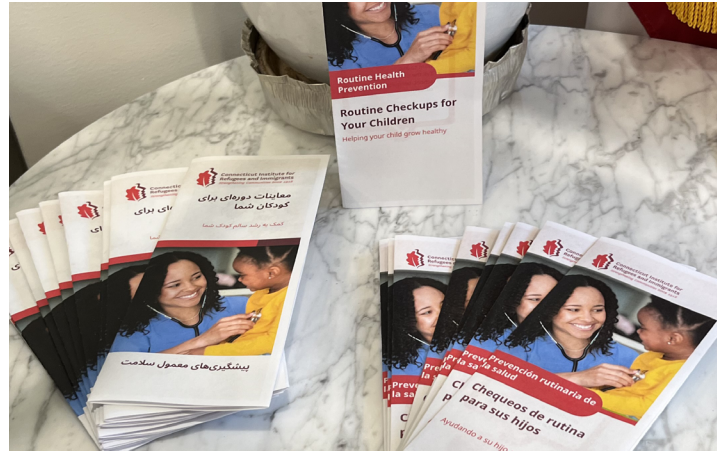


Hands On Hartford strengthens the community through housing support, food access, homelessness prevention, and outreach services. Their MANNNA Community Pantry, Backpack Nutrition Program, Supportive Housing, and Shared Use Kitchen all play a crucial role in meeting basic needs and fostering long-term stability. Their participation-based restaurant, Gather55, welcomes everyone—regardless of ability to pay—creating a space where community and compassion meet over a shared meal.

They also operate a Day Program that provides referrals, shelter support, health screenings, and a safe environment for those experiencing homelessness. With more than 1,400 volunteers each year and support from civic, faith-based, and organizational partners, Hands On Hartford continues to create a healthier, more inclusive Hartford for all.

About the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI)

[Learn more about their mission here](#)



CIRI provides a compassionate array of high-quality legal, social, and educational programming for refugees, immigrants, and survivors of human trafficking and torture.

CIRI is a statewide nonprofit organization that assists refugees and immigrants resolve legal, economic, linguistic and social barriers so that they become self-sufficient, integrated and contributing members of the community. CIRI achieves this mission by providing a compassionate array of high-quality legal, social and educational programming and by promoting cross cultural understanding and decent treatment for all.

How You Can Help (Most-Needed Items)

- Financial contributions (contacts: jindavis@uchc.edu, lcook@uchc.edu, samociuk@uchc.edu, parris@uchc.edu)
- Nonperishable food
- Full-size toiletries & household essentials
- Children's backpack nutrition program food
- Hygiene products (e.g., body powder, travel-size toothpaste, deodorant)
- Diapers (sizes 4-5) & baby wipes
- Reusable and small water bottles
- Pedometers
- Clothing (e.g., boxer briefs L-2X, t-shirts M-2X)
- Adult backpacks
- \$5 fast-food gift cards (McDonald's, Burger King, Dunkin')
- Bus passes

Black Family Wellness Expo

On March 21, 2026, the Department of Public Health Sciences proudly sponsored and hosted a table at the Black Family Wellness Expo, a community event focused on advancing health equity and improving access to wellness resources.

Faculty and staff connected with families throughout the day, shared educational materials, and distributed healthy recipes from the department cookbook to promote accessible, nutritious eating.

Events like the Black Family Wellness Expo reflect the department's continued commitment to community engagement, education, and advancing public health beyond campus.

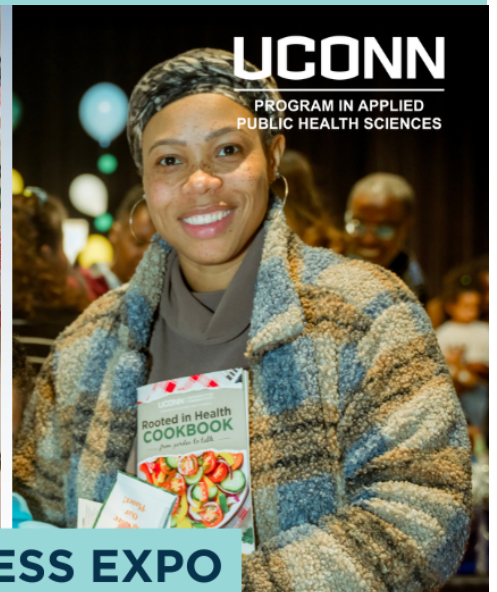


“It was truly gratifying to learn that the community regards UConn as a pillar of educational support,” shared Jini Korcz. “Many families expressed their appreciation to Public Health Sciences for sharing healthy recipes from our department cookbook.”





Watch the highlight video!



IN THE COMMUNITY

2026 BLACK FAMILY WELLNESS EXPO

THIS IS WHAT HEALTH EQUITY LOOKS LIKE

UConn Waterbury Wishfest



Our interactive activity encouraged students to reflect on how systems influence health, even in areas as basic as their dietary choices.

We had an incredible time connecting with students at **Wishfest UConn Waterbury!** The day started out with **speakers Temple Grandin and Rachel LaMont.** Then, led into a day full of interactive activities, education and conversation. From hands-on activities to thoughtful conversations, we loved introducing students to the impact of public health.

Our activity focused on the social determinants of health. Participants gained valuable insights into how their personal situations and community settings can influence their well-being. They also recognized the significance of public health policies and the importance of advocating for others.



Menstrual Packing Event



For more information, on how you can help, please reach out to norsigian@uchc.edu.

We are grateful for the incredible support from our UConn community in combating period poverty. Thanks to your generous donations, we have successfully purchased and distributed essential menstrual products. A special shoutout to Taline and our dedicated students for their hard work in assembling packages. This initiative continues to thrive, and we still need your help!

Together, we are making a difference and promoting healthier futures!

UConn Storrs Spring Fling



Planting seeds of kindness—literally.

Julia and Mahir handed out wildflower seeds starter kits during the **2026 Spring Fling** at Storrs. Students got to plant seeds of kindness by sharing positive messages with one another. Students loved reading the notes and leaving messages of their own.

UConn Hartford SOMOS Huskies Event



Our graduate assistants, Mahir, Taline and Julia, attended the **SOMOS Huskies** event at UConn Hartford, hosted by the Academic Achievement Center, and had the opportunity to connect with attendees through career-focused conversations.

Hands-On Public Health: UConn MPH Students Volunteer at Gather55



Our admin team and graduate assistants stepped out of the classroom and into the community.

They volunteered at Gather55, a restaurant where every meal helps fight food insecurity and bring people together. From prepping in the kitchen to serving meals and supporting guests, they experienced public health in action—meeting people where they are and supporting initiatives that create real impact.



STUDENT & PROGRAM NEWS

MPH Students, Alum & Faculty Present at UConn Storrs 2026 Health Equity Research Symposium



On March 26th, UConn hosted the 2026 Health Equity Research Symposium & Poster Session, bringing together students, faculty, researchers, and community partners to explore collaboration and equity-driven public health work.

A featured panel, “Foundations of Health Equity: From Frameworks to Practice,” included Stacey Brown, Mayte Restrepo-Ruiz, and Samia Hussein, who discussed how health equity frameworks can be translated into meaningful community-centered action. MPH students also presented research posters highlighting a wide range of equity-focused public health topics and applied research initiatives. The symposium showcased UConn’s continued commitment to advancing health equity through collaboration, research, and community engagement.

Spring 2026 12th Week Recap



As part of the **Spring 2026 12th Week Enrichment series and National Public Health Week**, MPH students gathered for an evening focused on reflection, learning, and accountability in health systems. The event included a Student Advisory Session with faculty mentors followed by a screening and discussion of SHUFFLE, a documentary examining fraud and ethical concerns within the addiction treatment industry.

Students also engaged in a live discussion with the film's producer, exploring how policy, regulation, and public health systems impact vulnerable communities. The event encouraged meaningful conversations around ethics, advocacy, and systems-level thinking in public health practice.

Graduate Assistants Host First Munch & Mingle Session



Munch and Mingle is a new end of semester event for prospective students. It's a welcoming space to meet fellow students, share ideas, and explore how public health connects to many different health professions.

During the event, students enjoyed lunch while participating in icebreakers and conversations about current issues shaping public health today. Graduate Assistants, Mahir, Taline and Julia also shared their personal journeys into public health, along with insights on preparing for graduate school and exploring career paths in the field.

The event showcased various opportunities to learn about the FastTrack and dual degree options, along with valuable tips for academic advising and navigating the next steps in health-related education.

We partnered with Allied Health Sciences and the Storrs Career Center to support each attendee's academic journey. To conclude the session, students engaged in a brief, interactive public health activity aimed at fostering discussion and promoting collaboration.

**You can receive notifications
when we host our next event!**

Sign up!

Public Health Nutrition Course Students Conduct Research at Keney Park



Dr. Angela Bermúdez-Milán gave Public Health Nutrition students hands-on experience in community-centered public health through a partnership with the Keney Park Sustainability Project.

MPH students worked alongside community partners to learn about urban farming, hydroponics, food access, and program implementation while helping evaluate and strengthen ongoing initiatives.

During National Public Health Week, Dr. Bermúdez-Milán also presented findings from a pilot study with the Hartford WIC program examining barriers to farmers market voucher use among participants.

The partnership continues to expand through efforts focused on nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, and improving access to fresh produce in Hartford communities.



The Department of Public Health Sciences proudly celebrated the Class of 2026 with a series of events that highlighted their hard work, achievements, and bright futures ahead.

The celebration began with the annual poster session, where students presented their research and shared the innovative work they've developed throughout their time in the program. The session offered a meaningful opportunity for students, faculty, and guests to engage with important public health topics and recognize the depth and diversity of student scholarship.

The festivities continued at the Graduation Dinner, an evening filled with celebration, connection, and reflection. Students, faculty, staff, and loved ones gathered to honor the accomplishments of the graduating class. The night featured awards recognizing outstanding academic achievement, leadership, and community impact, along with moments of joy captured at the photo booth and shared among peers.

These recognitions reflected not only success in the classroom, but also the real-

world impact our graduates have already begun to make in their communities and beyond.

The celebration culminated at commencement, where graduates officially crossed the stage and marked the transition from students to public health professionals. It was a proud and inspiring moment, symbolizing years of dedication, perseverance, and passion.

As we celebrate the Class of 2026, we recognize their commitment to advancing public health and improving the well-being of communities everywhere.

Congratulations to our graduates! We are incredibly proud of you and look forward to seeing all that you will accomplish.



2026 Commencement Student Speaker: Michael Raizin



Michael Raizin represented the program at the UConn Graduate School as student speaker at UConn Health 55th Commencement on May 11, 2026. A graduate of the MPH Fast-Track Program, Michael credits UConn Health’s emphasis on interprofessional collaboration and hands-on community experiences for shaping his passion for public and global health.

Following graduation, Michael will serve in the Peace Corps in the Philippines, where he plans to continue applying the community-centered skills and global health perspectives gained during his time at UConn.

MPH Alumni Host Mentoring Event for CT High Schools



MPH alumni Raquel Rosa and Chelsea Erem joined a meaningful milestone event celebrating the conclusion of a 10-week program within the Cato T. Laurencin Mentoring Programs.

Through this initiative, UConn Health students mentored high school students from Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy (HMTCA) and Princeton Technical High.

During their visit, students explored UConn Health through:

- A guided campus tour
- Student and faculty research presentations
- Hands-on experience in the simulation lab
- Opportunities to connect with current UConn Health students

PhD Student Spotlights



Jacqueline Sandoval, whose work focuses on aging and dementia, racial and ethnic health disparities, and mixed-methods research. Jacqueline holds a B.S. in Public Health Education from UNC Greensboro and an MPH from Yale University.

She is currently contributing to a National Institute on Aging funded project that examines emergency department care for Hispanic older adults living with dementia.



Priya Sandhya Prakash is a PhD student whose work centers on maternal and child health, reproductive health, and the social and structural factors that shape health outcomes.

She holds a B.S. in Allied Health Sciences and an MPH in Epidemiology from UConn, where she developed a strong foundation in quantitative methods and population health research.



[Click here to read his paper](#)

Nicholas Pellegrino had his first academic paper published by the Conversation!

His paper was entitled “HEPA air purifiers may boost brain power in adults over 40 - new research”

The study matters because air pollution can negatively affect mental function after just a few hours of exposure. Studies show that air purifiers are effective at reducing particulates, but it’s unclear whether these reductions can prevent cognitive harm from ongoing pollution sources like traffic. people living near major sources of air pollution, such as highways.

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