

## Health Equity Task Force- 2023 updates

### Introduction:

This progress report highlights the recent developments and achievements within the Health Equity (HE) Research Focus Area since the HSOM research retreat convened on February 15, 2023. To optimize health and wellness and overcome pervasive and often intersectional inequities, it is imperative that we support accessible and dynamic platforms that facilitate research focused on the prevention, screening, and treatment of diseases that disproportionately plague the Deep South region. From personalized medicine to population health, investigators need to study how our lived experiences, physical environments, communities, healthcare systems, and societal structures impact health outcomes, and identify potential opportunities for intervention and improvement. Such an approach acknowledges the complex nature of health and recognizes that improving health outcomes means intervening across multiple levels. Partnering with people, communities, and organizations to access and analyze biological, clinical, psychological, and social determinants of health data will allow for the application of technological, methodological, and analytic innovations to catalyze discoveries from the bench to the community that will inform practice and policy and optimize individual and population health outcomes. Prioritizing and investing in HE as a scientific research focus area by the HSOM is foundational towards overcoming deep-seated inequities, including those fueled by racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and those grounded in rurality and poverty. **It is imperative that we move beyond describing disparities to understanding their underlying drivers and determinants and implementing multi-level interventions that attenuate and overcome longstanding inequities in health.** Moreover, it is essential that we frame HE from an inclusive and wide lens, as evidenced by the original four concept proposals grouped to form the HSOM HE research focus area (leader indicated parenthetically): women’s health across the lifespan (Tita), global and rural health (Matthews), sexual and gender minority health (Clevenger), and health system and outcomes research to advance HE in chronic diseases (Mugavero).

Our focus has been on advancing HE through strategic recruitment, impactful events, creating collaborative spaces, and communication strategies.

### Key Achievements:

#### Established Program Director III position within the Dean’s Office, Office of Research

- Shyla K. Fields was selected via a rigorous process; started on August 1, 2023

#### Established Collaborative Health Equity Council (CHEC)

##### CHEC MEMBERS:

Tika Benveniste, PhD	T Kempin Reuter, PhD	Shyla K. Fields, MBA
Shaila Handattu, PhD, MBA	Jessica Williams, PhD, MPH	Tawanda Holston, MPSE
Michael Mugavero, MD	Shyla Fields, MBA	
Caitlin Clevenger, PhD	Brianna Patterson PhD, MPH	
Andrea Cherrington, MD	Sarah MaCarthy, ScD	
Bertha Hidalgo, PhD, MSPH	Timiya Nolan, PhD, APNN-CNP, ANP-BC	
Alan Tita, MD, MPH	Crystal Chapman Lambert, PhD	
Lynn Matthews, MD, MPH	Daniel Chu, MD, MSPH	
Latesha Elope, MD, MSPH	Verlon Salley, MHA	
Rachel Sinkey, MD	Mona Fouad, MD, MPH	

#### Strategic recruitment Initiative in Health Equity

##### Co-chairs: Drs Irf Asif & Andrea Cherrington

- A new recruitment program is in the works to target mid and senior-level faculty members and bolster the representation of mentors from diverse communities.

**Goals:**

- Recruiting up to 12 investigators as part of a major strategic initiative in Health Equity to expand an already strong portfolio across basic and translational research, outcomes, and population health science.
- Launch Date: October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**Participation in FIRST award recruitment & onboarding**

- Collaborated successfully in supporting early-career faculty from underrepresented backgrounds.
- The First Award program in collaboration with UAB and Tuskegee has facilitated the recruitment of talented early career individuals.

**DRIVEN Academy support: (\$10,000)**

- Provided financial and logistical support to the Driven Academy, a groundbreaking initiative conceived by Bertha Hidalgo and convened on September 21 and 22, 2023.
- The DRIVEN Academy garnered grassroots support from over 13 sponsors, raising \$70,000 for this program, which promotes mentorship and leadership development.
- The DRIVEN Academy organized a successful Coaching and Research Symposium, with 45 early career research-intensive faculty from backgrounds underrepresented in science in attendance.

**UAB Global Health Symposium (\$7,500)**

- Raised substantial visibility through platinum-level sponsorship at the Global Health Symposium, convened September 28 and 29, 2023.
- Capitalized on these platforms to promote the HE focus area's goals and initiatives, as well as initiatives led by Centers and Institutes led by CHEC members from the HSOM.

**MHERC SDOH Core: funded as Institutional Research Core**

- Provide a collaborative space on the 8th floor of the Boshell Diabetes Building for team members to hotel and convene office hours.
- SDOH team has been holding regular drop-in clinics, providing support for researchers in the health equity space.

**Future Planning/Immediate Priorities:****UAB landscape survey:** systematic assessment of HSOM extramural HE research portfolio

- Execute the landscape survey to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current, extramural funding landscape.
- Further stratify HE research funding by the 4 foci, departments, and divisions to identify strengths and growth opportunities.
- Contracting with Dr. Kathryn Kaiser, a methodological expert in systematic reviews and syntheses at UAB.

**HE strategic planning retreat, Q1 2024**

- Plan and execute the upcoming retreat to set clear goals and metrics for the program's success, informed by the current funding portfolio determined by the landscape survey.
- Engage CHEC team members to help systematically assess funding patterns and metrics across the 4 HE foci, departments, and divisions.
- Focused on integrating the HE focus areas with existing programs and initiatives led by HSOM Centers, Institutes, Departments, and other Schools at UAB.

**Shared Vision and Communication:**

- Explored the importance of articulating a shared vision for the program, aligning with UAB's broader vision and message.
- Engaged with leaders of other HSOM research focus areas to develop shared communications strategies and messaging.
- Utilized storytelling through photo and videography to engage the audience, enhance recruitment efforts, and foster a sense of connection.
- Explore innovative ways to integrate the HE focus areas with existing HSOM programs and initiatives.

- Remain committed to our mission of promoting HE, fostering diversity, and creating a more inclusive research environment.

**Conclusion:**

The HE Research Focus area has already made significant strides in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the academic and research community. By fostering collaboration, strategic recruitment, data-driven assessments, and effective communication, the program aims to drive positive change in HE and related fields. As a foundation, substantial progress has been made in building collaborations and supporting communities and spaces conducting mission-aligned programming.