



VCU

School of Public Health



July, 2026

News & Updates

Upcoming Professional Conferences

Virginia Public Health Association

2026 Annual Conference

Reynolds Community College

September 24-25, 2026

[Register here](#)

American Public Health Association

Annual Meeting & Expo

San Antonio, TX

November 1-4, 2026

[Register here](#)

Society of Behavioral Medicine

48th Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions

Atlanta, GA

April 14-17, 2027

[Abstract submission here](#)

Awards & Honors



Faculty promotion

Dina García, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed. was awarded promotion to associate professor with tenure as of July 1, 2026! Congratulations and well deserved, Dra. García!

Department Teacher of the Year

Dr. Richard Brown was recognized as Teacher of the Year for SBS at the school general faculty and staff meeting on June 16th.



- Dr. Kellie Carlyle was awarded two VCU Convergence Team Planning Grants as Co-PI: "One Health, One Welfare: Meeting Community Mental Health Needs through the Human-Animal Bond," in collaboration with the Schools of Social Work and Medicine; and "Reimagining Health in the Age of AI: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Communication, Decision-Making, Ethics, and Care in Complex Systems," a partnership between the Colleges of Humanities and Sciences and Health Professions and the School of Public Health.
- Dra. Dina García received a grant from the VCU Division of Community Engagement's Thriving Communities Research Pilot Grant Program as Co-PI with Dr. Kimberly Lintag-Nguyen of the School of Dentistry. Read more about the project [here](#).
- Dr. Maria Thomson received the Departmental Service Award for academic year 2025-2026.

SOPH Commencement 2026

At the School of Public Health Commencement Ceremony on May 9th, we celebrated PhD program graduate Dr. Fariha Tariq!



Drs. Sunny Kim and Dina García also celebrated their MPH program mentees, Jocelyn Espinoza (left) and Sarah Talley (right)!



Scholar Spotlight

Announcing Dr. Savannah Reitzel!

Savannah successfully defended her dissertation on June 4th. Her topic was "THRIVE: Transformative Health and Reproductive Information for Incarcerated Women's Empowerment." She celebrated her defense with her family and colleagues, and her dissertation committee: Drs. Jessica LaRose, Larkin Francis, Shawn Jones, and Richard Brown.



Paula Rivera participated as an expert judge in the project "Design and Validation of a Telehealth Consultation Platform for Nutritional Assessment and the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyle Habits among Adolescents and Young Adults in Rural Areas of the Department of Caldas (Colombia)" in May.



Alumni Updates



Dr. Kofoworola Williams (SBS '20) received a K01 award from NIMH for "A human-centered, multi-stakeholder approach to develop and test a digital intervention for Black male emerging adults with depression." Her project aims to improve mental health outcomes in Black male young adults through co-development and testing of a digital mental health intervention.

Dr. Williams is currently assistant professor in Community Health and Prevention at Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health.

Wrapping up the WE Project

This year marks the end of a 14-year-long effort by MPIs Drs. Maghboeba Mosavel and Jessica LaRose. Wellness Engagement Petersburg (or "WE") was a study grounded in a decade of community-based participatory research in partnership with residents and community partners in Petersburg, VA. The trial tested a grassroots, multilevel lifestyle intervention to reduce adiposity and promote cardiometabolic health for Petersburg residents.

On June 6, the OPT for Health lab hosted a community block party in Petersburg as the final community-based data dissemination event for the WE Project 2.0. The event featured exercise demonstrations, double dutch, a theatrical performance, a nutritional demonstration, and more!

Thanks to the amazing Dr. Chloé Jones for her leadership in planning this wonderful event, which was partially funded by a data dissemination grant she received from VCU's Division of Community Engagement.





SBS Events

Farewell for Dr. Alex Lucas

Dr. Lucas will be moving to the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences this August, but will remain affiliate faculty in SBS. We wish him all the best!



Recent Publications

Drs. Kellie Carlyle and Jeanine Guidry:

Guidry JPD, Laestadius LI, Engbersen-Severijns Y, Miller CA, Stevens MP, Burton CW, Carlyle KE, Huss J-M, Moffett K, Perrin PB. Untangling the Roots of HPV

Vaccine Acceptance in West Virginia: How Hesitancy and Misinformation Shape Parental Decisions. *Vaccines*. 2026; 14(7):608.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines14070608>.

Drs. Kellie Carlyle and Emiola Oyefuga:

Carlyle, K., Ramezani, N., Oyefuga, E., Russo, J., Lefeavers, S., Kitching, E., Daugherty, S., Shakeshaft, C., & Conley, A. That's inappropriate: Development of the Educator Misconduct Prevention and Reporting Inventory. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. doi [10.1080/10538712.2026.2667231](https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2026.2667231).

Oyefuga, E., Shakeshaft, C., Carlyle, K., Conley, A., Ramezani, N., Ingram, M., ... Kitching, E. (2026). Evaluating an Online Training Program for Child Sexual Abuse Prevention in Schools: The Role of Training, Leadership, and Policy in Educator Awareness and Reporting. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 1–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2026.2681211>.

Dra. Dina García:

García DT, Jasper K, Duarte S, Charles-Ayinde M. Advancing the careers of dental, oral, and craniofacial scholars through cross disciplinary collaboration and community grounded approaches. *JDR Clinical & Translational Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23800844261457065>.

García DT, Alvarez J, Muñoz-Moctezuma A, Parada K, Piocuda J, de Cuba Soria P. ¡Adelante! The Path to Success. Virginia Commonwealth University; 2026. Published in: VCU Scholars Compass
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/sbhd_pubs/6/.

Dr. Sunny Jung Kim, Dr. Vanessa Sheppard and Farnese Motto:

Kim SJ, Motto FM, Ming H, Clark V, Hong S, Lichtman AH, Sheppard VB. Perspectives on Cannabis Use among Cancer Survivors and Cancer Care Providers: Parallel Surveys. *J Cancer Educ*. 2026 Jun 20. doi: [10.1007/s13187-026-02934-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-026-02934-w).

Dr. Kristina Tatum:

Tatum KL, Dahman B, Stevenson A, et al. Survival and Recurrence With GLP-1 Receptor Agonists in Breast Cancer. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2026;9(5):e2612133. doi:[10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2026.12133](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2026.12133).

Drs. Kristina Tatum and Jessica LaRose:

Tatum KL, Smith DI, Hung HS, Weinstock M, Rhodenhiser S, Blincoe J, Brewer AE, LaRose JG, Brickhouse TH, Bean MK. Stakeholders' perspectives of facilitators and barriers to enhance hydration in elementary schools within a socioecological framework. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 2026. 14:1784617. doi: [10.3389/fpubh.2026.1784617](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2026.1784617).

Drs. Maria Thomson, Jessica LaRose, and Kristina Tatum:

Caccavale, L, Garr, K, Weinstock, M, Thomson, M, LaRose, J, Tatum, K, Bean, M. (2026). Support after Adolescent Behavioral Weight Loss Treatment: Navigating the Transition into Emerging Adulthood (Preprint). [10.2196/preprints.95649](https://doi.org/10.2196/preprints.95649).

Upcoming Events

Thursday, August 27th 4-6pm
SBS All Hands Meeting

Monday, August 17th 1-4pm
SBS PhD Program Orientation

Thursday, September 17th 12-2pm

SBS Seminar Series featuring APHA President Dr. Nandi Marshall

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