

Prepregnancy BMI and Gestational Weight Gain: New Evidence, Emerging Innovations, and Policy Implications: A Workshop

Speaker Bios

Britni Ayers, PhD, has a Masters in Sociology and a doctorate in Public Policy, specialization in family policy, from the University of Arkansas. Dr. Ayers is currently an Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences-Northwest (UAMS). Prior to coming to UAMS as an Assistant Professor, she spent 10 years studying maternal and child health within the community as both a lactation advisor and a midwife's apprentice. Dr. Ayers has conducted community-engaged research with the Marshallese community in Arkansas for the past nine years. The focus of this research has been to explore barriers and facilitators to maternal health access and culturally tailor, and implement, prenatal and postpartum interventions to improve maternal and infant health outcomes. She has expertise in community-engaged research, qualitative analysis, maternal and infant health, and family and health policy. Currently, she is the principal investigator on an R21 NIH (1R21NR020677) award, a 2-year award designed to determine the preliminary efficacy of CenteringPregnancy with care navigation to reduce maternal health disparities among Marshallese women.

Lisa Bodnar, PhD, MPH, RD, is Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. Her research interests include maternal nutritional status and birth outcomes, nutritional epidemiology, and perinatal epidemiology. Her research goal is to discover the healthiest dietary patterns and weight to promote the health of pregnant women and their children. Dr. Bodnar has contributed to scientifically advancing our understanding of optimal weight gain recommendations during pregnancy, the reproductive consequences of maternal obesity, and the association between dietary patterns and adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes. She has contributed her experience to several national panels that set guidelines for nutrition during pregnancy, including the 2009 Institute of Medicine Committee to Reevaluate Pregnancy Weight Gain Guidelines. Dr. Bodnar serves as a member of the Technical Advisory Group on Gestational Weight Gain that advises the WHO on the development of global gestational weight gain standards and optimal ranges. She received her PhD in Nutrition with an Epidemiology minor from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and shortly thereafter completed her postdoctoral fellowship in reproductive biology with Magee-Women's Research Institute and University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Cathryn Couch, MBA, is the founder and CEO of Ceres Community Project, a 100% organic food is medicine organization currently providing more than 230,000 medically tailored meals annually to clients in Northern California. Ceres' model includes a Youth Development Program serving hundreds of teens from more than 50 schools. Ceres has scaled their integrated community health model to more than a dozen communities across the US, Denmark and in 2025 New Zealand. Couch and Ceres are engaged in California and nationally around the integration of evidence-informed food interventions into healthcare as covered medical benefits, and values-based food procurement to advance local and sustainable food systems. She is engaged with the following coalitions and organizations: Vice-Chair, Food is Medicine Coalition Advisory Board; American Heart Association Health Care by Food Initiative; Chair, California Food is Medicine Coalition; Food & Society at Aspen Institute; Partnership HealthPlan of California Board of Commissioners; California Food and Farming Network; Hearts of Sonoma County CVD Collaborative; Marin Food

Policy Council. She was named a CNN Hero in 2016 and has an MBA from the University of Michigan.

Cindy D. Davis, PhD, serves as National Program Leader for the program in Human Nutrition conducted by the USDA-Agricultural Research Service. In this role, she helps direct the scientific program for six Human Nutrition Research Centers. Prior to joining USDA, she was the Director of Grants and Extramural Activities in the Office of Dietary Supplements and was a Program Director in the Nutritional Sciences Research Group at the National Cancer Institute. Cindy received her bachelor's degree with honors in nutritional sciences from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and her doctorate degree in nutrition with a minor in human cancer biology from the University of Wisconsin- Madison. She completed her postdoctoral training at the Laboratory of Experimental Carcinogenesis at the National Cancer Institute. She then joined the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center, USDA, as a research nutritionist. In 2000, she received a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers and was named the USDA Early Career Scientist. She is a supplement editor for the Journal of Nutrition, associate editor for Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition, and a member of the editorial board for Advances in Nutrition. In 2025, she was selected as a distinguished fellow of the American Society for Nutrition.

Christine D. Garner, PhD, RD, CLC is an Assistant Vice President of Research, an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and conducts research in the InfantRisk Center at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo, TX. She obtained both her Master's and Doctoral degrees in Nutrition at Cornell University, and she trained and worked as a Registered Dietitian in Pediatrics at the University of California San Francisco. Dr. Garner's research focuses on maternal and child health with a nutrition lens during pregnancy, breastfeeding, infancy, and early childhood – the “first 1000 days.” Recent and current projects include studies to understand experiences and decision-making among perinatal individuals and their healthcare providers, interventions to address maternal food insecurity, and implementation research to understand and address maternal health disparities through community-engaged research. She has worked with UNICEF and served on the board of the New York State Perinatal Association, on committees for the Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers and Babies, and in leadership in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Women's Health Dietetics Practice Group. She is a mom and an active researcher, author, and editor on topics of nutrition, pregnancy, and women's health.

Irene Headen, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Black Health in the Department of Community Health and Prevention at the Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health. Her research investigates the social and structural determinants of racial/ethnic inequities in adverse pregnancy outcomes. In particular, her work focuses on identifying neighborhood and community factors underlying these inequities and understanding how systems science methods can help translate these factors into multilevel interventions to improve Black maternal health outcomes. She earned her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley in the Department of Epidemiology in 2015.

Monique Hedderson, MPH, PhD, is the Associate Director of the Women's and Children's Health Section, a Research Scientist III (equivalent to a full professor academic rank) and the director of research clinics at the Division of Research, Kaiser Permanente Northern California (KPNC). Dr. Hedderson received her master's in public health and PhD in epidemiology from the University of Washington. She has with extensive experience conducting epidemiologic, clinical, and translational research in women's and children's cardiometabolic health in KPNC. Her research program focuses on the health effects of gestational weight gain on women's and children's health

outcomes. Her recent study, the LEAP cluster randomized controlled trial, tested a scalable mobile health intervention to promote healthy gestational weight gain in representative populations.

Amoreena Ranck Howell, MD, MSPH, FAAFP, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. As the Associate Program Director and Director of Maternal-Child Health for the University of Maryland's Family Medicine Residency, Dr. Howell is a full-spectrum family physician dedicated to training the next generation of physicians while serving the communities of Baltimore. With extensive expertise in maternal-child health, her career is a testament to a profound desire to address health inequities and improve the health system through medical education. After earning her medical degree from the University of Virginia and completing her residency at Wake Forest University, Dr. Howell joined the faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill. Honing her skills as an educator, she taught in their Family Medicine Residency while also earning a Master of Science in Public Health and completing their Faculty Development Fellowship. Dr. Howell then dedicated over five years to serving a diverse immigrant population at Unity Health Care, an FQHC in Washington D.C. She also solidified her commitment to education there as she taught residents and students for Georgetown University and was a key contributor to establishing Unity's National Family Medicine Residency in 2013. Since 2017, Dr. Howell has applied her extensive experience at the University of Maryland, where her specialization in maternal and child health remains her primary clinical interest and her continuing goal is to improve health outcomes by teaching family-centered care to residents and students.

Jennifer Hutcheon, PhD, is a perinatal epidemiologist and Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She completed undergraduate degrees in biology and nutrition, and worked as a clinical nutritionist before obtaining her Ph.D. in Epidemiology & Biostatistics at McGill University. Her research uses large population health databases ("big data") to inform policies and best practices in maternal and infant health. She has conducted numerous epidemiologic studies to inform the development of evidence-based pregnancy weight gain guidelines that balance risks to maternal and child health. She holds a Canada Research Chair in Perinatal Population Health.

Gilberto Kac, PhD, is a Professor of Nutritional Epidemiology at the Nutrition Institute at Rio de Janeiro Federal University. He leads the Nutritional Epidemiology Observatory, coordinating projects focusing on maternal and child nutrition. Dr. Kac's graduate training was strongly focused on public health nutrition (PhD in Public Health Nutrition at the University of São Paulo, 1999-2002), maternal and perinatal epidemiology (postdoctoral fellowship at University of Oxford, 2010-11), and global nutrition (visiting professor at the Institute of Global Nutrition, University of California at Davis, 2017-18). Professor Kac is a research fellow of the Brazilian National Research Council and an Excellence in Nutrition Fellow from the American Nutrition Society. He has interacted with several international stakeholders, such as the World Bank, the Pan-American Health Organization, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization, in his career trajectory. He has also served in several technical advisory groups. Professor Kac is an Associate Editor of Maternal and Child Nutrition and the editor-in-chief of a comprehensive nutritional epidemiology book published in Latin America. Dr. Kac has published 240+ papers in scientific journals and has supervised 50+ graduate students.

Over the past years, he has worked closely with the Brazilian Ministry of Health on global health/nutrition domains, e.g., as the national coordinator of the 2019 and 2024 Brazilian National Surveys on Infant Nutrition. Dr. Kac has long-standing expertise in GWG monitoring. He was one of the responsible scientists for the development of the Intergrowth 21st GWG standard for normal-

weight women. He also worked closely on the GWG Harvard pooling project that studied the role of maternal and neonatal outcomes on the GWG trajectories of 46 low- and middle-income countries and was a key investigator on the Latin-American Consortium that developed GWG standards and recommendations for adolescents. Dr. Kac has led the Brazilian Ministry of Health guideline released in 2022 that comprised a new standard with new recommendations, and is currently leading a team that is developing the World Health Organization global GWG project in association with WHO staff. These projects have strong programmatic, policy, and implementation science components on maternal and newborn health and nutrition.

Michelle Kominiarek, MD, MS, is a Maternal-Fetal Medicine physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and a Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. Dr. Kominiarek is nationally known for her expertise in pregnancies complicated by obesity and pregnancies that occur after bariatric surgery. Her clinical and research interests relate to studies of nutrition, physical activity, and gestational weight gain during pregnancy and the intrapartum care of people with obesity. Dr. Kominiarek's research also focuses on studies pertaining to prenatal care models and health disparities. She received her medical degree at Rush University Medical College. She completed both her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology and fellowship in Maternal-Fetal Medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago.

Stephanie Leonard, PhD, MS, is an Assistant Professor at Stanford University School of Medicine in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Obstetrics. Dr. Leonard has a long-standing research interest in studying weight and weight gain during pregnancy using large, real-world data sources. This led to her current research projects focused on improving the prevention and treatment of chronic hypertension and iron-deficiency anemia during pregnancy, funded by NHLBI and NICHD. Dr. Leonard trained in epidemiology at UCLA (MS) and UC Berkeley (PhD), where her research focused on nutrition in pregnancy and was completed in partnership with the WIC program and the Nutrition Policy Institute. She completed a postdoc in Neonatal and Developmental Medicine at Stanford prior to joining the faculty in Maternal-Fetal Medicine and Obstetrics.

Leah Lipsky, PhD, MHS, is a staff scientist in the Intramural Research Program of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Dr. Lipsky's research includes observational and experimental research examining how sociodemographic, environmental, psychosocial, and implicit cognitive factors influence eating behaviors, diet quality, and weight outcomes across critical developmental periods including infancy, childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood, and pregnancy. She serves on numerous committees focused on nutrition and obesity research and on editorial boards for the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. Dr. Lipsky holds a B.A. in Economics from Oberlin College, a M.H.S. in International Health/Human Nutrition from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and a Ph.D. in Nutrition from Cornell University.

Stephanie A. Navarro Silvera, PhD, is professor of public health at Montclair State University (MSU). After completing her masters' degrees, she worked as a nutrition educator at the Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC) at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Paterson, New Jersey. She then went on to work as an epidemiologist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the department of Epidemiology and Population Health before joining the faculty at MSU. During her professorship her work has focused on racial/ethnic disparities in health outcomes, and she was

awarded the prestigious National Cancer Institute's K01 Career Development Award in 2009 to pursue this work. She has also served on the boards of the American Public Health Association Cancer Caucus, on the American Society for Preventive Oncology Junior Member and Membership Committees and is a current member of the New Jersey Society for Public Health Education Academic Advisory Board. She has, more recently, been called upon by the New York/New Jersey media to serve as an expert to interpret and explain the epidemiology of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Silvera holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Rutgers University, an M.S. in nutritional sciences from Rutgers University, and a doctorate in epidemiology from the Yale School of Medicine.

Angela Odoms-Young, Ph.D., is the Nancy Schlegel Meinig Associate Professor of Maternal and Child Nutrition at Cornell University, Director of the Food and Nutrition Education in Communities Program (FNEC) and New York State Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), and is the Cornell Cooperative Extension Critical Issue Lead for Human Nutrition, Food Safety and Security, and Obesity Prevention. Dr. Odoms-Young's research explores how social and structural factors contribute to community and population-level variations in dietary intake and diet-related chronic diseases in the United States, with a key focus of how systemic inequities contribute to dietary risk. Her work also employs community-engaged approaches to inform the development and evaluation of programs and policies that empower communities to build sustainable, equitable food systems, improve nutritional well-being, and promote whole person health across the life course.

Dr. Odoms-Young has played an active role in shaping national food and nutrition policy. She has served on advisory committees and boards including the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) Food and Nutrition Board, contributing her expertise to critical policy and research discussions related to advancing nutrition science. She also served on national committees tasked with developing nutrition standards for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program and revising the food packages for the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Additionally, recently she co-chaired the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans Scientific Review Committee.

Dr. Odoms-Young received her B.S. in foods and nutrition from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and M.S./Ph.D. in community nutrition from Cornell University. Additionally, she completed a family research consortium postdoctoral fellowship examining family processes in diverse populations at the Pennsylvania State University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as well as a community health scholars fellowship in community-based participatory research at the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

Leanne Redman, PhD, is a Professor at Pennington Biomedical Research Center and Associate Executive Director of Scientific Education. Dr. Redman's primary research expertise lies in the intersection of obesity, metabolic disorders, and women's health. Her laboratory — the Reproductive Endocrinology and Women's Health Laboratory — conducts research in pregnant individuals (and their infants) with the goal to understand and lessen the impact of maternal obesity and metabolic disease on mothers and babies. She has made key contributions to understanding the physiological and behavioral drivers of gestational weight gain, designing and testing novel in-person and telehealth interventions to improve maternal outcomes and translating this knowledge from the research setting to public health programs. Dr. Redman has over 250 publications and she has received several prestigious honors, including awards for recognitions of her contributions to maternal obesity by The Obesity Society and the American Society of Nutrition and the National Postdoctoral Association for mentoring.

Laura E. Riley, MD, is Obstetrician and Gynecologist-in-Chief at NewYork-Presbyterian/ Weill Cornell Medical Center and Given Foundation Professor and Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Weill Cornell Medicine. A maternal-fetal medicine specialist and internationally recognized expert on obstetric infectious diseases, Dr. Riley specializes in the treatment of expecting mothers whose pregnancies are high-risk because of chronic illness, acute cancers, or infectious disease. She also works with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to develop practice guidelines for the care of pregnant women with Group B Strep, Ebola, Zika, influenza and COVID-19, as well as maternal immunization. She is the author of over 100 peer reviewed articles, clinical reviews, and national guidelines in her area of expertise, obstetric infectious disease. She is the past president of the Society for Maternal Fetal Medicine and is the consulting editor for Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinics of North America. Dr. Riley received her Bachelor of Arts degree in biology from Harvard University and her medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Dr. Riley remained at the University of Pittsburgh for her residency in obstetrics and gynecology before completing a fellowship in maternal fetal medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and infectious disease at Boston University Medical Center.

Nanette Santoro, MD, is the E. Stewart Taylor Chair of Obstetrics & Gynecology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Dr. Nanette Santoro completed her medical training in the 6-year BS-MD program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Albany Medical College, followed by residency at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City and a fellowship in Reproductive Endocrinology at Massachusetts General Hospital, where she remained on faculty for 3 years prior to joining the faculty at New Jersey Medical School in 1988. She moved to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine from 1998-2009, and then to the University of Colorado School of Medicine to assume the position of Chair.

Dr. Santoro has had continuous NIH funding since 1989, with serial R01, R21, U10, U54 and R25 grant awards focused on reproductive endocrinology, menopause and the effects of obesity on reproduction in women. She has authored over 300 peer-reviewed scientific publications and edited 4 books. She has personally mentored over 100 students, residents, postdoctoral fellows and junior faculty, many of whom have gone on to illustrious academic careers. She has been a Board member or elected officer for the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Inc. (1996-2009), the American Gynecologic and Obstetrical Society, the American Association for Gynecologists and Obstetricians Foundation, the Society for Reproductive Investigation, the North American Menopause Society, and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. She is Past President of the Society for Reproductive Investigation, Women in Endocrinology, the Society for Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility and the American Gynecologic Club. She is past Vice-President for Clinical Research for the Endocrine Society and President Elect of the Endocrine Society (2026-2027). She has been recognized by the Endocrine Society (Mentor Laureate Award 2016), the North American Menopause Society (Award for Research in Perimenopause 2004, prize paper and Tom Clarkson Research Award 2021), the International Menopause Society (Henry Burger Research Award in Perimenopause 2020), and the ASRM (Distinguished Researcher Award 2020). In 2018, Dr. Santoro was elected to the National Academy of Medicine. She is President Elect of the Endocrine Society (2026-2027).

Dr. Santoro has been named a Castle Connelly Best Doctor and “Best Doctor in America” for many years and has been a ‘Best Doctor’ in Westchester Magazine, New York Magazine, and 5280 Magazine. As Chair of the Department of OB-GYN at the University of Colorado School of Medicine since 2010, she helped recruit talent to make the Department #8 in the country for NIH funding in 2017, has tripled the faculty within the department, and quintupled the department’s annual revenue.

Judy Simon, MS, RDN, CD, CHES, is a registered dietitian nutritionist specializing in reproductive nutrition. She serves as adjunct faculty at the University of Washington and works as a clinical dietitian focused on women’s health and the OB/GYN population. In addition, she owns and operates her private practice, *Mind Body Nutrition PLLC*. Judy has held leadership positions in both the American Society of Reproductive Medicine’s Nutrition Special Interest Group and the Seattle Tacoma Reproductive Society. She is also recognized as a Fellow of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, a testament to her contributions to the field. Her co-authored book, *Getting to Baby: A Food-First Fertility Plan to Improve Your Odds and Shorten Your Time to Pregnancy* (BenBella Books, 2024), offers evidence-based guidance and practical strategies for enhancing fertility through nutrition. Judy’s expertise is frequently featured in leading media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Seattle Times*, *National Geographic*, *Verywell Health*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. She has also co-authored peer-reviewed articles published in *Fertility and Sterility* and *Diabetes Spectrum*.

Lawrence E. Tabone, MD, MBA, is the Director of Metabolic and Weight Loss Surgery and Division Chief of General Surgery at West Virginia University. He has performed over 2,000 bariatric operations including Roux-en-Y gastric bypass, sleeve gastrectomy, biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch, single anastomosis duodeno-ileal bypass, and a multitude of revisional bariatric surgeries. He currently serves as the President of the Virginia Bariatric Society and is a member of the Quality Improvement and Patient Safety Committee of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. Dr. Tabone earned his medical degree and completed his general surgery residency at Loyola University Chicago – Stritch School of Medicine, followed by a fellowship in bariatric and metabolic surgery at Duke University. He also holds an M.B.A., bringing a unique perspective to clinical leadership and healthcare delivery. His research focuses on the physiological effects of metabolic surgery, including changes in bone metabolism, gut hormone regulation, and cardiovascular health. Through his clinical, academic, and research work, Dr. Tabone is committed to advancing the field of bariatric surgery and improving outcomes for patients with obesity and metabolic disease.

Sacha Uelmen, RDN, CDCES, is the Director of Professional & Clinical Affairs at the Endocrine Society, where she leads the development of evidence-based, practical, and accessible programs and resources to support the training and professional growth of medical students, residents, fellows, and early-career endocrinologists. With more than 20 years of experience in diabetes education and nutrition—spanning clinical practice to national non-profit leadership—she brings expertise in quality improvement, patient and professional education, and advancing inclusive healthcare, with a current focus on strengthening the endocrinology workforce pipeline. She holds a BA in Sociology from the University of Michigan and a BS in Nutrition & Dietetics from Eastern Michigan University. A Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Diabetes Care & Education Specialist, Sacha has guided expert teams in publishing landmark consensus reports, including Nutrition Therapy for Adults with Diabetes or Prediabetes, Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support in Adults with Type 2 Diabetes, and a 2021 National Practice and Workforce Survey.

She continues to contribute to diabetes care advancement through her work with the Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists and as an active member of the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics.

Beth Widen, PhD, RD, is Associate Professor of Nutritional Sciences at The University of Texas at Austin. Her research is focused on nutrition, body composition and health during pregnancy, infancy and early childhood, particularly among families at high nutritional risk. Her contributions include advancing methods for prenatal weight and infant growth trajectories. She has also led a number of studies examining prepregnancy adiposity and prenatal weight gain in relation to child development and maternal and offspring body composition and metabolic health. She currently leads novel interventions to improve infant feeding and parenting sensitivity among infants and toddlers, and a longitudinal cohort focused on adipose tissue changes during pregnancy and postpartum, and their determinants. Dr. Widen has received many accolades including the Norman Kretchmer Memorial Award in Nutrition and Development from the American Society for Nutrition, the Mid-Career Award from the Community and Public Health Nutrition Research Interest Section of the American Society for Nutrition, and the Thrasher Research Fund Early Career Award. Dr. Widen holds a BS in Dietetics from Miami University, and a PhD in Nutritional Epidemiology from the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.