

The Early Relational Health Determinants of Future Health and Well-Being

Committee

David W. Willis

Chair

David Willis, M.D. (Chair), is professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Georgetown University, within the Thrive Center for Children, Families and Communities. There, he leads Nurture Connection, an impact network, to advance early relational health at the growing intersection of child health transformation and resilient community building in partnerships with families with a social justice commitment. A board-certified, developmental-behavioral pediatrician, Willis was a clinician in Oregon for more than 30 years with a practice focused on early childhood development and family therapy. Most recently, he led the start of the early relational health early childhood system transformation from an initiative at the Center for the Study of Social Policy before its transition to the Thrive Center. And, previously, he was the first executive director of the Perigee Fund, a Seattle-based philanthropy focused on strengthening the social and emotional development of all babies and toddlers, and on advancing the workforce to do so. Prior to that, Willis served as director of the Division of Home Visiting and Early Childhood Services at the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal Child Health Bureau, in Washington, DC; where he currently continues to be a thought leader in home visiting and early childhood systems. During his career, he has also been a Harris Mid-Career fellow with childhood development nonprofit ZERO TO THREE; the past president of the Oregon Pediatric Society; an executive member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP's) Section on Early Education and Child Care; and chair of the AAP's Board's Early Brain & Child Development Strategic Initiative. Willis has been a national lecturer, advisor to early childhood national policy and visionary for the transformation of child health care in coordination with early childhood communities and focused on the advancement of early relational health and young children's social-emotional and developmental well-being. He received his M.D. from Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University.

Michael Arenson

Member

Michael Arenson, M.D., M.S.C.R., M.A., is a pediatrician and faculty member in the Department of Pediatrics at Hennepin Healthcare and the University of Minnesota. He previously served as a fellow in Early Relational Health and Child Health Equity at UMass Chan Medical School and completed his pediatric residency at Seattle Children's Hospital and University of Washington. Dr. Arenson's work focuses on early relational health, trauma-informed care, and child health equity, particularly for system-involved youth. He co-edits the forthcoming AAP Pediatric Textbook on Developmental Trauma and Resilience and is a co-author of an upcoming American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on screening for childhood trauma. He has collaborated with the National Center for Relational Health and Trauma-Informed Care to design clinical tools that strengthen relational health in practice and regularly provides national training on trauma-responsive pediatric care. He is a member of the AAP Council on Early Childhood and serves as a peer reviewer for JAMA Open Network and Frontiers in Public Health.

Charlyn Harper Browne

Member

Charlyn Harper Browne, Ph.D., is an independent consultant focusing on supporting projects and developing resources designed to promote the healthy development and well-being of children, youth, and parents. She is a former senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Social Policy where she was responsible for contributing to the research, theoretical, technical assistance, and training components of projects related to children, youth, and families, in particular the Strengthening Families, Youth Thrive, and DULCE approaches. Previously, she served as a college and university administrator and a professor in departments of psychology and counseling. Her educational background includes extensive post-doctoral coursework in clinical child and family psychology after earning a Ph.D. in early childhood education.

Elisabeth Burak

Member

Elisabeth Burak, M.P.P., is a Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families (CCF) with more than two decades of experience in federal and state policies to support low-income families. She leads CCF research project on Medicaid's role in supporting early childhood development and maternal health and provides expertise and support to state and national leaders on Medicaid policy. Prior to joining CCF in 2011, she served as Director of Health Policy and Legislative Affairs with Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families, where she led successful efforts to expand access to Medicaid and CHIP for children and improve access to a range of education and social services. She also worked inside state government as the Director of Policy and Planning for the Arkansas Department of Human Services, leading a cross-agency children's mental health initiative. She began her career in Washington, D.C. at the National Governors Association and The Finance Project. She holds Master of Public Policy and Master of Social Work degrees from the University of Michigan and a B.A. from Smith College.

Dominique Charlot-Swilley

Member

Dominique Charlot-Swilley, Ph.D. is a psychologist and assistant professor at Georgetown University's Thrive Center for Children, Families, and Communities. Her work spans early childhood and pediatric primary care settings. She brings over two decades of experience serving infants, toddlers, and their families in Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; and Miami, FL. Her research expertise centers on intervention science that promotes early relational health and provider wellbeing. As a community-based researcher and mindfulness meditation teacher, she emphasizes co-creation with communities and the importance of leveraging their strengths to develop solutions tailored to their specific needs. She co-founded the Infant, Early Childhood, Mental Health: Family Leadership certificate program, developed the CPR² (Compassion, Practice, Relationship & Restoration) group-based wellness intervention, and co-created an online platform that enables behavioral health providers to assess and continuously improve both individual and organizational wellbeing. She serves on the Nurture Connection Steering Committee, the HealthySteps National Advisory Committee, and the FAN/AAP Advisory Board. Prior to joining Georgetown and Children's National Hospital, she served as a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University, adjunct professor at Howard University, George Washington University, and Montgomery College and was assistant director of a private practice in Maryland. Dr. Charlot-Swilley earned her Ph.D. in clinical child psychology from Howard University, completed her internship training at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, and completed postdoctoral training at Johns Hopkins University.

Dani Dumitriu

Member

Dani Dumitriu, M.D., Ph.D., is internationally recognized for her expertise in pediatrics; neuroscience; resilience; family-, patient-, and clinician-inclusive study design; and dyadic measures of parent-child health, such as maternal-infant emotional connection, prenatal and early postnatal influences (including stress) on maternal-infant health, and the relationship between early relational health and lifecourse health outcomes. Dr. Dumitriu is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics (in Psychiatry) and the inaugural director of the Center for Early Relational Health at Columbia University. She dedicates 80% of her time to research and 20% to active pediatric practice in the Newborn Medicine Unit at Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital of NewYork-Presbyterian. The unifying principle of Dr. Dumitriu's multifaceted research program is to actuate a strengths-based pivot in pediatrics: preventing pathology by promoting resiliency. From basic science through clinical & implementation studies, her multi-modal, multi-species, multi-scale research focuses on understanding and harnessing the neurocircuits of resilience, toward spearheading novel approaches to universal primary prevention and health promotion.

Andrew Garner

Member

Andrew Garner, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.A.P., is a pediatrician, advocate, and author. He has practiced primary care pediatrics with the University Hospitals of Cleveland for more than 25 years. Garner is an active member of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), has served as the president of the Ohio Chapter, and he has participated in three national AAP Leadership Workgroups (on Poverty, Epigenetics, and Early Brain and Child Development). He has co-authored the AAP's two policy statements (2012, 2021) on childhood toxic stress as well as an AAP-published book *Thinking Developmentally: Nurturing Wellness in Childhood to Promote Lifelong Health* (2018, 2nd edition 2025). Garner has been recognized for his advocacy on behalf of children and their families, including the Ohio Pediatrician of the Year Award from the Ohio Chapter of the AAP and the Susan Aronson Early Education and Child Care Advocacy Award from the national AAP Council on Early Childhood. He has a B.A., with distinction in psychobiology, from Swarthmore College, both M.D. and Ph.D. in neuroscience from Case Western Reserve University, and completed the pediatric residency training program at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Andrea Gonzalez

Member

Andrea Gonzalez, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. She holds a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Family Health and Preventive Interventions and is recognized as a Member of the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists. She also serves on several editorial boards, chairs the Public Health Agency of Canada's Child Maltreatment Surveillance Working Group, and is a member of the World Health Organization's Extending the Benefits Across the Life Course Network. Her research investigates how early life adversity shapes brain development, health, and behavior, with particular attention to intergenerational pathways of risk. She also develops and evaluates preventive interventions that support families and promote caregiver and child well-being. Trained in psychology, neuroscience, and epidemiology, Dr. Gonzalez brings an interdisciplinary perspective to maternal and child health, parenting, and family well-being, and works in collaboration with communities and partners across sectors to translate evidence into practice.

Justin Lavner

Member

Justin A. Lavner, Ph.D., is a professor and the director of clinical training in the Department of Psychology at the University of Georgia. His research aims to understand and improve family health and well-being, particularly among underserved and marginalized populations. Specifically, Dr. Lavner's work examines (a) how and why relationships change; (b) the effects of minority and contextual stressors such as racial discrimination, financial strain, and sexual stigma on individual and family functioning and the protective factors that buffer these effects; and (c) preventive interventions to strengthen relational, physical, and mental health among couples and families. He was an associate editor for the Journal of Family Psychology and serves on the editorial boards for a number of other journals, including Child Development, Family Process, the Journal of Marriage and Family, and the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. He received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and completed his clinical internship at the San Diego VA / University of California, San Diego.

Barbara Rogoff

Member

Barbara Rogoff, Ph.D., is UCSC Foundation Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of California-Santa Cruz. She investigates cultural aspects of children's learning and how communities arrange for learning, finding especially sophisticated collaboration, attention, and community-mindedness among children from some Mexican and Indigenous communities of the Americas. She is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Education, and a Fellow of the AAA, APS, APA, and AERA. She has received Distinguished Lifetime Contributions Awards from the Society for Research in Child Development, the Jean Piaget Society, the Latinx Caucus of SRCD, the Cultural-Historical Research Interest Group of AERA, and the Chemers Award for Outstanding Research (UCSC). She has held the University of California Presidential Chair and Fellowships of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Kellogg Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and the Exploratorium, and served as Editor of Human Development. A cat that lives at a University in Pakistan is named in her honor (the cat's full name: "Doctor Barbara Rogoff").

Her books have received major awards, such as *Learning Together* (finalist for the Maccoby Award, APA); *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (APA William James Book Award); and *Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town* (Maccoby Award, APA). A journal special issue published in Spanish and English provides an overview the theoretical framework that she and her colleagues have developed: LOPI, "Learning as a community process of observing and pitching in." *Journal for the Study of Education and Development / Infancia y Aprendizaje* (2022).

Michelle Sarche

Member

Michelle Sarche, Ph.D., is a professor in the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and trained as a clinical psychologist. She is a citizen of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe. Sarche has been partnering with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in research and evaluation related to children's development in the context of family, community, culture, and early care, education and home visiting programs and related to health and well-being across the lifespan for over 25 years. Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Administration for Children and Families. Sarche's current projects include the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center, the Native Children's Research Exchange Network and Scholars program, the Center for Indigenous Research Collaborations and Learning in Home Visiting, and the Center for Innovative Research, Capacity Building, and Leadership Development to End Substance Use Harms (CIRCLE). She is a 2018 Ascend at the Aspen Institute Fellow, recipient of the National Indian Head Start Association Child Advocate of the Year award, inductee into the Academy for Community Engaged Scholarship, and recipient of the Society for Prevention Research 2025 Advances in Culture and Diversity in Prevention Science Award. She obtained a B.Sc. in psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and both M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Loyola University—Chicago.