



# Disability Health Symposium



**Thursday, February 27, 2025**

- 8:00 AM                    **Registration/breakfast**
- 8:45 AM                    **Welcome and Opening Remarks**  
**Andrew Butler, Dean, UAB School of Health Professions**
- 9:00 AM                    **Keynote Address**  
**Advancing Health and Reducing Disparities for People with Disabilities  
in the United States**  
Linda Long-Bellil
- 9:45 AM                    **Break**
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- Session 1**                    **Secondary Health Conditions in Disability**  
Session Chair: Tim Behrens
- 10:00 AM                    **NCHPAD Connect: Bridging the Gap and Increasing Reach and  
Effectiveness of Healthcare, Therapy and Community Wellness Through  
a Data Driven Approach**  
Tapan Mehta
- 10:20 AM                    **Examining Secondary Health Conditions in Disability: Insights from the  
National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation  
Research (NIDILRR) Longitudinal Model Systems Databases**  
Yuying Chen
- 10:40 AM                    **Personal Voice**  
Dante Bacani
- 11:00 AM                    **Flash Talks**
- 12:00 PM                    **Lunch and Networking**
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- Session 2**                    **Telehealth and Telerehabilitation**  
Session Chair: Scott Crawford



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- 1:30 PM **Stronger Together: Empowering Stroke Recovery Through Family-centered Care**  
Sarah Blanton
- 2:00 PM **Creating a Telehealth Home-Based Program to Improve Exercise Guidelines Adherence in Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury**  
Alex Wong
- 2:30 PM **Break**
- 2:45 PM **Reimagining Telehealth with Artificial Intelligence**  
Mohanraj Thirumalai
- 3:00 PM **Leveraging Low-Cost Technology for Scalable Exercise Solutions for Children with Mobility Disabilities**  
Byron Lai
- 3:15 PM **Personal Voice**  
Teresa White
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- 3:35 – 5:00 PM **Poster Session and Networking**

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Friday, February 28, 2025

8:00 AM                      **Registration and Breakfast**

8:30 AM                      **Day Two Welcome**

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**Session 3**                      **Disability Research Dissemination and Implementation**  
Session Chair: Nancy Payne

8:45 AM                      **Keynote Address**  
**Improving Community Delivery and Sustainability of Exercise Programs  
for People Post Stroke**  
Ian Graham

9:30 AM                      **Rethinking Wellness: It is for All Persons. Advancing Health & Wellness  
Physical Therapy Practice for and with Persons Living with Neurologic  
Conditions**  
Elissa Held Bradford

10:00 AM                      **Break**

10:15 AM                      **Implementation Science Applications for Disability Health: Promises &  
Pitfalls**  
Larry Hearld

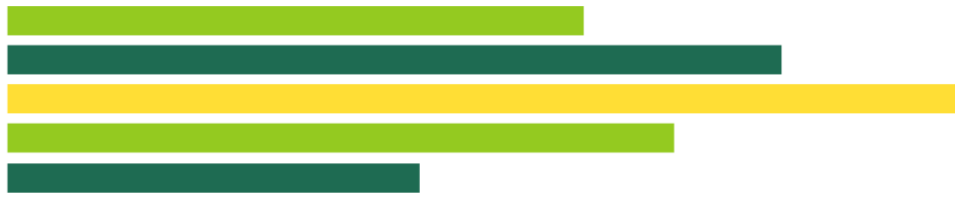
10:30 AM                      **Bridging the Gap with the Growing Resilience Out of Wellness and  
Thoughtful Habits (GROWTH) Program: A Community-Engaged,  
Iterative Implementation Science Approach to Social, Emotional, and  
Mental Wellness for People with Mobility Limitations**  
Robin Lanzi

10:45 AM                      **Meghan Mills**  
Personal Voice

11:05 AM                      **Closing Keynote Address**  
**Disability Inclusion & Representation in Implementation Science  
Research**  
Anjali Forber Pratt



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11:50 AM

**Announcement of Flash Talk and Poster Winners**

Yuying Chen

12:00-1:30 PM

**Lunch and Networking**



CENTER FOR ENGAGEMENT IN DISABILITY  
HEALTH AND REHABILITATION SCIENCES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham



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## Speaker Bios



**Dante A. Bacani** experienced a catastrophic ischemic stroke that nearly killed him in May 2021, a week after turning 55 years old. Since then, he has been focused on therapies and treatments for stroke recovery, and on maximizing his health span. He is an alumnus of NCHPAD's MENTOR, GROWTH programs, and SOS weight loss program. Prior to the stroke, Dante was a marketing & communications consultant, and an aspiring screenwriter. Still writing, he is currently working on a memoir of his stroke recovery experience. He's curious about what form his post-stroke career will take, and he's determined that some type of disability advocacy will be part of it. He lives in Los Angeles, CA (along with 13 million other aspiring screenwriters).



**Sarah Blanton, DPT** is a Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine, Division of Physical Therapy. Dr. Blanton is an NIH-funded researcher, with several grants exploring the integration of family carepartners into stroke rehabilitation. Dr. Blanton's DISCOVER Lab (Digital Scholarship Enhancing Rehabilitation), explores various ways digital scholarship can enhance rehabilitation research, education, and clinical practice and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. She is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the [\*Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation\* \(JHR\)](#).



**Dr. Elissa Held Bradford, Ph.D., PT, NCS** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Therapy and Athletic Training at Saint Louis University and a practicing physical therapist with over 20 years of experience. She is a board-certified specialist in Neurologic Physical Therapy. Her teaching, clinical practice and research centers on health promotion for those with neurodegenerative disease through the intersection of movement analysis and behavior change to enhance physical activity and health-related quality of life. Dr. Held Bradford has presented information related neurodegenerative disease, wellness, clinical reasoning, and visual analysis of human movement at local, national and international conferences and published several related articles.

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**Yuying Chen, MD, Ph.D.** is a tenured Professor and Vice Chair of Research in the UAB Department of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R). She was trained as a physiatrist in Taiwan and earned a Master of Public Health from Yale University and Ph.D. in epidemiology from UAB. Dr. Chen's has devoted her research to understanding the longitudinal course of spinal cord injury (SCI) by analyzing data from large datasets and through application of advanced analytics. With supports from NIDILRR, NIH, and private foundations over the last 2 decades, Dr. Chen has led several projects and published more than 100 manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals. Her work has gained national and international recognitions in areas of SCI epidemiology and

associated secondary conditions, including obesity, women's health, health disparities, and social determinants of health.



**Anjali J. Forber-Pratt, Ph.D.** is the Director of Research at the American Association on Health & Disability (AAHD), a disability activist, and a two-time Paralympian. Prior to this role, she served as the Director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) in the Administration for Community Living. She holds three degrees from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As a researcher, her primary area of work relates to disability identity development. She presents regularly at state, national, and international conferences and is an author on numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and chapters. As a wheelchair-user for over 40 years, Dr. Forber-Pratt is nationally and internationally recognized as a disability leader and mentor. She was a White House Champion of Change in 2013, and the

American Psychological Association awarded her the 2020 Citizen Psychologist Award for Advancing Disability as a Human Rights and Social Justice Issue Award.



**Ian D. Graham, Ph.D., FCAHS, FNYAM, FRSC** is Distinguished University Professor in the Schools of Epidemiology and Public & Nursing at the University of Ottawa, and Senior Scientist at the Centre for Implementation Research, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute. He is a health sociologist by training with extensive experience as a health services researcher and implementation scientist. Dr. Graham is a pioneer in the fields of knowledge translation and implementation science being the originator of such frameworks and models as the Knowledge to Action Framework, Ottawa Model of Research Use, and most recently,

Implementation Roadmap. From 2006-2012 he was seconded to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research as Vice President of Knowledge Translation. He has been inducted as a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, New York Academy of Medicine and Royal Society of Canada and twice awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Medal (2002, 2012) for contributions to research.

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**Larry R. Hearld, Ph.D.** is Professor and Director of Research in the Department of Health Services Administration at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is an Associate Director in the UAB Center for AIDS Research and UAB Center for Outcomes and Effectiveness Research and Education, where he serves as the Director of the Dissemination, Implementation, and Improvement Sciences Core. His research focuses on the antecedents and consequences of organizational change in health care, with special emphasis on dissemination and implementation science in health care. He has been a PI and co-I on NIH-, AHRQ-, PCORI-, and foundation-funded studies that examine the dissemination and implementation of quality improvement processes and innovative care delivery models within hospitals, primary care organizations, and local communities.



**Byron Lai, Ph.D.** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), within the Division of Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine. He has been conducting exercise research for people with disabilities for 8 years. He completed his doctoral training and a postdoctoral fellowship at UAB, within the Department of Physical Therapy in the School of Health Professions. He further completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine. He has over a decade of experience in clinical exercise training among various groups of people with physical and cognitive disabilities. Dr. Lai's research interests focus on incorporating technology to provide enjoyable and accessible,

evidence--based exercise programs for people with disabilities. Specific areas of interest include active video gaming, wearable monitoring devices, and therapeutic exercise with music.



**Robin Lanzi, Ph.D., MPH**, is a professor of Health Behavior and Psychology and applied developmental psychologist with an MPH in maternal and child health and training in Implementation Science. Her postdoctoral fellowship was in Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) at the UAB Sparks Center for Learning and Developmental Disorders. A central theme throughout her research is "putting research into practice" through multiple pathways, including a focus on community engagement and dissemination and implementation science. Her scholarly activities center on mental well-being, disability and chronic health conditions and the advancement of new research methodologies and strategies. She serves as Director of Community Engagement

for CEDHARS, National Director of Community Engagement and Translational Sciences for NCHPAD and MPI of the UAB CFAR Implementation Science Consultation Hub.

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**Linda Long-Bellil, Ph.D., JD** is an assistant professor of Family Medicine and Community Health in the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School where she is based at the E.K. Shriver Center. She conducts research and policy analysis on issues related to health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, and long-term services and support. She also teaches in the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Fellowship program and has more than twenty years of experience teaching medical and other health professions students how to provide quality care to people with disabilities. She is a founding board member of the Alliance for Disability in Health Care Education, a member of the Editorial Board of the Disability and Health Journal, and Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Spina Bifida Association of Greater New England.



**Tapan Mehta, Ph.D.** is a health services researcher with several years of experience in biostatistics and data mining. He is a tenured Professor and Vice Chair for Research in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). His training included PhD in Biostatistics and Masters in Electrical Engineering. He co-leads the NIH-funded Nutrition Obesity Research Center Behavioral Science and Analytics Core and leads the CDC-funded Data Coordinating Center for the National Center on Health Physical Activity and Disability. His research projects include from large randomized controlled trials related to telehealth to analysis of large existing datasets. Dr. Mehta's research interest span from clinical, epidemiological and

health services related scientific inquiries in topics related to obesity, cardiometabolic conditions, disability, and rehabilitation.



**Meghan L. Mills, Ph. D** is a Program Director at the UAB School of Health Professions Research Collaborative. She earned her doctorate at the University of New Hampshire in medical sociology. Her expertise is in the unequal social distribution of health outcomes and the social model of disability. As a disability researcher and service dog handler, Dr. Mills is particularly passionate about education and advocacy aimed at protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities who use service dogs. Her recent research examines the relationship between people fraudulently presenting their pets as service dogs and the resulting discrimination for people with disabilities. Currently, her work focuses on improving healthcare accessibility for service dog

handlers.



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**Mohanraj Thirumalai, Ph.D.** is an Associate Professor in the Division of Preventive Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and serves as the Director of Health Technology. In his current role, he leads groundbreaking research at the intersection of technology and health, with a focus on creating scalable, accessible, and impactful solutions for underserved populations, including people with disabilities. Dr. Thirumalai's work emphasizes leveraging innovative technologies such as telehealth platforms, interactive voice response systems, and adaptive gaming devices to address chronic disease management and promote physical activity. He directs a rehabilitation engineering research center focused on recreational and exercise

technologies for people with disabilities through which multiple interventions are designed and delivered.



**Teresa White** received confirmation that her symptoms of tingling and fatigue were due to multiple sclerosis in 2010, after 8 months of miscellaneous tests and "possible" diagnoses. As a busy mother of five children, a choice had to be made. That choice was to face this diagnosis head on and make the most out of all resources available. With the guidance of her amazing medical team, she was able to begin a medication regime that alleviated her symptoms and allowed her to regain her positive outlook on life. She has kept her disease progression in check for almost 15 years! Getting connected with the NCHPAD programs, MENTOR and GROWTH, opened a new window on the body/mind/spirit approach to good health that stays with her. Participating in the SOS Everyone

program and being an assistant coach reinforced the positive lifestyle changes. She is active in the annual MS Walk for her area, raising awareness, and much needed funds for research to close the gap on a future cure.



**Alex Wong, Ph.D., OT, CRC** is an Assistant Director in the Center for Rehabilitation Outcomes Research at the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab and a Research Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the Department of Medical Social Sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. His current research focuses on developing, evaluating, and implementing technology-based approaches to assess and treat persons with neurological disorders. He is particularly interested in developing therapeutic tools that enable longitudinal measurement of patient outcomes, as well as personalized and timely models of treatment delivery. Dr. Wong has contributed to federally and foundation-funded projects that involve mobile health assessments

of post-injury functioning and technology-supported interventions to promote self-management, wellness, and exercise adherence among individuals with neurological disorders.