



STATE PARTNERSHIPS

— IMPROVING —

NUTRITION & EQUITY

State Partnerships Improving Nutrition & Equity (SPINE) Kick Off Meeting: Speakers Bios

Bios are arranged in the order in which speakers will be presenting.

Jennie Hefelfinger, MS- Jennie A. Hefelfinger is the Director for the Center of Advancing Healthy Communities. She has been a public health advocate for more than 33 years, working at the local, state, and national level.

Previously, Jennie provided leadership and direction for several programs and projects, including: the Action Communities for Health Innovation and Environmental Change (ACHIEVE) Program; the Balancing Intake through Exercise Project; and the Safe Routes to School Florida Partnership. She also provided program support to the Arthritis Program, the National Diabetes Prevention Program, Million Hearts, and other capacity building initiatives.

During the 2004-05 hurricane season, Jennie was Hurricane Katrina Individual Displaced Persons Team Lead and a Hurricane Frances Operations Chief. She also served as part of the response teams for Hurricanes Charley and Ivan. She was also Executive Director of the Florida Partnership for Healthy Communities for the Florida Alliance of YMCAs for three years and provided direction for the Pioneering Healthy Communities grant award from the YMCA of the USA.

Jennie has a BS and an MS from Florida State University. She has been a member of national and state professional organizations and associations and multi-agency coalitions. Jennie has held executive leadership positions in most of her volunteer efforts, including as a board member of the Directors of Health Promotion and Education and as President of the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors as well as different positions with the Florida Public Health Association.

Jennie is a graduate of Leadership Tallahassee, Class 27, and enjoys traveling and biking with her friends and family.

John W. Robitscher, MPH- As Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, John Robitscher, MPH, provides direction and leadership to achieve NACDD's [Mission, strategic plan](#), and annual operating and fundraising plans; and serves as steward of the Association's [funds](#). Since joining NACDD in 2005, he has led the organization's acquisition of more than \$100 million in funding for hundreds of chronic disease prevention and health promotion [programs](#) across all 50 states and U.S. territories.

NACDD currently represents over 7,000 public health practitioners working across the United States, specifically working in chronic disease prevention and health promotion programming at state and local health departments and other organizations.

As CEO, John oversees a growing organization of 38 full-time employees and more than 50 consultants located across the country and in U.S. territories. John has also overseen the growth of the Association, itself, from less than \$5 million when he joined the organization in the early 2000's to \$48 million in FY 2021.

In 2020, after years of John's leadership to promote health equity, John committed NACDD to advancing [anti-racism](#) in public health and challenged other public health organizations and associations to do the same.

John has more than 30 years of experience managing nonprofit organizations. Prior to joining NACDD, John served as the Executive Director of the Henry W. Grady Foundation and as a fellow at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

John also served as the Chief Development Officer for the International Life Sciences Institute's Center for Health Promotion. John was the Director of Rural Health for the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Laura Kettle Khan, PhD, MIM- Dr. Laura Kettel Khan is currently the Senior Scientist in the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Kettel Khan is internationally known in the field of obesity prevention evaluation methodology and research design of multi-sectoral interventions and serves on numerous national advisory committees related to evaluation which build the evidence for policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies for healthy communities. She represents the CDC on numerous national partnerships with public and private funders which focus on healthy eating and active living. When Laura isn't working, she enjoys laughing at her Airedale terrier, Elsa, adapting a recipe so it tastes great, community service, building adult relationships with her two sons, Andrew and Louis, and visiting and sharing memories with her 92-year-old mother in California.

Charita James, MS, RD- Charita James is a Public Health Consultant with NACDD for the State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) Program. She is a Registered Dietitian with more than 10 years of diverse experiences in the public health nutrition realm. She has a deep interest in community nutrition, food justice, and nutrition security.

Charita has a successful track record for developing and implementing community programs that promote health equity, develop young food justice leaders, and build the capacity of organizations to carry out healthy food projects. Charita holds a MS in Nutritional Sciences from Rutgers University and a BS in Community Health Education from Hunter College. Charita

enjoys traveling, trying new cuisines and restaurants, fitness, and doing anything that involves self-care (including watching the newest shows on Netflix). She resides in New Jersey.

Patrilie Hernandez, MS- Patrilie Hernandez (she/they) is a Public Health Consultant with NACDD for the State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) Program. She has more than 14 years of professional experience that has shaped her understanding of health and nutrition as not only individual pursuits, but how they seamlessly intersect with our built environment, equity, and social justice.

After initially working in the restaurant industry in both back and front of the house for more than five years, Patrilie redirected her love for food to nutrition education, anti-hunger advocacy, and policymaking around food access and food justice. Since then, Patrilie's work in nutrition has broadened to address the other social determinants of health that influence individual and community well-being. In her spare time, she likes cooking for others, looking at the moon, and spending time with her fiancé and her chihuahua.

Tiffany M. Pertillar, MSW, MPH, CHES- Tiffany is a public health professional with nearly 15 years of experience working on population health, chronic disease prevention and control, and health equity. With Master's degrees in Public Health and Social Work and sub specializations in Maternal Child Health and Global Health, Ms. Pertillar's public health career has focused on advancing equity in communities of color, both domestically and internationally. In 2008 she was the manager of and master trainer for a national train-the-trainer initiative funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, where she trained over 1,000 nurses and lactation consultants on how to assist employers desiring to establish lactation support programs for their employees. Since that time, Ms. Pertillar has worked extensively on policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve the built environment and give all people access to healthy choices where they live, work, and play. In addition, Ms. Pertillar consulted with the National Association of Certified Professional Midwives, serving as their organizational strategist and providing direction and support to the organization as they sought to understand and address the needs of childbearing people in this country while determining the role that health equity, race, and social justice play in meeting those needs. As a public health consultant with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, Ms. Pertillar was a master trainer, engaging facilitator and experienced project manager with skills in grant writing, budget management, and personnel oversight. She has experience leading teams and projects related to school health, health equity, and preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes and colorectal cancer. Ms. Pertillar has supported the advancement of chronic disease prevention through policy advocacy, working to educate policy makers at the state and federal level. She has worked with traditional and non-traditional partners to advance population health to support chronic disease prevention, specifically in the most underrepresented and overlooked communities.

In 2018, Ms. Pertillar co-founded Epic Health Solutions, a consulting firm focused on Social Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within organizations and systems. Through this work, she has supported state health departments, philanthropic organizations, and national

membership associations in their efforts to integrate equity concepts into their internal organizational culture and their outward facing programs, policies, and practices. She is a social reformer and compassionate crusader for justice, whose mission is to elevate equity and promote health for all people, and she is known for her thought-provoking insights into the social issues that adversely impact the health of racial and ethnic minorities throughout the United States and beyond. She has a profound ability to captivate and connect audiences in efforts to bridge the racial and wealth gaps that have both defined and divided our nation. She works tirelessly to engage, educate, and empower this generation to incite the kind of social change that lifts up equity and upholds social justice in all ways.

Vishwarupa (Vish) Vasani, MPH- Vishwarupa (Vish) Vasani, MPH, is the Associate Director of the Center for Advancing Healthy Communities. She comes to NACDD from YMCA of the USA. As a Technical Advisor, she provided training and technical assistance to local YMCAs in the delivery of evidence-based chronic disease prevention and management programs to ensure adherence to program standards, contract terms, and other performance requirements.

Prior to that role, she was a Public Health Specialist for five years with the City of Minneapolis Health Department. There, she coordinated the development and implementation of various strategies designed to improve access to healthy eating, active living, and chronic disease prevention and management opportunities for all Minneapolis residents, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color. Her two greatest achievements were developing and leading the city's first healthier beverage initiative (ReThink Your Drink, Every Sip Counts) and working with the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority to create onsite systems for residents in high-rises to eat healthy, be active, and prevent and/or manage diabetes and hypertension.

She also completed a three-year Public Health Prevention Service fellowship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where she worked in the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity and the Division of STD Prevention. Vasani originally is from San Diego and currently resides there with her husband and daughter.

Diana C. Parra, PhD, MPH, PT- is a research assistant professor at the Brown school, she is also a yoga and mindfulness teacher and a mindfulness facilitator for the [Academy for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#). She focuses her research on the promotion of health and wellness through community-based programs for physical activity, nutrition, yoga, and mindfulness, geared towards marginalized, underrepresented, and oppressed minorities, particularly the Latinx immigrant population in the United States. Dr. Parra is a trained physical therapist from Bogota Colombia, with a Masters Degree in Public Health from Saint Louis University and a PhD in Social Work with a concentration in public health from Washington University in St. Louis. She completed her post-doctoral experience in Public Health nutrition at the University of Sao Paulo. She is a yoga teacher and a Mindfulness facilitator.

Karma E. Harris, MSPH- Karma Harris is a Public Health Consultant with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD). With this role, she leads the Walkability Action Institute project and most recently led the Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities project for NACDD.

Over the last 10 years at NACDD, she's worked with approximately 120 locations throughout the country in helping them make healthy community improvements. She has assisted them with capacity-building assistance, expertise and leadership in the establishment of new policy, system, and environmental (PSE) changes for inclusive physical activity, healthy eating, and tobacco strategic areas. Her tenure in chronic disease prevention and leadership is marked by 10 years of local and regional public health experience in the state of North Carolina, where she served in administrative leadership positions in two rural North Carolina counties to develop and manage community health educators, WIC nutritionists, and broad community health efforts.

Karma especially enjoys the overlap between physical activity, active transportation, built design, and disability inclusion and holds the general belief that when communities are built for everyone, no one gets left out.

When she is not working, one may often find her swimming, biking, running, and competing in the fun sport of triathlon. Much of her love for the built environment comes through seeing how a community is designed through the eyes of a biker, runner, or walker.

Leah Rimkus, MPH, RD- Leah Rimkus is the Program Evaluator for the Building Resilient Inclusive Communities (BRIC) program. Leah brings to NACDD more than 15 years of experience in research, evaluation, and program/project management. Her professional experiences have included positions in nonprofit, academic, and local government settings.

Prior to joining NACDD, Leah worked for five years with a large human service agency in Chicago, leading and supporting the evaluation of numerous programs, including parenting support, early childhood, youth development, and other programs. There, she supported staff across the agency in continuous quality improvement efforts and outcome reporting to a variety of public and private funders. Leah previously served for seven years as Deputy Director for Bridging the Gap, a national research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that focused on improving understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity, and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. As part of Bridging the Gap, Leah helped design research tools and protocols that were used in a national study to describe and identify disparities in community food environments. She also is a past recipient of a Fulbright fellowship which supported research on food and nutrition policy in Brazil.

Leah earned her Master of Public Health from the University of California, Berkeley, and her bachelor's degree in Nutrition from the University of Texas at Austin. She lives in Chicago with her husband and son.

Crystal E. Doxie, MBA - Crystal E. Doxie, MBA, is a Program Grant Manager at the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. Crystal brings to NACDD areas of expertise working in Grants and Contracts with pre-and-post award administration and management. She has an MBA in Healthcare Administration with a focus on Gerontology. Prior to her career at NACDD, Crystal was the Grants Manager at Georgia Institute of Technology for the School of Computer Science for three years. A native of Oklahoma, Crystal worked for 20 years at the University of Oklahoma as Grants Manager and Financial Specialist. She has managed an extensive portfolio of research grants for faculty members considered experts in their fields of autoimmune disease. She served on the Institutional Review Board providing ethical and regulatory oversight of grants involving human subjects.

Crystal's role and responsibilities at NACDD will include various areas of management in pre-and-post award, such as providing grant management support and coordination with CEO, Director of Programs and Director of Operations on the compliance of operational grant policies and procedures as well planning and preparation for the submission of grant application or proposals, identify new grants that align with the Association mission and strategic plan, assist with the preparation of the indirect rate audit proposal with the cognizant agency, and with the Single Audit (formerly known as the A133) and final closeout activities of grants and financial reporting. In addition to her regular work, she also provides oversight for the electronic pre-and-post award documentation retention system.

Crystal is an active member of Grants Professionals Association (GPA), where she serves on the Georgia Chapter of GPA and American Society of Administrative Professionals (ASAP). She regularly attends annual conferences and is involved in a podcast discussing areas of her expertise working in Grants and Contracts. She is very active with the senior adult population and enjoys in her free time volunteering for ministries such as Meals on Wheels and conducting focus groups for Children of Aging Parents (COAP). Crystal has successfully orchestrated annual events for senior adults in her community such as Senior's Night Out and annual picnics. Crystal is a strong advocate for caregivers, where she has been a caregiver for 15 years to her mother who has Multiple Scoliosis and promotes healthy mental and physical living for those caring for senior adults. In addition to Crystal's activities involved with the Senior Adult community, she also enjoys spending time with her four grandchildren