

# Fall 2021 Curtis Center Newsletter



The Curtis Center  
for Health Equity  
Research and Training

*Thankful and Thriving as We Celebrate 100 Years of Michigan Social Work*

## Celebrating Dr. James L. Curtis's 99th Birthday

This past April, Dr. James L. Curtis joined the Curtis Center Team for our monthly meeting. We sang "Happy Birthday" in honor of his 99th birthday and thanked him for his generous financial gift that created the Curtis Center.



Greetings Curtis Center friends,

In my opinion, the changing seasons are a time to pause and reflect. In fact, as I sat down to write this letter for our fall newsletter, I could not help but look back at our spring newsletter and think "My, my, my! We have done a lot since spring!"

I am excited to share this Fall 2021 issue of the Curtis Center newsletter with you for several reasons. First, we have hired a new Associate Director, Professor Jaclynn Hawkins, who will lead our educational and outreach initiatives. Second, the summer months brought several new health equity projects to the Center and with that came new faculty, staff, and student members. Finally, I remain enthusiastic about the innovative research, training, and outreach initiatives we have taken on. I am confident they will help us to lean into our vision of health equity for marginalized communities in Michigan and across the globe. Several dedicated team members worked hard to put this newsletter together. I hope you enjoy learning about what we have been up to.

Enjoy!

Daphne C. Watkins, Ph.D., Director  
 Vivian A. and James L. Curtis Center for Health Equity Research and Training

### New Associate Director

Assistant Professor Jaclynn Hawkins has been appointed Associate Director of the Curtis Center. She is also a Signature Program faculty affiliate.

"I was the recipient of the Vivian A. and James L. Curtis Endowed Scholarship as a Ph.D. student which made a huge difference in my life. I'm thrilled to be able to give back through this position in the Curtis Center for Health Equity," says Hawkins. "I am excited to help make our center a leader in health equity research, training and community outreach. We have many exciting things on the horizon, and with a strong team of staff, students and faculty, the possibilities are endless."



### New Team Members since March

Since March, we have welcomed several new faculty affiliates, staff, and students to the Curtis Center team.

### New Faculty Affiliates

We have expanded our team with the addition of five more faculty affiliates.



**Jade Burns**  
 Ph.D., RN, CPNP-PC  
*Assistant Professor of Nursing*

[Learn more](#)

**Fernanda L. Cross**  
 Ph.D., MSW  
*Assistant Professor of Social Work*

[Learn more](#)



**James M. Ellis**  
Ph.D., MSW  
*Assistant Professor, UM-SSW*

[Learn more](#)



**Paul J. Fleming**  
Ph.D., MPH  
*Assistant Professor of Health Behavior & Health Education*

[Learn more](#)



**Kara Zivin**  
Ph.D., M.S., M.A.  
*Professor of Psychiatry, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Health Management and Policy, and Research Career Scientist, VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System*

[Learn more](#)

**New Staff**

Over the summer, we also welcomed four new staff members onto the Curtis Center team.



Kate Kloss, M.S., RDN, CDCES  
*Program Manager*



Sharon Norris-Shelton, MSc  
*Senior Research Associate*



Jane Rafferty, M.A.  
*Research Area Specialist Sr.*



Ashley Starks, MSW  
*Program Assistant*

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**New Student**

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Brittany Ribeiro Brown  
*Curtis Center Doctoral Student  
Research Assistant,  
YBMen Project Manager*

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**Curtis Center External Advisory Board**

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Meet Curtis Center Advisory Board Member  
Derek M. Griffith, Ph.D.

Derek M. Griffith is a founding co-director of the Racial Justice Institute, founder and director of the Center for Men's Health Equity and professor of Health Systems Administration and Oncology at Georgetown University. Trained in psychology and public health, Dr. Griffith has published more than 140

articles on pursuing racial, ethnic and gender equity in health and addressing racism as a determinant of health.

Dr. Griffith has expertise in the health of middle-aged Black men because they tend to have the worst health profile among Black men in the United States and the worst health profiles of any age group of men globally. His research focuses on four broad areas: (a) how ideals of manhood can be used to motivate men to engage in healthier behavior; (b) how gendered racism, distrust and mistrust affect health; (c) the role of stress and coping in men's health; and (d) how an intersectional lens can be used to inform men's health interventions.

When asked why he joined the Curtis Center Advisory Board, Dr. Griffith said, "I have been working with Dr. Watkins for more than a decade. We initially met and began collaborating when I was a junior faculty member in the University of Michigan School of Public Health. Dr. Watkins came to Michigan as a postdoctoral fellow." Dr. Griffith went on to say, "We were kindred spirits and a bit unique because we were among the few at the time who explicitly shared an interest in focusing on the health and well-being of Black men." Since this time, Drs. Watkins and Griffith have continued to collaborate. In addition to co-authoring several manuscripts, they co-edited a journal special issue and are now co-editing, with Professor James Smith, a book tentatively titled, "Health Promotion with Adolescent Boys and Young Men of Colour: Global Strategies for Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice in Context" (Springer Press). "With my move to Georgetown this summer, there is a unique opportunity to create a partnership between the Curtis Center, the Freemasons Centre for Male Health and Well-being – Northern Territory at Darwin University in Australia and my new Center for Men's Health Equity in the university-wide Racial Justice Institute at Georgetown University. The edited book is the first of these projects, but we look forward to others."

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### Meet the Board

Earlier this year, our External Advisory Board met with the Curtis Center leadership. The charge of the External Advisory Board is to (1) inform our research, education and community outreach strategies; (2) provide advice and guidance on our current efforts and future initiatives; and (3) discuss our current projects, weigh in on important initiatives and provide insight into cutting-edge research, education and outreach efforts that inform our work.



**[Dr. Paula Allen-Meares](#)**

University of Illinois, Chicago



**[Dr. Jorge Delva](#)**

Boston University



[Dr. Jodi Jacobson-Frey](#)

University of Maryland, Baltimore



[Dr. Derek Griffith](#)

Georgetown University



[Dr. Tanya Sharpe](#)

University of Toronto



[Dr. Michael Spencer](#)

University of Washington



At our **Inaugural Health Equity Seminar** on Thursday, December 2, our External Advisory Board member Dr. Tanya Sharpe presented “A Pandemic of Grief: Experiences of Black Survivors of Homicide Victims—A discussion on the disproportionate impact, root causes and consequences of homicide for Black communities.” [YYou can now view the recording of this seminar on our website.](#)

### Active and Ongoing Projects

**1. The Michigan Center for Diabetes Translational Research (MCDTR)** has received funding from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) for another five years under new leadership, including both Dr. Watkins and Dr. Hawkins. Dr. Watkins is the Co-Director, with Dr. Edwin Fisher (from UNC at Chapel Hill), of Core #3, titled “Leveraging Community, Peer, and Family Support.” This Core aims to help investigators design and evaluate novel intervention approaches that effectively mobilize and evaluate different types and combinations of community, family and peer support to both address social needs and support health behaviors to improve diabetes prevention, management and equity.

Dr. Hawkins, in collaboration with Dr. William Herman, will lead the Pilot and Feasibility Program. She will create and distribute the MCDTR P/FS Grants Program Request for Applications (RFAs), solicit extramural reviews of applications, assemble the yearly review panel and ensure proper oversight and review of P/FS Grant expenditures. Dr. Hawkins will also track and report the success of the MCDTR P/FS Grants Program. Dr. Hawkins will be primarily responsible for organizing recruitment strategies for early career investigators who are underrepresented in translational diabetes research. She will also create and coordinate professionalization and mentorship activities for MCDTR P/FS awardees.

## **2. Diabetes with African American Men**

Dr. Hawkins is the PI of the Michigan Men's Diabetes Project, MenD, a three-month group-based virtual diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES) pilot study funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and the Claude D. Pepper Older Americans Independence Center. Participants of this study are African American men over the age of 55 with Type 2 diabetes that are currently living in the Metro Detroit area. The objective of this pilot project is to examine the relative effectiveness, feasibility and acceptability of a peer-leader intervention for African American men with Type 2 diabetes. Since African American men are at the highest risk for poor diabetes health outcomes, the long-term goal of the research is to determine the most effective, practical and sustainable approach to provide DSMES to African American men.

## **3. #MYHealth: Training the Next Generation of Scientists Through Participatory Research and Advocacy**

Dr. Watkins is a Co-Investigator for #MYHealth: Training the Next Generation of Scientists Through Participatory Research and Advocacy. This is an NIH-funded Science Education Partnership Award (SEPA). An overall goal of this project is to address the persistent problem of low-income and minority groups continuing to be disproportionately underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research careers.

This study will combine an innovative, youth-centered research program (MyVoice) with a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to build three components: 1) researcher identities, 2) scientific literacy and 3) scientific self-efficacy. The study team will achieve this objective by training underrepresented high school students as co-researchers to create applied science and research experiences.

## **4. NCID Unarmed Mental Health Crisis Evaluation**

Dr. Watkins is also a co-investigator on the NCID Unarmed Mental Health Crisis Evaluation proposal titled "Anti-racist Action by Cities and Communities to Respond to Racist Police Violence." This project will attempt to answer several questions: What are existing models for alternatives to armed police to address mental health or social crises? How does a municipality take steps to create an unarmed public safety program? What are key metrics to determine the success of such a program? Dr. Watkins will be working with Drs. Paul Fleming and William Lopez from the School of Public Health.

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## **Announcements**

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After a four-month process, the **Advancing Public Safety at the University of Michigan Task Force** released its final report on May 6, 2021 ([click here to see the report](#)). Together with Dr. Earl Lewis, Dr. Daphne C. Watkins co-chaired the task force of university faculty, students, staff and a parent, to address the current state of public safety and security at the University of Michigan.

**Congratulations to YBMen Project Manager Dr. Ed-Dee Williams!** He successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation, entitled “Black Boys Mental Health Help-Seeking: Exploring Perceptions, Barriers and Social Processes,” over the summer, and he has accepted a tenure track faculty position with Boston College to begin in the Fall of 2023. ([Click here for announcement.](#))

**Post Doc Opportunity:** The director of Nina Jackson Levin’s T32, Dr. Christopher R. Friese, is currently recruiting for the Research Fellows National Cancer Institute T32 Training Program, T32 in Cancer Care Delivery, which is focused on health equity. [You can view the posting here.](#)

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## Community Outreach and Research Dissemination

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**Community Engagement:** On March 12, 2021, Dr. Daphne C. Watkins discussed the responsibilities institutions have to the communities they serve during the **LEAD: Racial Equity and Community Engagement webinar**. Featured speakers Dr. Watkins and Dr. John M. Wallace, Jr. (University of Pittsburgh) shared their experiences with respectfully and responsibly entering communities.

[Check out this and other videos on our website \(click here\).](#)

**Dr. Watkins talks to film director Spike Lee** and jazz trumpeter Terence Blanchard for the Social Justice Changemaker Lecture.

[You can read the UM-SSW article about this Lecture here.](#)

**U-M SSW Centennial Lecture Series:** On October 14, 2021, Dr. Watkins contributed to the first session of the UM-SSW’s Centennial Lecture Series Intervention Research in Mental Health: Intervention Innovations for Depression and Suicide. If you missed it, you can view a recording of this lecture, which includes her talk “[Physical Distance, Social Connection: Reducing Depression Among Young Black Men With The YBMen Project](#)” (at minute 27:30). At the second session on November 17th, Dr. Hawkins presented on “[Program AACTIVE: African Americans Coming Together to Increase Vital Exercise](#).” On December 7, 2021, Dr. Watkins moderated the third session in this Centennial Lecture Series, “[Intervention Research in Mental Health, Session 3: Intervention Innovations for Technology-Based Approaches](#).”

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## Updates on the Signature Programs

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### **African American Chronic Care Equity through Self-management Program**

Lenette Jones, Jaclynn Hawkins and Jamie Mitchell, the Signature Program Faculty Leads for this Curtis Center Signature Program, have been leading several exciting research projects and writing two manuscripts (under review).

Dr. Jamie Mitchell, in addition to being named Michigan Medicine Rogel Cancer Center’s assistant director for clinical research participation, part of their Community Outreach and Engagement program ([see the announcement here](#)), was selected to provide the keynote for September’s Michigan Medicine Social Work Symposium, the theme of which was “A Research Odyssey: Integration of Social Justice and Shaping Inclusion in Research.” She was also a featured speaker at Ruth Frost Center for Abundant Aging/United Church Homes Conference on the Intersection of Race and Aging in August.

Dr. Jaclynn Hawkins, in addition to being named the Curtis Center associate director over the summer, also received an R21 research grant from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases entitled “Diabetes Self-Management Intervention for

African American Men” ([click here for more information](#)). Also, Dr. Hawkins gave a plenary talk for the NIDDK-funded Diabetes Research Centers and Centers for Diabetes Translation Research Virtual Seminar Series “Type 2 Diabetes in African American Men: Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead” ([click here to access the recording](#)).

Dr. Lenette Jones received the Betty Irene Moore Nurse Leader and Innovator Award. ([See her acceptance video here.](#))

### **Developing a Partnership to Address Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women in Michigan**

This Signature Program continues to work on developing community-led research with Uniting Three Fires Against Violence, a statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalition serving tribes in Michigan. Dr. Katie Schultz and the director and staff at the coalition continue their work on soliciting information about research priorities from key stakeholders. Over the summer, the program supported a tribal victim’s advocate who was interviewed as part of an online course on intimate partner violence being developed at the University. This was an opportunity to develop content on the unique context of violence against Native women and directly from a tribal member working in her community in this national online course.

In May, Dr. Schultz’s research project, Tribal Reservations Adolescent Connections Study, was funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. ([Click here for the UM-SSW announcement.](#))

### **A Psycho-Oncology Fellowship to Support Pre-Doctoral Health Disparity Research on Adolescent and Young Adult Sex and Gender Needs During Cancer**

Dr. Anao Zhang and the Curtis Center pre-doctoral fellow at Michigan Medicine’s Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Oncology Program, Nina Jackson Levin, recently published three peer-reviewed articles in leading psychosocial oncology journals including Critical Reviews in Oncology/Hematology. Additionally, the two authors had two papers accepted, one by Annals of LGBTQ Public & Population Health and one by the Journal of Cancer Survivorship. Notably, Nina’s first-authored paper in Annals of LGBTQ Public & Population Health directly addresses existing research and practice challenges facing sexual and gender minority (SGM) AYA cancer survivors. Additionally, Nina Jackson Levin (Co-PI) was recently awarded a pilot grant from the Institute for Research on Women and Gender to evaluate oncofertility needs and preferences of SGM cancer survivors. Finally, Dr. Zhang (Co-PI) recently received a grant from Ellipsis Health (direct cost: \$200,000) to evaluate the utility of an artificial intelligence- (AI-) enabled distress screening tool for adolescents and young adults. Findings from this study will provide valuable preliminary data to implement this tool among AYA cancer survivors who often experience mental health-related disparities during cancer care.

Dr. Zhang and Nina were recently interviewed for the Michigan Health Lab blog article, “Meet the team that’s changing cancer experiences for teenagers, young adults,” featuring the work of the AYA Oncology program at C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital. ([Click here for the article.](#))

### **The Young Black Men, Masculinities, and Mental Health (YBMen) Project**

#### **YBMen Launches in Australia**

The YBMen Project has been launched in Australia. The Freemasons Centre for Male Health & Wellbeing will use Indigenous leadership and co-design processes to adapt and contextualize the program to meet the needs of young Indigenous males across Australia. Developed initially for young Black college men in the U.S., YBMen provides social and educational support and connectedness via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Dr. Daphne Watkins, YBMen Project Founder, will serve as an advisor to the program. For more information on the partnership, [please follow this link for the press release.](#)

**YBMen at Michigan State University - A Report of Our Findings**

In 2017, Michigan State University and the YBMen Project team began conversations to bring YBMen to their main campus. The discussions centered around the challenges Black males were experiencing on campus and ways the YBMen intervention could help them thrive and improve their overall well-being. Using social media and prompts from pop culture, the YBMen team shared educational content about mental health, masculinity and social support with the men. At the end of the five-week program, the men completed a post-interview and participated in a survey about their experience. The outcomes of the interviews and survey were positive. They showed an increased awareness of progressive definitions of masculinity, fewer depression symptoms and positive attitudes about the value of social support. For more information about the MSU/YBMen program, [read the full report here.](#)

**YBMen Explores Program for Black Boys in High School**

YBMen is excited to be working with Transforming Research into Action to Improve the Lives of Students (TRAILS) to bring the YBMen Project to high school-aged Black boys at Ypsilanti Community High School (YCHS) in Michigan. TRAILS is a unique program that brings mental health care to schools. Earlier this fall, YBMen held separate focus groups at the high school with students and school personnel (teachers, staff, coaches, counselors, and social workers) to learn more about the specific needs of their Black boys. YBMen is now using what was learned from these focus groups to inform next steps in developing a program that supports Black boys at YCHS. More to come on this collaboration in our next issue. For information about TRAILS, [please visit their website here.](#)

**Congratulations to all of our Signature Program Faculty  
on their grant awards and fellowships!**

A special Congratulations to Lynn Videka, Dean and Carol T. Mowbray Collegiate Professor of Social Work, who will be stepping down as Dean at the end of December. The Curtis Center thanks you for your support and wishes you all the best.

**Connect with us!**

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