



# 2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Dornsife

School of Public Health



# WELCOME FROM THE DEAN

Welcome to our annual report for the 2024–2025 academic year. It has been a time of resilience, innovation, and impact at the Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health.

As we look ahead to a new academic year, I am proud to reflect back on the remarkable accomplishments of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. While no single report can capture the full scope of activity within our school, what follows offers a high-level glimpse into the many ways our community continues to advance its mission.

We celebrated new milestones, from welcoming new leadership at the university level to strengthening collaborations across disciplines and with our community partners. These efforts underscore our shared commitment to preparing students and driving research that addresses the most pressing health challenges of our time.

I invite you to join us in celebrating these achievements and in continuing to shape a healthier, more equitable world together.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gina Lovasi".

**Gina S. Lovasi, PhD, MPH**

Dana and David Dornsife Dean

Professor of Epidemiology

Drexel Dornsife School of Public Health





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## I. SCHOOL NEWS

+ On July 1, 2025, the university officially welcomed Dr. Antonio Merlo as Drexel's 16th president. Under his leadership, Drexel aims to further elevate its global standing in experiential education. President Merlo's early and active engagement with deans and leaders across the university has set the stage for a smooth transition and for the effective communication needed to collectively envision where the university is headed in a rapidly changing world.

+ In March 2025, Dornsife was ranked the number one school of public health in Philadelphia once again, according to the *US News and World Report* 2025 rankings of the nation's best graduate schools. Nationwide, the school tied for 27 out of 219 schools and programs of public health throughout the U.S. Each year, as more schools and programs are accredited, the rankings become more competitive. Since 2015, Dornsife has been recognized as a top graduate school nationally. This acknowledgement reflects the school's commitment to public health education and preparing the future workforce.

+ In October 2024, the Urban Health Collaborative (UHC) at Dornsife received 82 Alliance's inaugural A Better Tomorrow Award at the 2024 Mobility Conference. This award recognized UHC's contributions to improving climate, health, and equity in Philadelphia and beyond. Josiah Kephart, PhD, MPH, assistant professor at Dornsife, accepted the award on behalf of the UHC.



+ Dornsife's Center for Public Health Readiness and Communication (CPHRC) and Office of Education collaborated to develop and launch micro-credentials in infection control and emergency preparedness for staff in nursing homes and long-term care facilities throughout Pennsylvania. The development of these courses, which began in June 2023, was made possible with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DoH). It was part of a pilot project targeted to 125 facilities selected by PA DoH that participate in the state's Long-term Care Resiliency Infrastructure Supports and Empowerment (LTC-RISE) initiative. The goal was to implement workforce and infrastructure improvements to transform culture and improve the resiliency of long-term care facilities across the Commonwealth. In fall 2024, 122 students enrolled in one or more of these courses from 39 different long-term care facilities across Pennsylvania. More than 100 badges have been awarded so far and the micro-credentials continue to be offered online.

**Follow Dornsife on social  
media for more school news.**



**#EXPERIENCEDREXEL**



## II. STUDENT LIFE, ACADEMICS, & PRACTICE

+ Kwang-Seok Kang, Master of Science (MS) in Infection Prevention and Control student at Dornsife, was presented with the Emerging Leader in Infection Prevention Award by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC). This award recognizes new infection preventionists who have demonstrated commitment to the field and their professional growth. He was presented with this award at the APIC Annual Conference and Expo in June 2025 in Phoenix, AZ. Additionally, the award enables a year of leadership mentoring for him to further advance in the field.



+ Tai Simpson, Master of Public Health (MPH), doctoral student at Dornsife, and Kaylee Wilson, sociology student with a minor in global public health, represented Dornsife at the Population Association of America conference in April 2025. They presented “An Intersectional Comparison of Mental Health Outcomes by Sexual Minority Status and Rurality,” which was Simpson’s first research project at Drexel University.

+ Stacy Jimenez, MPH student and Dornsife Public Health Research Fellow, worked as a research assistant under the direction of Ana Martinez-Donate, PhD, professor and associate dean for public health practice and external relations at Dornsife, on the CRiSOL Mente project throughout the spring quarter. This project aims to improve mental health outcomes and promotes access to culturally appropriate mental health treatment within the Latino community in Philadelphia. Leading the project’s social marketing campaign, Stacy supported “promotoras de salud” by developing culturally tailored outreach materials and engaged Latino communities through in-person events, radio, and social media to reduce stigma around mental health care.

+ During the spring quarter, Disha S., MPH student, completed a research assistantship with the Health Equity Advancement Lab (HEAL) Lab, founded by Alexis Roth, PhD, MPH, associate professor at Dornsife. She worked on the TIARAS Project, which is a collaboration with Prevention Point Philadelphia, a community-based study that centers harm reduction and public health interventions for high-risk populations. It was a hands-on opportunity to apply what she learned in class to real-world research that makes an impact.

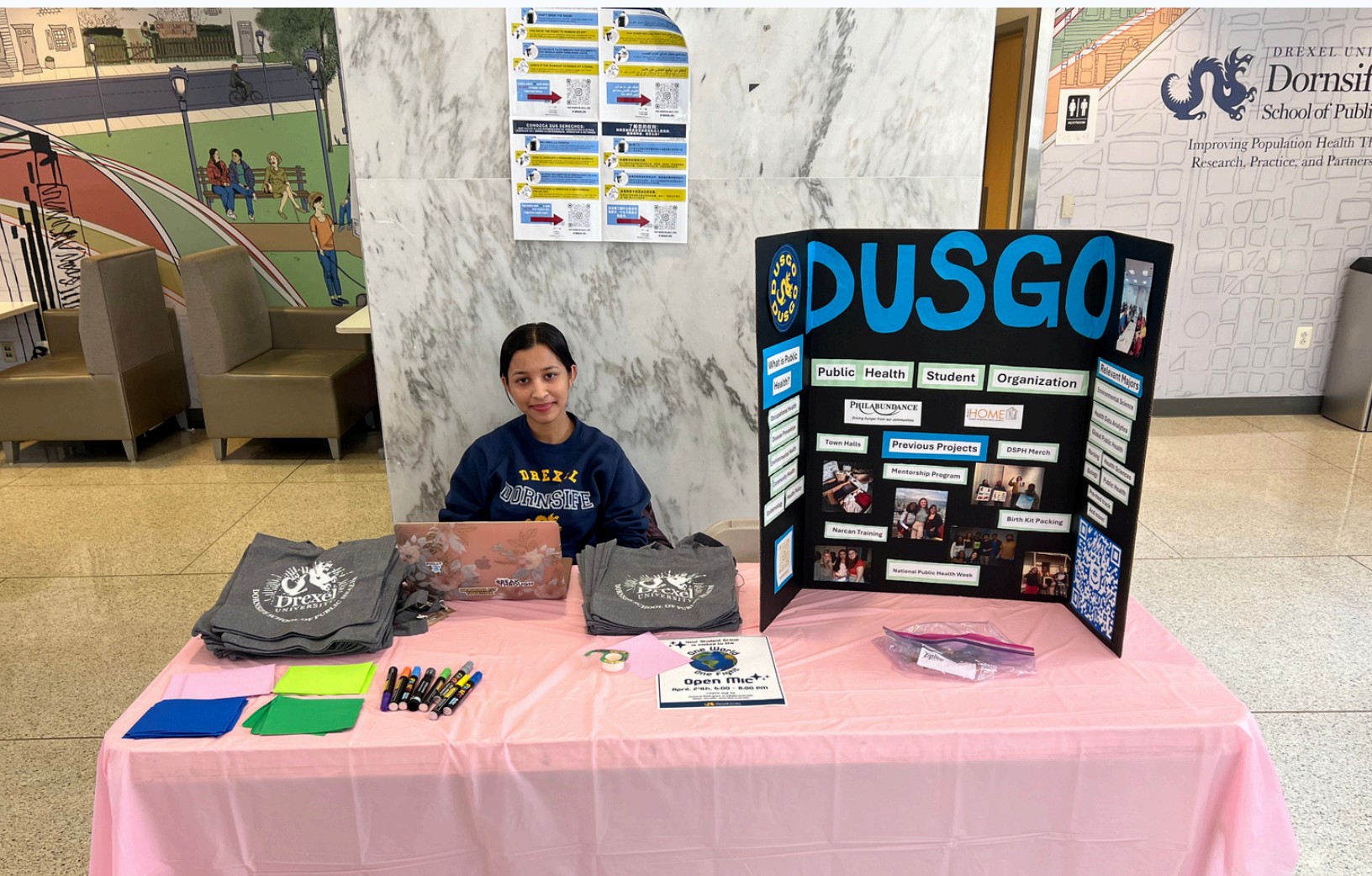
+ Dornsife MPH students Dilawer Siddiqi and Divya Chanda were selected as Association of Schools & Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) ‘This is Public Health’ Ambassadors for the 2024-2025 academic year. The cohort was the largest to date, comprised of more than 90 graduate students hailing from 61 ASPPH member schools worldwide. Dilawer and Divya each played a crucial role in fostering interest in public health education and career opportunities.



+ Eudes Johan Soussa completed an internship at the Delaware Valley Community Health (DVCH) in the Vaccine Department over the summer of 2024. This opportunity enabled him to apply his classroom knowledge in a practical setting. He worked closely with healthcare professionals to promote vaccination programs.

+ Marissa Campbell, MPH student with a minor in Maternal and Child Health, completed a Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant internship over the summer of 2024 at the New Jersey Department of Health's (NJDOH) Division of Family Health Systems. Marissa assisted the NJDOH Title V Team with their 2025 needs assessment within the Block Grant process, specifically within their data and capacity stage to gather secondary data. Every five years, states receiving Title V funding are required to conduct this assessment to identify the priority health needs that will guide state and local Title V programming over the next funding cycle. Marisa learned more about this process and gained valuable hands-on experience within a state government.

+ Dornsife's Undergraduate Student Government Organization hosted a school merchandise fundraiser in support of Philabundance's special initiative to end hunger among children while school is out for summer 2024. They raised \$439, which helped to provide 880 meals for children. Based in Philadelphia, the nonprofit aims to drive hunger from communities and to end hunger for good. They serve nine counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey and are proud members of the Feeding America network.





## Meet the IDEA Fellows

+ This year's cohort of IDEA Fellows (October 2024 - June 2025) at Dornsife led and supported efforts at the school to build and nurture an institutional culture where all students, staff, and faculty feel more connected and valued.

Fellows work closely with an associate dean or faculty member to develop, implement, or evaluate Dornsife initiatives based on their chosen area of emphasis. This was the fifth year for the program, with the largest cohort yet.



### **Shadan Alghamdi**

Hometown: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Program: PhD, Biostatistics

IDEA Project: Shadan developed resources to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for marginalized communities while working amongst a team of passionate fellows and mentors.



### **Bitanya Ayalew**

Hometown: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Program: BS, Public Health

IDEA Project: Bitanya conducted a scoping review of digital interventions for suicide prevention and depression among Black youth with an added focus on visuals and engaging dissemination.



### **Devani Baraiya**

Hometown: Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Program: MPH, Epidemiology

IDEA Project: Devani audited community-engaged scholarship at Dornsife centering on assessing the school's existing partnerships to pinpoint areas for growth, especially with local communities not yet engaged. The audit went beyond a simple inventory; it was a strategic tool to improve tracking and encourage community-engaged scholarship.



### **Amber Bolli**

Hometown: Philadelphia, PA

Program: 12-month MPH in Epidemiology

IDEA Project: Amber looked at health and place by mapping social determinants and health inequalities by City Council District in Philadelphia. She produced actionable recommendations to help inform city leaders to address health disparities through place-based solutions.





### **Olivia Cordingley**

Hometown: Kingston, Massachusetts

Program: PhD, Community Health and Prevention

IDEA Project: Olivia measured structural stigmatization and discrimination for HIV research with Latine sexual and gender minorities. She developed meaningful, validated measures of structural stigma and discrimination to deepen the understanding of how these issues impact health outcomes and inform more effective, equity-focused interventions.



### **Pravallika Shanthi Jagan**

Hometown: Telangana, India

Program: MPH, Epidemiology

IDEA Project: As a part of the Inclusion Innovators team, Pravallika worked towards making Dornsife a more inclusive place for people with disabilities. This project was unique because it included multiple types of disabilities like physical, mental, sensory, neurodivergent, congenital and chronic illnesses amongst others, and transcending stereotypes.



### **Samantha Kargbo**

Hometown: Freetown, Sierra Leone

Program: MPH, Epidemiology

IDEA Project: Samantha supported Black maternal health equity through Black-led, community-based organizations focused on maternal health in Philadelphia. The project strengthened her research and community engagement skills in public health, while also contributing to the capacity building of the organizations.

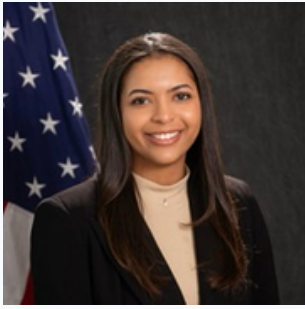


### **Colebe Oliver**

Hometown: Glenside, PA

Program: MPH, Health Management and Policy

IDEA Project: Colebe's project focused on supporting Reneé Moore, PhD, research professor and associate dean for culture, community & opportunity, and her team by assisting with programming and evaluating efforts to enhance equity and inclusion at Dornsife. This opportunity allowed her to make a meaningful impact while developing skills to tackle systemic inequities in public health.



### **Renyztablette Ortega-Cotto**

Hometown: Orlando, Florida

Program: MPH, Epidemiology

IDEA Project: Renyztablette worked with the Epidemiology and Biostatistics department's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging Committee to support and strengthen current initiatives.



### **Tai Simpson**

Hometown: Frankfort, Kentucky

Program: PhD, Epidemiology

IDEA Project: Tai worked on a feasibility and acceptability pilot study of GANAS: a transformative masculinities intervention to increase social connectedness and reduce stress in Latino men led by Luis Valdez, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife.



### **Janel Rodriguez**

Hometown: Monterrey, Mexico

Program: BS in Public Health, double minoring in Social Entrepreneurship and Climate Change

IDEA Project: Victoria contributed to a project that directly addresses historical inequities by creating a case for reparations through the lens of health equity and justice. She aimed to center the voices and lived experiences of Philadelphia community members and ensure their needs and knowledge guided the work.

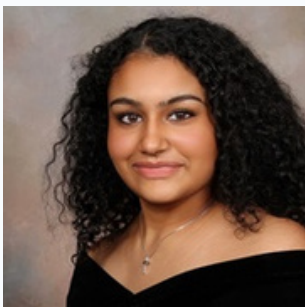


### **Victoria Rodríguez Villarreal**

Hometown: Monterrey, Mexico

Program: BS in Public Health, double minoring in Social Entrepreneurship and Climate Change

IDEA Project: Victoria contributed to a project that directly addresses historical inequities by creating a case for reparations through the lens of health equity and justice. She aimed to center the voices and lived experiences of Philadelphia community members and ensure their needs and knowledge guided the work.



### **Sris Wilfred**

Hometown: Robbinsville, NJ

Program: BS/MPH, Public Health and Healthcare Services Administration

IDEA Project: Sris supported Reneé Moore, PhD, research professor and associate dean for culture, community & opportunity, and her team to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging related activities, assist with trainings, and evaluate efforts to enhance equity and inclusion at Dornsife.



### III. RESEARCH FOCUS

+ Researchers within Drexel's Medical Cannabis Research Center, a collaboration between Dornsife and Drexel College of Medicine, led an observational study that explored the cannabinoid and terpene profile preferences of medical cannabis patients who are seeking to treat specific medical conditions. The study looked at certified medical cannabis patients in the Pennsylvania Medical Marijuana Program who primarily use cannabis to treat chronic pain, anxiety disorder, or both. The data showed that participants' preferences generally followed dispensary agents' advice. At times, it contradicted animal and human studies of cannabis isolates, which is expected given an entourage effect, where certain cannabinoids and terpenes can act differently as an isolate vs. full-spectrum, plant-derived product. The study was published in the *Journal of Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* in June 2025.

+ A research review, published in the *Journal of Science of The Total Environment* in June 2025, summarized the current state of evidence pertaining to the association between warm residential indoor temperatures and health or well-being outcomes. Researchers found evidence that warmer indoor temperatures are associated with a variety of adverse outcomes, based on a selection of papers in which investigators used a variety of methods to estimate temperature exposures. However, the number of articles that empirically identified maximum safe temperatures was limited, pointing to a strong need for further research moving forward. Janelle Edwards, PhD, post-doctoral researcher at The Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements, and Population Health Equity at Dornsife, led this research.

+ Data from researchers at Dornsife found a statistically significant link between severe natural disasters, such as heatwaves, droughts, floods, and wildfires, and loss of health care infrastructure — including hospitals and outpatient care facilities. Published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in May 2025, the study captured all climate-related disaster events nationwide from 2000-2014. Yvonne Michael, ScD, professor at Dornsife, Jana Hirsch, PhD, associate research professor at the Urban Health Collaborative at Dornsife, and Kevin Chang, MD, student in the Drexel College of Medicine, contributed to this research.

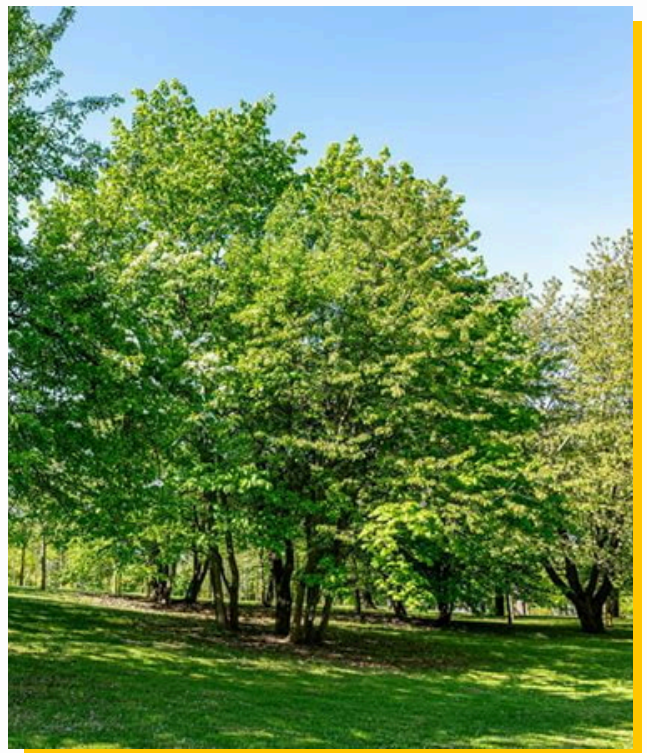
+ In May 2025, Bengucan Gunen, MSPH, doctoral student, and Ann Klassen, PhD, research professor, both at Dornsife, reviewed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) coverage in the media and highlighted key takeaways. They analyzed 84 news stories from 1997 through 2022 about a key measure of SNAP eligibility: the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). They found that local news covered this issue consistently, in local papers across the U.S. and throughout the 25-year time period that they looked at. This helps to raise public awareness of the importance of state-level SNAP policies because many people may not realize these determine who in their state can have access to this federal benefit. The review was published in the journal *Health Affairs Scholar*.



+ Ashley B. Gripper, PhD, MPH, assistant professor at Dornsife and The Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements, and Population Health Equity at Dornsife, and Tori Cowger, PhD, MPH, research associate at the François-Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Center for Health and Human Rights within the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, developed an Agricultural Community Power Scale (AgCPS). The scale, published in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* in May 2025, measures agricultural community power developed by, for, and with U.S.-based urban growers provides a framework for assessing the impacts of urban agriculture programming. AgCPS is grounded in community-derived questions, knowledge, and lived experiences, and demonstrates potential applicability across multiple disciplines, including public health, sociology, and psychology.

+ Gabriel Schwartz, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife, led research finding that health care organizations may not be doing enough to connect patients with housing services when they are needed most. Using the machine learning technique known as natural language processing to identify older adults experiencing housing insecurity, the team found that more than nine out of 10 patients in primary and/or emergency care who were housing insecure — 93 percent — were not referred to social services within six months. Links to services, although rare, were more likely to occur in primary care than in emergency department care. The paper was published in April 2025 in the journal *The Gerontologist*.

+ A study published in the journal *Science of The Total Environment* in April 2025 found links between the number of trees planted and higher birth weight. Additionally, nearby tree planting, including new and existing trees, were associated with three key measures of newborn health: higher birth weight, lower risk of small-for-gestational-age birth, and decreased risk of pre-term birth. For example, each tree planted within 100 meters of a mother's home within 10 years before a child's birth was associated with a statistically significant 2.3-gram increase in birthweight. In contrast with previous studies that also look at greenspace and pregnancy, the current study controlled for existing tree coverage to focus on the role newly planted trees may play in the health of newborns. Yvonne Michael, ScD, professor at Dornsife, led this study with researchers at the USDA Forest Service.



+ A SALURBAL-Climate paper published in *Nature Cities* in February 2025 shed light on large inequities in flood exposure within 276 cities in eight Latin American countries. The research, led by Josiah Kephart, PhD, MPH, assistant professor at Dornsife and the Urban Health Collaborative, and a team of investigators from Latin America, is the first of its kind to examine neighborhood-level social determinants of flood exposure in Latin America. They found that residents of neighborhoods with the lowest education levels experienced on average 4.3 times more flooding than the ones with higher education.



+ Research published in the journal *Reproductive Health* in February 2025 found that having supportive parents who value a girl's education and having a close female friend may lower the risk of postpartum depression among adolescents in Nairobi, Kenya. Working with the African Population and Health Research Center and Ali Groves, PhD, MHS, associate professor at Dornsife, lead author Luwam Gebrekristos, MPH, doctoral student, gathered and quantified the experiences of 193 adolescent mothers (aged 14–19) living in an informal settlement in Nairobi within one year after giving birth. They looked at different types of social support, including help from the child's father, parental support, support for education, social club membership, and having supportive female bonds. Since adolescent mothers in Kenya face unique challenges and high birth rates, more support from parents and friends could help.



The strongest protective factor against postpartum depressive symptoms was having parental support for girls' education,...[Also] adolescent mothers who had a female friend to confide in experienced lower risk of postpartum depressive symptoms.

**-Luwam Gebrekristos**

+ A SALURBAL study published in *The Lancet Global Health* in February 2025 explored the complex relationship between cancer mortality rates and socioeconomic development in 343 cities across nine Latin American countries. The study analyzed data from 2015 through 2019 to map the geographic distribution of cancer deaths for seven common types of cancer: breast, lung, colorectal, stomach, liver, prostate, and cervical. The findings provide valuable insights into the impact of socioeconomic factors on cancer outcomes in urban Latin America. Authors from Dornsife include Mariana Lazo, MD, PhD, ScM, associate research professor at Dornsife and the Urban Health Collaborative; Ana Diez Roux, MD, PhD, distinguished university professor, dean emerita of Dornsife, and co-director of the Urban Health Collaborative; and Usama Bilal, MD, PhD, MPH, associate professor at Dornsife and co-director of the Urban Health Collaborative.

+ Published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* in January 2025, research found no significant changes in rates of fatal violence against women following bail reform policy implementation. In New Jersey, the rate of intimate partner violence-related homicide was 0.68 per 100,000 women before bail reform (2015–2016) and 0.54 per 100,000 after bail reform (2017–2019). This study builds on the growing body of research on cash bail reform. Jaquelyn Jahn, PhD, MPH, assistant professor at Dornsife and the Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements, and Population Health Equity, and Taylor Riley, PhD, MPH, postdoctoral scholar at the Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, led this research.

+ Lilianna Phan, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife and Drexel's College of Nursing and Health Professions, co-led research titled "Knowledge and Use of Menthol-Mimicking Cigarettes Among Adults in the U.S." published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in January 2025. This research found that a considerable proportion of adults were aware of, susceptible to, and had experimented with or were currently using synthetic cooling agent menthol-mimicking cigarettes. Being Black or African American, being a man, being a younger adult, using menthol and nonmenthol cigarettes, and living in states with a menthol cigarette ban were associated with these outcomes.

+ Damaris Lopez Mercado, doctoral student at Dornsife, co-led research published in the *Med Care Journal* in December 2024 titled “American Rescue Plan Act and Access to Health Care for Latinos According to Citizenship Status.” The study found that the American Rescue Plan Act may have helped increase white citizens' insurance coverage, but this benefit did not extend to Latinos, regardless of citizenship status. The study urged the development of more inclusive health policies that do not have restrictions based on citizenship and concluded that “legal authorization status is an important step toward reducing health care inequities.”



+ Researchers at the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute examined how many autistic people in the U.S. received housing support from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to explore their experiences and health outcomes. Published in the scientific journal *PLOS One* in December 2024, they found that the number of autistic people receiving housing support grew significantly between 2008 and 2016. The number of autistic individuals on Medicaid who enrolled in HUD's housing assistance programs increased by 70 percent between 2008 and 2016 – from nearly 53,000 individuals, to over 88,000. In 2016, among the 846,350 autistic Medicaid enrollees, 10.4 percent (88,315) were HUD-assisted. Among these, 65 percent resided in extremely low-income households, according to HUD data. Lindsay Shea, DrPH, director of the Policy and Analytics Center in the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, led this research uncovering a need for upstream interventions to address social determinants and basic needs of autistic people who live in low-income households to help alleviate housing instability and associated health concerns.

+ A study published in *Annals of Family Medicine* in November 2024, explored direct primary care practices (DPCs), which are health care providers that charge patients a regular membership fee, instead of billing private insurance, the government, or another third party to cover most or all medical care. This research, led by Neal D. Goldstein, PhD, associate research professor at Dornsife, found DPCs were less likely to be in designated health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) overall and less likely to be in a high-priority-need HPSA but more likely to be in a rural or partially rural HPSA compared to primary care providers in the U.S.

+ According to a study published in the journal *Health and Place* in November 2024, rates of deaths from heart disease — especially among men — are lower in neighborhoods with more greenspace. Studying heart disease deaths in Philadelphia from 2008 to 2015, the researchers also found that, contrary to their hypothesis, it was in neighborhoods with more crime where greater park access and tree canopy cover were associated with lower rates of heart disease deaths. Leah Schinasi, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife, led this research conducted with USDA Forest Service data and supported by the American Heart Association.

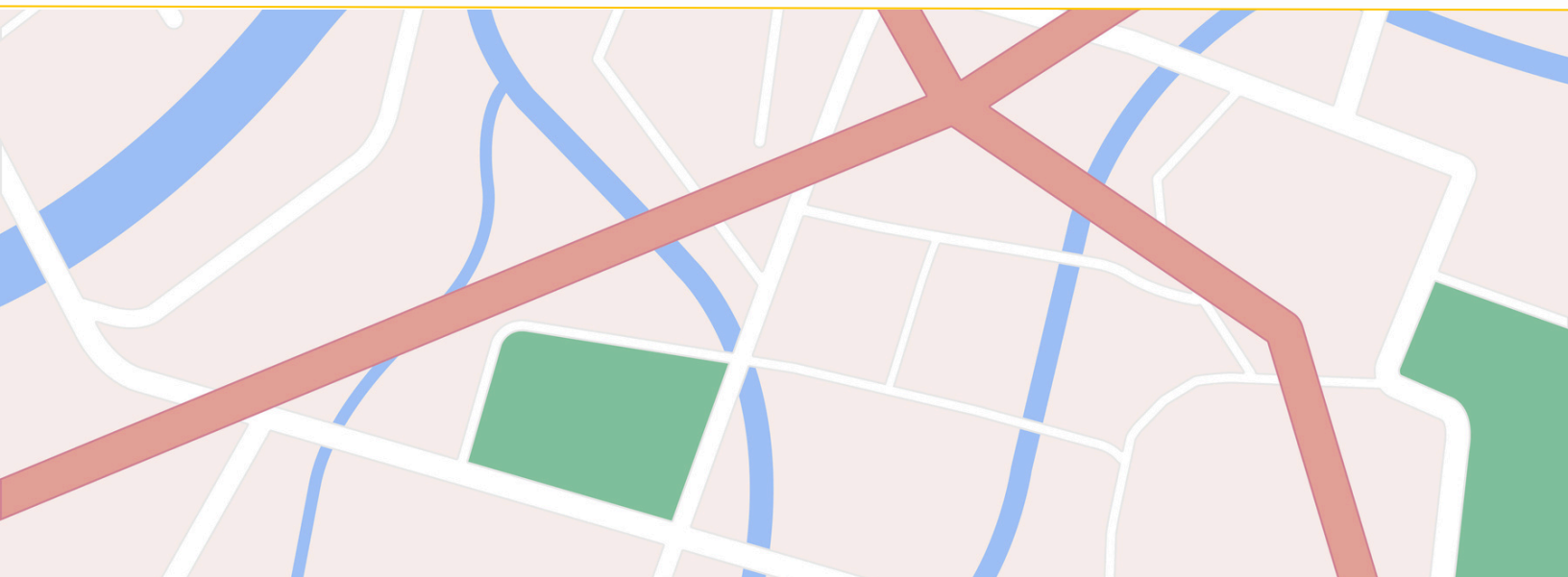


+ Elizabeth Salerno Valdez, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife, led research titled “Using youth participatory action research to explore the impacts of structural violence on LGBTQIA + youth health” which was published in *Culture, Health & Sexuality* in October 2024. The purpose of this research was to explore what historically marginalized youth in a youth participatory action research project characterize as the big picture issues affecting the lives of LGBTQIA+ youth.

+ In October 2024, the Autism Transitions Research Project, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration and led by A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, released findings that underscore critical challenges and opportunities in transitioning autistic youth into adulthood. As approximately 1.2 million autistic individuals are expected to reach adulthood in the coming decade, these insights are vital for shaping future research and services. Led by Anne M. Roux, MPH, research scientist and director at the Policy Impact Project in the Autism Institute's Policy and Analytics Center, and a multidisciplinary team, the study identified key barriers that hinder successful transitions, including delays in diagnosis and access to services, long waitlists, and an over-reliance on care partners to provide daily supports and to navigate complex service systems.

+ In fall 2024, Reneé Moore, PhD, research professor; director of the Biostatistics Scientific Collaboration Center (BSC); and associate dean for culture, community & opportunity, and Gina S. Lovasi, PhD, MPH, Dana and David Dornsife dean and professor, received additional funding of \$175,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to extend the Dornsife Initiative to Transform Academia for Equity (DITAE) work. This enables increased staff support and engaging the university community in a shared vision on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

+ Janelle Edwards, PhD, post-doctoral researcher at The Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements, and Population Health Equity at Dornsife, conducted a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature which found redlining and mortgage discrimination associations in 45 papers. Results from the review suggest the need for careful consideration of optimal methods to analyze mortgage discrimination, such as the Home Owners' Loan Corporation spatial assignment or Home Mortgage Disclosure Act index parametrization, contemplation of covariates, and place-based knowledge of the study location. This review was published in September 2024 in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*.



+ According to a study published in September 2024 in *Health Affairs*, millions of eligible adults may not be signing up for medical and nutrition support programs because they live in areas where friends and neighbors are detained due to their immigration status. Researchers, including Brent Langellier, PhD, associate professor at Dornsife, and Caroline Kravitz, MPH, doctoral student at Dornsife, looked at the number of detainer requests issued in each U.S. county, as well as households' enrollment in Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2011, 2016, and 2019. The researchers found a statistically significant association between detainer requests and lower enrollment in both government programs in both U.S.-born and immigrant households, with a stronger association among adults in households with at least one immigrant in the household, compared to U.S.-born households.

+ Studying data across three generations – education of parents and grandparents, and health data from parents and their children – researchers found a statistically significant association between grandparents' education level and their grandchildren's epigenetic-based “real” age, which considers the age of cells and proteins linked to DNA in the body. Grandchildren of college-educated grandparents showed slower biological aging (i.e., younger biological age relative to chronological age) than those whose grandparents did not graduate from college using five different epigenetic-based aging clocks. These clocks use a saliva swab to examine a biological process known as DNA methylation – which changes as the body ages – to predict an individual's age based on their health profile at the cellular level. The study was led by Agus Surachman, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife, and researchers at the University of California and the University of North Carolina. It was published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* in August 2024.



**Read more about  
research at Dornsife**





## IV. GLOBAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT

+ The 2024-2025 academic year marked the 10-year anniversary of a partnership between Dornsife and World Vision, the largest non-governmental organization provider of clean water in the developing world.

This came together through the visionary philanthropy of Dana and David Dornsife aiming to increase water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) access globally. The historic gift from the Dornsife family in 2014 established the groundwork for a transformative collaboration focused on equity, capacity building, and impactful changes in communities across the globe.

To commemorate this anniversary the Office of Global Health produced a 10-Year Anniversary Commemorative Book that highlights stories, innovations, and major milestones across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and Drexel's own neighborhood in Philadelphia.



Read the  
Commemorative  
Book



+ Alex Ezech, PhD, professor and associate dean for human rights and global health, Ali Groves, PhD, MHS, associate professor, and Luwam Gebrekristos, MPH, doctoral student, all at Dornsife, each served a role on the second Lancet Commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. Alex co-chaired the Commission, and Ali and Luwam were members of the Commission. The commission's report emphasized that investing in adolescent health yields a "triple dividend"—benefits for young people today, the adults they will become, and the next generation. However, they noted that current funding is insufficient, with adolescent health initiatives receiving only 2.4 percent of health development assistance in 2016–21.



## Meet the Dornsife Global Development Scholars

The Dornsife Global Development Scholars program is a nationally and internationally recognized capacity-building program for bridging gaps between scientific research, development practice, and applied problem-solving in the context of improving global health.

This program is based on a mentorship model that allows Drexel students of all majors and educational levels to work alongside World Vision International, a major international non-government organization and the largest distributors of water around the world, on humanitarian efforts that push forward to achieving all U.N. Sustainable Development Goals related to the global agenda prioritizing WASH.

While gaining international experience in rural parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia for 2 to 6 months, Dornsife Scholars address cross-cutting themes in WASH such as social marketing, economic development, health education, community engagement, evaluation, and a host of other areas related to promoting and improving overall health and development in low-resource settings.



Afua Awuah, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine  
  
World Vision's Zambia  
WASH team



Aneri Amin, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine  
  
World Vision Indonesia  
WASH Team



Anthony Owusu, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine  
  
World Vision Tanzania  
WASH team



Emily Ernst, undergrad student  
Drexel Pennoni Honors College  
  
World Vision Lesotho  
WASH team



Filza Zuberi, MPH student  
Dornsife School of Public Health  
  
World Vision Lesotho  
WASH team



Julia Wiafe-Jackson, undergrad student  
Drexel's College of Arts & Sciences  
  
World Vision Zambia  
WASH team



Milan Howell, undergrad student  
Drexel School of Biomedical  
Engineering, Science & Health  
Systems  
  
World Vision Zambia  
WASH team



Niya Manning, BS/MS student  
Drexel College of Arts and Sciences  
  
World Vision Zambia  
WASH team

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Siddhartha Peri, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine

World Vision Indonesia  
WASH team



Viva Paintsil, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine

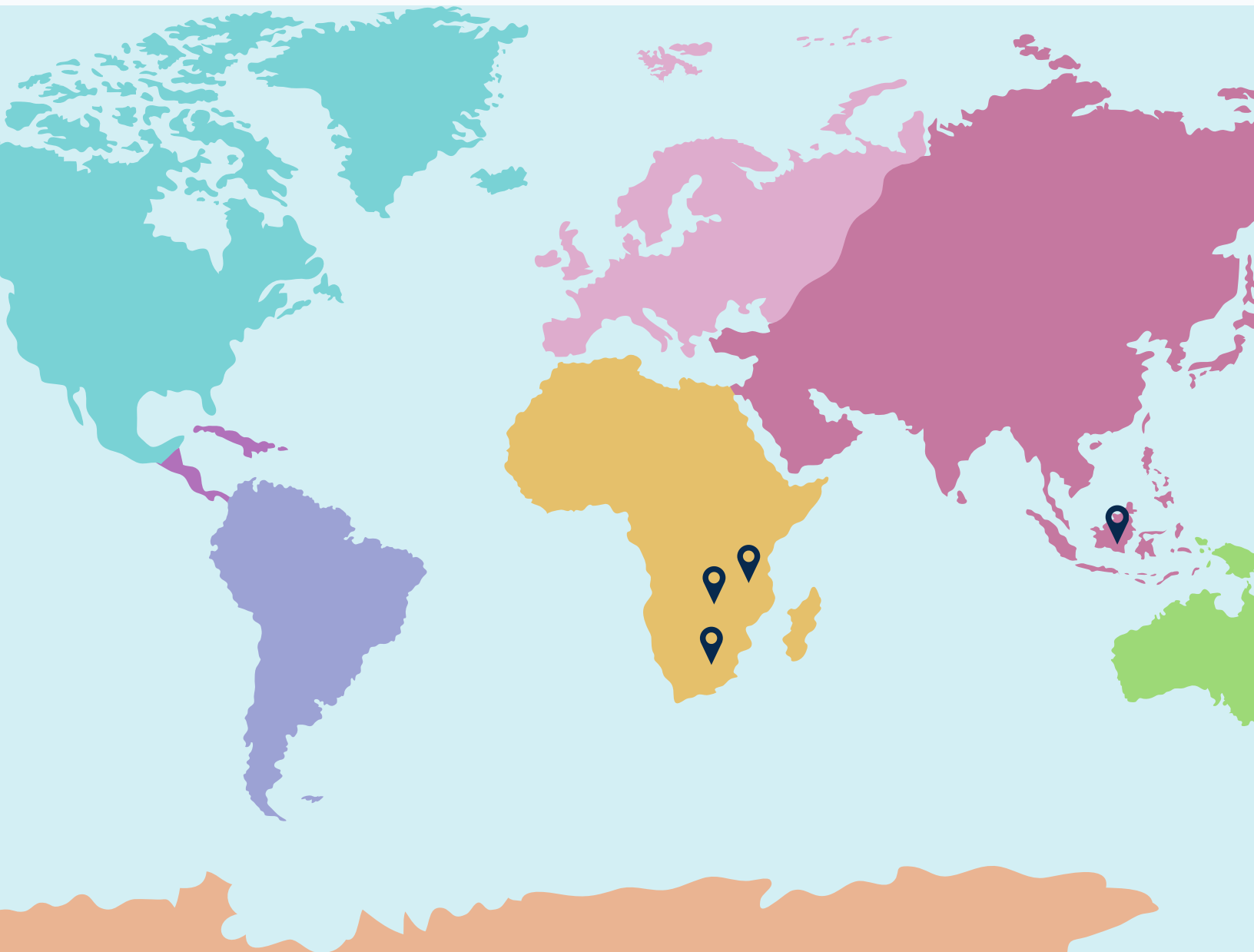
World Vision Tanzania  
WASH Team



Vivek Babu, MD student  
Drexel College of Medicine

World Vision Indonesia  
WASH Team

Read more about the  
latest cohort of Dornsife  
Global Development  
Scholars



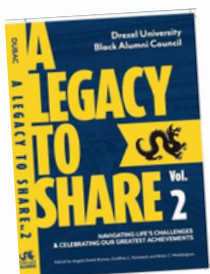
## V. ALUMNI UPDATES

+ At the annual Dornsife Awards event hosted at Nesbitt Hall, faculty, staff, and students recognized two outstanding alumni in February 2025. Erin Nipps, MPH '24, program analyst in the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health, was presented with the Recent Alumni Award, which recognizes a new alum (within 5 years of graduating) who has achieved important and promising accomplishments, is dedicated to health as a human right, and has exceptional promise for future success. In addition to her role at the city's Department of Public Health, Nipps is a Philadelphia Eagles cheerleader and was part of a big year as the Eagles won Super Bowl LIX in 2025.



Palak Raval-Nelson, PhD '08, MPH '02, health commissioner in the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health, was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award for making significant contributions throughout her career to the field of public health and for her leadership. Recipients of this award have attained recognition and respect for their accomplishments, and demonstrated strong interest and commitment to the mission, vision and values of Dornsife. Raval-Nelson also inspired the Class of 2025 as the Commencement 2025 speaker.

+ In November 2024, Jamile Tellez Lieberman, DrPH '21, received a City of Philadelphia Resolution from Councilwoman Quetcy Lozada in recognition of her ongoing work in public health research and practice while at Dornsife and now at Esperanza as Senior Vice President of Community Engagement, Research, and Health Equity. A key aspect of her work has been the creation of programs that address the specific challenges faced by Latinos in North Philadelphia, such as the language barrier and lack of access to preventive health services.



+ In February 2025, the Drexel Black Alumni Council published Vol. 2 of A Legacy to Share, which features 100+ stories chronicling Black students and alumni who cut through the obstacles faced throughout this country's history to enjoy successful careers and a zest for lifelong learning. Dornsife alum Sabrina Charles, MPH '18, is a contributing author of this publication.



## VI. FACULTY & STAFF NEWS

+ In June 2025, Daria Waite, MPH, MSW, research associate at the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice at Dornsife, was awarded a Stoneleigh Emerging Leader Fellowship for her project aimed at enhancing the understanding of the needs of survivors of violence and their access to services through 2027. Daria aims to foster broader utilization of hospital-based violence intervention program services.

+ Robert I. Field, PhD, JD, professor at Dornsife and Drexel's Thomas R. Kline School of Law, was awarded the Jay Healey Teaching Award by the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics at Boston University in June 2025. The award celebrates dedicated health law faculty and their passion for teaching health law, their mentoring of students and/or other faculty, and their ability to inspire others.

+ In May 2025, Brent Langellier, PhD, MA, associate professor at Dornsife, was one of eight health professionals selected for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Health Policy Fellows Program at the National Academy of Medicine. Brent and the other fellows were chosen in a national competition for highly accomplished health and behavioral/social science professionals who have an interest in health policy.

+ Esther Chernak, MD, clinical professor, along with alum Ngozi Fadulu, MPH '23, attended the May 2025 Preparedness Summit in San Antonio, Texas. They presented on their experiences developing and delivering a curriculum of micro-credentials focused on improving emergency preparedness, infection prevention and control, and clinical knowledge in long-term care to an audience of public health and healthcare professionals.



+ The co-directors of the Urban Health Collaborative at Dornsife – Ana Diez Roux, MD, PhD, distinguished university professor and dean emerita of Dornsife, and Usama Bilal, MD, PhD, MPH, associate professor at Dornsife – were appointed co-editors-in-chief of the *Journal of Urban Health* in February 2025. They wrote an editorial for the February 2025 issue, “A New Phase for the Journal of Urban Health: Building on the Journal’s History to Improve Urban Health, Equity, and Environmental Sustainability Worldwide,” in which they outline their vision and priorities for the journal.

+ Jan M. Eberth, PhD, professor and chair of the department of Health Management and Policy at Dornsife, was named a Global Advisory Council member for GO2 for Lung Cancer for a three-year term in January 2025. GO2 supports the lung cancer community through patient assistance, research, and advocacy.

+ Arthur Frank, MD, PhD, professor emeritus and clinical professor at Dornsife, was appointed Distinguished Professor (Honorary) in the Department of Environmental Engineering at the Delhi Technological University starting in January 2025. Frank accepted the nomination at the university’s 53rd meeting in November 2024.

+ Melissa Kaufman, EdD, associate dean for education at Dornsife, spoke at an event titled “Reskilling & Upskilling: Preparing for the Future of Work” hosted by BadgeCert in October 2024. Melissa discussed embracing new skills, roles, and ways to showcase achievements and competencies – like digital badges and micro-credentials – so the workforce can thrive in an ever-changing job market.

+ In October 2024, Gabriel L. Schwartz, PhD, assistant professor at Dornsife, was selected for the 2024-25 cohort of the Health Equity Scholars Program. The program was created by the Scholars Strategy Network, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to support early-career scholars researching social determinants of health.

+ Tariem Burroughs, PhD, executive director for external partnerships at Dornsife, was named a Philadelphia Gay News 48 Most Influential LGBTQ+ Leader for 2024. Tariem was specifically identified as an “Emerging Leader” which celebrates young activists and professionals making an early mark in their respective fields. He was presented with the award at the historic Arch Street Meeting House in October 2024. In February 2025, Tariem was also named a Black Trailblazer by *City and State Pennsylvania*. The publication celebrated Black Pennsylvanians for the progress they embody.

+ In September 2024, Drexel officially moved to an organic turf management model across the University City Campus and will eliminate synthetic herbicides and fertilizers, just over a year after a group of students in Drexel’s EcoReps Program started a pilot program to test the efficacy of the model. Anneclaire De Roos, PhD, professor and interim chair of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at Dornsife, who is on the advisory board for Philadelphia’s Healthy Outdoor Public Spaces (HOPS) law, helped students with necessary research and to secure funding. Long-term, moving to an organic model can benefit the University as well as the environment. In other campuses that have moved to organic models, costs have decreased over three to five years due to decreases in fertilization and irrigation needs.





## VII. EVENT ROUNDUP

+ Beginning in July, Dornsife hosted its 2025 Summer Public Health Leadership Institute, an academic program for highly motivated high school students. Participants made meaningful connections with peers while preparing for college life in an immersive setting and learned about studying public health. Summer 2025 was the largest cohort of students yet with 46 participants. Due to demand, for the first time, the program was held over two different weeks.



+ On June 12, 2025, at the Miller Theater in the heart of Philadelphia, Dornsife students, faculty, staff, families, and loved ones gathered to celebrate the hard work, dedication, and accomplishments of the Dornsife Class of 2025. Palak Raval-Nelson, PhD '08, MPH '02, health commissioner at the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health, was the keynote speaker. Later in the day, the University-wide commencement took place at Citizens Bank Park (home of the Philadelphia Phillies). The University's keynote speaker was Drexel alum Justin Best '19, a two-time Olympian, Olympic gold medalist, and investment banker.





+ During the week of April 7–11, 2025, students, faculty, and staff at Dornsife came together to celebrate the 30th anniversary of National Public Health Week (NPHW), a nationwide initiative launched by the American Public Health Association (APHA). The 2025 theme focused on several key priority areas in public health — championing resilience for health, optimizing health for all, amplifying voices for public health, and strengthening the public health workforce for the future. The Dornsife community embraced these themes with a range of events designed to educate, engage, and empower including a CPR and Narcan training event, a tabling event with various exhibitors, a film screening, and more.

+ On April 3, 2025, the Promise Zone Research Connection hosted its inaugural West Philly Research Day to help create an environment that fosters trust and collaboration amongst research institutions and community members based in West Philadelphia. This successful event connected research institutions, local organizations and community members to engage in meaningful conversations and promote mutually beneficial outcomes of research for community residents.



+ The sixth annual Public Health Case Competition at Dornsife was held in February 2025. In six interdisciplinary teams, undergraduate and master's students were tasked with creating a micromobility policy memo for Philadelphia city officials and a 1-page flyer to promote their plan to the public. Over two weeks, teams met to discuss possible interventions to improve the state of micromobility and explore the feasibility of policies for the city. After presenting, teams answered questions from the judge's panel which aided in the selection process. After 15 minutes of judge's panel deliberation, winners — first place, honorable mention, and people's choice — were revealed and students were applauded for their efforts. Tariem Burroughs, PhD, MEd, MSODL, executive director for external partnerships, leads this annual event.





+ From November 2024 to April 2025, Dornsife's Population Health Spotlight Series welcomed expert speakers who discussed the state of infectious disease science, drivers for emerging infections, and advances in the control and prevention of infectious diseases. In addition to a lecture, each event included opportunities for interested students, faculty, and staff to meet in small groups with the speaker. Esther Chernak, MD, MPH, FACP, clinical professor at Dornsife and professor at Drexel's College of Medicine (DUCOM), led the event planning committee. The series was a collaboration between Dornsife and DUCOM, as it was funded in part by the Dr. Elias "Eli" Abrutyn Memorial Lecture Fund. Dr. Abrutyn (1940 – 2007) was an infectious disease expert and former associate provost and associate dean of academic affairs at DUCOM.

+ The 2024 American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting and Expo took place in Minneapolis, MN, from October 27 - 30. Several faculty, staff, and students presented research, sat on an expert panel, or showcased their work at a poster session. On Sunday of the conference, a Drexel Alumni and Friends reception was held where guests mingled and enjoyed refreshments after brief remarks from the dean. The Dornsife community looks forward to gathering once more in Washington, D.C., for another Drexel Alumni and Friends reception during APHA.

+ On Wednesday, September 18, 2024, Dornsife hosted its Welcome and Pinning Ceremony event during Drexel Welcome Week. This longstanding event—first initiated by founding dean and humanitarian Dr. Jonathan Mann—was an opportunity for the Dornsife community to formally welcome all new students, staff, and faculty. Keynote speaker Darrin W. Anderson, Sr, PhD, president and CEO of the Urban League of Philadelphia, shared reflections on his career in public health which has embraced a holistic approach that recognizes the connection between affordable housing, community and economic development, employment, education, policy, and health equity. A reception with light refreshments followed the ceremony. The upcoming 2025 event will be extra special as Dornsife will welcome members of the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute to the school.

## VIII. IN THE MEDIA REPORT

In the 2024-2025 academic year, numerous members of the Dornsife community were featured in various local, national, and global news outlets offering expert commentary and analysis on a range of public health topics.

From environmental health concerns such as gas stove fumes, refinery emissions, extreme heat, and asbestos exposure, to systemic challenges in prison water quality and health insurance coverage, their voices have helped shape public dialogue around community health and policy. Researchers also contributed insights into global adolescent health and wellbeing, autism research and funding, and the risks first responders face in the line of duty.

These media contributions underscore the school's role as a valuable resource for those seeking reliable public health insights.

**41** *faculty, staff or students were mentioned or quoted in*  
**55+** *stories in the mainstream media.*

## IX. SCROLL CALL

Over the past academic year, there have been lots of Instagramable moments to share from new student orientation events to graduation celebrations! Be sure to follow along for updates on students, staff, faculty, alumni, and more.

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Congrats to Rabbi Nancy Epstein, MPH, MAHL, clinical teaching professor of community health and prevention at Dornsife, on her retirement!



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It's official — they did it!!! 🎓🎉 Congrats, Class of 2025. 💛💙 #ForeverDragons



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Ahead of Valentine's Day, MCHSO + SGO held a tabling event with sexual health resources, self care goodie bags, and sweet treats! 💕🍪



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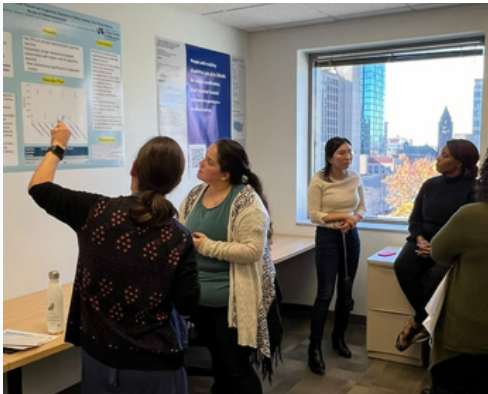


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Go Birds! 🦅💚💛 We Dragons are wishing the Philadelphia Eagles the very best of luck in Super Bowl LIX. #FlyEaglesFly



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Thank you to everyone who participated in yesterday's Urban Health Collaborative Day, the Center's annual poster day and reception.



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Today we welcomed new Dornsife students, faculty, and staff at the Pinning Ceremony. #NewDragons



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