

Mid-Atlantic Public Health Partnership Conference

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This year's second annual Mid-Atlantic Public Health Partnership Conference used a virtual platform to bring together public health professionals and students from Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania to explore "*Strengthening Communities Through Trauma-Informed Public Health,*" this year's conference theme. This "newish" partnership recognizes that public health challenges do not observe state lines and that coming together as a region can do more to move the needle on common public health opportunities and threats than to address them as individual states. Occurring in the midst of the fourth wave of the pandemic (January 13-14, 2022), the conference focus emphasized that a strong public health infrastructure that is trauma-informed and equitable is crucial to address healing and rebuilding at the local, regional and national levels.

A warm salute from Kaye Bender, President of the American Public Health Association, kicked off 1.5 days of thoughtful programming around the many ways trauma impacts individuals and communities, the importance of developing systems that respond with trauma-informed care promoting healing and resilience, and how we can prevent future trauma from challenges before us (including climate change). From a ninth-grade student presenting research on the impact of climate change to a New York Times best-selling author, Rachel Louise Snyder, sharing a harrowing expose of domestic violence and the many holes in our medical, social service and law enforcement systems (*No Visible Bruises*), a diverse group of panelists shared their insights related to the importance of ensuring that public health infrastructures are trauma-informed and preparing for future threats to public health.

Keynote speaker, Senator Sarah McBride of Delaware, a member of the LGBTQ+ community and the first transgender member of a state legislature, delivered a heartbreakingly yet inspiring speech on her personal struggles, and how she rose above to become the influential woman she is today.

Sacoby Wilson, Associate Professor at the University of Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health, gave a dynamic talk that revved up listeners regarding the threat of climate change in Maryland, and the dramatic consequences here in the mid-Atlantic area and the rest of the world. Dr. Wilson was joined by Deepa Manikar from the National Nurse-Led Care Consortium (Delaware) and Dan Early from Booz Allen Hamilton (Pennsylvania), who elaborated on both the physical health and mental health effects of climate change that we are currently seeing and will continue to see.

The conference also focused on the lasting effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACES). Logan Herring (Delaware), Malcolm Yates (Pennsylvania), Aileen Fink (Delaware), and Claudia Remington (Maryland), shared data from their respective states and spotlighted promising programs. Dr. Kathleen Brewer-Smyth, a professor at the University of Delaware, painted a vivid portrayal of how ACEs haunt women throughout their lives gleaned from her research with inmates at a women's prison.

Friday's forum began with a speech delivered by Mike Africa Jr., writer, activist, and subject of the HBO Max documentary "40 Years A Prisoner" about the aftermath of the 1978 storming of the MOVE compound in Philadelphia. When Africa was six years old, he saw a police bomb detonate in his familial home, killing his uncle, cousin, and nine other family members. After 25 years, Africa was able to free his parents from jail and continues to lead others in the pursuit of justice, exhibiting impressive resilience as he "moved forward," despite the unspeakable trauma he experienced as a youngster.

The last panel of the conference focused on the experiences of individuals living with intellectual disabilities. Panelists Sara Molina-Robinson (Pennsylvania), Mark Salzer (Pennsylvania), Charmaine Wright (Delaware) and Adriane Griffen (Maryland) shed light on the needs of these individuals and the intensified impact of trauma, with an important reminder to include this vulnerable population group in public health program planning, coalition building, and resource allocation, as all too often the narratives of those with disabilities are left out of the conversation.

The conference program also included time to acknowledge the stress that we as public health workers have endured during the ongoing pandemic. Participants were treated to a relaxing, mindfulness exercise led by psychologist Christine Runyan that was tailored to the needs of those working on the frontlines and all of us who have been on heightened alert since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.

The second annual Mid-Atlantic Public Health Conference successfully provided another opportunity for public health folks from three states to learn from one another--this time examining trauma-informed public health practice. Conference participants had the opportunity to network and get to know one another a bit in a fun afternoon virtual social. The conference also gave students the opportunity to present their related research. One student attendee shared that this year's meeting not only helped her professionally in that she has a better understanding of the future challenges that those in the public health field can expect, but also found the meeting to be personally therapeutic. The conference organizers (Stephanie Shell, Joshua Miller-Myers, Brooke Spencer, Tim Gibbs, Kate Smith, Jody Gan, Suparna Navale) look forward to continuing the partnership and offering an in-person or hybrid gathering in 2023.

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