

## From the Guest Editors

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As Guest Editors, we are pleased to present this issue of the *Delaware Journal of Public Health* dedicated to one of Delaware's current public health priorities: promoting healthy aging across the lifespan. As the state's population continues to age, it faces both opportunities and complex challenges that require innovative research, cross-sector collaboration, and evidence-informed public health action. This special issue brings together a diverse collection of scholarship and practices that reflect the breadth of work currently underway to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of older Delawareans.

The contributions in this issue represent the multidisciplinary nature of public health, featuring perspectives from researchers, clinicians, healthcare systems, community organizations, policymakers, and government agencies. Together, these articles demonstrate that advancing healthy aging requires collaboration across disciplines and sectors, recognizing that the determinants of health extend far beyond healthcare alone.

The research presented in this issue examines the complex interplay among cognitive health, psychosocial well-being, environmental influences, and public health infrastructure that shape aging experiences, with particular attention to Delaware's older adult population. Collectively, the manuscripts explore innovative approaches to understanding cognitive aging through functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS) and cognitive assessment, identify barriers to implementing evidence-based fall prevention programs, evaluate the capacity of public health infrastructure to respond to population aging, and examine how neighborhood conditions and social isolation influence cognitive health and overall well-being. Additional work investigates the predictors of loneliness among older adults participating in Delaware senior center programs, providing important insights into the social determinants of healthy aging. Together, these studies illustrate the value of integrating neuroscience, epidemiology, qualitative inquiry, health services research, and community-engaged approaches to address the multifaceted challenges of aging.

The articles collectively emphasize the importance of creating environments that enable older adults to remain healthy, engaged, and independent within their homes and communities. Aging in place depends not only on access to high-quality healthcare, but also on coordinated investments in housing, transportation, public health infrastructure, social services, technology, and community engagement. A central message emerging from this collection is that healthy aging can be approached from a systems-based perspective.

Importantly, the work presented throughout this issue underscores that no single discipline or organization can address the complexities of population aging alone. Sustainable solutions will require integrated systems that intentionally connect healthcare, public health, social services, community organizations, and policymakers to address the social, environmental, and structural factors that influence healthy aging. Meaningful collaboration among academic institutions, healthcare organizations, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community partners is

essential for translating research into practice and improving health outcomes for older adults.

Delaware is uniquely positioned to build upon these partnerships. Recent statewide initiatives, including collaborative efforts surrounding the development of a medical school and expanded investments in rural health, present important opportunities to strengthen the state's healthcare workforce, expand access to care, and improve health equity. These initiatives are particularly relevant for older adults living in Delaware's rural communities, where provider shortages, transportation barriers, and social isolation often limit access to healthcare and health promotion services. The work highlighted in this issue offers a strong foundation upon which these emerging initiatives can build.

This issue is intended not as the culmination of a conversation, but as a catalyst for continued dialogue, research, and action. The findings and perspectives presented here highlight both the progress that has been made and the work that remains to ensure that Delaware is prepared to meet the needs of its growing older adult population. We hope these articles stimulate new research collaborations, inform policy development, strengthen community partnerships, and inspire innovative approaches to promoting healthy aging. Equally important, we hope they encourage readers from every sector to consider their role in creating communities where all individuals have opportunities to age with health, dignity, purpose, and connection.

The future of healthy aging in Delaware will depend on our collective commitment to translating evidence into practice, fostering collaboration across disciplines, and developing policies and programs that support older adults throughout their lifespan. We are honored to share this collection of work and look forward to the continued advancement of aging research, practice, and policy across Delaware and beyond.

Thank you to all contributors for their scholarship, innovation, and commitment to improving the health of older Delawareans. Their time and perspectives shared are valued. We appreciate the opportunity to serve as guest editors and thank Drs. Omar Khan and Kate Smith for their support and time in coordinating this issue.

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