

Conference Report

93rd Annual Georgia Public Health Association Meeting and Conference Report

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ABSTRACT

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference of the Georgia Public Health Association (GPHA) was held in Jekyll Island, Georgia, at the Jekyll Island Convention Center, on May 3-5, 2023. The goal of the 2023 Georgia Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Conference was to assemble emerging public health professionals, current practitioners, academicians, governing entities, and community stakeholders for educational opportunities and networking to support the vision and mission of GPHA.

The theme for the 2023 Georgia Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Conference theme was selected by the GPHA Executive Board during a meeting in the early fall of 2022 and was “Creating a Healthy Georgia: Conversations and Collaborations for Change”. One hundred and seventy (170) abstracts were submitted for peer review: sixty-three (63) were accepted for poster presentations, sixty-seven (67) for workshop presentations and twenty-three (23) for roundtable sessions. Of the 63 posters, 30 were student submissions. Three plenary sessions with diverse, internationally known, public health practitioners and clinicians addressed key areas of public health advocacy, the “All of Us Research Program”, and critical and strategic thinking to improve the health of the public.

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference brought together five hundred and ninety-seven (597) conference attendees, which is the highest number of conference attendees to date for an Annual Meeting and Conference and provided an opportunity for participants to earn up to eleven (11) continuing education credits. An online, post-conference evaluation was completed by two hundred (200) attendees and will be used to identify areas of achievement and opportunities for improvement.

Keywords: Georgia Public Health Association, Conference proceedings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference of the Georgia Public Health Association (GPHA) was held in Jekyll Island, Georgia, at the Jekyll Island Convention Center, on May 3-5, 2023. Two pre-conference meetings were held on Tuesday, May 2, 2023; a joint meeting by the Epidemiology and Environmental Health Sections as well as a District Nursing Directors meeting. The goal of the 2023 GPHA Annual Meeting and Conference was to assemble emerging public health professionals, current practitioners, academicians, governing entities, and community stakeholders for educational opportunities and networking to support the vision and mission of GPHA. Specifically, annual meeting and conference offerings were chosen to support the 2023 conference theme of “Creating a Healthy Georgia: Conversations and Collaborations for Change”.

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference built upon the opportunities identified during the 92nd Annual Meeting and Conference, which was the first one held in person after the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic. This included the opportunity for pre-conference workshops, three nationally known plenary speakers, re-aligning the sponsorship categories, increasing the number of poster presentations,

initiating roundtable discussions as a conference offering, expanding the use of a conference app, and maximizing the availability of continuing education credits.

The theme for the 2023 GPHA Annual Meeting and Conference was selected by the GPHA Executive Board during a meeting in the early fall of 2022 and was “Creating a Healthy Georgia: Conversations and Collaborations for Change”. It was chosen to allow our participants to reflect on the accomplishments of the past few years, but also to look forward and determine how we, individually and collectively, could improve, advance, and build resiliency for the challenges, and opportunities, to come. One hundred and seventy (170) abstracts were submitted for peer review: sixty-three (63) were accepted for poster presentations, sixty-seven (67) for workshop presentations and twenty-three (23) for roundtable sessions. Of the 63 posters, 30 were student submissions. Three plenary sessions with diverse, internationally known, public health practitioners and clinicians addressed key areas of public health advocacy, the “All of Us Research Program”, and critical and strategic thinking to improve the health of the public. Concurrent workshops provided an array of focus areas

including, but not limited to public health governance by Board of Health members, environmental health, maternal and child health, global health, emergency preparedness, communicable disease, chronic disease management, oral health care, social determinants of health, health disparities, immunizations, nursing workforce training, and health equity.

Twenty (20) awards were presented during the 2023 Annual Meeting and Conference. Viewed as a great opportunity to recognize a colleague, group, or organization for excellence in protecting and promoting the health of Georgia residents, the awards committee publicly recognized the awardees during the Awards Breakfast.

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference brought together five hundred and ninety-seven (597) conference attendees, which is the highest number of conference attendees to date for an Annual Meeting and Conference. The meeting provided attendees with eighty (80) options for concurrent workshops, sixty-two (62) posters to view, twenty-four (24) options for roundtable discussions, access to twenty-one (21) exhibitors, sixteen (16) section meetings, and the ability to earn up to eleven (11) continuing education credits. An online, post-conference evaluation was completed by two hundred (200) attendees and will be used to identify areas of achievement and opportunities for improvement. 2 The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference of the Georgia Public Health Association was overwhelmingly rated as “good or excellent”.

OVERVIEW

Purpose

Established in 1928, the Georgia Public Health Association (GPHA) is a registered, non-profit corporation organized for the purpose of promoting the public and personal health of the citizens of Georgia through public health practice at the local, i.e., county, and state levels. Recognized as the largest body of public health professionals in a single organization in the southeastern United States, the Georgia Public Health Association, also known as an “Affiliate” of the American Public Health Association (APHA) is one of 52 state and regional public health associations that champion the same goals as APHA to promote, protect and advocate for the public's health. As an independently established organization, GPHA operates with its own infrastructure, policies, processes, and procedures. Each year, GPHA participates, implements, and advocates on behalf of various public health issues through an annual meeting, program collaborations and/or development, continuing education opportunities, professional development opportunities, and educating our state elected officials and key stakeholders on key evidence-based public health policies.

The goal of the 2023 GPHA Annual Meeting and Conference was to assemble emerging public health professionals, current practitioners, academicians, governing entities, and community stakeholders for educational opportunities and networking to support the vision and

mission of GPHA. Specifically, annual meeting and conference offerings were chosen to support the 2023 conference theme of “Creating a Healthy Georgia: Conversations and Collaborations for Change”. Four objectives were chosen as pillars for the conference. They were: 1) participants would examine methods for strengthening public health departments, programs, and community infrastructure to care for our citizens across Georgia; 2) participants would have networking opportunities to engage in conversations to promote collaborations among key public health stakeholders; 3) participants would be able to converse with researchers focused on public health concerns; and 4) participants would be able to describe lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic and other emerging infections that could be applied to future emergencies.

History

Several locations and venues across the state of Georgia have hosted the Annual Meeting and Conference of the Georgia Public Health Association through the years. These locations include Savannah (n=24); Jekyll Island (n=23); Atlanta (n=18); Augusta (n=4); Gainesville (n=1); and Macon (n=1). There was no annual meeting during the early years (1929-1936); during World War II (1941-1943 and 1945); for four years during the 1980s, and only one-day annual meetings and business sessions with educational workshops between 2006 and 2010. In 2020 the GPHA conference was canceled due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and in 2021 the association hosted a virtual meeting and conference in the fall. The 2023 Georgia Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Conference was held at the Jekyll Island Convention Center in Jekyll Island, Georgia, on May 3-5, 2023.

Theme

The 2023 Georgia Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Conference theme was selected by the GPHA Executive Board during a meeting in the early fall of 2022. The GPHA Executive Board consists of representation from each of the sixteen Sections- Safety and Health Preparedness, Health Education and Promotion, Environmental Health, Career Development, Rural Health/Primary Care, Laboratory, Epidemiology, Administration, Maternal and Child Health, Medical/Dental, Nutrition, Nursing, Board of Health, Academic, Health Information and Technology, and Communications- the President, PresidentElect, Vice President, Immediate Past President, Secretary, Treasurer, Parliamentarian, Affiliate Representative to the APHA Governing Council, two Representatives At-Large, the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the Georgia Public Health Association???, and a Representative to the National Association of Local Boards of Health. This year's theme, “Creating a Healthy Georgia: Conversations and Collaborations for Change” was selected because it allowed our participants to reflect on the accomplishments of the past few years, but also allowed for looking forward and determining how we, individually and

collectively, could improve, advance, and build resiliency for the challenges, and opportunities, to come.

CONTENT

The 2023 conference included plenary sessions, workshops, roundtable discussions, poster sessions, and exhibits.

1. Plenary Sessions

Chris Chanyasulkit, PhD, MPH, President of the American Public Health Association, served as the Opening Plenary Session Speaker and her address was entitled, “Harnessing the Power of Public Health”. Dr. Chanyasulkit is a grounded public health practitioner with a strong belief in eliminating the structural barriers to equity for marginalized populations. She holds leadership positions with local, state, regional, and national governance, and civic engagement organizations, working to promote racial, gender, and health equity. She has served as a gubernatorial appointee to the Massachusetts Asian American Commission and the Commission on the Status of Women where she advocated for the needs of Asian Americans and Women throughout the Commonwealth. Passionate about reproductive rights, she has also served on the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM) Advocacy Board of Directors from 2013-2019 and currently serves on the PPLM Board of Directors for the medical center.

Priscella Pemu, MD, MS, FACP, Associate Dean for Clinical Research, Director of the Clinical Research Center, Morehouse School of Medicine, served as the General Plenary Session Speaker and her address was entitled, “What Can ‘All of Us Research Program’ Do for Public Health and Population Health and Research in Georgia”. Dr. Pemu is an internist whose goal is to improve the health of all patients like those she encounters in her primary care practice. Dr. Pemu is the Morehouse School of Medicine site Principal Investigator for the All of Us Health Provider Organization called SEEC. She leads the Morehouse Participant and Clinical Interactions unit (PCI of the Georgia Clinical and Translational Science Award. In this role, she is directly involved in ensuring quality and efficiency of clinical research studies through training of staff, review, and prioritization of resources for clinical projects and review of Data and Safety Monitoring reports as the Chair of the Institutional Scientific Advisory Committee.

Brian Castrucci, DrPh, President and CEO, de Beaumont Foundation, served as the speaker for the third plenary session, the Sellers-McCroan Lecture, and his address was entitled, “Making the Invisible Visible: Critical Strategies, Moves, and Resources to Improve the Health of the Public”. An award-winning epidemiologist with ten years of experience working in health departments in Pennsylvania, Texas, and Georgia, Dr. Castrucci brought a unique perspective to the philanthropic sector that allows him to shape and implement visionary and practical initiatives and partnership to combine research and practice to improve public health. Under his leadership, the de Beaumont

Foundation is advancing policy, building partnerships, and strengthening the public health system to create healthy communities by serving as a leading voice in health philanthropy and public health practice.

2. Workshops/Section Meetings

Eighty (80) conference workshops were held during the Annual Conference and Meeting with conversations, discussions, and sharing of public health research and/or practice findings across each Section represented in GPHA. Each workshop provided the participants with a title, description, and learning objectives that was shared in the Conference Program Book upon their check-in at the meeting. The time frame for the workshops was either a thirty (30) minute or sixty (60) minute oral presentation and they were held on each day of the conference. The Section meetings were ninety (90) minutes in length and were held on Wednesday, May 3, 2023. Each Section meeting included a keynote speaker, selected by the Section leadership, the dissemination of section-specific awards, a business meeting, and the election of the 2023-2024 officers.

3. Roundtable Discussions

For the first time in Georgia Public Health Association history, the forum of “Roundtable Discussions” was used to foster conversations on pertinent public health concerns and issues. Designed as a combination of presentation and group discussion, twenty-four (24) discussions were held, across eight, ninety (90) minute time slots in a large convention center ballroom, with participants interested in that topic meeting around a table for an open discussion. Examples of such discussions included but were limited to “Housing as a Social Determinant of Health: The City of Atlanta’s Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS Program” to “Using a Visionary Strategy for Public Health: Collaborating with Community Partners to Improve Community Health” to “Addressing Rural Health Challenges in Georgia and Scotland: A Framework for International Collaboration”.

4. Posters

Located in the Exhibit Hall, sixty-three poster presentations were selected and on display during all three days of the Annual Meeting and Conference. This was the largest selection of research projects ever presented at a GPHA conference and represented work on behalf of undergraduate and graduate students (medical school students, Master of Public Health candidates, and doctoral candidates in public health), public health faculty, and public health practitioners. Authors were available to answer questions about their work during the President’s Reception on the first day of the Conference for a ninety (90) minute period. All students that were selected to participate in the poster presentations at the Conference were also eligible for the Student Poster Award Competition. Sponsored by the JiannPing Hsu College of Public Health, Georgia Southern University, three students received first, second, and third place honors based on the quality of the research presented,

their display, and their ability to answer questions from the judging team.

5. Exhibit Hall

The 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference Exhibit Hall was in the Main Ballroom of the Jekyll Island Convention Center and served as the site for the poster presentations and President's Reception for all conference attendees, vendors, and guests. This venue provided a much larger venue and access to conference participants than in previous years when conference space was limited. Exhibitors were provided a four-hour period to set up their display prior to the Opening Plenary Session and Business Meeting. The exhibitors then had ten designated hours of conference attendee time allocated during the 5 three-day meeting. The prospectus for exhibitors at the 2023 GPHA Annual Meeting and Conference can be found in Table 1. The partners that provided exhibits throughout the Annual Meeting and Conference are listed in Table 2.

Sponsorship

The Georgia Public Health Association Annual Conference and Meeting would not be possible without the support of external partners. Nearly ten months prior to the Annual meeting and conference, a sponsorship packet is developed and used to solicit funding for the operational costs of the meeting. Signed by the GPHA President and Vice President, the correspondence is shared in writing, and electronically, with former partners and new prospects at the recommendation of Section officers and other Executive Board members. The Sponsorship categories, benefits, and responding organizations for the 2023 Annual Meeting and Conference are listed in Table 2.

Abstract Submission and Acceptance Process

On October 31, 2022, a call for abstracts was announced with a deadline for applications to be uploaded into the Digital Commons platform by November 30, 2022. An extension was given until December 12, 2022. This was the first year the Conference Committee utilized a web-based submission system for the conference abstracts. The Digital Commons platform was used for all abstract submissions, reviewing, and accepting of abstracts. Additionally, the platform archives all the accepted abstracts and presentation products from the conference and is searchable. Abstract authors self-selected a format: poster, 30-minute workshop, or 60-minute workshop. The conference committee invited public health practitioners, researchers, educators, and students with expertise/experience in public health to serve as abstract reviewers. A total of 72 abstract reviewers representing academic institutions; local health districts; Georgia Department of Public Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and other non-profits served as reviewers. Reviewers scored abstracts over 8 categories on a 1-10 scale with one being the lowest and ten being the highest: Importance of the Topic, Originality of the Work/Innovation, Defined Objectives/Purpose of the Work, Methodology, Conclusions, Overall Reviewer Enthusiasm, Fit for Proposed Format, and Relevance to Conference

Theme. Reviewers then made a recommendation to the conference committee to either accept or reject the abstract and provided comments, a format recommendation, and a section recommendation.

Annual Awards

The awards committee of the Georgia Public Health Association solicited nominations from December 2022 through March 2023 for GPHA annual awards, including the distinguished Sellers-McCroan Award, to be presented during the annual conference in May 2023. Viewed as a great opportunity to recognize a colleague, group, or organization for excellence in protecting and promoting the health of Georgia residents, the awards committee reviewed the nominations and publicly recognized the awardees during the Awards Breakfast. The actual award was presented during the Section meeting associated with the award. The awards recipients during the 2023 Annual Meeting and Conference are listed in Table 4.

James W. Alley Memorial Fund / Silent Auction History and Process

Established in 2001 with consent of the Georgia Public Health Association, the James W. Alley Memorial Fund served to honor a former Director of the Georgia Division of Public Health, former GPHA President, and medical missionary who provided care in Bolivia. The intent of the fund was to provide an opportunity for two people, a Master of Public Health (MPH) candidate and a public health professional, to visit Montero, Bolivia, and assist in the work he led to address the health issues of the indigent and medically fragile. In 2014, the Executive Board approved a new purpose for the James W. Alley 6 Memorial Fund, and it was to support a limited number of registration scholarships to the Georgia Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Conference for students. This practice remains intact. Public health practitioners, local health departments, and District offices donate items for the Silent Auction each year and the funds earned are still used to assist students in attending the meeting through the Jim Alley Fund. In 2023, three conference registration scholarships were awarded to students across Georgia so they might have the chance to attend the conference.

Continuing Education

Conference attendees were afforded the opportunity to obtain continuing education credits for the sessions for which they actively participated. Participants were advised that they must attend the entire session and complete the evaluation online within five weeks after the conference to earn credit hours and obtain a CE certificate. The Georgia Public Health Association was able to provide accreditation statements to conference participants from medicine (CME) which read "this activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the Essential Areas and Policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education through joint sponsorship of the American Public Health Association (APHA) and the Georgia Public Health

Association. The APHA is accredited by the ACCME to provide continuing medical education for physicians. The Nursing (CNE) Accreditation Statement read, "This continuing nursing education activity was approved by the American Public Health Association's Public Health Nursing Section (APHA/PHN), an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. The Health Education (CHES) Statement read, "sponsored by the American Public Health Association (APHA), a designated approver of continuing education contact hours (CECH) in health education by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. This program is designated for Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) to receive up to 11 total Category 1 contact education hours. Finally, the Designation Statement reads, "the APHA designates this live educational activity for a maximum of 11 AMA PRA Category 1 Credit(s)".

Evaluation

A post-conference evaluation was sent electronically approximately one week after the close of the 93rd Annual Meeting and Conference to solicit feedback on achievement, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. This information is then shared and reviewed by the Georgia Public Health Association Executive Board. Two hundred (200) conference attendees completed the post-conference

evaluation, or ~31% of those attending. A summary of key findings includes:

The most valuable parts of the 93rd GPHA Annual Meeting and Conference were (in rank order)- (1) Concurrent Sessions; (2) Section Meetings ;(3) Plenary Sessions; (4) Sellers-McCroan Lecture, and (5) Awards Breakfast. Favorite parts of the conference included the breakout sessions, awards ceremony, the variety of sessions, the keynote speakers, being in Jekyll Island, the Board of Health sessions, networking, and the poster sessions. The least favorite parts of the 93rd Annual GPHA Meeting & Conference included scheduling conflicts, temperature in the breakout rooms was too warm, rooms were crowded during roundtable discussions, and more water stations were needed. Sixty-five (65.5%) percent of respondents preferred to keep the location of the Annual Meeting and Conference in Jekyll Island for future meetings. Ninety-five (95.5%) percent of respondents preferred to keep the meeting time during the first week in May. Seventy (70.9%) percent of respondents rated the food served during the conference as excellent or good. Eighty-nine (89.2%) percent of respondents rated the registration cost of the conference as excellent or good. Ninety-seven (97.5%) percent of respondents rated the registration process for the conference as excellent or good, and ninety-eight (98%) of respondents rated the 93rd Annual Conference and Meeting as excellent or good overall. The post-conference evaluations 7 will serve as a resource of information for the 94th Annual Meeting and Conference Planning Committee.

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