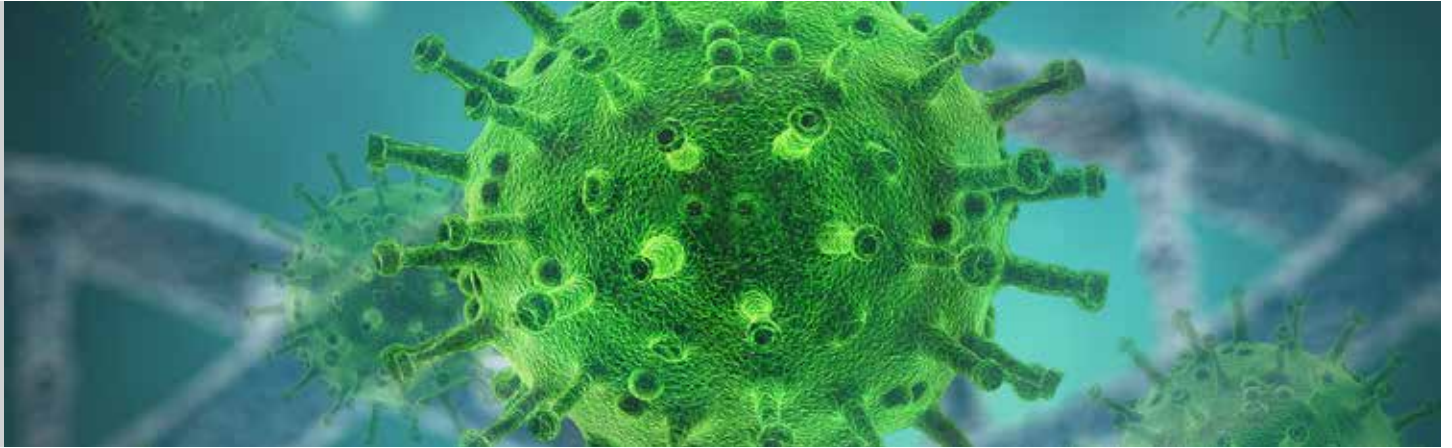




CAIRHE

CENTER FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND RURAL HEALTH EQUITY



PRACTICING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH IN PANDEMIC TIMES

I sit writing this from a home office where, like many of you, I've been stuck for the past eight weeks due to the threat of COVID-19. During this time many things have changed, and we've had to learn to pivot in many significant ways. I've been asking myself the questions, How is our center—one based on significant community engagement and face-to-face interaction—being *present* for our vulnerable tribal and rural community partners, now and into the foreseeable future? How can our projects adapt? How can we be most useful to MSU and the state?

Some answers have come due to our unique position and existing partnerships, but as COVID-19 is teaching us many lessons, we still have much to learn.

CAIRHE faculty **Selena Ahmed, Ph.D.**, **Stephen Martin, Ph.D.**, and I have been highly engaged in working with an amazing group of campus faculty in the basic sciences on understanding this pandemic from many angles. These groups are working on COVID-19 testing strategies, epidemiology, modeling, gene sequencing, and much more. Getting to know our colleagues in microbiology, virology, engineering, mathematics, and other disciplines has been fantastic and a real blessing.

We've also been doing what I call “community engagement on steroids” as we work to connect basic scientists, clinicians and clinics, hospital systems, and public health agencies in work to enhance testing capacity and commence important research studies. Many of these collaborations are new and exciting, but this hurried pace is definitely *not* our usual way of engaging with partners! Such community-engaged work would normally take a year of discussions, joint planning sessions, and in-person visits.

Instead, our recent intensive partnership-building feels like sewing the parachute once we've jumped out of the plane. It will continue to be a wild ride as we watch the scientific, local, and national news daily on this rapidly changing and challenging situation. Still, we remain hopeful that our work in serology testing with our most vulnerable communities will provide not only scientific insights, but also informed public health strategy for these communities as we deal with COVID-19 into the next year.

You can read about these testing efforts, and CAIRHE's many outreach activities during the pandemic, in our feature story on p. 2.

On a personal note, here are some of the lessons I'm learning now: how to have more patience—and more gratitude; how to do more with less; and how to adapt to changing timelines and let go of planning too far into the future. I'm also reminded of the importance of building new bridges and connections. And I'm getting better at waiting for “yes” while preparing for when “yes—we're ready to collaborate!” comes.

Moments of reflection and sharing are critical in this time of uncertainty. I'm learning that CAIRHE's goal of a robust Health Equity Network where public health agencies, clinical entities, communities, and researchers are all connected and collaborating is absolutely critical if we're to face and manage challenges such as pandemics and climate change in the future. And I'm leaning into the question, How can we more intentionally apply the lessons we're learning now to build a better and more equitable future for all?

Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D.
Director and Principal Investigator

For Healthy Communities Under the Big Sky

CENTER NEWS

CAIRHE RESPONDS TO COVID-19 CRISIS THROUGH INTENSIFIED ENGAGEMENT

Its daily operations disrupted by COVID-19, CAIRHE pivoted in the early days of the crisis in Montana to serve the state in new ways and forge innovative partnerships that will continue into the summer and well beyond.

If there's been any silver lining to the pandemic in Montana, said CAIRHE Director **Alex Adams**, M.D., Ph.D., it's the fact that entities of all kinds that seldom interacted before the crisis have been drawn into cooperative ventures for the good of public health.



Alex Adams

"Throughout this crisis our concern has been not only for our faculty and staff, but also the safety of our most vulnerable community partners," Adams said. "Our commitment to health equity research is stronger than ever, but with COVID lurking, we have to go about our work thoughtfully, responsibly, and in new, creative ways."

As a center founded on community-based participatory research, CAIRHE is always forging new connections through its faculty, its Community Engagement Core, and its statewide Health Equity Network. But with the COVID-19 landscape changing by the hour, Adams and the Center found themselves convening meetings—*fast*—that wouldn't have seemed necessary, or even possible, before.

Adams calls it "community engagement on steroids."

Very early in the university's response to the crisis, she was among a handful of campus leaders who encouraged faculty help for local COVID-19 testing efforts, as well as the survey and collection of campus lab supplies that could be used by local health providers. By mid-April, MSU had repurposed instrumentation for [testing at Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital](#), greatly expanding statewide capacity for tests.

With support from the university and [Montana INBRE](#), CAIRHE acquired 10,000 serology testing kits, and the Center is now working with Bridger Orthopedic Urgent Care and Gallatin County Public Health to validate the kits for upcoming studies, including one to be led by **Stephen Martin**, Ph.D., director of CAIRHE's [Translational Biomarkers Core Lab](#). That pilot study, which would examine aging-related inflammation in older adults infected by SARS-CoV-2, will begin as early as September, pending National Institutes of Health approval.

CAIRHE is also collaborating with Salish Kootenai College and the St. Luke clinical centers on the Flathead Reservation in anticipation of a serology testing study there, to be led by **Selena Ahmed**, Ph.D., Adams, Martin, and local partners. In eastern Montana, the Center has partnered with Bighorn Valley Health Center, which serves a large number of rural communities in that half of the state, for testing in the coming months.

"COVID-19 is going to be with us well into 2021," Adams said, "so in many ways this fight is only getting started."

NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Other CAIRHE faculty, facing disruptions in their research due to COVID-19, have adjusted their work to examine research questions related to the pandemic.

Research Project Leader **Carmen Byker Shanks**, Ph.D., was unable to collect data this spring at her project's two partnering food banks due to safety concerns for her participants. The skyrocketing demand for food banks due to the economic downturn has also made it difficult for her partners to collaborate as before.

Seeing an opportunity, Byker Shanks and her team created a statewide survey to assess how COVID-19 has impacted Montanans' health, particularly food security. With thousands of responses so far, the survey is open to anyone in Montana and runs through June. ([Take the survey here.](#))

"Our research team is interested in how the food accessed and consumed has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early March in Montana," she said, "along with other related factors that might impact food patterns, such as physical activity and stress."

Byker Shanks is partnering with several county and state agencies around the state to provide tailored county data from the survey that can be used to increase food security in the future. "We're also conducting this survey in four other states to understand the differences between urban and rural places nationwide," she added.

Her upcoming paper in the *American Journal of Public Health* also addresses food insecurity during COVID-19.

CAIRHE investigators **Cara Palmer**, Ph.D., and **Benjamin Oosterhoff**, Ph.D., who currently lead separate Developmental Mini-Grant projects at the Center (*see p. 5*), found themselves unable to travel and meet with new community partners when closures locked down the state. Instead they used their time in isolation—made easier by the fact that they're married—to administer multiple waves of youth surveys about COVID-19 across three different participant groups. To date they've surveyed roughly 2,000 adolescents across the United States.

Among other findings, they determined that youth attitudes about COVID-19 severity, social responsibility values, social trust, and self-interest were associated with news monitoring, social distancing, and disinfecting behaviors. Teens who reported stronger belief in the seriousness of COVID-19, less social responsibility and social trust, and valuing their own self-interest over others also reported more hoarding at stores.

Their first paper on the findings has been accepted, and a second paper, "Adolescents' Motivations to Engage in Social Distancing during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Associations with Mental and Social Health," will appear in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

When Adams and her own research team wanted to do something to support Native families coping in isolation, they produced a new video for their website, [Turtle Island Tales](#), called *Igmú Is Bored*. The children's video, starring the puppet character from their first video, *Igmú's Tipi Dream*, explores topics of boredom and handwashing that were especially timely in the early days of the pandemic.

"It was fun and interesting to produce a video entirely at a distance," Adams said.

CAIRHE also has acted as a source for timely COVID-19 information for Montana communities, particularly tribal areas facing uneven levels of response from federal authorities.

CENTER NEWS

Community Research Associates **Sue Higgins**, MS, and **Emily Salois**, MSW, compiled [lists of resources for Native communities](#), which Higgins posted and maintains on CAIRHE's website.

Higgins's *Resources of the Week* email, which she compiles with **Dani Morrison** of the American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program, continues to highlight COVID-19 news and information each week.

"Providing timely information on the challenges our communities are facing is one way we can do our part," Higgins said. "Even while we're separated, we're all in this together."

CAIRHE's home page also highlights other MSU websites of interest to communities statewide. These include the [COVID-19 Rural Resources and Information](#) pages maintained by the Office of Rural Health, and the [Montana COVID-19 Blog](#) presented by MSU's Disease Ecology Lab (Director **Raina Plowright**, Ph.D.).

SCALING BACK WHILE MOVING FORWARD

Even before the winter snows could vanish, it was clear 2020 would be anything but typical for researchers at Montana State.

By mid-March, MSU's sudden and rapid response to the looming threat of COVID-19 had changed CAIRHE's course for the first half of the year and likely many months beyond. While the Center's grant support from the National Institutes of Health has been unaffected, the way CAIRHE has had to carry out its daily operations has shifted drastically.

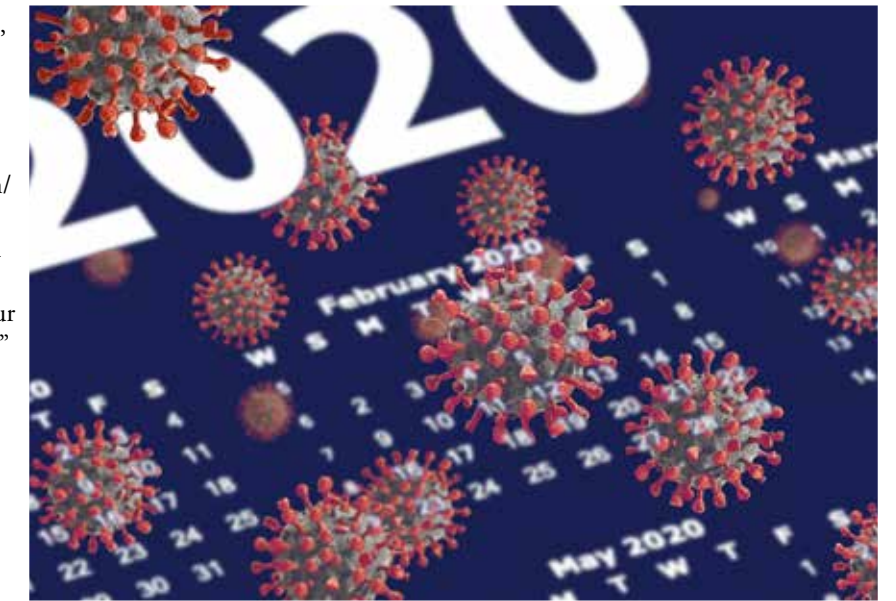
Before official MSU directives began on March 16, when President **Waded Cruzado**, Ph.D., asked university offices to shift toward remote learning and work-at-home plans, Adams asked CAIRHE's faculty and staff to begin making adjustments to their work routines.

On March 13 she suspended all CAIRHE travel to tribal areas. "Our reservation communities are the most vulnerable in the state due to multiple factors, including high rates of chronic disease and autoimmune conditions, as well as poor health care access in the best of times," she wrote to Center investigators. "This disease can be transmitted even if you don't seem sick, so please keep your communities safe by staying home."

Adams encouraged a shift toward virtual means, such as Web- and teleconferences, for community advisory board meetings and focus groups, and she urged caution with any data collection in less vulnerable communities that would involve groups of 10 people or more.

By March 27, most CAIRHE data collection had ceased. On that day MSU Vice President of Research, Economic Development, and Graduate Education **Jason Carter**, Ph.D., had moved the university to "Research Level 2: Modified Operations with Approved Exceptions." MSU classes had already moved online after students were asked not to return from Spring Break, and K-12 schools statewide had moved to online instruction.

"Level 2 means pausing research when possible, or developing a plan for modified operations when research is deemed essential



per guidelines," Carter wrote at the time. MSU remained at Level 2 until May 18, when it transitioned down to Level 1.

While some CAIRHE faculty were fortunate to be between data collection phases in their projects this spring, others dependent on reservation visits, public school operation, or close personal contact with research participants have encountered delays in data collection, or missed opportunities.

Meanwhile, during March, the national wave of cancellations affecting travel and academic conferences of all types radically altered CAIRHE's events calendar.

First, organizers of the **2020 Montana Healthy Communities Conference** (*see Fall 2019 issue*), originally scheduled for April 28-30 in Helena, announced the postponement of that event. As a co-sponsor, CAIRHE had been involved in planning the content and agenda, and the Center also was to host both a pre-conference session on public health research and a research poster session. A shortened version of the Helena gathering is now being rescheduled for November, with several innovative online components planned during the preceding months.

CAIRHE also was forced to postpone **Promoting Indigenous Research Leadership (PIRL)**, its three-day workshop originally scheduled for June 8-10 in Bozeman (*see Fall 2019 issue*). That event, held in partnership with the National Institutes of Health, is designed to promote the research careers of Indigenous and other early-career faculty working with Indigenous communities. By the time the event was postponed, CAIRHE and its NIH partners had already selected the cohort of 19 junior faculty participants from across the United States.

"We're still assessing our options for rescheduling PIRL toward the end of 2020," said CAIRHE Program Coordinator **James Burroughs**. "So much depends on the COVID-19 outlook in Montana, and that's cloudy at best. We're also finding that a lot of individuals are going to be reluctant to travel until there's a vaccine, which could be well into 2021."

For now, in spite of compassion and diligence from so many to sustain life and work in Montana's communities, an invisible virus still seems firmly in control. ☸

RESEARCH

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Here's a summary of what CAIRHE's faculty investigators have been working on, even amid the disruption of COVID-19.

Carmen Byker Shanks, Ph.D., RDN ([The UnProcessed Pantry Project \[UP3\]](#)), and her team worked during Fall 2019 to develop the protocol for their 12-week trial. During this time the two participating food pantries collaborated on changes to their food supplies that resulted in more unprocessed foods and less ultra-processed foods. Recruitment for the trial began in January, with the study occurring at the two food pantries in January through April, with several modifications put in place for participant safety during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because food security concerns have risen sharply statewide due to the pandemic, the study's participating food banks and its community advisory board continue to operate under unprecedented stress; but the outlook for the project and future research remains bright once normal operations can resume. Byker Shanks and her team recently submitted three manuscripts based on UP3 work, with one already accepted.

Monica Skewes, Ph.D. ([Development and Pilot Test of Indigenist Relapse Prevention for American Indians](#)), has continued collaboration with her team's community advisory board (CAB) and community partners to revise and refine their culturally adapted relapse prevention intervention. Using data from a survey of 198 tribal members who self-identified as struggling with substance use problems, as well as focus group data from the community, she has incorporated strategies into the curriculum that include: enhancing social support and coping with lateral violence; reframing personal and historical trauma from a resilience perspective; coping with stress from racism and unfair treatment; forgiving self and others for previous harms; and re-engaging with healthy people and activities available on the reservation. The team also conducted follow-up interviews with a subset of participants who went through a trial run of the intervention last summer to find out what they liked or didn't like about it and what they learned that was most helpful. Working together with the CAB, they refined and reorganized the intervention materials and discussed upcoming plans for pilot-testing the new curriculum.

Among other activity, **Andreas Thorsen, Ph.D.**, and co-investigator **Maggie Thorsen, Ph.D.** ([Modeling Rural Perinatal Health Outcomes and Service Systems to Improve Health Equity](#)), developed measures of mothers' access to Level 1, 2, and 3 birth facilities in Montana that show that American Indian women have less access to obstetric services—namely, longer drive times and less access to higher-level facilities that accommodate complex births. The work resulted in two recent manuscripts. The project's growing team obtained and cleaned five years of Montana birth certificate data (2014-18, including more than 60,000 births), as well as Montana hospital-level data from the American Hospital Association. Both data sets have proven important to the success of the study's first two aims. In addition, the team collated and cleaned data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the PricePoint Hospital Directory, and other sources.

Kelly Knight, Ph.D., and co-investigator **Colter Ellis, Ph.D.** ([Somatic Mindfulness Training for a Healthy Workforce](#)), recently

prepared two manuscripts that begin to evaluate the prevalence of secondary trauma, risk and protective factors, and health outcomes. Last fall they provided consultation and training to the Billings Area Office of the Indian Health Service and the Bozeman (MT) City Attorney's office—trainings that have the added benefit of further refining the curriculum that will be the basis of the team's secondary trauma intervention to come. Other work toward that intervention includes the ongoing creation of a curriculum to augment the team's secondary trauma "toolkit," and a completed pilot test to refine and strengthen intervention materials and data collection procedures. The coming year will focus largely on the preparation of a major multiyear external grant that will support the team's pioneering work in their field in the years ahead. Meanwhile, Knight and Ellis continue to mentor a growing cohort of graduate and undergraduate students in their Secondary Trauma Intervention and Learning Lab (STILL).

At the end of the Spring 2020 semester, **Ellis received one of two Outstanding Teaching Awards** given by MSU's College of Letters and Science.

Lauren Dotson Davis, Ed.D. ([A Trauma-Informed Approach for Positive Youth Development for Montana Students](#)), implemented her pilot study over the winter at a high school in rural southwestern Montana. In this 7-week intervention, 19 high-school student participants completed a 45-minute trauma-informed yoga session with a certified yoga instructor twice a week during their regularly scheduled physical education class. Students also completed pre-intervention surveys that indicated levels of adverse childhood experiences, anxiety, symptoms of depression, and other measures. The study collected salivary cortisol before and during the intervention to determine if participants' stress levels were impacted, though a final collection after the intervention had to be scrapped when the school closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Cortisol analysis was completed by CAIRHE's [Translational Biomarkers Core Lab](#). Preliminary findings suggest that this intervention is effective at improving various elements of mental and behavioral health.

Scott Monfort, Ph.D. ([Elucidate Differences in Physical Activity and Movement Patterns in Montana Farmers and Ranchers](#)), and his team have collected low-demand season data from 19 ranchers and 12 farmers, with collections during high-demand seasons ongoing (calving for ranchers) and upcoming (summer irrigation for farmers). The data will provide foundational knowledge on the movement patterns and intensity of occupational tasks in farming and ranching, guiding future efforts to improve understanding of osteoarthritis in rural Montana communities. The team also has made substantial progress in the data processing algorithms to quantify physical activity intensity patterns during typical working activities. Though springtime activities were delayed to avoid placing undue risk on rural communities as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened in Montana, Monfort and his team hope to complete these tasks in the coming months while following public health guidelines. 🌱

CENTER NEWS

SKEWES AND RINK WIN "SPIRIT OF MT" AWARD READ BEFORE U.S. HOUSE

A pair of CAIRHE investigators and their community partner who work to improve health on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation were recognized recently by U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte of Montana.

Adriann Ricker from Fort Peck Community College and MSU faculty members **Monica Skewes, Ph.D.**, and **Elizabeth Rink, Ph.D., MSW**—both longtime CAIRHE investigators—were recognized in January with Gianforte's Spirit of Montana Commendation.

Ricker, an enrolled member of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and



(Left to right) Elizabeth Rink, Monica Skewes, and Adriann Ricker.

Sioux Tribes, Skewes, and Rink have spent years working with members and leaders of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation to pursue solutions to public health issues confronting Montana, Gianforte said when recognizing the three in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Through community-based research, they are helping develop trauma-informed policies for reservation agencies," Gianforte said. "All three are working vigorously alongside tribal members to find solutions."

Skewes, an associate professor in the MSU Department of Psychology, focuses her research on substance abuse and mental health in rural Indigenous communities. Rink, professor of community health in the Department of Health and Human Development, researches sexual and reproductive health in Indigenous communities in Montana and the Arctic. She has

worked with people on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation for nearly 14 years.

Last year, Ricker, Rink, and Skewes were selected for a prestigious three-year program supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that aims to develop interdisciplinary research leaders (*see Fall 2019 issue*). The three plan to use the program to collaborate with Fort Peck community members and lawmakers to develop effective, compassionate, and health-promoting policies that acknowledge the multiple sources of trauma affecting Fort Peck tribal members. — *MSU News Service*

BYKER SHANKS FEATURED IN GQ ARTICLE ON RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

CAIRHE investigator **Carmen Byker Shanks, Ph.D., RDN**, and her [UnProcessed Pantry Project \(UP3\)](#) were featured in a recent [GQ article](#) on the health consequences of certain processed foods.

Through her work on the CAIRHE project and in MSU's [Food and Health Lab](#), which she leads with **Selena Ahmed, Ph.D.**, Byker Shanks has emerged as a national expert on the health risks of so-called ultra-processed foods. In partnership with two Montana food banks, UP3 aims to improve dietary quality by influencing the food supply through organization-wide nutrition policies, modifying the food environment with minimally processed foods, and encouraging patrons toward healthier food options.

In discussing the benefits of unprocessed foods, including weight loss, the *GQ* article says, "Shanks notices similar benefits in her UnProcessed Pantry Project, ongoing research she conducts that's funded in part by the NIH. Last year, a pilot group of 40 participants ate less processed food; collectively, their cholesterol improved and they lost weight as they ate more protein and whole grains and fewer added sugars.

"The bottom line here is to try to eliminate ultra-processed food whenever possible," she says."



Carmen Byker Shanks

SIX FACULTY RECEIVE FIRST CAIRHE DEVELOPMENTAL MINI-GRANTS

CAIRHE introduced a new program at the end of 2019 to help MSU junior investigators establish partnerships with a community, public health agencies, or clinical organizations, or to help a community find a faculty investigator partner.

The new Developmental Mini-Grants, made possible through funding from the office of **Jason Carter, Ph.D.**, MSU Vice President of Research, Economic Development, and Graduate Education, are designed to strengthen the pipeline of multidisciplinary investigators who seek support from the Center.

"It's our hope that by helping faculty lay the groundwork for community-based research, we can set them up for greater success in the years ahead as CAIRHE investigators," said CAIRHE Program Coordinator **James Burroughs**.

(continued on p. 6)

CENTER NEWS

Applications for the first Mini-Grants, in amounts up to \$10,000 each, were due December 2, 2019, with six grants awarded in early 2020. The recipients are:

- **Edward Gamble**, Ph.D., MBA, Jake Jabs College of Business & Entrepreneurship;
- **Angela Jukkala**, Ph.D., R.N., College of Nursing (Great Falls Campus);
- **Benjamin Oosterhoff**, Ph.D., Department of Psychology;
- **Cara Palmer**, Ph.D., Department of Psychology;
- **Julie Ruff**, Ed.D., M.S., College of Nursing (Bozeman Campus);
- **Emily Tomayko**, Ph.D., R.D., CAIRHE.

Although funding for the Mini-Grants had been slated to expire June 30, an extension approved by Carter due to COVID-19 disruptions will allow research spending through December 31.



Edward Gamble



Angela Jukkala



Benjamin Oosterhoff



Cara Palmer



Julie Ruff



Emily Tomayko

CAIRHE hopes to offer the Mini-Grants again in 2020-21, Burroughs said, with a likely application due date sometime in the early fall of this year. Details will be available on CAIRHE's [Request for Proposals](#) web page.

ELIZABETH RINK CO-LEADS NEXT FULBRIGHT ARCTIC INITIATIVE

CAIRHE investigator and mentor **Elizabeth Rink**, Ph.D., MSW, will serve as co-leader of the third cohort of the [Fulbright Arctic Initiative](#), designed to stimulate international research collaboration on Arctic issues while increasing mutual understanding between people of the United States and member countries of the Arctic Council.

Rink was selected as a fellow in the second iteration of the program in early 2018 (*see Spring 2018 issue*), and in the months since she has conducted her work with researchers from the Thule Institute at the University of Oulu in Finland and members of the Sami community in Utsjoki, Finland, to examine sexual and reproductive health disparities of the Finnish Sami, an Indigenous

group in Northern Finland. Rink has conducted research in Greenland since 2007 examining sexual and reproductive health among the Inuit.

"I really hope this particular work will highlight the need for Arctic countries and the rest of the world to pay attention to reproductive health in these very fragile Indigenous communities in the Arctic," Rink said in 2018.

The new program will begin in March 2021 after participants are selected in December. As co-leader along with Dr. Greg Poelzer of the University of Saskatchewan, Rink will provide intellectual leadership, support, and mentoring to participating scholars throughout the program.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CORE COMPLETES WEBINAR SERIES

CAIRHE and its partners [Montana INBRE](#) and the [American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program](#) recently completed their 2019-20 Webinar Series.

Organized and hosted by **Sue Higgins**, MS, community research associate in the Center's Community Engagement Core, the webinars examined a variety of issues important to faculty involved in community-based research. The four events were:

- "Tips for Writing Research Proposals to the NIH," featuring **Alex Adams**, M.D., Ph.D. (CAIRHE) and **Elizabeth Rink**, Ph.D., MSW (CAIRHE). October 21, 2019.
- "Financial Management Toolkit for NIH-Funded Health Researchers," featuring **Maya Bronston** (CAIRHE), **Jennifer Hodges** (AI/AN CTRP), and **Cori Huttinga**, (Montana INBRE). December 11, 2019.
- "Best Practices in Community-Based Participatory Research and Community Advisory Board Development," featuring **Ann Bertagnoli**, Ph.D. (Montana INBRE), **Colter Ellis**, Ph.D. (CAIRHE), **Monica Skewes**, Ph.D. (CAIRHE), and **Emily Salois**, MSW (CAIRHE/Montana INBRE). February 10, 2020.
- "Primer on MSU Extension: Bridging Health Research and Rural Community Outreach," featuring **Cody Stone**, Ph.D. (Director, MSU Extension), **Brianna Routh**, Ph.D. (MSU Extension), and **Mark Schure**, Ph.D. (MSU, Health and Human Development). April 28, 2020.

The fourth webinar in the series, in April, had the largest audience yet, Higgins said. "Roughly 100 people attended, and our panelists fielded questions on topics including the COVID-19 response in rural and Native Montana," she said.

All four webinars are available as videos on [CAIRHE's website](#).

Higgins also participated in a webinar offered by MSU Extension for its agents and specialists on April 29, when she offered information on CAIRHE's new website pages, produced with Montana INBRE, providing COVID-19 [information and resources for Native communities](#).



Sue Higgins

PEOPLE

NUTRITIONAL SCIENTIST EMILY TOMAYKO JOINS CAIRHE AS RESEARCH FACULTY

In January **Emily Tomayko**, Ph.D., R.D., joined CAIRHE as an assistant research professor.

An established health researcher who previously served as an assistant professor at Oregon State University, Tomayko hopes to use her community-based research experience and nutrition content knowledge to address childhood obesity disparities and promote obesity prevention initiatives.

"I've collaborated with Emily for nearly eight years as a fellow nutritional scientist, so I knew how well-aligned her scholarship and career goals are with CAIRHE and our state," said CAIRHE Director **Alex Adams**, M.D., Ph.D. "We're delighted to have her at MSU, where she will no doubt establish herself as a research leader in her field and as a valuable colleague."

Already Tomayko is getting down to work. Currently she is awaiting the award of an R21 grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, an arm of the National Institutes of Health. That grant could start as early as July.

In addition, Tomayko has received a CAIRHE Mini-Grant (*see pp. 5-6*) and is waiting for decisions on other grant proposals submitted to the Montana Healthcare Foundation, MSU's American Indian/Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program, and the Spencer Foundation.

"I can feel the momentum building within the Center to be a real hub for community-centered health research," Tomayko said. "I'm particularly grateful to be part of a team of researchers working creatively to continue serving the needs of communities during this challenging time."

Tomayko received her Ph.D. in Nutritional Sciences from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Wisconsin.

LORI LINDGREN: CAIRHE'S STAFF ASST.

Lori Lindgren, an MSU graduate student originally from Memphis, Tenn., joined CAIRHE in October 2019 as the Center's part-time staff assistant.

A master's student in the Department of Health and Human Development's Community Health program, Lindgren assists Grants Management Specialist **Maya Bronston** with various fiscal tasks, including P-card reports, correspondence with PIs, and assisting faculty with the transition to the new Chrome River expense software.

"Lori continues to be an important contributor to our work," Bronston said. "We're lucky to have her involvement while she finishes her studies, and our team has quickly learned to rely on her for help."

Lindgren was a McNair Scholar at MSU as an undergraduate student, graduating with her bachelor's degree in Community Health in May 2019. She plans to complete her master's degree in May 2021, with her project examining advocacy for health care access, particularly in relation to diabetes management.

"I love working for CAIRHE," Lindgren said. "I appreciate Maya's willingness to teach me, and I enjoy learning about the various research projects. Knowing that I have a little part to play in helping our researchers do their work to reduce health disparities is very satisfying." 🌱



Lori Lindgren

Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity (CAIRHE)

Health Sciences Building
P.O. Box 173485
Montana State University
Bozeman, MT 59717-3485
Web: www.montana.edu/cairhe



ADMINISTRATION

Alexandra Adams, M.D., Ph.D., *Director and Principal Investigator*
James Burroughs, *Program Coordinator*
Tel: (406) 994-4407; E-mail: jburroughs@montana.edu
Maya Bronston, *Grants Management Specialist*
Erik Adams, M.D., Ph.D., *Director, Health Education and Research Bus (HERB)*
Selena Ahmed, Ph.D., *Director, Translational Biomarkers Core*
Nicole Carnegie, Ph.D., *Statistical Consultant*
Lori Lindgren, *Staff Assistant*
Stephen Martin, Ph.D., *Director, Translational Biomarkers Core Laboratory*
Eliza Webber, MPH, *Research Project Manager*

CAIRHE PROJECT LEADERS

Carmen Byker Shanks, Ph.D., RDN, *Dept. of Health and Human Development*
Lauren Dotson Davis, Ed.D., *Department of Education*
Colter Ellis, Ph.D., *Department of Sociology and Anthropology*
Vernon Grant, Ph.D., *Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity*
Kelly Knight, Ph.D., *Department of Sociology and Anthropology*

Scott Monfort, Ph.D., *Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering*
Monica Skewes, Ph.D., *Department of Psychology*
Andreas Thorsen, Ph.D., *Jake Jabs College of Business and Entrepreneurship*
Maggie Thorsen, Ph.D., *Department of Sociology and Anthropology*
Emily Tomayko, Ph.D., R.D., *Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity*

CAIRHE MENTORS

Suzanne Held, Ph.D., *Department of Health and Human Development*
Elizabeth Rink, Ph.D., MSW, *Department of Health and Human Development*
Sarah Shannon, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, *Dean, College of Nursing*

COMMUNITY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Emily Matt Salois, MSW
Susan Higgins, M.S.

EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dennis Donovan, Ph.D., *Professor Emeritus, University of Washington*
Donald Warne, M.D., MPH, *University of North Dakota*
Jack Westfall, M.D., MPH, *Robert Graham Center*

Research reported in this publication is supported by a Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) award from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health, award number P20GM104417. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

Writer, Editor, Layout: James Burroughs; Design: Kristen Drumheller, MSU

Copyright © 2020 by the Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity