



Action Research Center for Health Equity

Department of Medicine

Bending Health Toward Justice

A Note from Our Director

Dear friends,

Welcome to the ARC Newsletter!

Recently, we at the Center for Vulnerable Populations changed our name to the Action Research Center (ARC) for Health Equity to better reflect our values. Our new name, inspired in part by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s adage, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," reflects our commitment to addressing the structures and systems that perpetuate health disparities. At ARC, we use rigorous, action-oriented research to catalyze change.



We created this newsletter to share insights from our work and to spark conversation. We would love for you to join us in our mission to bend the arc of the moral universe toward a world in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive and live a healthy life. Please, subscribe and join the conversation!

I look forward to building this new chapter with you and exploring the positive impacts we can achieve together.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Margot'.

Margot Kushel, MD
Director, ARC for Health Equity



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Website

ARC ACHIEVEMENTS

National Academy of Medicine elects Dr. Alicia Fernández to membership

The well-deserved honor is the highest recognition in American medicine. [Announcing Dr. Fernandez's membership](#), the Academy highlights Dr. Fernandez for "seminal health services research elucidating the impact of language and literacy barriers on patient outcomes and experience of care that highlights the challenges facing millions with limited English proficiency, and for effectively championing workforce diversity and health equity through high-impact research and program development."

[Dr. Alicia Fernandez](#) is a Core Faculty member of ARC for Health Equity and serves on the ARC Executive Committee. She is also a professor of medicine at UCSF, a general internist at the Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, Associate Dean of Population Health and Health Equity for the UCSF School of Medicine, and the founding Director of the UCSF [Latinx Center of Excellence](#).



Dr. Neeta Thakur's team at CLEAR Lab receives five-year grant for \$3.23 million from National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

ARC Core faculty member, [Dr. Neeta Thakur](#) is the principal investigator of a team which has earned a five year block of support from the NIEHS. Her

team's project, **Driving Environmental Justice: Community Monitoring of Diesel Truck Emissions and Impacts on Asthma Morbidity in Immigrant Communities**, seek to estimate the short-term health effects of black carbon exposure on daily rescue medication use and symptom burden; understand how acculturative stress and discrimination may modify or enhance this association; identify multilevel protective factors that reduce the health effects of black carbon exposure in asthma; and co-prioritize protective strategies at the individual, household, and community level.



Dr. Neeta Thakur's academic and community partners include UC Berkeley, Lifelong Medical, Central California Asthma Collaborative, and Little Manila Rising. The team will enroll 300 Latine households to participate in capturing detailed rescue medication-use data while creating a sensor network and air quality model to derive an hourly 100-meter black carbon concentration grid.

Read more about [CLEAR Lab](#)'s project on the [NIEH project site](#).

Dr. Oanh Nguyen appointed chief of ZSFG's Division of Hospital Medicine

As a hospital medicine physician deeply committed to advancing care in safety-net settings and serving historically marginalized communities, ARC Associated Faculty member [Dr. Oanh Nguyen](#) will soon step into the role of chief of the Division of Hospital Medicine at ZSFG.

Announcing Dr. Nguyen's recent appointment, Dr. Neil R. Powe, Chief of Medicine, and Dr. Robert M. Wachter, Department of Medicine Chair wrote: "As a health services researcher steeped in epidemiology and implementation science, Oanh's research seeks to advance health equity by using rigorous methods to evaluate healthcare system innovations. Her work, sponsored by the NIH and private foundations, focuses on care transitions, addressing unmet social needs that affect health, and examining the impact of health policies on access to treatment such as dialysis, inpatient addiction care, and diabetes medications."



Dr. Nguyen also serves as the Co-Director of Academic Development and Scholarship for the Division of Hospital Medicine, Scholarship Coach for UCSF Health's Learning Health Systems initiative, ZSFG Liaison to the UCSF CTSI Participant Recruitment Program, and Deputy Editor of the *Journal of Hospital Medicine*. Dr. Nguyen's appointment is effective November 1, 2024.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Dr. Brie Williams on Transforming Correctional Systems



Dr. Brie Williams, ARC Associate Director for Policy and Founding Director of **Amend**, joined forces with **Cyrus Ahalt**, Amend's Chief Program Officer, in a recent essay for Vital City.

Providing an array of practiced-based antecedents, their essay points to work by international organizations to examine and reshape approaches to public health, safety, and rehabilitation that can help transform carceral systems and institutions for the benefit of incarcerated people, carceral staff, and their communities.

[Read More](#)

Dr. Nynikka Palmer and Equitable Cancer Detection



"Black men are more than twice as likely to die from prostate cancer," says ARC Core Faculty member, **Dr. Nynikka Palmer**.

Dr. Palmer, who has a National Cancer Institute-funded career development award to bridge the divide between low-income African American men and equal prostate cancer treatment, recently spoke with UCSF News about a first-of-its-kind partnership between UCSF and the City of San Francisco that's paving the way for statewide changes to increase prostate cancer screenings among Black men.

[Read more](#)

Dr. Margot Kushel & Sage Johnson on Housing Affordability



ARC Director, [Dr. Margot Kushel](#), and [Sage Johnson](#), Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative ([BHII](#)) Lived Expertise Advisory Board Co-Chair, spoke with Fox Business about the gap between wages and housing prices pushing more workers into homelessness in a Fox Business broadcast entitled, "Some employed homeless Americans live in their cars."

[Watch Here](#)

FACULTY ANNOUNCEMENT

Please join us in welcoming [Melanie Molina](#), MD, MAS, as the newest member of ARC's Mentored Faculty!

Melanie is an Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at UCSF and Affiliate Faculty of the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies. She is also the Co-Director of the Social Emergency Medicine and Health Equity Section in the Department of Emergency Medicine and holds a secondary appointment in the Department of Medicine's Division of Clinical Informatics and Digital Transformation.



Melanie works clinically as an emergency physician at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and UCSF Medical Center, and as a health services and informatics researcher within the UCSF School of Medicine. Her research focuses on improving comprehensive emergency care for vulnerable populations, specifically leveraging technology to identify and address social needs in the emergency department.

Dr. Molina was born and raised in Austin, TX. She graduated summa cum laude from The University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Arts in Hispanic Studies, continuing her medical training at Harvard Medical School and the Harvard Affiliated Emergency Medicine Residency at Mass General Brigham.

Prior to joining UCSF faculty, Dr. Molina completed a postdoctoral fellowship through the National Clinician Scholars Program at UCSF and a Master in Advanced Studies through UCSF's Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics—these included formal training in research, policy, and advocacy.

Outside of research and clinical work, Dr. Molina stays true to her Austinite roots and enjoys singing, dancing, playing the sax, and going to live music shows.

We hope Melanie's involvement with ARC will offer her many opportunities to enrich her faculty experience and deepen her engagement with a community of action-oriented researchers focused on health equity.

Welcome, Melanie!

FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

Aguilera A, Arévalo Avalos M, Xu J, Chakraborty B, Figueroa C, **Garcia F**, Rosales K, Hernandez-Ramos R, Karr C, Williams J, Ochoa-Frongia L, **Sarkar U**, Yom-Tov E, **Lyles C**. Effectiveness of a Digital Health Intervention Leveraging Reinforcement Learning: Results From the Diabetes and Mental Health Adaptive Notification Tracking and Evaluation (DIAMANTE) Randomized Clinical Trial. *J Med Internet Res*. 2024 Oct 8;26:e60834. [PubMed Citation](#)

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Stovall R, Li J, Fitzpatrick J, Roberts E, Palmowski A, Anastasiou C, Izadi Z, Friedly J, Singh N, Gensler LS, Schmajuk G, **Yazdany J**. Low socioeconomic status and female sex are associated with worse functional status in axial spondyloarthritis. *Arthritis Care Res (Hoboken)*. 2024 Sep 18. Online ahead of print. [PubMed Citation](#)

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