

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®



College of
Community
Health Sciences

2024-25

ANNUAL

REPORT



A LEGENDARY TRADITION OF TEACHING, SERVICE AND RESEARCH



OUR CORE VALUES

Integrity

Social Accountability

Learning

Innovation

Patient-Centeredness

Transparency

*Interprofessional
Collaboration*



OUR MISSION

We are dedicated to improving and promoting the health of individuals and communities in rural Alabama and the Southeast region through leadership in medical and health-related education, primary care and population health; the provision of high quality, accessible health care services; and research and scholarship.

We pursue this mission via the following strategic priorities:

- Shaping globally capable, locally relevant and culturally competent physicians through learner-centered, innovative, community-based programs across the continuum of medical education.
- Addressing the physician workforce needs of Alabama and the region with a focus on comprehensive family medicine residency training.
- Forging an international reputation as a health sciences academic research center.
- Providing high-quality, patient-centered and accessible clinical services delivered by health-care professionals of all disciplines.
- Creating a culture of employee wellness and growth.

COLLEGE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES 2024 WORKFORCE BY THE NUMBERS

73 FACULTY

425 STAFF

15 STUDENT STAFF

19 GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

532 TOTAL



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DEAN

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Community
Health Sciences

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DEAN'S MESSAGE



Dr. Richard Friend

*We are dedicated
to improving and
promoting the health
of individuals
and communities
in rural Alabama...*

This is our mission. We embarked on this important and critical journey in 1975 with the start of our Family Medicine Residency Program and the opening of University Medical Center, our community medical practice.

Earlier this year, exactly 50 years later, we launched a Psychiatry Residency Program. The residency was accredited in February, and we are in the early stages of recruiting prospective residents. We will introduce our inaugural class in June 2026. In the years between the creation of our two residencies, we grew University Medical Center from a single location in Tuscaloosa to a total of six locations throughout West Alabama that today have more than 100,000 ambulatory patient visits annually.

Alabama's need for more primary care doctors, especially for the state's smaller and rural communities, provided the foundation for the College of Community Health Sciences and our Family Medicine Residency, as well as our mission. The three-year residency is now one of the oldest and largest family medicine residencies in the country, annually educating and training 48 medical school graduates (16 each year).

To date, our Family Medicine Residency has graduated 605 family medicine physicians and 52% practice in Alabama. Of these, 38% practice in rural communities throughout the state.

Our residency alumni also hold key leadership positions with prominent state medical associations — the Alabama Academy of Family Physicians, the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, the Alabama Family Practice Rural Health Board — where they keep the critical need for rural health care front and center.

While the Family Medicine Residency provides a central way for us to meet our mission by producing needed primary-care physicians for Alabama's rural communities, University Medical Center provides the base for a clinical teaching program for our residents and medical students.

UMC began as the Family Practice Center in 1975 in a small building off University Boulevard and across the street from DCH Regional Medical Center. At the Family Practice Center, residents received outpatient education and training, and faculty physicians provided direct patient care to the UA campus and Tuscaloosa community.

In 2005, UMC moved to its current location at the corner of University Boulevard and Peter Bryce Boulevard and expanded into a multi-specialty practice providing care in family and internal

medicine, ob-gyn, pediatrics, neurology, geriatrics, sports medicine and psychiatry and psychology. Social work and nutrition services are provided, along with lab, X-ray and ultrasound. UMC continues to serve as a primary clinical education and training site for our residents, and it serves as a major health-care provider for Tuscaloosa, nearby communities and UA.

We took our first step to expand our medical practice in 2015 with the opening of UMC Northport. We quickly followed with UMC clinics in Demopolis (2017), Fayette and Carrollton (2021), and Livingston (2022).

It is crucial that primary health care is available and accessible in these rural communities, which, like similar communities in Alabama and across the nation, suffer from a lack of health-care services and providers, have populations that are older and sicker, and have struggled with hospital closures.

The availability of mental health care is equally essential, so the addition of our Psychiatry Residency was a natural next step in our mission and will complement, enhance and expand our work to improve the health of individuals and communities.

There is a significant need nationwide for psychiatrists; in Alabama, the need is particularly acute. Alabama ranks last among all states in the ratio of mental health providers per capita, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Alabama also has a higher suicide rate than the national average and high rates of depression among its population. The state reported 16.6% deaths (per 100,000 people) in 2024 due to intentional self-harm, compared to the national average of 14.8%. Nearly a quarter of adults in the state experienced depression last year.

Our Psychiatry Residency is a four-year education and training program for medical school graduates that will prepare board-eligible residents in the field of psychiatry. Residents will learn and work alongside skilled and experienced faculty and medical professionals in a range of inpatient and outpatient practice settings, including smaller and rural community sites that are partnering with us. The residency will initially allow for six residents each year, and we hope to increase that number in the ensuing years.

The goal of our Psychiatry Residency is to expand mental health care services and access by producing well-trained psychiatrists who understand the needs of communities in Alabama. There has always been and continues to be a demand for mental health care services that is not being met, and we want to address this need with well-trained psychiatrists.

In 2025, we recognize and celebrate important milestones for the College of Community Health Sciences — a half century of teaching and caring with our Family Medicine Residency and University Medical Center, and the beginning of our Psychiatry Residency. I hope you take time to read about these accomplishments in this edition of Annual Report, along with articles about other important work we are doing to meet and further our mission.



Dr. Richard Friend

Dean, College of Community Health Sciences

LEGENDS IN THE MAKING

The pinnacle of medical education at the College of Community Health Sciences is its residency programs — The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency and The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Psychiatry Residency.

The **Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency** is a well-established three-year program for doctors seeking to specialize in the practice of family medicine. It is one of the nation's oldest and largest family medicine residencies, annually educating and training 48 resident physicians.

The College also offers **seven fellowships** for family medicine physicians who want additional specialized training in behavioral health, emergency medicine, geriatrics, hospital medicine, obstetrics, pediatrics and sports medicine.

The **Tuscaloosa Psychiatry Residency** was accredited in February 2025 to train psychiatrists to better meet the mental health

needs of Alabama and the Southeast region. The residency is a four-year program for medical school graduates that will prepare board-eligible residents in psychiatry. The residency will allow for six residents each year, with the first class to start June 2026.

Along with graduate medical education, CCHS, which is also designated a regional campus of the UAB Heersink School of Medicine in Birmingham, provides **the clinical education of medical students** (third and fourth years) to a cohort of Heersink School of Medicine students.

The College's **Master's in Population Health Sciences Degree** has seen significant enrollment since its inception in 2018. Population health sciences is an interdisciplinary field that integrates clinical care with public health practices to reduce, manage and prevent disease.

Medical students are accepted into the **College's accredited Primary Care Track** and are part of the track for all four years of medical school. The Primary Care Track is designed to provide students with a strong foundation in clinical medicine through longitudinal experiences with patients and mentors. Students spend their third year of medical school in a longitudinal integrated clerkship, where they care for a panel of patients, observing how their illnesses and diseases progress or improve over time rather than just as episodes. This differs from the traditional third-year model where students rotate through different specialties, often in a hospital setting.



Medical School Graduates at 2025 CCHS Senior Banquet

Many CCHS learners enter medical school via the College's **Rural Pipeline programs**, a sequence of programs from high school through college that recruit and mentor rural Alabama students for health-care careers.

High school programs

- Rural Health Scholars
- MOORE Scholars
- Rural Dental Health Scholars

Undergraduate program

- Tuscaloosa Rural Pre-Medical Internship

Graduate program

- Rural Community Health Scholars

Medical and dental school pre-matriculation and graduate programs

- Rural Medical Scholars
- Rural Dental Scholars

Continuing Medical Education

As an accredited CME provider, the College of Community Health Sciences hosted 16 activities in 2024, enabling 263 community physicians and 690 other health professionals to earn a total of 468 CME credits.

NEW PSYCHIATRY RESIDENCY FOR COLLEGE

The College of Community Health Sciences launched a new residency program in 2025 to help address the critical need for psychiatrists in the state.

The newly accredited University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Psychiatry Residency Program is for medical school graduates and will prepare board-eligible residents in the field of psychiatry.

The four-year residency will allow for six residents each year (for a total of 24 residents), with the first class to start July 2026.

Dr. James Reeves, who will direct the psychiatry residency, said the program will expand mental health services by producing well-trained psychiatrists who understand the needs of communities in West Alabama.

“Our goal is to recruit and train psychiatrists to work in West Alabama and fill the ongoing need for mental health care in Tuscaloosa and surrounding communities,” said Reeves, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral medicine with CCHS. “There has always been and continues to be a demand for mental health services that is not being met. We hope to finally address this with highly trained psychiatrists who will improve the mental health of those in need.”

Alabama ranks last among all states in the ratio of mental health providers per capita, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The state also has a higher suicide rate than the national average — 16.6% deaths (per 100,000) due to intentional self-harm in 2024 compared to the national rate of 14.8%. Alabama also has high rates of depression, with nearly a quarter of adults suffering from depression last year.

“Our patients and the community will benefit tremendously from this new program, as the need for mental health services and psychiatrists is greater now more than ever,” said Dr. Richard Friend, dean of CCHS.

The College was notified Feb. 14 by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) that the Tuscaloosa Psychiatry Residency had received accreditation. ACGME is an independent, nonprofit organization that monitors education standards essential in preparing physicians to deliver safe, high-quality medical care.

“The inception of this psychiatry residency is an enduring investment in the mental health of the population of West Alabama,” said Dr. Thad Ulzen, professor and chair of psychiatry and behavioral medicine with CCHS. Ulzen, Reeves and Dr. Marisa Giggie, professor and vice chair of psychiatry and behavioral medicine, were instrumental in developing the residency.

The new residency will provide opportunities for psychiatry residents to learn and work alongside highly skilled and experienced medical



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE - TUSCALOOSA CAMPUS

professionals in a wide range of inpatient and outpatient practice settings, including urban medical centers and smaller and rural community sites. Residents will work at DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, on the hospital's inpatient unit, in the psychiatric emergency room and will handle psychiatric consultations. The hospital, part of the DCH Health System, is the region's advanced trauma center.

Residents will also work in community mental health at Indian Rivers Behavioral Health in Tuscaloosa and in community mental health and rural psychiatry at Project Horseshoe Farms in Greensboro, Ala. In addition, residents will have addiction psychiatry rotations at Bradford Health Service's rehabilitation unit in Warrior, Ala., and they will work with physicians at University Medical Center and the UA Student Health Center and Pharmacy, both of which are operated by CCHS. UMC, the largest multi-specialty community practice in West Alabama, serves as the foundation of the College's clinical teaching program for its medical students and family medicine residents.

"The UA administration, DCH Health System, Indian Rivers Behavioral Health and our other partnering sites have been unwavering in their support for this new program," Friend said. "Their commitment to providing high-quality, accessible mental health care in this community is notable and appreciated."

The new psychiatry residency joins The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, also operated by CCHS and one of the oldest and largest family medicine residencies in the nation. Reeves said psychiatry residents

will work alongside family medicine residents on the joint provision of behavioral and primary health care.

"We plan for the psychiatry and family medicine residencies to be synergistic, with joint case conferences and providing family medicine residents with new learning opportunities they don't have now," Reeves said.

Friend said the psychiatry residency "will enhance the learning experience of our family medicine residents, medical students and other CCHS learners through collaborative and innovative care for our patients."

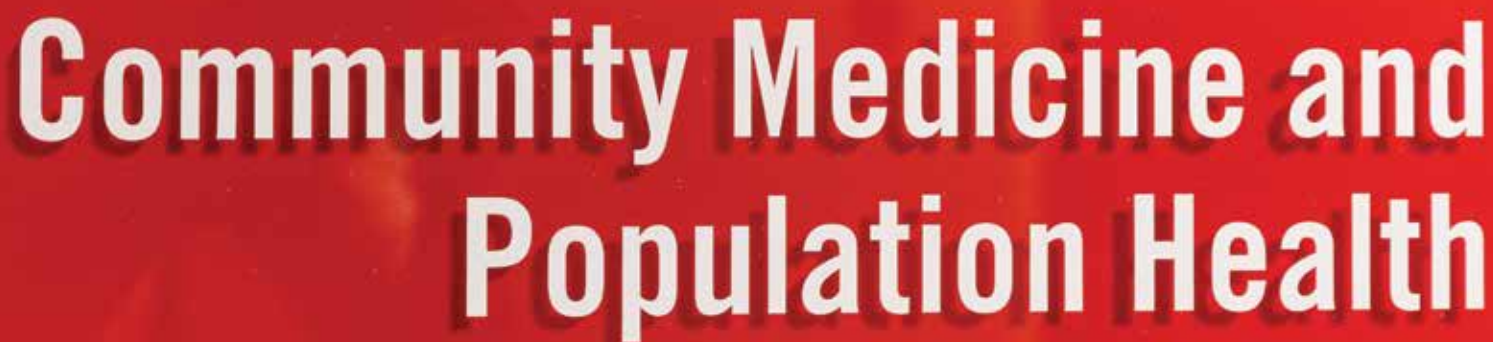
STRONG GROWTH FOR COLLEGE'S POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES DEGREE

Since the College of Community Health Sciences launched its master's degree in population health sciences in 2018 with just two students, 57 students have graduated from the program as of 2024.

Population health sciences is an interdisciplinary field that integrates clinical care with public health practices to reduce, manage and prevent disease. Dr. Mercedes Morales-Aleman, director of the master's degree program, said students are taught

to understand the needs of different population groups, with a particular focus on health disparities.

"In clinical settings, whether private practices or hospitals, population health is used to analyze electronic medical records, engage with community and patient populations, and leverage data, research and evidence-based practices to improve health outcomes for specific communities," said Morales-Aleman, associate professor of community



Community Medicine and Population Health

medicine and population health with CCHS. The program has seen significant growth since its inception, and the UA Graduate School recognized it in 2024 for its quick growth and number of applicants. A total of 389 applications were received in the academic year 2023-24.

The population health master's degree program courses are designed to help develop new knowledge and skills necessary to study and improve patient-reported outcomes, investigate policies related to health, examine social determinants of health, and transition to value-based payment models. Additionally, the program emphasizes using a community-based approach to improve population health and provides students with advanced statistical skills needed for a successful research career in population health data analysis and informatics.

Graduates of the 30 credit-hour program are educated and trained to address the health needs

of diverse communities and are equipped with data-driven strategies to help transform health care. The master's program is designed for health-care professionals and administrators, researchers and traditional students.

"Our program can help these students gain knowledge of the healthcare system and understand health research fundamentals," Morales-Aleman said.

She said many of the program's graduates are working as health-care professionals — nurses, doctors, administrators, health educators, dentists and physical therapists. "Our students are pursuing this degree because it will open up job promotions for them or allow for a new direction in their career."

Students can complete the master's in population health sciences in three semesters. Classes are offered in person and online and are taught

POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES MASTER'S DEGREE

Since its 2018 inception, the program has grown
from **2** students to more than **60** graduates.

There were
389 applicants in the 2023-2024 academic year.

by CCHS faculty with expertise and experience in medicine, nursing, public health, psychology, health education, economics and health policy.

“I have applied so much of what I learned through course readings and activities to my daily tasks. The curriculum of the program thoroughly prepared me for my public health role,” said Dawn Hollinger, a 2023 graduate of the master’s program who is now bureau chief of Cancer Prevention and Control at the Delaware Division of Public Health.

Hollinger oversees three components of the National Comprehensive Cancer Control program and the WISEWOMAN grant funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She also manages the State of Delaware’s Screening for Life and Health Care Connection programs and the Delaware Cancer Treatment Program.

MISSION SUPPORT

The Master of Science in Population Health Sciences supports the CCHS mission by:

- Providing training in health-related education and population health to students, a majority of whom are practicing health-care providers or plan to enter medical school after completing the program.
 - Producing population health research and scholarship based on thesis research projects and other collaborative mentored work with faculty (fellowships, research assistantships) that advances the quality and accessibility of health-care services.
-

STUDENT VOICES:

“I chose to complete my master’s degree in Population Health Sciences with CCHS because it allowed me to explore health and health care from the perspective of a variety of disciplines and taught me how to use that knowledge to improve the health of others. Studying population health allows me to be able to look past the science of health and medicine and see the business, policy, economics and research that all underpin it.”

Drew Richardson, August 2023 graduate

“The University of Alabama’s M.S. in Population Health Sciences program has equipped me with the knowledge and tools to become a future leader in medicine for my patients at the individual and community levels. Being immersed in classes with students of all backgrounds has granted me the opportunity to grow in an engaging and collaborative classroom setting.”

Kate Graziano, August 2024 graduate

“Working full-time in health research, I wanted to expand my knowledge and experience in data management and informatics, from a population health lens. I enjoyed the rigorous coursework and the opportunity to apply skills in a hands-on practicum. I plan to use my skill set to pursue a doctoral degree with hopes to lead research to improve health outcomes in my own community.”

Asia Johnson, May 2024 graduate

RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE LEARNING SITES FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

The College of Community Health Sciences has expanded learning opportunities in rural medicine in Alabama for its medical students. Enterprise has been added as a third community learning site, joining existing sites in Demopolis and Pell City.

In its role as a regional campus of the UAB Heersink School of Medicine, CCHS provides the third and fourth years of medical school (clinical education) to a cohort of medical students. All medical students spend their first two years at the Heersink School of Medicine's main campus in Birmingham before completing their final two years at either the Birmingham campus, CCHS or one of the other regional campuses — Montgomery and Huntsville.

At CCHS, medical students complete their clinical education as part of the College's Primary Care Track, which is the only medical education track of its kind at the Heersink School of Medicine.

As part of the Primary Care Track curriculum, medical students spend their third year in a longitudinal integrated clerkship, where they follow a panel of patients over time and through different specialties and health-care settings. The third-year clerkship is divided into two 24-week blocks: CCHS medical students spend half of their third year in the Tuscaloosa Immersion Experience and the other half in either the Tuscaloosa Integrated Experience or the Community Integrated Experience.

In the Community Integrated Experience, students work closely with private practice physicians in Demopolis, Pell City and Enterprise, learning what it means to practice medicine in a rural community. The students spend either half or full days each week in different specialty clinics in the communities.



They develop relationships with patients, observe how their diseases progress over time, and get to know the patients in the context of their communities and families rather than just as episodes of illness or disease. For example, students can care for a pregnant patient, deliver her baby and care for the newborn. This differs from the traditional third-year clinical education model, where every four to eight weeks students rotate through a different specialty, often in a hospital setting.

“We hope the experience gives the students a true sense of what it’s like to be a small-town doctor,” said Dr. Grier Stewart, CCHS assistant dean for undergraduate medical education. “Evidence shows that if we train students in these small towns and rural areas, they’re more likely to practice in those communities.”

The medical students at each Community Integrated Experience site learn under the supervision of the community site leaders, who are the primary points of contact for the students and responsible for creating and supervising student schedules with community preceptors. The site leaders are Dr. Ashley Steiner in Demopolis, Dr. Hunter Russell in Pell City and Dr. Beverly Jordan in Enterprise. All three are graduates of the College’s Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program.

In the Tuscaloosa Integrated Experience, students spend full or half days each week in different specialty clinics at University Medical Center under the supervision of UMC physician faculty. They also spend time with physician preceptors in the Tuscaloosa community. UMC, which is operated by CCHS, serves as the foundation for the College’s clinical teaching program for medical students and family medicine resident physicians.

In the second block, the Tuscaloosa Immersion Experience, students work alongside physician faculty at UMC, moving through rotations in pediatrics, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery and neurology. They also spend time with physician preceptors in the Tuscaloosa community.

Of the students who completed the Primary Care Track in March 2025, 87% matched into primary-care residencies, including 53% into family medicine residencies. In addition, 67% of these students are staying in Alabama for their residency training.

MEDICAL STUDENT EDUCATION

BY THE NUMBERS 2024

32 UAB Heersink School of Medicine students completed their third and fourth years of medical school on the CCHS Primary Care Track and matched with residency programs in 11 states.

9 graduates matched to Alabama residencies.

Graduates matched into a range of residency specialties: family medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, surgery, internal medicine, emergency medicine, neurology, anesthesiology, diagnostic radiology, orthopedic surgery, psychiatry and physical medicine and rehabilitation.

OUR IMPACT

CCHS has provided clinical education to

1,079 medical students since its founding in 1972.

A HALF CENTURY OF PREPARING PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS

Just a few years after the College of Community Health Sciences was established at The University of Alabama in 1972, CCHS leaders launched the UA Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency — a three-year program that would educate and train medical school graduates seeking to specialize in the new discipline of family medicine.

Several earlier events helped spark the residency's creation.

An American Medical Association committee report released in 1969, Meeting the Challenge of Family Practice, gave rise to the new specialty of family medicine. The report found that family medicine physicians were needed to provide comprehensive personal health care within the nation's complex healthcare system.

"Preparation of large numbers of such physicians is essential if the public is to receive maximal benefits from American medicine in the future," according to the report, known today simply as The Willard Report. "Success will require a significant reorientation of medical education."

Then, as the 1970s began and Alabama faced a serious health crisis, UA President Dr. David Mathews addressed a Tuscaloosa conference on community medicine, noting: "It's alarming to look

at the crisis in health care facing the cities and towns of Alabama outside of the larger metropolitan areas. A breakthrough is desperately needed."

CCHS and the Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency, with a focus on training family medicine physicians, was that breakthrough. Mathews

recruited Dr. William R. Willard, who had chaired the AMA committee

that produced the 1969 report, to develop the College and to be its first dean, giving CCHS one of the country's leading authorities on family medicine. Willard and other early CCHS faculty set to work creating a strong training program in family medicine for medical school graduates using the guidelines of The Willard Report, which

defines a family physician as one who "accepts responsibility for the patient's total health care within the context of his or her environment, including the community."

"As family physicians acquire continuing relationships with their patients, they become highly effective in dealing with the social dimensions of their illnesses," according to the report.

Dr. Michael McBrearty would be the first graduate of the Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency,



joining the program in 1974 after transferring from the University of Oklahoma Family Medicine Residency. By November of that year, two other residents joined — Dr. Tim Simmons, who transferred from St. Margaret's program in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Dr. Larry Sullivan, a new University of Alabama School of Medicine graduate.

By the time McBrearty graduated in July 1975, the residency had fielded its first full class — 12 residents. At the time, the program was one of 140 such residencies in the country in the new medical specialty that was rapidly growing.

Distinctive Benefits

From the beginning, it was apparent the residency would provide an excellent learning environment for family medicine physicians in training. A key benefit of the program was that it was the only residency at DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa, providing ample opportunity for residents to directly care for patients and develop procedural skills; no other residencies competed for patients or faculty



Dr. William deShazo and Coach Bear Bryant



Dr. William R. Willard



Dr. Sandral Hullett



Dr. Michael McBrearty

THE UA TUSCALOOSA FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

BY THE NUMBERS 2024

48 resident physicians in training

100% board passage rate

7 post-residency fellowships for family medicine physicians (behavioral health, emergency medicine, geriatric medicine, hospital medicine, obstetrics, pediatrics, sports medicine)

OUR IMPACT

One of the oldest and largest family medicine residencies in the United States

605 physicians trained through the residency since its 1975 founding

567 alumni practicing family medicine

1 in 7 Alabama family medicine physicians graduated from the residency

284 graduates practice in **46** of Alabama's **67** counties

52% of graduates practice in Alabama

38% of graduates (**107**) practice in rural Alabama

88% of graduates (**485**) practice in the Southeast

teaching time. The 583-bed DCH, the referral hospital for West Alabama and the region's advanced trauma center, is still a vital partner with CCHS in training family medicine residents.

Dr. William deShazo was tapped in 1976 to direct the residency, and the first class he recruited would be a memorable one. The class included the first African Americans to join the residency, only 13 years after former Alabama Gov. George Wallace's infamous stand in the schoolhouse door: Dr. Sandral Hullett, an Alabama native and recent graduate of the Medical College of Pennsylvania; and Dr. Herb Stone, who had recently earned his medical degree from Emory University in Atlanta.

Hullett, who was the first female in the residency, went on to have a successful career as a rural practitioner. She was inducted into the National Institute of Medicine, a unit of the National Academy of Sciences, and was named Rural Doctor of the Year in 1988 by the National Rural Health Association.

deShazo, who cared for UA athletes and served as personal physician to legendary UA football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, also introduced a sports medicine rotation to the residency curriculum. Behavioral medicine was another discipline that CCHS faculty recognized early on would be important for family medicine physicians.

As the 1990s got underway, the residency had graduated 165 residents and of these, more than half were practicing in Alabama, many in small towns and rural communities. The College could claim to have one of the most productive family medicine residencies in the country, being in the top 10% in the number of residents who graduated.



By the middle of the decade, the residency had graduated 222 residents. The growth was driven in part by an expanded recruiting pool that included graduates of osteopathic U.S. medical schools and international medical graduates. As the decade ended, the residency had 258 graduates, making it one of the most productive programs in the Southeast.

Continued Growth

By 2002, the residency had trained 290 family physicians. Nearly 52% were practicing in Alabama, and the availability of health care in the state's rural and underserved communities had improved.

Residents were also being trained to use a new health-care technology: an electronic medical record. EMRs store, manage and retrieve patient medical information electronically, enabling clinicians to access patient data instantly, facilitating improved care coordination and decision-making.

To accommodate the residency's growth and the College's medical practice, where residents received their outpatient clinical training, construction

began on a new building that would provide an optimal environment for teaching and patient care. The new 72,000-square-foot building opened in 2005 on the corner of University Boulevard and Peter Bryce Boulevard.

Not content to remain at 12 new residents per year, College leaders set out in 2012 to expand the three-year residency from a total of 36 residents (12 per year) to a total of 48 residents (16 per year). Alabama was still far short of the number of primary-care physicians needed, ranking nine out of 50 among the most underserved states based on Health Professional Shortage Area scores. In 2012, the residency was granted nine additional slots, becoming one of the largest family medicine residencies in the United States with a total of 48 spots. Prospective residents took note, and the spots quickly filled.

As the decade unfolded, additional fellowships were added to existing ones in obstetrics and sports medicine. These included fellowships for behavioral health, emergency medicine, geriatrics, hospital medicine and pediatrics. The fellowships are designed for family medicine physicians who want additional specialized skills.





New instruction was added to the residency curriculum, including on global health. Opportunities to learn about diseases in developing countries and care for some of the world's poorest people were among the reasons the College implemented a certification in global health for residents in 2017.

A New Decade

The arrival of COVID-19 three years later moved CCHS residents to the front lines of the pandemic on campus as the College led UA's response. Residents provided COVID testing to thousands of UA faculty, staff and students. They provided daily checks on and cared for UA students in quarantine and isolation. Once vaccines became available in 2021, residents helped vaccinate the campus community. Residents also cared for COVID patients at DCH.

In 2022, the Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency added a one-year Integrated Residency Program for fourth-year medical students planning a primary care practice to better prepare them for their first year of residency. In their fourth year of medical school, students in the integrated program are paired with a resident and work in a continuity clinic. The students take over that same patient panel when they start their first year of residency.



Graduates of the Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency hold important leadership positions with state, regional and national medical and educational organizations. They advocate passionately for an increased focus on family medicine and primary care, and for prevention and public health.

In addition, residency alumni are a powerful resource for the College. They readily serve CCHS medical students, residents, faculty and staff, and patients of the College's medical practice. With a majority of alumni remaining in Alabama to practice, CCHS has a pool of experts to serve as preceptors for medical students, peers for residents and fellows, and colleagues for faculty and staff.

As the Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency embarks on its sixth decade, it remains clear that the goal set at its founding, to place more doctors in the state, particularly in its small towns and rural communities, is being met. The vision that began with the dedication and determination of a small group of administrators, faculty, physicians and residents, is today producing needed primary-care physicians for Alabama.

A PATHWAY TO RURAL CARE



Rural Pipeline programs at the College of Community Health Sciences provide a pathway for rural students to pursue health-care careers.

The five-week summer **Rural Health Scholars**, **MOORE Scholars** and **Rural Dental Health Scholars** programs are exclusively for high school juniors and seniors from rural Alabama communities and provide students with opportunities to learn about health professions while experiencing college firsthand. Students take college courses for credit, attend tutorials and seminars, shadow physicians and other health professionals and participate in field trips to rural medical facilities. Approximately 40% of students who have participated in these programs since their inception have gone on to medical and other health professions schools.

The seven-week **Tuscaloosa Rural Pre-Medical Internship** is for rural pre-medical undergraduate

students interested in rural primary care and provides insight about needs in rural Alabama in family medicine, internal medicine and pediatrics by providing learning activities, discussions and shadowing opportunities.

There are three programs through which students can earn a master's degree in rural community health, which prepares students to be health-care providers and community leaders in rural Alabama. They are the Rural Medical Scholars Program, the Rural Dental Scholars Program and the Rural Community Health Scholars Program.

The **Rural Medical Scholars Program** recruits rural Alabama college students who want to become physicians and practice in the state's rural communities, where they are most needed. Eleven students were admitted in 2024 to this selective five-year medical program of CCHS and the UAB

Heersink School of Medicine. The program includes a year of study about primary care practice in rural areas, after students receive their undergraduate degree, that leads to early admission to the Heersink School of Medicine. After two years of study at the Heersink School of Medicine campus in Birmingham, students return to CCHS for their third and fourth years of clinical education.

“What we know about rural medical education is that people from rural areas tend to go back to rural areas to practice. That’s why our rural programs pipeline exists,” said Dr. Drake Lavender, director of CCHS Rural Programs.

The **Rural Dental Scholars Program** was piloted in 2023-24 with four students, and five students enrolled for 2024-25. The program, modeled after the successful Rural Medical Scholars Program, offers an admissions pathway to the UAB School of Dentistry for rural Alabama college students who want to become dentists and practice in the state’s rural communities, where there is a shortage of oral health care. To prepare students for the rigorous dental school curriculum, students take biomedical courses, participate in rural health seminar courses and shadow dental providers during their year of studies at CCHS.

The **Rural Community Health Scholars Program** works to increase the competitiveness of rural students who have completed undergraduate degrees and expressed an interest in medicine or other health-care careers. The program teaches principles of rural public health as well as rural health concerns.

“The pipeline allows you to remain true to your rural roots,” said Dr. Paris Cooke, now a resident with the College’s family medicine residency who entered the pipeline as a Rural Health Scholar and was also a Rural Medical Scholar.

RURAL PROGRAMS

BY THE NUMBERS 2024

11 students entered the 29th class of the Rural Medical Scholars Program, a medical education track for rural Alabama students who want to become physicians and practice in rural communities.

5 students entered the second class of the Rural Dental Scholars Program for rural Alabama students who want to practice dentistry in rural communities.

OUR IMPACT

Since the Rural Medical Scholars Program was founded in 1996:

289 students have been admitted to the program

255 (88%) have graduated medical school

126 (49%) entered a primary-care residency

86 are practicing in rural Alabama

COLLEGE GRADUATES RECOGNIZED AS UA CENTENNIAL SCHOLARS

Five College of Community Health Sciences graduates were recognized as Centennial Scholars in 2024 by The University of Alabama Graduate School in celebration of the school's 100th Anniversary. Centennial Scholars are graduates of the University's master's and doctoral degree programs and are chosen for the distinction they bring to UA graduate programs through their professional accomplishments.

Dr. Brittney Anderson earned a master's degree in rural community health through her participation in the College's Rural Medical Scholars Program. She completed her graduate medical education (residency training) at the UA Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, which the College operates. Today, Anderson, a family medicine physician, cares for patients in Alabama's severely underserved Black Belt region at her medical practice, Anderson Family Care, in Demopolis, Ala. She is president of the Alabama Academy of Family Physicians and serves as vice speaker for the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

Dr. Lee Carter earned a master's degree in rural community health through his participation in the College's Rural Medical Scholars Program. He completed his graduate medical education (residency training) at the UA Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, which the College operates. Today, Lee, a family medicine physician, cares for patients at Autauga Medical Clinic in rural Autaugaville, Ala., and has been active in advocacy for his patients and the specialty of family medicine. He is board chair for the Alabama Academy of Family Physicians and serves on the Alabama Family Practice Rural Health Board.

Dawn Hollinger completed her master's degree in population health sciences at CCHS and serves as bureau chief for Cancer Prevention and Control for the Delaware Division of Public Health. In the role, she oversees three components of the National Comprehensive Cancer Control program and the WISEWOMAN grant funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She also manages the State of Delaware's Screening for Life and Health Care Connection programs and the Delaware Cancer Treatment Program. She said the skills she obtained from the population health sciences master's degree prepared her well for her public health position.

Dr. Deanah Maxwell-Stafford earned a master's degree in rural community health through her participation in the College's Rural Medical Scholars Program. She completed her graduate medical education (residency training) at the UA Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, which the College operates. Today, Maxwell-Stafford, a family medicine physician, practices in her hometown of Tuskegee, Ala., caring for patients at Rhema Health and Wellness. She also played a critical role with the Alabama Department of Public Health during the COVID-19 pandemic. She has previously served as president and board chair of the Alabama Academy of Family Physicians.

Casey Tupea completed her master's degree in population health sciences at CCHS and now serves as the dental team manager in the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services/Office of Integrated Health. In the role, she advocates for adults with disabilities and has developed and implemented a statewide program to train peers on how to best serve this population. Tupea, a dental hygienist, also provides dental care for adults with disabilities. She said the skills and knowledge gained from the population health sciences program enable her to deliver high-quality care for her patients.

CENTENNIAL
100th
ANNIVERSARY
SCHOLARS

INTERCOLLEGIATE PARTNERSHIPS

Thirty-one University of Alabama graduate students from programs across campus had paid assistantships with and were mentored by CCHS faculty in 2024.

5 College of Arts and Sciences

8 College of Community Health Sciences

3 Culverhouse College of Business

2 College of Education

1 College of Engineering

11 UA Graduate School

1 College of Human and Environmental Sciences

CLINICAL LEARNERS

CCHS provided medical learning opportunities in 2024 for 302 students studying in health-care fields from UA and other universities:

135 Nursing

16 Clinical Psychology

12 Social Work

27 Education

3 Nutrition

4 Music Therapy

4 Pharmacy

50 Pre-medical

13 Pre-physician's Assistant

1 Population Health Master's

2 Physical Therapy Trainees

5 Visiting Resident Physicians

2 Visiting Medical Students

11 Rural Medical Scholars

12 Tuscaloosa Rural Pre-medical Internships

5 Rural Dental Scholars

LEADING WITH CARE

In 2025, University Medical Center celebrates its 50th anniversary.

From the single-location Family Practice Center that opened in 1975 to six University Medical Center clinics today, UMC has become the largest multi-specialty practice in West Alabama and the capstone of primary health care in the region. In 2024, UMC recorded more than 102,000 out-patient visits among all its clinics.

UMC's history reflects a resolute commitment to its mission of improving the health of individuals in Alabama, particularly in rural communities where there is often a critical shortage of primary health care. Dedication to that mission led to the opening of UMC clinics in recent years in Demopolis,

Fayette, Carrollton and Livingston to complement UMC's well-established clinics in Tuscaloosa and Northport.

UMC providers and residents of the College's University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency also provide primary care to patients at the Good Samaritan Clinic, behavioral health care to patients at Maude Whatley Health Services, obstetrics care to patients in Marengo, Marion and Pickens counties, and UMC sports medicine physicians are the providers of choice for UA Athletics.

UMC operates Capstone Hospitalist Group, which is the exclusive hospitalist provider for the DCH Health System in Tuscaloosa, providing services at



DCH Regional Medical Center and Northport Medical Center. Capstone Hospitalist Group cared for more than 100,000 patients in 2024.

Over the years, UMC has modernized clinical care with the introduction of an electronic medical record, patient portal, more specialty care, and a digital health monitoring program for patients 65 and older and those with limited health-care access. Through a partnership with Ceras Health, UMC offers leading-edge patient digital devices, which monitor vital signs and other health factors to provide access to patient health data in real time, improving the management of diabetes, hypertension and transitions from hospital to home.

UMC clinics in Tuscaloosa and Northport have National Committee for Quality Assurance accreditation as Patient-Centered Medical Homes, a model of team-based care that puts patients at the forefront of care. PCMHs have been shown to build better relationships between patients and their clinical care teams.

UMC participates in quality and value-based programs like Medicare, Affordable Care Organizations and the Alabama Medicaid Coordinated Health Network quality program, which incentivize meeting established clinical quality metrics.

The 50th anniversary milestone not only demonstrates how UMC has grown and evolved to deliver innovative, compassionate and patient-centered care of the highest quality, but also its steadfast dedication and commitment to improving the health of Alabamians.

UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

102,602 UMC visits (outpatient)

71,565 Tuscaloosa

12,672 Northport

6,531 Demopolis

4,800 Fayette

3,271 Carrollton

3,763 Livingston

117,497 UMC hospital visits

102,446 Capstone Hospitalist Group

15,051 UMC Physicians

220,099 Total patient visits

ENHANCING THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

University Medical Center launched a **new Patient Portal** in 2024 to offer an easy and convenient way for patients to engage in their health care. The more robust Patient Portal lets patients receive appointment reminders via their cell phones and emails, request prescription refills and send secure messages to their providers.

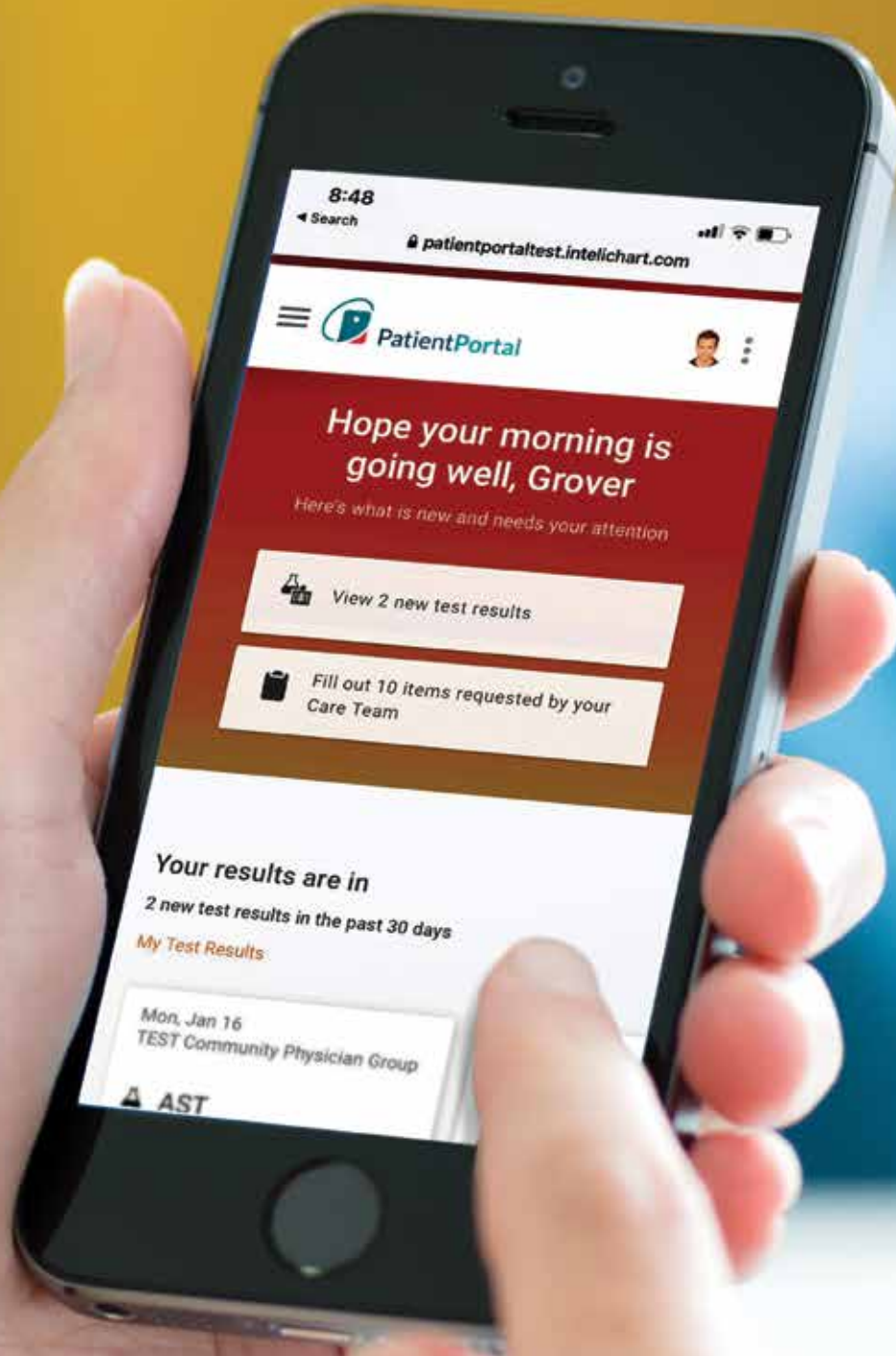
UMC in Tuscaloosa is working to expand health services for University of Alabama employees. Patients of UMC's Faculty-Staff Clinic who have UA health insurance will soon be able to **have their prescriptions filled** at the UA Student Health Center and Pharmacy (SHCP). Dependents on the plan can also receive pharmacy services. The services will initially be available only to UMC Faculty-Staff Clinic patients; UMC hopes to expand services to patients of the center's other clinics in the future. The UMC Faculty-Staff Clinic is exclusively for UA employees and their families and provides walk-in and urgent care, scheduled appointments, telemedicine visits and travel health services. The clinic is an effort by UMC and UA to create a healthier campus community by providing the care and resources that improve and maintain the physical well-being of University employees and their families. The College of Community Health Sciences operates UMC and the SHCP.

UMC created and filled a director of Imaging Services position in 2025 to expand X-ray and ultrasound services to UMC's smaller, rural clinics.

WEST ALABAMA LOCATIONS

Tuscaloosa
Northport
Fayette
Carrollton
Demopolis
Livingston





UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER A HISTORICAL TIMELINE



1972: UA's College of Community Health Sciences is founded to respond to the acute need in Alabama for more primary-care physicians for its small towns and rural communities.

1975: The Family Practice Center opens off University Boulevard across from DCH Regional Medical Center. It was established as both a clinical education site for medical students and resident physicians and a health-care provider for Tuscaloosa and the UA campus.



CELEBRATING

50th ANNIVERSARY

2002: Construction begins on a new building for CCHS, and the medical practice gets a new name – University Medical Center. UMC implements an electronic medical record and patient portal.



1981: To accommodate a growing patient population, five double-wide trailers are added behind the Family Practice Center.

1982: The Family Practice Center is renamed Capstone Medical Center.



1985: More than 7,000 square feet of clinical space is added to Capstone Medical Center for new exam rooms, an ob-gyn suite, a minor surgery/procedures room and a new waiting room. The patient population continues to grow.



2003: University Hospitalist Group is established by UMC, and physicians begin providing hospital medicine services at DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa.





2005: University Medical Center opens in its new location at the corner of University Boulevard and Peter Bryce Boulevard with a multi-specialty practice that includes family medicine, internal medicine, ob-gyn, geriatrics, neurology, pediatrics, psychiatry, psychology, sports medicine, UA's Faculty-Staff Clinic, social work, nutrition services and X-ray services.

2011: UMC launches and spearheads UA's Flu Shot Campaign, providing free flu shots to UA employees and students at pop-up sites across campus during the fall semester. The campaign continues annually.

2015: UMC-Northport opens in the former Fitness One building to provide family medicine care to the Northport community.



2017: UMC-Demopolis opens adjacent to Whitfield Regional Hospital to provide family medicine, prenatal and obstetrics care.

2018: The Family Medicine Clinic at UMC in Tuscaloosa is nationally certified as a Patient-Centered Medical Home for its commitment to place patients at the center of care and to advance quality in the health care it provides.

2019: UMC-Northport is nationally certified as a Patient-Centered Medical Home.

2019: UA faculty and staff care expands to include mental health services provided at a separate UMC clinic.

2021: The Pediatrics Clinic at UMC in Tuscaloosa is certified as a Patient-Centered Medical Home.

2021: UMC-Fayette opens to provide the rural community, experiencing high infant mortality rates, with additional prenatal, obstetrics and gynecology services.

2021: UMC-Carrollton opens to provide family medicine, prenatal and obstetrics care in rural Pickens County along with colonoscopy and endoscopy consultations.

2021: University Hospitalist Group is renamed Capstone Hospitalist Group and expanded to provide hospitalist services at both DCH Regional Medical Center in Tuscaloosa and Northport Medical Center.

2022: UMC-Livingston opens to provide family medicine and other primary health-care services to individuals and families in Sumter County and to students and employees of the University of West Alabama.



2022: UMC-Northport is relocated and expanded to allow for the delivery of multi-specialty care, including family medicine, prenatal care, obstetrics and pediatric care, women's health, geriatrics, neurology, behavioral health and sports medicine. There is also on-site social work and nutrition services, as well as lab, X-ray and ultrasound services.

2022: UMC partners with Ceras Health to offer a digital health monitoring program for patients 65 and older and those with limited health-care access.

2024: UMC launches a new and improved patient portal.

2024: UMC begins a perinatal mental health support group, Thrive Together, to provide a safe and confidential space for new mothers to come together and talk about the challenges of motherhood.

2025: UMC begins work to implement Epic, a new and advanced electronic health record system.

ADDICTION MEDICINE



Dr. David Panting

Inspired by his great-grandfather's work as an apothecary during a yellow fever epidemic in Honduras, Central America, Dr. David Panting's initial interest in medicine later carved a path toward addiction medicine, which is the treatment of substance use disorders.

Panting, a psychiatrist who joined University Medical Center in 2024, is UMC's first addictionologist. He is also an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at the College of Community Health Sciences, which operates UMC. Panting hopes to soon introduce addiction medicine into his clinical work and the College's teaching curriculum.

Addiction is a chronic brain disorder that causes people to compulsively use substances or engage in

behaviors despite harmful consequences, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine. "Addictions have been around for a long time, but the science behind it has improved in recent decades with research on substance abuse, eating disorders and behavioral addictions," Panting said.

He became certified as an addictionologist through the American Society of Addiction Medicine, an organization focused on evidence-based prevention, treatment and recovery for people with addiction disorders. He is also a fellow of ASAM.

Prior to pursuing medicine and addictionology, Panting wanted to become a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. After graduating high school, he moved to New York City and joined the U.S. Air Force ROTC at Manhattan College. But in the 1970s, there was a height range to become a pilot, and he was too tall. "I never knew that there were such parameters, and I wondered 'What am I going to do now?'"

Faced with this obstacle, Panting opted to return to his home in Honduras, where he earned his medical degree through an eight-year program at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras. This included four years of preclinical studies, two years of clinical studies, one year of clinical internships and one year of social service. During that last year, medical students work for the government, often in rural areas.

It was during his year of social service that Panting had his first experience providing health care in a

rural setting. He recalled that at the time, the rural areas of Honduras faced significant health challenges.

“I was assigned to a small village and was the sole doctor in charge of the health center,” Panting said. “Resources were scarce — one nurse, a couple of voluntary techs — with limited electricity and only kerosene gas refrigerators to keep vaccines cool. The focus of health care was on basic medical care and preventive measures, especially for women and children.”

After completing medical school, Panting opened his own clinic as a general practitioner in Honduras. He said in that country, medical school graduates are not required to complete a residency to practice general medicine.

After practicing in Honduras for three years, Panting moved back to the United States and completed a psychiatry residency at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pa., also serving as a chief resident. His interest in how the brain works led him to choose psychiatry as a specialty.

During his residency, Panting’s interest in addiction medicine grew while caring for patients at Pennsylvania jails. His supervising physician was a substance abuse specialist, a health-care professional who treats those struggling with addiction.

Prior to joining CCHS, Panting served 20 years as medical director of First Step of Sarasota in Sarasota, Fla., establishing the county’s Addiction Receiving Facility for addiction treatment and recovery. He also served as the medical director of the Manatee Memorial Hospital Department of Psychiatry in Bradenton, Fla., and was an adjunct clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine in Bradenton.

KEEPING UA SAFE FROM THE FLU

Since 2011, University Medical Center has led The University of Alabama’s efforts to keep UA students, faculty and staff protected from the flu.

During the annual Flu Shot Campaign, nurses from UMC, the UA Student Health Center and Pharmacy and the Capstone College of Nursing administer flu vaccines to UA students and employees — at no cost and with no health insurance required — at sites across campus, including the Quad, University buildings and student residence halls. Free flu shots are also available to spouses and dependents of UA employees and retired UA faculty and staff.

The campaign, held every fall semester, begins in early September and runs through mid-November.

FLU SHOTS

BY THE NUMBERS 2024

7,033 flu shots given



CARING FOR LEGENDS IN THE MAKING

The University of Alabama Student Health Center and Pharmacy, which is operated by the College of Community Health Sciences, is the medical home for UA's 40,000-plus students.

Its mission: delivering high-quality and compassionate health care to support UA students. To that end, the SHCP provides primary health-care services as well as services in women's health, psychiatry, nutrition, dermatology, allergy and immunizations. The Center also has pharmacy, X-ray and laboratory services.

In 2024, the SHCP was reaccredited by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. The accreditation is in place through March 31, 2027, and was granted upon completion of an on-site survey conducted by AAHC representatives.

The SHCP has significantly expanded health services and clinic space since its 2021 merger with CCHS. A women's health pavilion was built in 2022 to provide increased gynecologic and other women's health services and to add a private waiting room. New clinic exam rooms and offices for doctors and other health-care providers were also added throughout the SHCP.

The merger has also provided UA students with access to more specialized care — neurology, sports medicine, endoscopy and endocrinology — just next door at University Medical Center, which CCHS also operates.

UA STUDENT HEALTH CENTER AND PHARMACY

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

40,298 Total patient visits, including:
24,566 Primary care visits
5,189 Women's health visits
4,019 Psychiatry visits

23,826 Pharmacy visits
and prescriptions filled

OUR IMPACT

Delivering expanded and enhanced health-care services
to better support

UA's **40,846** students



TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

The research portfolio of the College of Community Health Sciences emphasizes clinical and translational research in primary care medicine, drug delivery and discovery, community-engaged research, population health and telemedicine.

CCHS RESEARCH FACILITIES

Institute for Rural Health Research

The Institute conducts research focused on improving the health and lives of Alabama’s rural citizens.

Division of Clinical Investigations

Two clinical trial studies with Exact Sciences Corporation were activated in 2024 for the SynAIRgy Study for sleep apnea, and participants are currently enrolling.

National Center on Forensics

The Center is a partnership with the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences and the University of Alabama at Birmingham and provides specialized forensic science education and legal training to support law enforcement, district judges, other appropriate criminal justice agencies and future practitioners in the field.

University of Alabama Center for Convergent Bioscience & Medicine

Though not housed within CCHS, the College played a significant role in recruiting the faculty members who comprise the CCBM, which works to overcome obstacles that keep promising drug therapies in the laboratory from translating into treatments for patients. A CCBM research focus is immune-inflammatory diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, lupus, chronic kidney disease, and autoimmune and neurodegenerative disorders.

RESEARCH

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

\$22,209,956
Grant submissions

\$5,931,572
Grant awards

BRIDGING BASIC SCIENCE AND CLINICAL APPLICATION TO IMPROVE HEALTH

The new Department of Translational Science and Medicine at the College of Community Health Sciences was established to provide a robust teaching and research infrastructure focused on preclinical innovation and therapeutic development in immune-inflammatory diseases.

The department's mission is to foster groundbreaking research and education that translates scientific discoveries into therapeutic strategies for conditions involving low-grade inflammation, dysfunctional immune systems, and co-existing diseases. Its vision is to become a center of excellence, bridging basic science and clinical application to improve public health through a deeper understanding of immune-related conditions.

Approved in 2024 after three years in the making, the department is focused on several key goals for the coming years. This includes the launch of a Master of Science in Translational Science and Medicine degree by fall 2026, with plans for a PhD program and a Bachelor of Science degree to follow. Additionally, the department aims to further develop its research infrastructure to support continued advancements in therapeutic development for immune-inflammatory diseases.

Dr. M.N.V. Ravi Kumar, interim chair of the department and Distinguished University Research

Professor with CCHS, said the department drives therapeutic innovation through advanced drug delivery systems across nano, micro and macroscales.

“Our focus is on enhancing the therapeutic potential of both small and large molecules, with an emphasis on disease prevention, management and treatment,” he said. “By incorporating cutting-edge delivery technologies early in the drug discovery process, we aim to reduce attrition rates while enhancing efficacy and safety.”

Dynamic Team

The department is led by a dedicated and dynamic team of faculty and staff who bring a wealth of expertise across various fields, including immunology, translational medicine and therapeutic development.

Kumar said the department excels in drug discovery, formulation development and preclinical testing, and advancing the development of innovative therapeutic solutions. The department also offers expert consultancy, collaborative research, and training to accelerate the progress of new therapies.

Faculty members are strongly supported by multiple NIH R01 grants and engaged in cutting-edge research, and staff members support the

department's mission through administrative, academic and research functions. Together, they work collaboratively to advance the department's goals of fostering innovation and improving health outcomes through translational science.

"This department represents a significant opportunity for both the College and The University of Alabama," said Dr. Richard Friend, dean of CCHS. "We are fortunate to have such a talented core group of faculty in this exciting area. I look forward to expanding both the research and academic degree offerings in our new department."

In addition to their groundbreaking research, faculty members are deeply engaged in the academic community, delivering guest lectures

at prestigious national and international forums and actively contributing to seminars. Faculty collaborate and publish with academic institutions at the state, national and international levels, including the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Texas A&M University, Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, as well as Philipps University-Marburg and Saarland University, both in Germany. In addition, technologies developed by department faculty have been licensed to the startup Peroral Biosciences Inc. Faculty members' outstanding contributions to their fields have earned them numerous prestigious accolades, including election as a Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine and the Global Leader Award from the American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists. Kumar is UA's recipient of the 2025 SEC Faculty Achievement Award.





Department of Translational Science and Medicine faculty

- Dr. Raghu Ganugula, Assistant Professor
 - Dr. John Napoleon, Assistant Professor
 - Dr. Meenakshi Arora, Associate Professor
 - Dr. James Dalton, UA Provost and Executive Vice President
 - Dr. M. N. V. Ravi Kumar, Interim Chair and Distinguished University Research Professor
-

Innovative Courses

In 2022, department faculty launched an interdisciplinary PhD program in Advanced Drug Delivery, aimed at integrating expertise across multiple fields to address complex challenges in drug delivery systems. The program currently hosts seven PhD students with diverse academic backgrounds, including medicine, physiology, veterinary medicine and pharmaceutical sciences. Kumar said this diversity enriches the learning environment and fosters collaborative research to drive innovative advancements in the field of drug delivery.

The department has pioneered several groundbreaking courses, not only as the first of their kind within CCHS but also at the University level. In addition, the department has developed several innovative laboratory-based courses, which are designed to provide hands-on experience in critical aspects of drug delivery research. These courses complement the department's commitment to innovation and will be part of the department's future growth of its academic programs.

In addition, department faculty actively mentor undergraduate research students from across various colleges at UA. These students gain valuable hands-on experience in translational science and drug delivery, contributing to the department's dynamic research environment while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration.



“Our dedicated team is tirelessly working to address the critical challenges in immune-inflammatory diseases, with a strong focus on translating scientific discoveries into tangible solutions for patients,” Kumar said. “As we look toward the future, we are committed to further growing our department, expanding our academic programs and advancing our research initiatives. Together, we are paving the way for groundbreaking developments in immune-inflammatory therapeutics, and I am eager to see the positive impact we will continue to make on global health.”

Select Publications and Conference Presentations

- 1) R. Ganugula, K. Babalola, I. Heyns, M. Arora, S. Agarwal, C. Mohan, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Lymph node targeting of cyclosporine ameliorates ocular manifestations in a mouse model of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) via PD-L1. *Nano Today* 57: 102359, 2024. (Cover article)
- 2) W. Pula, R. Ganugula, E. Esposito, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar, M. Arora. Engineered urolithin A-laden functional polymer-lipid hybrid nanoparticles prevent cisplatin-induced proximal tubular injury in vitro. *Eur. J. Pharm. Biopharm.* 200: 114334, 2024.
- 3) I. Heyns, A. Faunce, M. Mumba, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar, M. Arora. Nanotechnology-enhanced naloxone and alternative treatments for opioid addiction. *ACS Pharmacol. Transl. Sci.* 7: 2237-2250, 2024. (Cover article)
- 4) I. Heyns, M. Arora, R. Ganugula, S. Allamreddy, S. Tiwari, D Shah, R. Basu, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Polyester nanoparticles with controlled topography for peroral drug delivery using insulin as a model protein. *ACS Nano* 18: 11863-11875, 2024 (Cover article)
- 5) W. Yang, M. Arora, H. W. Han, W. Jiang, D. M. Kim, W. Ai, Q. Pan, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar, W. A. Brashear, Y. Sun, S. Guo. ZnPP-laden nanoparticles improve glucose homeostasis and chronic inflammation during obesity. *Br. J. Pharmacol.* 1-19, 2024.
- 6) M. W. Holliday, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar, and D. Sheikh-Hamad, Chronic interstitial nephritis in agricultural communities: Observational and mechanistic evidence supporting the role of nephrotoxic agrochemicals. *Clin. J. Am. Soc. Nephrol.* 19: 538-545, 2024.
- 7) K. T. Babalola, M. Arora, R. Ganugula, S. K. Agarwal, C. Mohan, M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Leveraging lymphatic system targeting in systemic lupus erythematosus for improved clinical outcomes. *Pharmacol. Rev.* 76: 228-250, 2024. (Cover article)

Conferences

- 1) A.T Wahab, I.M Heyns, R. Ganugula, M. Arora; M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Urolithin-a laden nanoparticles upregulate heme oxygenase (HO-1) and enhance mitochondrial quality control in mouse model of cisplatin-induced acute kidney injury, AAPS PharmSci 360, October 20-23, 2024, Salt Lake City, UT [rated in top 10% of abstracts received, selected for best poster award].
 - 2) K. T. Babalola, R. Ganugula, M. Arora, S. Dwivedi, and M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. The non-GLP dose range-finding study on lymphatic-targeting of cyclosporine in Mrl-lpr mouse model of SLE, AAPS PharmSci 360, October 20-23, 2024, Salt Lake City, UT [rated in top 10% of abstracts received, selected for best poster award].
 - 3) K. T. Babalola, R. Ganugula, M. Arora, J. Asenso, and M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Lymphatic targeting of cyclosporine improves survival and ameliorates lupus-like autoimmune disease in NZB/W mice, AAPS PharmSci 360, October 20-23, 2024, Salt Lake City, UT.
 - 4) S. Allamreddy, R. Ganugula, M. Arora, I. M. Heyns, S. Dwivedi, and M. N. V. Ravi Kumar. Comprehensive strategy for type 2 diabetes: non-competitive ligand-based oral delivery of curcumin combined with long-acting insulin to prevent secondary complications, AAPS PharmSci 360, October 20-23, 2024, Salt Lake City, UT. [Chosen for the Special Poster Collection Sponsored by Merck]
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COLLEGE PART OF NATIONAL CHILD BRAIN DEVELOPMENT STUDY

Researchers and faculty with the College of Community Health Sciences are part of a comprehensive and long-term nationwide study of the risk and protective factors for healthy brain development in children.

The aim of the study is to understand the effects of exposure to social factors and other environmental conditions during pregnancy and after birth,

and to identify family resilience factors that help overcome adversity.

The HEALthy Brain and Child Development Study is being funded with a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and includes a 27-site national consortium at universities and research hospitals across the United States.





A multidisciplinary team of researchers and physicians at The University of Alabama and the UAB Heersink School of Medicine in Birmingham are conducting the research in Alabama, which received \$7.1 million of the NIDA grant.

The study will establish a large cohort of pregnant women and follow them and their participating child for at least 10 years. The longitudinal study is collecting data during pregnancy and early childhood, including images of the child's brain, growth measurements, medical and family history, as well as information about social, emotional and cognitive development. The study is using UA's MRI Research Facility for brain imaging.

Dr. Lea Yerby, associate professor of community medicine and population health with CCHS, said the information will help families and society better understand child development and how brains and behaviors are affected by experience and environment.

Yerby co-leads the UA site with Dr. Sharlene Newman, executive director of the Alabama Life Research Institute.

UA has recruited participants in the second trimester of pregnancy from University Medical Center locations in Tuscaloosa and in surrounding

rural communities. CCHS operates UMC. Recruitment began in September 2023, and 55 participants had been enrolled in the study as of March 2025.

Three faculty physicians from CCHS who practice at UMC are also part of the project. They are Dr. John McDonald, associate professor and chair of obstetrics and gynecology; Dr. Catherine Lavender, associate professor and director of the CCHS Family Medicine OB Fellowship; and Dr. Brian Gannon, associate professor and director of the UMC Pediatric Clinic in Tuscaloosa. Two additional CCHS faculty physicians are supporting the project: Dr. Shawwna Ogden, a family medicine physician with additional training in behavioral health; and Dr. Ashley Steiner, a family medicine obstetrician.

Yerby said the national study will benefit from having rural Alabama participants. "Real-life experiences of rural moms and infants are often overlooked and not represented in research, but this project gives the opportunity to learn how the adversities and resilience of rural communities impact children long term."

TELEMEDICINE SERVICES FOR RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The College of Community Health Sciences was awarded a \$503,466 grant in 2024 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants Program. The funds will be used to equip four hub sites and four end-user sites in rural West Alabama with interactive telehealth and distance learning video equipment.

Clinicians with University Medical Center, which the College operates, will deliver telemedicine services to the four end-user sites in Marengo, Fayette, Pickens and Sumter counties, benefiting

approximately 15,906 rural residents. UMC, based in Tuscaloosa and the largest multi-specialty community medical practice in West Alabama, has clinics in those four counties.

The USDA Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants Program helps rural and remote communities use advanced telecommunications technology to connect with others in the support of health care provision and rebuilding rural economies.

Expanding health care access for nearly **16,000** rural residents



COLLEGE IS SITE OF NATIONAL SLEEP APNEA CLINICAL TRIAL

A College of Community Health Sciences faculty member was named a site leader in 2024 for a national clinical trial seeking to help patients with obstructive sleep apnea. OSA occurs when throat muscles relax and block airways while a person sleeps, causing irregular breathing patterns.

“There is a massive number of people who have this problem,” said Dr. James Geyer, a neurologist who is also board certified in sleep medicine. He is a professor with CCHS and medical director of the College’s Institute for Rural Health Research.

Long-term untreated sleep apnea can increase the risk of other health problems, such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure and even dementia, Geyer said. The most common treatment for OSA is a CPAP machine that uses mild air pressure to keep breathing airways open while a person sleeps.

Geyer is currently involved in the SynAIRgy clinical trial that focuses on the potential benefits of Apnimed, an investigational drug. Apnimed has been shown in research studies to improve the abnormal breathing that occurs in OSA. There currently are no FDA-approved medications for this condition.

The SynAIRgy study is being conducted at sites nationwide. Geyer is leading the site at CCHS for a Phase 3 clinical trial, which will provide research data about Apnimed’s safety and efficacy. Ten participants were enrolled in the trial as of 2024.

Through national research efforts, CCHS is working to improve care for obstructive sleep apnea, a condition linked to stroke, heart disease and other life-threatening conditions.

TOBACCO CENTER MARKS 25 YEARS

TOBACCO

25

YEARS

CENTER

The University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, housed within the College of Community Health Sciences, celebrated its quarter-century anniversary in 2024.

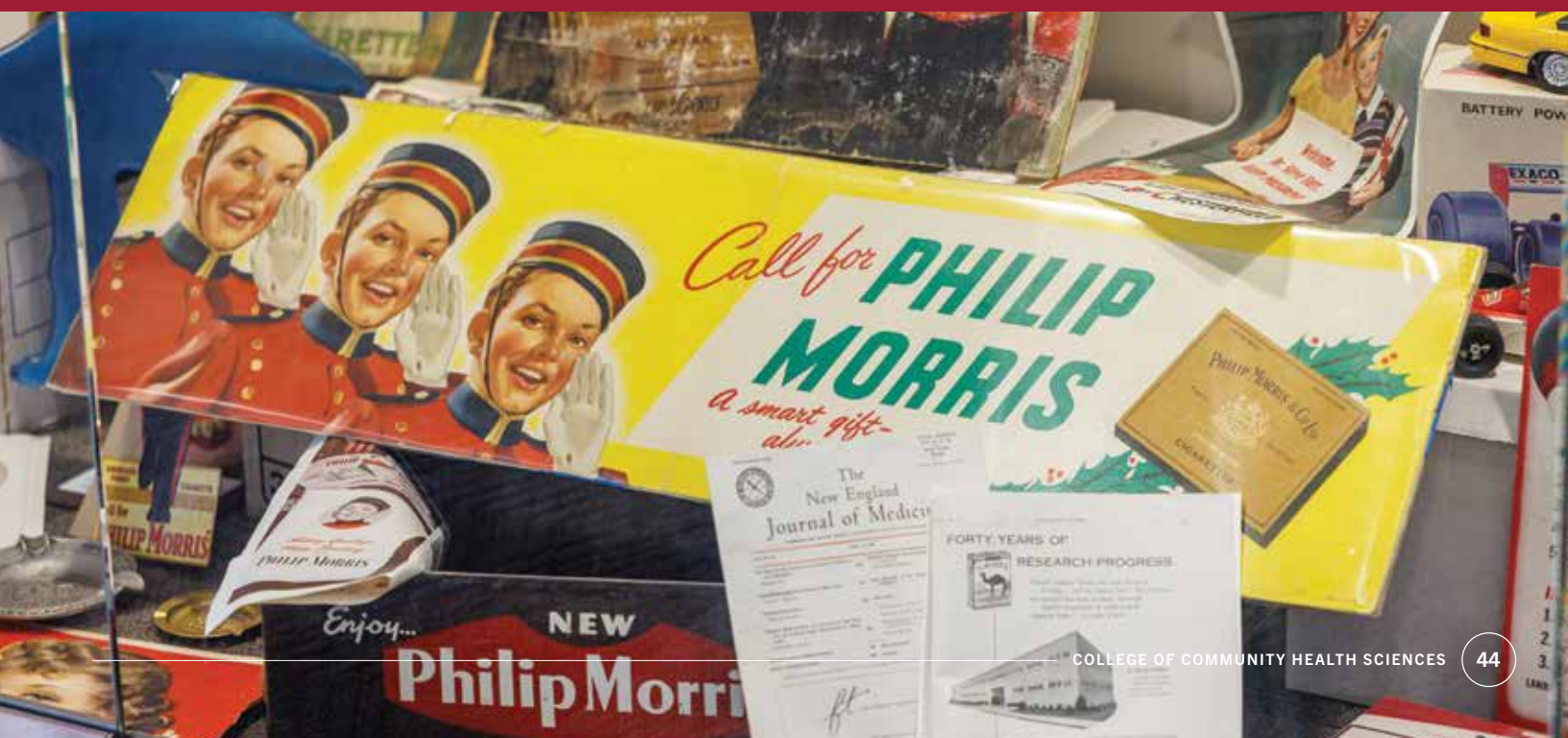
The Center holds the largest collection at any university of original documents, artifacts, photographs and news coverage of anti-smoking activism, cigarette marketing and the tobacco industry from the 19th Century to the present. Its purpose is to educate the public and health professionals about the historical and contemporary aspects of tobacco use, highlight tobacco's devastating health impacts, and expose industry tactics designed to thwart efforts to reduce smoking.

The Center was founded and is directed by Dr. Alan Blum, the College's Gerald Leon Wallace, MD, Endowed Chair in Family Medicine.

The Center's work is presented through online exhibitions, oral histories and presentations at museums and libraries across the country.

The work has earned praise from the World Health Organization and has received national awards from the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American School Health Association.

Blum said the model developed by the Center can be used to address other emerging health issues, such as obesity, digital media addiction and vaccination refusal. (csts.ua.edu)

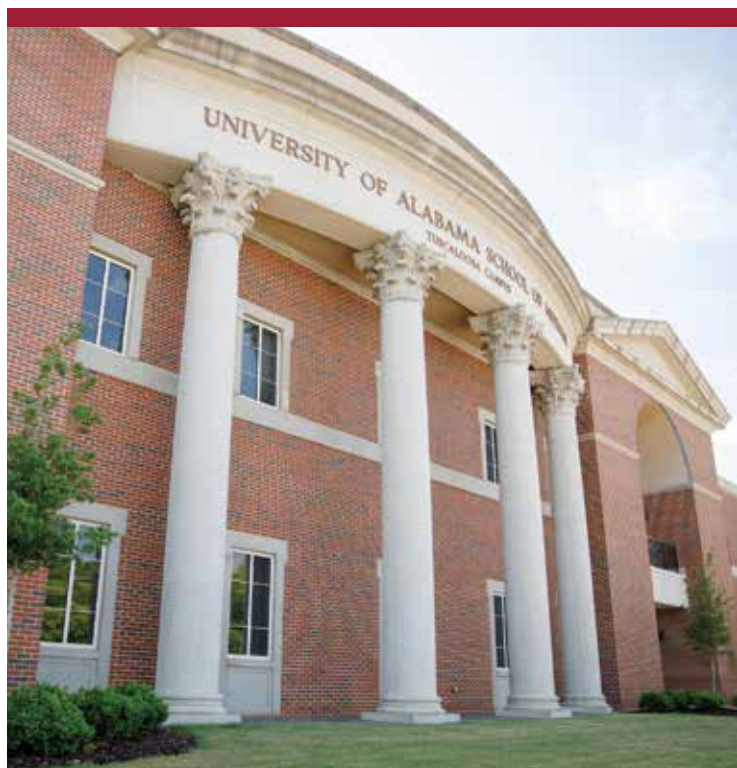


CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The Rising Tide Capital Campaign is an effort by The University of Alabama to raise \$1.8 billion in philanthropic support for strategic priorities over a 10-year period. As part of this campaign, the College of Community Health Sciences set a campaign goal for itself of \$8 million. The College is well on the way to meeting that goal, having raised \$6.6 million to date. The Capital Campaign concludes September 2026.

The mission of CCHS is to improve and promote the health of individuals and communities in rural Alabama and the Southeast through leadership in medical and health-related education, primary care and population health; the provision of high-quality, accessible health-care services; and research and scholarship.

Dr. Richard Friend, dean of CCHS, said the current health-care environment provides unique opportunities to think beyond classrooms, clinics and laboratories to improve and promote health. “Our doctors, educators and students are at the forefront of great changes. Accomplishing this (campaign) goal will provide a transformational impact to health care across our state, region and beyond.”



CCHS CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

BY THE NUMBERS

\$8 Million CCHS campaign goal

Total raised to date **\$6.6 Million**

\$5 Million in program support

\$1 Million in scholarship support

PROGRESS TO DATE

83% of campaign goal met

600 donors

1,400 gifts

OUR IMPACT

Major gifts received in 2024 help support the:

- Education of students from rural Alabama communities studying to become primary care physicians and eventually practice in rural communities.
- CCHS Obstetrics Fellowship, created to address the overwhelming need for obstetrics care in rural and remote areas of Alabama.
- UA Student Health Center and Pharmacy program that assists uninsured or underinsured students with medical and health-care needs.
- CCHS Sports Medicine program.

BOARD OF VISITORS

The CCHS Board of Visitors is made up of 37 volunteers, including alumni, donors, community physicians, businesspeople, community activists and other friends of the College of Community Health Sciences. The board's purpose is to help the College develop relationships and partnerships with communities in Alabama and organizations at the state and national levels.

The board meets biannually and advises the College on long-range planning, assists the College in securing financial resources, and helps to develop opportunities for medical students and resident physicians.

37 Leaders. One Mission.

*To help strengthen and support
the next generation of physicians.*

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Mr. D. Bradley Cork
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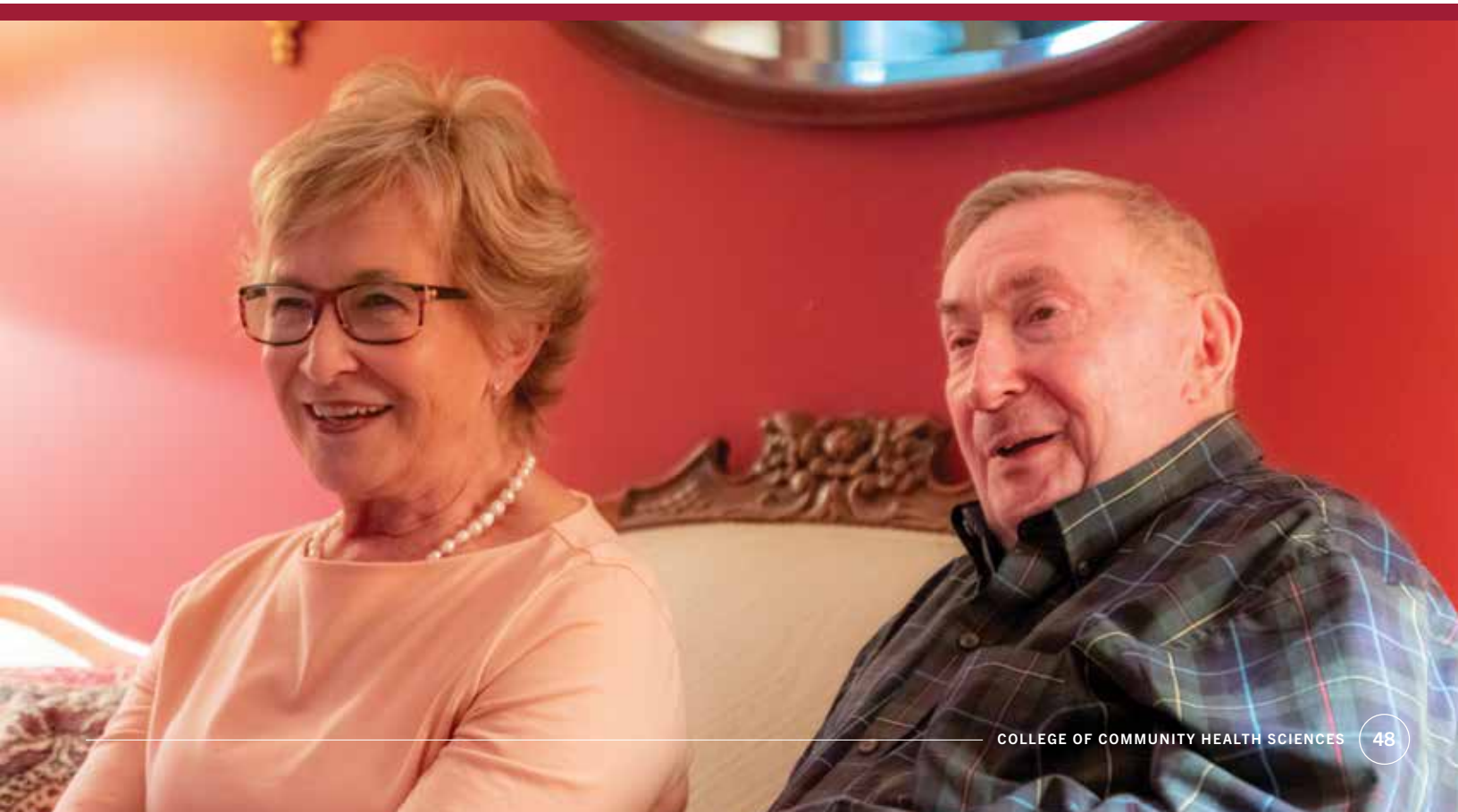
COMMITTED TO MEDICAL EDUCATION

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Pieroni have a steadfast commitment to the education of medical students and resident physicians at the College of Community Health Sciences.

Together with their family, the Pieronis established the Robert E. Pieroni, MD, and Family Endowed Compassionate Care Award in 2024 to recognize a third-year family medicine resident who best exemplifies the characteristics of patient-centered compassionate care, patient advocacy and social justice. CCHS operates The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program, one of the oldest and largest family medicine residencies in the country.

Dr. Elizabeth Scott received the inaugural award during residency graduation ceremonies last summer. “The faculty and staff of CCHS made an excellent choice in selecting the first family practice resident to receive the award,” Dr. Robert Pieroni said. “Dr. Scott’s patients, colleagues and faculty have recognized her not only for her medical acumen but also for the laudable care and compassion she extends to all of her patients.”

The award follows the creation several years ago of the Robert E. Pieroni, MD, and Family Endowed Scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to medical students at CCHS who are interested in primary



care practice with the intent of helping to alleviate some of their medical school debt.

The scholarship is presented at the College's annual Senior Banquet, an event that recognizes and celebrates UAB Heersink School of Medicine students who complete their third and fourth years of medical school (the clinical training years) at CCHS. Recipients of the scholarship in 2024 were Collin Darwish, Joshua Graham, Austin Kidd and June Wolford. Each received \$1,000. For the education of medical students, the College is a regional campus of the Heersink School of Medicine.

Dr. Robert Pieroni's connection with CCHS extends well beyond the gifts he and his family have bestowed on the College and its residents and medical students. Pieroni, a native of Boston, joined CCHS as a faculty member in 1974, just two years after the College was founded. Though he retired in 2005, he and his family have remained strongly committed to the work of the College, whose mission is to improve the health of individuals and communities in rural Alabama and the Southeast region.

In addition to their generous support of CCHS, Pieroni and his wife, Dorothy, also serve on the CCHS Board of Visitors, an advisory board that assists the College with long-term planning and securing financial resources to help continue to develop opportunities for medical education.

"Medical students and residents are routinely evaluated on their medical knowledge and skills as applied to patient care," Pieroni said. "As famed physician Dr. William Osler stated, 'The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease.' This holistic approach entails the compassionate care of all patients regardless of their circumstances."

SUPPORT FOR RURAL MEDICAL EDUCATION

The CCHS Rural Programs Gift Fund received \$50,000 from The Caring Foundation in 2025 to support rural medical education programs at the College of Community Health Sciences.

The fund primarily supports the College's Rural Medical Scholars Program, which is exclusively for rural Alabama students who want to become physicians and practice in rural communities. The program includes a year of study, after students receive their undergraduate degree, that leads to a master's degree in rural community health at CCHS and early admission to the UAB Heersink School of Medicine.

The Caring Foundation was established in 1990 by BlueCross BlueShield of Alabama to serve as a charitable foundation and is focused on improving the health and well-being of Alabamians by investing in organizations across the state.

SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF RURAL PHYSICIANS

Alton and Elizabeth Sturtevant know about the critical need for doctors in rural Alabama communities, and they want to help medical students interested in rural medicine avoid debt while completing their education and training.

The Sturtevants made their first gift to the College of Community Health Sciences in 2021 to support the education of its students. In its role as a regional medical campus, the College provides the third and fourth years of medical school (the clinical years of education) for a portion of students at the UAB Heersink School of Medicine.

In 2024, the couple made a \$50,000 gift to the College to further enhance support for students who have expressed a desire to practice rural medicine. In total, the Sturtevants have gifted

\$100,000 to the College as part of The Sturtevant Rural Medical Student Endowed Support Fund.

The fund is used for a variety of purposes in support of the CCHS mission of educating and training future rural primary-care physicians. If the fund is used to award scholarships, priority consideration is given to third- or fourth-year medical students at CCHS who want to practice rural medicine and who demonstrate financial need.

Alton Sturtevant said his prior work in medical laboratories, as well as providing guest lectures to family medicine resident physicians in Selma, Ala., and serving on hospital infection control committees, provided him with significant exposure to Alabama's rural health-care needs.

*“I’ve seen firsthand,
the need in rural health care.”*

— Alton Sturtevant, on why he and Elizabeth chose
to support rural medical students at CCHS.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS

Thanks to the generous support of our donors, the College of Community Health Sciences annually provides scholarships and awards to medical students, residents in The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program and students in the College's Rural Health Leaders Pipeline programs.

2024 Medical Student Scholarships

Frank Fitts Jr. Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Collin Darwish \$3,000
Joshua Graham \$3,000
Austin Kidd \$3,000
Ashley Spears \$3,000

The Dr. Sandra Hullett Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Cody Anger \$1,000
Carla Brown \$1,000

The Dr. Benjamin Collins Maxwell Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Devin Dobbins \$900
Austin Kidd \$900
Lauren Huguley \$900

Jovita M. Taylor Endowed Scholarship

Recipient: Emily Hooker \$1,500

Robert E. Pieroni, MD, and Family Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Collin Darwish \$1,000
Joshua Graham \$1,000
Austin Kidd \$1,000
June Wolford \$1,000

Reese Phifer Jr. Memorial Foundation Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Devin Dobbins \$1,500
Lauren Huguley \$1,500
Abygayle Nelson \$1,500
Ben Rogers \$1,500

The Larry Mayes Endowed Scholarship

Recipients:

Channing Bruce \$5,000
Lauren Huguley \$5,000

Dr. Terrence M. Pugh Diversity in Medicine

Recipient: Cody Anger \$1,000

Dr. William W. Winternitz Sr. Geriatric Scholarship

Recipient: Devin Dobbins \$500

2024 Medical Student Awards

William R. Willard Award

Recipients:

Mykeala Watt \$1,000
Cooper Wright \$1,000

Interprofessional Excellence Award

Recipient: Jillian Tinglin \$1,000

Neurology Award

Recipient: Jacob Abshire \$1,000

2024 Residency Graduation Awards

360 Award

Recipient: Dr. Joshua Washington \$1,000

William R. Willard Family Medicine Award

Recipient: Dr. Chase Britt \$1,000

William W. Winternitz Geriatric Award

Recipient: Dr. Elizabeth Scott \$500

MORE THAN EVER, PHILANTHROPY IS VITAL FOR OUR FUTURE

The College of Community Health Sciences welcomes your partnership and your generosity in support of our work in shaping medical education, providing high-quality health care, fostering research and expanding our community outreach. Together we can further the College's mission and significantly improve and promote the health of individuals and communities in Alabama and the Southeast region.

**Consider a gift today to the Friends of CCHS,
the College's annual fund, or any of our other initiatives.**

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Contact

Taylor Mooney

Associate Director of Development

Taylor.mooney@ua.edu

(205) 348-7109

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all of our donors and friends who gave to the College of Community Health Sciences in 2024 through cash donations, in-kind gifts, estate gifts and matching funds. The gifts benefit faculty, residents and medical students — and communities throughout Alabama — by providing resources for scholarships, classrooms, clinics and research opportunities for future primary care physicians.

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*Your generosity makes a difference and benefits
CCHS faculty, residents, medical students
and, ultimately, communities throughout Alabama.*

FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

The University of Alabama Tuscaloosa Family Medicine Residency Program celebrated its 50th anniversary with an alumni reunion weekend June 13-14, 2025, at UA. The weekend included a welcome party, continuing medical education lecture offerings, and culminated in a dinner and awards ceremony. The reunion weekend was hosted by the College of Community Health Sciences, which operates the residency.







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