

**COMING
TOGETHER
FOR ACTION**



TOWARD MENTAL WELLNESS

Chicago, IL

September 26-28, 2024

CT4A: CALL TO ACTION

Where it all began!

together4action.org



IN SEPTEMBER 2024, the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice (Global Alliance) hosted the Coming Together for Action Symposium (CT4A) and the Policy Institute. The theme this year was *Toward Mental Wellness*.

The Global Alliance collaborates with individuals with lived expertise, researchers, and practitioners from across disciplines to promote mental wellness for all in settings where we live, learn, work, pray and play. Underscoring the need to act and work together to

counter threats to mental wellness, such as health disparities, global conflicts, climate change, increased displacement, and erosion of human rights, CT4A intended to bring people together to reimagine ways to foster settings, social environments, and policies that promote wellness.

The symposium broadly focused on three main areas: equity; behavioral health across the life span; and children and families. The Scientific Committee welcomed submissions that examined systems, settings, and policies that focus on response to current context and the prevention of future crises.

Together, approximately 150 people committed to interdisciplinary action, gathered at the symposium to share details about their efforts, learn, and engage with others in like-minded settings and challenged ourselves and each other to consider key questions about what is next.

The purpose of this report is to share a summary of the event and ideas that were raised for us all to consider within our own local communities including a call for action.

This report was drafted by Gita Jaffe, Ruta Rangel, Robin Kimbrough-Melton, Silicia Lomax, Rebecca (Rebkah) Zellellev, CT4A Planning Committee, all of the CT4A moderators and designed by The Ivy Group.



Global Alliance Presidents at CT4A 2024 (from left): Ryan Kilmer, Rebecca Singer, Cynthia Taylor Handrup, Oscar Barbarin, Deborah Klein Walker, Jill D. McLeigh

Details

Policy Institute:

Thursday, September 26, 2024

Coming Together for Action Symposium 2024:

Friday, September 27–Saturday, September 28, 2024

Location:

University of Illinois @ Chicago – Student Center West

Reception:

UIC College of Nursing, 2nd Floor

Committee Chairs

Co-Chairs: Cynthia Taylor Handrup and Debbie Klein Walker

Scientific Committee: Jill D. McLeigh and Ryan Kilmer

Fundraising/Sponsorship: Cynthia Taylor Handrup/Robin Kimbrough-Melton

Policy Institute: Silicia Lomax and Gita Jaffe

Programming: Gita Jaffe

Student and Early Career Committee: Lucy Bailey Rabinowitz and Surasya Guduru

Mentoring Lunch: Rebecca Singer, Lucy Bailey Rabinowitz, and Surasya Guduru

Community Outreach: Rebecca Singer and Amber Kraft

Continuing Education: Cynthia Taylor Handrup, Robin Nisi

100th Anniversary: Jill D. McLeigh

Wellness Hub: Swarnima Chaudhary



Supporters



The Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice would like to thank our sponsors of Coming Together for Action 2024:



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**

ADAPTIVE TESTING | **UNRIVALED**
TECHNOLOGIES | **MEASUREMENT**
VALIDATED • PRECISE • ACCURATE



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Nursing & Health Studies

NORC at the
University of
Chicago



Key Metrics

Programming

- 8** Scientific Committee Concurrent Sessions
- 69** Total Presentations from Scientific Committee
- 6** Spotlight Sessions (Invited)
- 2** Special Programming Sessions
(Mentor Lunch and Student & Early Career Welcome)
- 77** Total Sessions

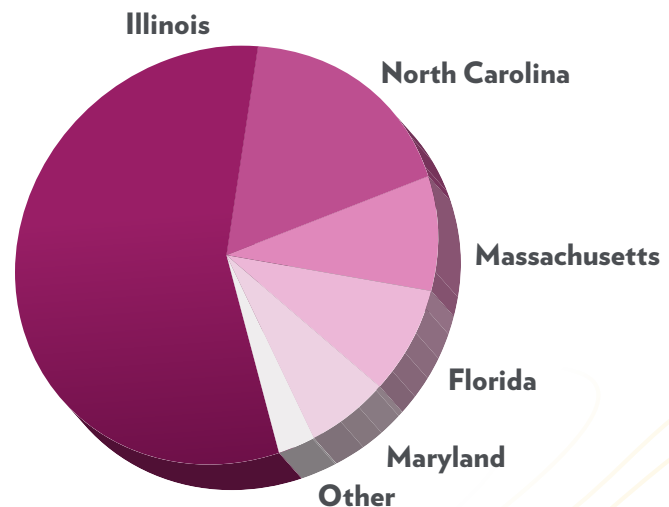
Registrant Locations

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Illinois 64 | Virginia 2 |
| North Carolina 20 | South Carolina 2 |
| Massachusetts 10 | Minnesota 2 |
| Florida 9 | Connecticut 2 |
| Maryland 7 | New Jersey 2 |
| Georgia 6 | Alaska 1 |
| Texas 6 | Iowa 1 |
| New York 6 | Rhode Island 1 |
| California 5 | New Hampshire 1 |
| Washington D.C. 5 | Switzerland 1 |
| Tennessee 4 | Canada 1 |
| Michigan 4 | |
| Colorado 3 | |

Does not include 33 registrants who did not list a location and 11 who did not answer.

Registrants & Attendees

- 175** Registrants and Honorary Guests
- 150** Attendees
- 94** Attendees Presented (63%)
- 50** Policy Institute Attendees



Website & Whova Event App Engagement



2,310 Agenda Web Page Visits



79 Community Board Messages



931 Attendee Profile Views



49 Business Cards Scanned & Exchanged

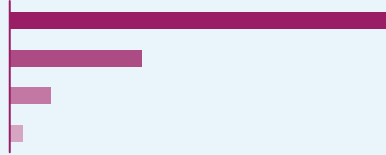


290 Private Messages



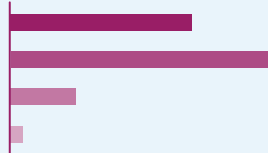
CT4A Evaluations

I think the symposium promoted interdisciplinary collaboration.



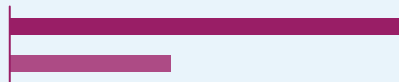
Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree

I feel equipped with new knowledge and/or tools to be utilized in my work.



Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree

I had a positive overall experience at Coming Together for Action 2024.



Strongly Agree
Agree

42 Surveys were submitted.

“The discussion about the housing crisis was very eye-opening and interesting. I enjoyed many of the other presentations as well.”

“I enjoyed the IP sessions the most because the work shared really aligned with the work that I do.”

“I thought the concurrent sessions were really valuable and showcased the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives and collaborations when working in the behavioral health and social justice space.”

“I greatly appreciate the roundtable discussions. I wish there was more time to spend in these sessions however, as great discussion seemed to begin just in time to wrap up I really enjoyed all of the diverse topics, areas of research, bringing all disciplines together.”

“I enjoyed all sections and events. I learned in new approaches to promote mental health using community-based initiatives. The depth and breadth and multidisciplinary of topics was outstanding. Great organization and many networking opportunities.”

“I appreciated learning from the award winners; I found the concurrent sessions content to be consistently strong; I appreciated the focus on a host of salient and relevant topics, interdisciplinary and community partnerships, and diverse settings.”

“Very informative but VERY saturated in academia and less in other disciplines.”

“I think it was great. I loved the intimate vibe of the conference, where everyone was very friendly and united in their goal of making a difference. I would not add anything in the conference.”

“Everything was so well organized and relevant. Keep the good work to sustain the caring and intimate vibe of such a technically strong conference. Thanks!!”



Policy Institute | CT4A Add-on

Thursday, September 26, 2024

Invited Panel ◀

Toward Mental Wellness: The Role of Policy



Silicia Lomax, MPH
Director, Waxman Strategies
MODERATOR



Kevin C. Lichtenberg
Attorney,
HeflerLichtenberg



Octavio Martinez, Jr., MD, MPH
Executive Director,
Hogg Foundation for
Mental Health



Alisha Warren
Assistant Commissioner
of Mental Health,
Chicago Department of
Public Health

This moderated panel of advocates, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers explored ideas such as:

- The importance of innovative approaches, such as social prescribing, to promote holistic wellness;
- The intersection of mental health with broader social factors such as access to broadband internet;
- The importance of including people with lived experience in policy development;
- The need for policies that address the growing demand for mental health services, particularly among aging populations; and
- Emphasis on the role of local and state-level advocacy in driving change.



Skill-Based Workshop

The workshop provided practical guidance on developing concise written statements related to *Toward Mental Wellness*, emphasizing their application in advocacy efforts such as town halls, governmental meetings, and letters to Congress or editors. Facilitated small groups explored the relationship between written and oral statements and discussed key topics, including workforce reimbursement, cultural competency, coalition-building, and accessible education.

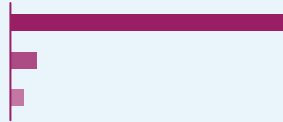
Facilitators emphasized:

- The importance of framing statements to advance behavioral health policy priorities including clearly articulating implications;
- Developing effective statements is a skill that takes time and practice; and
- The use of prompts in developing effective statements (i.e. who is the audience that you are writing this statement for and why is this topic important to the audience) is helpful.



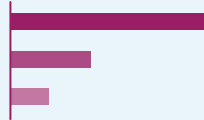
Policy Institute Evaluations

I had a positive overall experience at the Policy Institute.



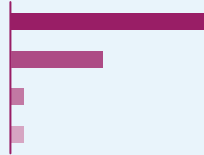
Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral

I found the networking opportunity valuable.



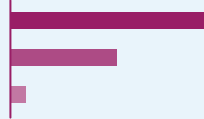
Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral

I found the content of the Policy Institute helped me gain a better understanding of various advocacy and policy approaches and settings.



Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree

I learned something new during the Policy Institute.



Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral

24 Surveys were submitted.

“Amazing experience! Thank you so much! Love the panel speakers. The facilitators at each table for the workshop were fantastic. Really enjoyed the workshop. The prompts were so helpful for this exercise and future work developing policy statements.”

“I would’ve liked more time for the workshop or an additional workshop if time allowed.”

“This was all very new to me so it was nice to come to such a welcoming and educational experience.”

“Content: the panel kept bringing it back to policy with concrete steps/advice to draft (a) policy statement.”



CT4A Invited Programming

CT4A Opening Panel ◀

Toward Mental Wellness: Community Based Strategies and Solutions



Maury Nation, PhD
MODERATOR



Victoria Ngo, PhD
Gary B. Melton Award



Lisa Sherman Luna, MA
Max Hayman Award



Octavio Martinez, Jr., MD, MPH
Marion Langer Award

In [CT4A 2024's](#) opening panel, [awardees](#) discussed strategies, and solutions that they have utilized that focus on supporting individuals, families, and their communities. They explored topics such as working in hostile environments, overcoming tensions that enduring challenges raise and recommendations for future action. Highlights of the dynamic moderated discussion included:

- Task-sharing interventions, both internationally and nationally, have shown that mental health support can be both effective and sustainable in diverse settings;

- The importance of integrating self-care strategies for providers from the outset to prevent burnout;
- Empowering immigrant and refugee communities fosters resilience and supports collective mobilization for change;
- Engaging communities cultivates a supportive environment for lasting impact; and
- Strong relationships are essential, particularly among and between funders and grantees. Investing time in researching their goals, aligning values and utilizing data are important.



Tips for Action:

- Engage community-centered approaches, as they are often the most effective, since those closest to the challenges are best equipped to identify practical solutions;
- Prioritize fostering trust in relationships as its role in achieving effective and sustainable responses is paramount to successful outcomes; and
- Do not deviate from your values even if you aren't allowed to express certain values by law (i.e. anti-DEI policies). Ask the questions. What does pushing back mean? How do we turn this into action?

CT4A Spotlight Session ◀

Child Thriving Communities: Understanding the Key Ingredients Towards Well-being



Jill McLeigh, PhD
MODERATOR



Oscar Barbarin, PhD



James Garbarino, PhD



Anne Scheer, PhD

This session explored the foundations of child thriving communities and the relationship of community institutions, such as educational settings and associated policies, to the socialization of children. Panelists discussed the importance of listening to youth and giving them opportunities to participate and the benefits of democracy on the well-being of youth and their communities. The panelists illustrated their points with examples of successful child-thriving communities. Finally, they discussed the barriers in achieving child thriving communities.

Highlights of the discussion included:

- Opportunities to participate and meaningfully engage in activities provide children with frameworks to understand the world and themselves;
- Children are not a homogenous group, therefore their diversity must be genuinely represented, rather than tokenistic opportunities that fail to represent the diversity of children;
- Schools should emphasize caring relationships, where students feel valued and emotionally safe; and
- Communities respectful of children and youth incorporate the concept of control, which reflects shared aspirations, provides the framework for setting clear boundaries and goals and helps children and youth manage their emotions and build resilience.



Tips for Action:

- Ensure youth programming is led by youth and reflects their interests;
- Engage diverse groups of people around issues of interest and understand their strengths and needs; and
- Schools and families should reflect on their actions and consider if they are achieving the outcomes they desire.

Presidential Award Address ◀

The Future of Global Mental Health



Shekhar Saxena, MD

2024 Presidential Citation for Lifetime Achievement

In his Presidential Award Address, Dr. Saxena shared his journey, including reflecting on his experience in clinical practice, policy work, and teaching. Highlights of the address included:

- The global mental health landscape has advanced significantly, with increased awareness and understanding, international commitments, and the empowerment of individuals with lived experiences driving progress;
- Challenges remain—particularly in terms of funding, precision in treatment, integration into broader health and social care, and addressing social and economic determinants such as poverty and conflict; and
- It is important to recognize and learn from local to global and global to local experiences.



Tips for Action:

- For clinicians, to consider engaging in policy work and for policymakers to stay connected to work on the ground;
- Advocate for continued and improved commitments to global mental health, to overcome the insufficient investment;
- Adopt and improve integration of mental health care within and across health and social care;
- Engage actors who are not currently involved in better integrating care;
- Focus on understanding the underlying causes and pathways of mental health issues to provide more tailored care; and
- Pay more attention to prevention.

CT4A Spotlight ◀

Housing as a Human Right: Exploring Challenges and Solutions for All



Rebecca Singer, DNP, RN
MODERATOR



Stephen Brown, MSW LCSW



Christine Haley, MS



Frederick Fret



Marc Raifman, JD

In this spotlight session, panelists explored housing as a human right. Holistic considerations of key issues, strategies, and solutions were explored. Particular focus on concepts related to health and housing, the needs of long-term residents and new arrivals, whole of community responses to enduring challenges and the role of current policies.

Highlights of the dynamic discussion included:

- Responses to the homelessness crisis must address the racial complexity of access to resources and the impact of discriminatory policies toward the African American community;
- Rethinking traditional methods of care delivery for individuals who use drugs in addition to challenging stereotypes are essential in offering effective treatments;
- Voices of people experiencing homelessness must be included in decision-making processes, in order to create effective and respectful solutions to address their needs;
- Building trust, removing barriers to participation and using accurate language are critical;
- Creating a supportive and inclusive environment for migrants is essential, both upon arrival and in the long term. Positive first impressions, along with holistic responses (i.e. educational programs and language support) foster a sense of belonging and help newcomers integrate meaningfully into their new communities; and
- Narratives that suggest that people do not want housing and/or shelter is false. Barriers to use, such as pet permission and encampment regulations are provider barriers, rather than resident barriers.



Tips for Action:

- Utilizing strategic thinking and systemic change from a holistic perspective is essential for ending homelessness; and
- It is imperative to learn from the past and understand relevant parallels to the current context, such as the Great Migration.

CT4A Highlights

Awardee Presentations in Chicago ◀

Presidential Award | **Shekhar Saxena**

Gary B. Melton Award Winner | **Victoria Ngo**

Marion Langer | **Octavio Martinez**

Max Hayman | **Lisa Sherman Luna**

Vera Paster Award | **Devi Soman**

MORE AT bhjustice.org/about/awards



Shekhar Saxena



Victoria Ngo



Octavio Martinez



Lisa Sherman Luna



Devi Soman

Student Abstract Award Winner ◀

Julia Liu

Connecting Students to Care: Understanding Student Mental Health Supports and Gaps in Chicago Public Schools

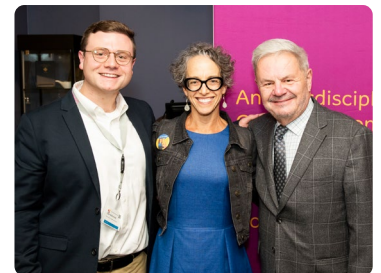
Recognition Award Honorees (In Person) ◀

Institute for Nonviolence Chicago

Terry Gross founded the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago in 2015 with a mission of bringing peace to Chicago's underserved neighborhoods. The values and actions of the organization are guided by the nonviolence principles of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. — everyone has a part to play in ending gun violence. The Institute uses an evidence-based model to bring together civilians and organizations to implement wraparound services for high-risk individuals in Austin, West Garfield Park, Back of the Yards, and portions of Brighton Park. nonviolencechicago.org



Terry Gross (left), Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Nonviolence Chicago



Colin McCormick (left), Director of Programs and Dr. Ed Pratt (right), Executive Director, Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants

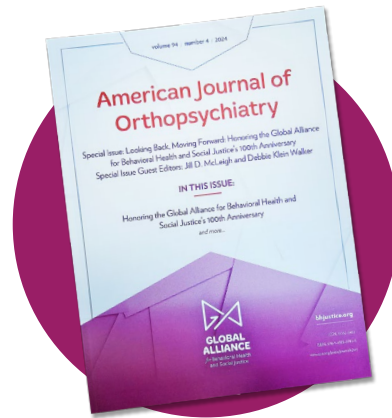
Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants

The Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants (ICDI) reunites families separated by the U.S. Immigration system and helps them integrate into the community. With a focus on ensuring the dignity of individuals, ICDI provides direct services, clothing, housing, and guidance to help newly arrived migrants better navigate the US systems. icdichicago.org

SPECIAL SESSION

100th Anniversary AJO Special Issue Panel ◀

- Print Journals Released
- Looking Back, Moving Forward: Honoring the Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice's 100th Anniversary ([Articles in AJO Vol. 94, Issue 4](#))



Undergraduate Contest ◀

Winner: **Brandi Shines**

Essay entitled: **Self-Care**

Stigma, depression, addiction, despair, watching one fade
Losing one's hair
Self-care

Advocating daily to talk and be seen
Crying silently while your mind screams
Thoughts race and become the unknown
Fighting battles, no one can see
This is mental health; this is you, this is me

Lost in translation, somewhere out there
Self-care

Inclusive but no support
Advocating, pleading, and wanting to change
Take the corner
Step inside, follow the voices, and don't hide
The light of hope, the beacon of love
I am here to be your guide

One by one, the pain subsided, the tears faded
Joy was there
Self-care

You are your best advocate, number one fan
Mental health, depression biggest scam
Once forgotten, once unseen, now embraced
Engaging, learning to live outside the cries
Blurring the noises, surviving the lies

The lies you tell yourself self you are okay
The lies you listen about what people say
The lies you believe when the noise stops
The lies you feel beneath the smile
You are ok; you are worthwhile



Runner Up: **Amanda Adams**

Essay entitled: **Achieving Mental Wellness in the Digital Age**

Call to Action

The purpose of the Call to Action session was to have a space for facilitated discussion on themes, ideas, and considerations raised during the CT4A symposium. Beyond having a space to share and learn with and from others, attendees were encouraged to explore strengths and challenges in their own efforts and raise questions for evaluating and potentially implementing these in their own work, as well as in the efforts of the Global Alliance.



The graphic below illustrates the key themes from the discussion. ◀



Use of Plain Language

- It is important to use plain language that people can easily understand, moving beyond jargon or specialized terms used within specific circles. It highlights the need to communicate across diverse audiences, acknowledging that people from different disciplines, experiences, or backgrounds may interpret language differently.
- A common language fosters better collaboration, especially in interdisciplinary settings, by bridging gaps in understanding. It is important that appropriate language is used for each audience, so messages are communicated effectively.
- **Call to Action:** Reflect on your own efforts and consider if the language you use is accurate and appropriate? Is there other language to more effectively disseminate the same message?

Interdisciplinary

- It is important to step outside of familiar frameworks that represent individual disciplines and/or roles; embracing, honoring, and respecting new perspectives is important.
- Interdisciplinary work provides a new way of approaching enduring challenges facing communities and stimulates responses based on the lessons learned within and across the various disciplines and settings.
- **Call to Action:** Think outside of the box. Consider different perspectives and disciplines to foster more inclusive and holistic approaches to mental well-being and societal challenges.

Expanding the Toolbox

- The current ‘toolbox’ can not adequately respond to the need for mental health support in our communities. It is necessary to explore strategies beyond traditional clinical settings, such as social prescribing and community-based “healing spaces.”
- **Call to Action:** As related to the environments where you work, live, play and pray, broaden the scope of mental health interventions by incorporating traditional and non-traditional approaches and settings to meet the diverse individual, family and community needs.

Understand the Evidence

- Even though the concept of “evidence-based programs” is important and widely used, it is essential to use critical reflection on whose evidence is considered valid and how it is applied. At times, programs labeled as evidence-based fail to account for context-specific limitations or include diverse perspectives, such as those from communities affected by the programs, resulting in interventions not fitting the local needs.
- **Call to Action:** Reflect on the evidence that is created with and through your efforts. How is it received? How and to whom is it being shared? Are there other pathways for building and sharing the evidence base that you are developing?

Meaningful Involvement of People with Lived Experience

- It is important to engage and include the perspectives of people with lived experience (PWLE) in program development, implementation, and evaluation.
- Meaningful inclusion of PWLE may enhance the effectiveness of programs and foster trust.
- **Call to Action:** Consider if the settings that you are dedicated to meaningfully include PLWE. If they do not, explore opportunities for change.

Focus on Strengths and Address the Challenges

- Shift the conversation from focusing solely on mental health symptoms and challenges to emphasizing positive experiences and the strengths of individuals, families, and communities.
- Prioritize well-being and recognize that an individual’s assets promote resilience and encourage personal growth. This helps move beyond a deficit-focused narrative and addresses mental health along the continuum.
- **Call to Action:** Consider the narratives that are shared through your efforts, do they honor the strengths and opportunities for positive outcomes of individuals, families and their communities, within these spaces?

Redefining Measurement of Success

- Traditional metrics for measuring success, often focus on quantifiable outcomes that do not always reflect meaningful change in communities, especially within short grant cycles.
- **Call to Action:** Create spaces for collaborative conversations (with diverse stakeholders) to understand what success looks like, focusing on context-specific outcomes aligned with community priorities.



Community Engagement

- Community-driven approaches are essential. Discussion identified that researchers often exclude the expertise of communities.
- **Call to Action:** Ensure the environments you are in honor community expertise to promote and sustain meaningful work and invest resources as possible.

