



## Speaker Bios

publications and has served as principal investigator or co-investigator on multiple federally and foundation-funded research projects related to nutrition, behavioral interventions, and chronic disease prevention. She is an active member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers and has received numerous honors, including the American Society for Nutrition Education & Behavioral Sciences Research Interest Section Early Career Award.



### Natasha Bray, DO

Dr. Natasha Bray is an accomplished physician and educator specializing in Internal Medicine and Addiction Medicine. She currently serves as Campus Dean of the Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at the Cherokee

Nation, where she also holds a Clinical Professorship in Rural Health. Dr. Bray earned her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Oklahoma State University and completed her Internal Medicine residency at the Cambridge Health Alliance, a Harvard-affiliated hospital, followed by a fellowship in Health Policy with the American Osteopathic Association. She has also earned a Master of Science in Medical Education with an emphasis on simulation and competency-based assessment. She is board-certified in Internal Medicine, Addiction Medicine, and Osteopathic Medicine and is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and the American College of Osteopathic Internists. Dr. Bray has received numerous accolades, including the 2022 AOF Educator of the Year Award. Her recent publications explore health equity, addiction medicine, and osteopathic education. Dr. Bray is a passionate advocate for rural and tribal health education and workforce development.



### Lora Cotton, DO

Lora Cotton, DO, is Chair and Professor of Family Medicine at Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences. She teaches across all levels of medical education and maintains active clinical practice along with ongoing scholarly work.

With her recent Certification in Culinary Medicine, she integrates evidence based nutrition and the joy of cooking into her approach to patient care and learner education.



### Cyndi Crook

Cyndi Crook serves as Executive Director of the DRH Health Foundation and Community Relations at DRH Health in Duncan, Oklahoma, a role she has held since 2007. She also chairs Pathways to a Healthier You, a community health improvement

organization serving a two-county region. Ms. Crook earned her Master of Arts from the University of Oklahoma

and her Bachelor of Arts from Baylor University. With a background in healthcare leadership and philanthropy, her work focuses on community health engagement, strategic communications, and fundraising development. Under her leadership, foundation assets have grown substantially, supporting expanded nursing scholarships and community health initiatives. She is actively involved in regional service organizations and has held leadership roles in healthcare marketing and community arts.



### Alicia Ford, PhD

Dr. Alicia Ito Ford is Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences. She is a licensed health service psychologist specializing in clinical neuropsychology, with

expertise in neurocognitive assessment and substance use disorders. Dr. Ford earned her PhD in Counseling Psychology from the University of Kansas, completed an APA-accredited internship at the Ann Arbor VA Healthcare System, and a postdoctoral fellowship in Clinical Neuropsychology at the University of Michigan. She serves as Psychiatry Course and Clerkship Director and leads resident research initiatives. Her work has been recognized with the Regents' Distinguished Research Award and multiple national presentation awards. Dr. Ford has an extensive publication record, with recent peer-reviewed articles (2023–2025) addressing data sharing practices, diversity in clinical trials, and neuropsychological outcomes in addiction research.



### Lois Ellen Frank, PhD

Dr. Lois Ellen Frank is an award-winning chef, food historian, culinary anthropologist, author, photographer, and educator specializing in Indigenous foods of the Americas. Based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she is the chef-owner of Red Mesa Cuisine,

LLC, where she collaborates with Chef Walter Whitewater (Diné/Navajo) to promote Indigenous cuisine and cultural education. Dr. Frank earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of New Mexico, with research focused on Native American foodways and contemporary Indigenous cuisine. Her James Beard Award-winning cookbook *Foods of the Southwest Indian Nations* established her as a leading authority on Native foods, and her 2023 cookbook *Seed to Plate, Soil to Sky* received two International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) awards in 2024. She has served as a U.S. State Department Culinary Diplomat, taught at the Institute of American Indian Arts, and continues to advance Indigenous food sovereignty, health, and wellness through education, research, and culinary outreach.

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### **Ericka Hanson, JD**

Erika Hanson is a Clinical Instructor at the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, where she works with partners and students to advance innovative health care models. Erika primarily focuses on legal and policy implementation matters concerning health

care financing and delivery of services that address the social determinants of health, reproductive justice, and the design of cash payment as treatment pilots for seriously ill patients and their families. Prior to joining Harvard, Erika was a Staff Attorney at The Legal Aid Society in New York City where she represented clients, conducted class action litigation, and led policy advocacy on a wide range of health law issues, and she was a Georgetown Women's Law & Public Policy Fellow and a Reproductive Rights & Health Legal Fellow at the National Women's Law Center in Washington, D.C. She is a licensed member of the New York State bar.



### **Beth Harp, DO**

Dr. Beth Harp, is Executive Medical Director for Cherokee Nation Health Services, the largest tribally operated healthcare system in the United States. A primary care physician by training, she provides executive leadership for a comprehensive healthcare

network that includes multiple outpatient clinics and a certified stroke center, serving Cherokee Nation citizens and surrounding communities.

In her role, Dr. Harp oversees clinical operations, quality initiatives, and strategic efforts to improve access to high-quality, patient-centered care across the health system. She is committed to advancing rural and tribal healthcare while promoting innovative approaches to population health and community wellness. In addition to her executive responsibilities, Dr. Harp remains actively engaged in service and leadership initiatives that support the health and well-being of her community.



### **Ariana Harwood, DO**

Dr. Ariana J. Harwood is a Family Medicine resident at Oklahoma State University's Lawton Family and Lifestyle Medicine Residency, where she serves as Lifestyle Medicine Chief and Student Liaison (2025–2026). She earned her Doctor of

Osteopathic Medicine from Campbell University School of Osteopathic Medicine in 2023 and completed her PGY-1 training at Kettering Health before continuing her residency in Lawton, Oklahoma. Dr. Harwood is board eligible in Family Medicine (2026) and board certified in Lifestyle Medicine through the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. Her

clinical interests include preventive care and lifestyle-based interventions in rural populations. She was recognized as a Distinguished Clinical Scholar in Family Medicine and has contributed to research in peripheral artery disease, with a peer-reviewed publication in the Open Journal of Internal Medicine.



### **Deana Hildebrand, PhD, RD, LD**

Dr. Deana Hildebrand is Professor and Interim Department Head in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at Oklahoma State University. She earned her doctoral degree from Oklahoma State University and is a Registered Dietitian licensed in Oklahoma.

She also holds a Cooperative Extension appointment and serves as state lead for the Community Health Extension Program.

Dr. Hildebrand's teaching and applied research focus on the intersection of social determinants of health, obesity prevention, and food security, with emphasis on policy, systems, and environmental strategies. Her work has been supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust. Her work is published in peer-reviewed journals and she has presented at numerous professional conferences.

She is a member of the American Society for Nutrition and the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior and has contributed to national committees and task forces supporting Extension's Framework for Health and Well-being.



### **Fahad Khan, DHCA, MPH**

Dr. Fahad Khan, is Senior Director of Population Health Strategy and Health Equity for Oklahoma Complete Health, where he leads initiatives to improve health outcomes, reduce disparities, and strengthen community partnerships across

Oklahoma. He previously served as Director of Community Analysis and Linkages for the Oklahoma State Department of Health and has more than two decades of experience in public health leadership, epidemiology, program evaluation, and strategic planning.

Dr. Khan earned a Doctor of Health Care Administration from Oklahoma State University, a Master of Public Health with concentrations in Health Administration and Policy and Epidemiology from the University of Oklahoma, and a Bachelor of Dental Surgery from Karachi University. He is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the University of Oklahoma Hudson College of Public Health. His honors include the Neil Hann Leadership Award, the Oklahoma

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State Department of Health Community Service Award, and the Oklahoma Public Health Association Exceptional Merit Award. Dr. Khan has authored publications on tobacco prevention, healthy homes, and childhood lead exposure, including a 2024 article in \*Frontiers in Public Health\*.



### Lauran Larson, MPS

Lauran Larson serves as Senior Manager of Food and Health at Hunger Free Oklahoma, where she leads statewide initiatives integrating nutrition and healthcare systems, including oversight of a \$1 million USDA WIC Innovation Grant. She is concurrently a Lead Teaching Assistant at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a Bloomberg Fellow pursuing a Doctor of Public Health in Food Systems for Health. Larson earned a Master of Prevention Science and a Bachelor of Arts with distinction in Sociology and Psychology from the University of Oklahoma. Her work focuses on nutrition security, obesity prevention, and cross-sector coalition building. She has received numerous honors, including the de Beaumont Foundation's 40 Under 40 Public Health Award and the Bloomberg Fellowship. Her recent scholarly contributions include national presentations on nutrition equity and state-level obesity prevention strategies.



### Edward Legako, MD

Dr. Edward Legako was raised in Fletcher, Oklahoma, as one of seven children. He attended Cameron University where he studied chemistry, initially planning to pursue doctoral education. Encouraged by a local physician, he chose medical school at the University of Oklahoma, earning his M.D. degree in 1978. Following medical school, Dr. Legako completed a pediatric residency, a natural fit given his passion for children. He married Leann Parish, a neonatal nurse, together they settled in Lawton, Okla., where he practiced general pediatrics for 40 years at Great Plains Pediatrics. In addition to general pediatrics, Dr. Legako and his wife collaborated with the University on perinatal initiatives for regional hospitals that delivered babies in southwest Oklahoma. They helped develop a lactation program for Comanche Co. Hospital and played a key role in establishing the first Level II neonatal intensive care unit outside of a metropolitan area in partnership with OU. He also contributed to community health through his work with Fit Kids of Southwest Okla., addressing childhood obesity. Legako served as President of the Okla. Chapter of the American Academy Of Pediatrics, where he worked to develop a practical toolkit for physicians to diagnose and treat childhood obesity. Beyond medicine, he has been deeply involved in community health, founding the Lawton Farmers Market and later expanding it

into a year-round market with a permanent facility. Today, he continues his involvement at Memorial Health Systems of Southwest Oklahoma, serving on the Board of Trustees. He serves as President of the Lawton Farmers Market. An avid vegetable grower, he remains active in both his profession and his community. He and his wife have 3 daughters and continue to reside in Lawton, Oklahoma.



### Cassie Mitchell, PhD, RDN

Dr. Cassie M. Mitchell is Assistant Professor of Pediatrics in the Section of Pediatric Diabetes and Endocrinology at the University of Oklahoma Children's Hospital and the TSET Health Promotion Research Center. She serves as Director of Nutrition Research for the Harold Hamm Diabetes Center, is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN), and is a member of both the Stephenson Cancer Center and Harold Hamm Diabetes Center at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

With more than a decade of training in nutrition, exercise physiology, and health promotion, Dr. Mitchell's research focuses on maternal and child health, including pregnancy, postpartum, and infancy. She completed two postdoctoral research fellowships and secured competitive funding from the Harold Hamm Diabetes Center, the American Diabetes Association, and the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Mitchell is also dedicated to mentoring underrepresented minorities and is a proud member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and a first-generation college graduate.



### Doug Nolan, DO

Dr. Doug Nolan serves as the Associate Dean of Tribal Health Affairs at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at the Cherokee Nation. A board-certified family physician, he has dedicated his career to advancing rural and tribal healthcare. He completed his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, followed by an internship at Tulsa Regional Medical Center and a residency in Family Medicine at Oklahoma State University. Dr. Nolan has held numerous leadership roles, including Program Director for the Cherokee Nation Family Medicine Residency and Medical Director for Cherokee Nation Health Services. Recognized for his contributions to healthcare, he has received accolades such as the Cherokee Nation Lifetime Achievement Award and the Rural Health Association of Oklahoma's Rural Physician of the Year. His recent publications in the Journal of Osteopathic Medicine focus on public health trends and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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### Breanna Russell, MA

Breanna L. Russell, MA, is Quality Manager for the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA), where she leads statewide quality initiatives focused on chronic disease prevention and management, including tobacco cessation, diabetes prevention, and

lung cancer screening. She provides strategic leadership, technical assistance, and program oversight to internal teams, managed care entities, and healthcare providers across Oklahoma. Ms. Russell previously served as Manager and Program Coordinator for OHCA's SoonerQuit Program, where she advanced tobacco cessation initiatives and strengthened provider engagement statewide. Prior to joining OHCA, she held leadership roles with the American Heart Association's CDC-funded ANCHOR Partnership Program, supporting national policy and community health initiatives. She earned her Master of Arts in Criminal Justice Management and Administration and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Central Oklahoma. Her expertise includes quality improvement, program management, health communications, and cross-sector collaboration.



### Marianna Wetherill, PhD

Marianna Wetherill, PhD, MPH, RDN/LD, DipACLM, is an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma (OU) Tulsa Schusterman Center, with joint appointments at the Hudson College of Public Health, School of Community

Medicine, and TSET Health Promotion Research Center. She is the director of the Oklahoma Food is Medicine Initiative (OK-FIMI), lead dietitian and associate director for the OU Culinary Medicine Program, faculty director for the OU Food First Pharmacy, and is a founding course director for three lifestyle medicine classes for medical and physician assistant student learners. Outside of the teaching kitchen, Dr. Wetherill collaborates with Hunger Free Oklahoma as a lead evaluator for the Double Up Oklahoma (DUO) program and lead advisor for its DUO for Health patient education initiative, as well as with the Sunflower Foundation as a lead evaluator and advisor for the Kansas Food Medicine Initiative (K-FIMI). Her NIH-funded research emphasizes community-based collaborations with food banks, social service organizations, medical clinics, and tribal communities to develop and implement "food is medicine" (FIM) interventions for diverse populations affected by trauma, food insecurity, and other nutrition inequities.



### Walter Whitewater

Chefs Lois Ellen Frank, Ph.D. and Walter Whitewater are Santa Fe, New Mexico based chefs at Red Mesa Cuisine, a catering company specializing in Indigenous Cuisine and Cultural Education. Their work focuses on the revitalization of ancestral

Native American cuisine with a modern twist using locally and Native American sourced ingredients. Together, they have worked with communities in the Southwest for many years. This work culminated in the James Beard Award winning cookbook; Foods of the Southwest Indian Nations published by Ten Speed Press. Their newest cookbook, Seed to Plate, Soil to Sky was released by Hachette Book Group and is receiving accolades for being one of the top 100 plant-based books of all time and won two International Association of Culinary Professionals awards (IACP) in 2024. Dr. Frank was the recipient of the Local Hero Olla Award, which recognizes an exceptional individual for the work they do to create healthy, innovative, vibrant, and resilient local sustainable food systems in New Mexico. Chef Whitewater, who is from the Navajo Nation, was one of the first Native American chefs to cook at the James Beard House in New York City and the recipient of the James Lewis Award from BCA Global for his work as a native chef. Together as part of the U.S. State Department and Consulate General's Culinary Diplomacy Program they traveled to Ukraine (2013), the United Kingdom (2105) and Russia (2016) to teach about the history of Native American foodways, work with food as a form of diplomacy to create dialogue and educate people on the Native American food contribution shared with the world and how these native foods have influenced many of the foods we now eat every day. They also traveled to Guam (2011) to work with the Humanities Guahan on the revitalization of traditional foods and foodways in Guam. Dr. Chef Frank and Chef Whitewater work with the Physician's Committee (PCRM) on a program entitled The Power to Heal Diabetes: Food for Life in Indian Country [www.nativepowerplate.org](http://www.nativepowerplate.org) and Food as Medicine that uses the Ancestral Native American diet for health and wellness in Native Communities throughout the United States and they teach a Native American cooking class at the Santa Fe School of Cooking. They both appeared in the new PBS documentary entitled Eating History: A Taste of New Mexico 2025 a documentary made by the Museum of New Mexico Foundation (MNMF) in collaboration with Docufilms.