



2026  
**ALABAMA  
RURAL HEALTH  
CONFERENCE**

March 18 – 20, 2026

Hoover, AL

ALABAMA OFFICE OF  
**PRIMARY CARE  
RURAL HEALTH**



# AGENDA MAIN CONFERENCE

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18TH

2:30 PM

**QPR Training** - 2 CEUs

4:30 PM

**Telehealth Hands-On Training**

5:30 PM

**Adjourn Day 1**



## THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH

8:00 AM

**Breakfast / Vendor Networking / Conference Check-In**

9:00 AM

**Maternal Health Resources and Chronic Disease Prevention** - 1.0 CEUs  
Annie Jones, LMSW; Adrian Collier

10:00 AM

**Crafting Solutions and Community Building for Maternal Care** - 1.0 CEUs  
Holly Horan, PhD; Janise Norman RN, IBCLC; Jamilah Channel;  
Ashley Steiner, MD; Tamela Hughes, LPC; Andrea Hayes, LMSW

11:00 AM

**Aligning Community Resources with the Needs of Families: AL-MOMS** - 1.0 CEUs  
Elizabeth Muñoz, DNP, CNM, FACNM; Candace Knight, RN, BSN, PhD

Noon

**Lunch / Annual Business Meeting**

12:45 PM

**Panel Discussion: Navigating the Rural Emergency Hospital Model: Revenue Sustainability and Community-Centered Care**  
Dr. Irfan Asif, MD; Dr. Bill Curry, MD; and Dewayne Bailey, MBA

1:30 PM

**Break / Vendor Discovery**

2:15 PM

**Breakout Sessions**

**Breakout 1** - 1.0 CEUs

**Learn the Walk Before You Walk Beside Them: Using a Poverty Simulation to Prepare Medical Students for Rural Clinical Rotations**  
Andrea Gathercole, MS

**Breakout 2** – 1.0 CEUs

**Whose Problem Is It? Equipping Rural Alabama for Suicide Prevention**

Pam Williams, LMSW

**3:00 PM**

**Break**

**3:15 PM**

**Breakout Sessions**

**Breakout 3**

**Elevating Revenue Cycle Performance: How Leadership Alignment Drives Cash Collections**

Amy Graham, MBA, CRHCP

**Breakout 4** – 1.0 CEUs

**S.E.C.U.R.E. – Safe Emergency Control Understanding and Redirecting the Elderly in Rural Hospital Settings**

Heidi Smith

**4:00 PM**

**Break**

**4:15 PM**

**From Documentation to Intelligence: Practical Use Cases for Ambient AI in Healthcare** – 1.0 CEUs

Derrick Helms

**5:00 PM**

**Adjourn Day 2**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 20TH**

**7:15 AM**

**Breakfast / Check-In**

**8:30 AM**

**Water Fluoridation: Value Beyond Teeth** – 1.0 CEUs

Stephen C. Mitchell, DMD, MS

**9:30 AM**

**Healthcare Outlook for Alabama in 2026** – 1.0 CEUs

Scott Harris, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA

**10:15 AM**

**Networking Break**

**10:45 AM**

**Healthcare Panel Discussion** – 1.0 CEUs

Emily Marsal; Danne Howard; Mary Finch, JD, MBA, CHC; moderated by Dave White

**Student Poster Awards**

**Noon**

**Adjourn Day 3**

# AGENDA AHEC SPONSORED STUDENT TRACK

## THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH

- 8:00 AM** Sign in / Registration / Breakfast
- 9:00 AM** Welcome / Speaker Introduction
- 9:30 AM** Telehealth Session  
Lloyd Sirmons
- 10:15 AM** Break
- 10:30 AM** Nutrition & Rural, Healthy/SNAP Programs
- 11:30 AM** Panel Discussion
- Noon** Students participate in ARHA Conference sessions

## FRIDAY, MARCH 20TH

- 7:15 AM** Breakfast / Check-In
- 8:30 AM** Water Fluoridation: Value Beyond Teeth - 1.0 CEUs  
Stephen C. Mitchell, DMD, MS
- 9:30 AM** Healthcare Outlook for Alabama in 2026 - 1.0 CEUs  
Scott Harris, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA
- 10:15 AM** Networking Break
- 10:45 AM** Healthcare Panel Discussion - 1.0 CEUs  
Emily Marsal; Danne Howard; Mary Finch, JD, MBA, CHC; moderated by Dave White
- Student Poster Awards**
- Noon** Adjourn Day 3

## CEU INFORMATION

The Alabama Statewide Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Program works to strengthen the healthcare workforce across Alabama by supporting students and professionals in rural and underserved communities. Through education, training, and community engagement, AHEC helps connect future health professionals with meaningful experiences that prepare them for service in high-need areas. We are proud to support the Annual Alabama Rural Health Conference and will be awarding Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to eligible participants as part of our commitment to advancing rural health initiatives and professional development. AL Statewide AHEC Program is an approved provider of continuing education hours for nurses by the Alabama Board of Nursing (Provider ABNP1584, Expiration Date 6/14/2028). The program has awarded the session(s) below the following contact hours for the Alabama Rural Health Association Conference, March 18–20, 2026. Please note that ABN-approved CEUs can also be applied toward continuing education requirements for social workers, in accordance with Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners.



# SPEAKERS



## **Adrian Collier**

Adrian Collier is a graduate of Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (AAMU) with a B.S. in Biology and a minor in Chemistry. She began her career teaching 7th and 8th grade science in the Wilcox County Public School System before earning a Master of Education in Secondary Education from Grand Canyon University, graduating in the top 1% of her class. She now serves as Senior Program Manager at West Central Alabama AHEC and leads the AlaR.I.S.E Maternal Care Coordination Project, working to improve access to maternal care across several Alabama counties.

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## **Annie Jones, LMSW**

Annie Jones, LMSW serves as Population Health Coordinator for the West Central Alabama Area Health Education Center (WCAAHEC). In this role, she supports community-based initiatives aimed at improving health outcomes and addressing social determinants of health across rural West Alabama. Her work includes coordinating population health programs and outreach efforts focused on chronic disease prevention, including initiatives that address diabetes and heart disease in underserved communities. As a licensed master social worker, Jones brings a community-centered perspective to advancing health equity and strengthening connections between healthcare resources and the populations they serve.

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## **Holly Horan, PhD**

Dr. Holly Horan is a medical anthropologist, emerging implementation scientist, and a birth and postpartum doula of 13 years. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Division of Global and Rural Women's Health in the Department of OB/GYN at the University of Alabama's Heersink School of Medicine. Dr. Horan's research focuses on perinatal stress and mental health, trauma-informed support, doula care, collaborative perinatal care, and maternity care deserts in the US and Puerto Rico. She is also adjunct faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama, the Co-Director of the Collaborative Perinatal Care Laboratory, and the President of the Board of Directors for the Birthwell Community Doula Project. Holly is currently in part-time doula practice, providing volunteer services for Medicaid-eligible families in West-Central Alabama.

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## **Janise Norman RN, IBCLC**

Janise Norman lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and is the Region II Perinatal Coordinator. Ms. Norman is a registered nurse and a retired International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). She served at the bedside for 20 years before joining the Alabama Department of Public Health Perinatal Services and has over 29 years of nursing experience with the DCH Health System. Ms. Norman served as a the Region II Perinatal Abstractor for six years prior to becoming the Region II Perinatal Coordinator. When she is not serving the Region II perinatal community, this University of Alabama graduate focuses on spending precious time with her family, especially her granddaughter, Sadie.

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## **Jamilah Channel**

Jamilah Channel is passionate about maternal health and believes that no one should have to give birth alone. She is a proud graduate of Bethune Cookman University where she studied psychology and child development. She is a certified Birth and Postpartum Doula, lactation advocate, and peer support specialist. She is the Chief of Operations for Diamonds for Doulas- a non-profit that supports underserved families in West-Central Alabama and a maternal health researcher at the University of Alabama for the West Alabama Cardiovascular Health program. Jamilah is a student midwife studying at Commonsense Childbirth School of Midwifery and the founder of Na'ima's Love, her personal doula business where she provides care for expecting families.



## **Ashley Steiner, MD**

Dr. Ashley Steiner is an assistant professor at the University of Alabama's College of Community Health Sciences and a family medicine obstetrician in Demopolis, Ala. She helped reopen Whitfield Regional Hospital's labor and delivery unit and focuses on improving rural maternal health, including co-leading a federal grant to train providers in rural Alabama. A native of Cape Breton Island, Steiner earned her medical degree from Saba University and completed her residency and fellowship at the University of Alabama. She also served seven years in the Canadian Armed Forces.

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## **Tamela Hughes, LPC**

Tamela Hughes, LPC, is a therapist, program developer, and founder committed to reshaping maternal mental health care. She serves as Director of Mental Health and Program Innovation at West Alabama Women's Center, where she leads integrated behavioral health services and develops programs that support birthing people and families. Through Courage To Thrive Consulting, she partners with organizations to strengthen culture, emotional wellness, and workforce resilience. Her work centers identity, equity, and sustainable systems of care, helping individuals and institutions move from survival to stability and from stigma to empowered healing.

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## **Andrea Hayes, LMSW**

Andrea Hayes, LMSW, is the Projects and Grants Manager at Tuscaloosa Latino Coalition, where she is dedicated to strengthening community access to care. Her work focuses on connecting individuals and families to services while identifying and addressing gaps within existing systems. In her therapeutic practice, Andrea provides culturally competent care grounded in a humanistic, person-centered approach. She is passionate about equity, advocacy, and partnering with communities to develop solutions that promote sustainable, meaningful change.

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## **Elizabeth Muñoz, DNP, CNM, FACNM**

Dr. Elizabeth Muñoz, DNP, CNM, FACNM, is Director of Clinical Education in the Nurse-Midwifery Pathway and an assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing. She is a Fellow of the American College of Nurse-Midwives and practices per diem in Urbana, Illinois, with Carle Midwifery Services. Muñoz earned both her master's and Doctor of Nursing Practice degrees from Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and is committed to improving reproductive health outcomes, reducing bias in maternity care, and expanding midwifery practice, particularly in underserved communities.

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## **Candace Knight, PhD, RN, BSN, FAAN**

Dr. Candace Knight, PhD, RN, BSN, FAAN, is an Associate Professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing and Director of the Nurse-Family Partnership of Central Alabama, a nurse home-visiting program supporting first-time mothers and infants. She teaches maternal-child health nursing and childbirth education, leads community-based efforts to improve maternal and infant outcomes, and mentors the next generation of nurses and nurse leaders. Knight's work has been recognized for excellence in teaching and community impact, reflecting her long experience as a labor and delivery nurse and educator.



## **Irfan Asif, MD**

Dr. Irfan Asif, MD, is Chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine and Associate Dean for Primary Care and Rural Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Heersink School of Medicine. He is a board-certified family medicine and sports medicine physician with national leadership roles in sports and exercise medicine, including serving as 2nd Vice President of the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine. His research focuses on sports cardiology, physical activity as medicine, and health equity, and he serves as senior editor for the British Journal of Sports Medicine and associate editor for Sports Health. Dr. Asif earned his medical degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and completed his family medicine residency and sports medicine fellowship at the University of Washington.

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## **Billy Curry, MD**

Dr. William A. Curry, MD, is a highly respected internal medicine physician and professor emeritus of medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He has devoted much of his career to expanding rural healthcare access and medical education in Alabama, serving for over two decades as Associate Dean for Primary Care and Rural Health at the UAB School of Medicine and working directly in rural practice earlier in his career. Dr. Curry earned his medical degree from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and completed his internal medicine residency at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. He has also held leadership roles with the Medical Association of the State of Alabama and the American College of Physicians. He was recently recognized as Alabama's "Community Star" for his lifelong commitment to rural healthcare and teaching future healthcare professionals.

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## **Dewayne Bailey**

Dewayne Bailey is the Director of the Alabama Rural Health Collaborative at UAB Health System, a nonprofit supporting rural and public hospitals across the state. He focuses on expanding access to care in rural communities through clinical training, simulation resources, and operational support for local hospitals. Previously, Bailey held roles at UAB Callahan Eye Hospital & Clinics and within the Alabama chapter of the National Association of Health Services Executives. A Birmingham native, he earned a bachelor's in biology and an MBA from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is active in mentorship and community outreach for emerging healthcare leaders.

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## **Andrea Gathercole, MS**

Andrea Gathercole, M.S., is a medical student at the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine with a focus on Obstetrics & Gynecology. She holds a master's degree and brings a strong background in maternal health and patient advocacy to her training. Gathercole is passionate about supporting underserved communities and advancing women's health through both clinical care and research.

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## **Pam Williams, LMSW**

Pam Williams, LMSW is a Licensed Master Social Worker serving with VitAL Alabama, a statewide initiative focused on improving mental health and addiction care in Alabama. She is involved in projects that support behavioral health education, training, and resources for providers and communities across the state. Williams brings professional expertise in social work and contributes to statewide efforts that address stigma, prevention, and access to mental health services.



## **Amy Graham, MBA, CRHCP**

Amy Graham, MBA, CRHCP, is a healthcare executive and principal with Stroudwater Associates, where she provides strategic direction in finance and revenue cycle management for hospitals, rural health clinics, pharmacies, and laboratories. With more than 20 years of experience, her expertise includes accounting consolidations, budgeting and forecasting, revenue cycle optimization, and strategic financial analysis to support organizational goals across diverse healthcare settings. Prior to joining Stroudwater, she served as Senior Vice President of Revenue Cycle Management at PathGroup and held leadership roles in global business services at Walmart's Health and Wellness division.

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## **Heidi Smith**

Heidi Lynn Smith is the Director of Marketing and Business Development for Ivy Creek Healthcare, based in Wetumpka, Alabama, where she supports community and rural hospital growth. She has extensive experience in healthcare outreach and service line development, previously serving as an outreach coordinator at L.V. Stabler Memorial Hospital and working with rural hospitals across the Southeast on census growth, service expansion, and employee retention. Smith completed undergraduate studies at the University of Southern Mississippi and graduate studies at Auburn University at Montgomery.

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## **Derrick Helms**

Derrick Helms is Managing Partner at Sparkhound in Birmingham, Alabama, where he leverages over 20 years of experience in business strategy, AI, and digital transformation to drive revenue growth and client success. A U.S. Army veteran, he is skilled in business automation, cloud modernization, and process improvement, bridging technical solutions with organizational goals. Helms is also active in mentorship and community outreach, helping organizations implement innovative, results-driven strategies.

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## **Stephen C. Mitchell, DMD, MS**

Dr. Stephen C. Mitchell, DMD, M.S. is a board-certified pediatric dentist and Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatric Dentistry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Dentistry. He serves as Director of the UAB Civitan Sparks Dental Clinic and Director of Predoctoral Pediatric Dentistry, where he trains future dentists and expands clinical care for underserved populations. Dr. Mitchell earned his dental degree, pediatric dentistry certificate, and Master of Science in Oral Biology from UAB, and his work focuses on improving access to pediatric dental care, especially for individuals with special health needs, as well as advancing community-based oral health education and policy in Alabama.

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## **Scott Harris, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA**

Dr. Scott C. Harris, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA is the State Health Officer for Alabama, leading statewide public health initiatives including pandemic response, infant mortality reduction, and opioid mitigation. He trained in internal medicine and infectious diseases at UAB, holds a Master of Public Health, and is board-certified in both specialties. Dr. Harris is a fellow of the American College of Physicians and the Infectious Disease Society of America.



## Emily Marsal

Emily Marsal is the Executive Director of the Alabama State Health Planning & Development Agency (SHPDA), where she leads strategic health planning and development efforts for the state. In her role, Marsal works with health leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to advance health planning initiatives, including Alabama's rural health care policy and funding strategies. She has been featured presenting state health planning updates at major healthcare summits focused on strengthening rural health care systems in Alabama.

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## Danne Howard

Danne Howard is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Alabama Hospital Association, the statewide organization that advocates for hospitals and healthcare systems. She has nearly three decades of experience with AlaHA, previously serving as Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, where she led policy advocacy, legislative relations, operations, and emergency preparedness on behalf of Alabama's hospitals. A native of central Alabama, Howard began her career in clinical medicine before transitioning into healthcare policy and leadership, and she is recognized as a respected voice for hospitals at both state and national levels.

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## Mary Finch, JD, MBA, CHC

Mary Hayes Finch is the President and CEO of the Alabama Primary Health Care Association, where she provides leadership and strategic vision for advancing community health center performance and expanding access to quality primary care across Alabama. Before joining the association in 2007, she served as a Deputy Attorney General for Alabama and Chief of Staff for the Alabama Medicaid Agency, where she led Medicaid policy and statewide health initiatives. Finch holds a B.S. in Organizational Development from Troy University, an MBA from Auburn University, and a Juris Doctorate from the Thomas Goode Jones School of Law.

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## David White

David White serves as Senior Policy Advisor in Governor Kay Ivey's administration, providing strategic guidance on statewide policy initiatives. In June 2022, Governor Ivey appointed him to the Statewide Trauma System Funding Committee, reflecting his involvement in enhancing Alabama's healthcare infrastructure.

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## Lloyd Sirmons

Lloyd Sirmons is the Director of the Southeastern Telehealth Resource Center, part of the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In this role, he leads efforts to advance telehealth implementation and support for rural and underserved communities across Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Sirmons has a strong background in IT and telehealth innovation, having worked in systems analysis and telehealth project leadership before taking on his current role. He earned an Associate's degree in Computer Science from Columbus State University and a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Liberty University.

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