

UAMS News Bureau

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**UAMS Establishes Southern Public Health
and Criminal Justice Research Center**

LITTLE ROCK — A new center using evidence-based research to inform public health practice in criminal justice settings has been established by the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

The Southern Public Health and Criminal Justice Research Center (S-PAC) is directed by Nick Zaller, Ph.D., and will conduct, analyze and disseminate research in criminal justice settings by working with community members, organizations and policy makers to understand the challenges associated with criminal justice involvement and its impact on families and communities.

Zaller is a professor in the College of Public Health Department of Health Behavior and Health Education.

“We will specifically focus our efforts on the southern U.S., where mass incarceration is particularly severe,” said Zaller. “We hope to better understand the epidemic of mass incarceration within a local context so we can address the needs of those populations most severely impacted.”

Arkansas has the sixth highest incarceration rate in the country at 900 per 100,000 people. Further, Arkansas’ incarceration rate is considerably higher than that of the United States as well as many other countries.

The center has many projects underway, through multiple funding sources including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Arnold Ventures, the National Institute on Aging and the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

Projects include reducing probation revocations in Pulaski County, Arkansas; developing an Aging Research in Criminal Justice and Health (ARCH) network; treating substance use disorder in the criminal justice system through digital health; increasing use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis among high-risk jail detainees; and evaluating opportunities for diverting individuals with behavioral health needs away from incarceration.

“Our ultimate goal is to eradicate racial, economic and public health inequities related to criminal justice involvement,” said Zaller.

The center will maintain four core units – administrative, education and training, research and evaluation, and dissemination and policy.

Others involved in the center include:

- George Pro, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, will examine relationships between prison-based COVID-19 outbreaks and community spread, and study ways to utilize health data systems to improve health care among recently incarcerated individuals.
- Brooke Montgomery, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, will provide expertise on the role of criminal justice system involvement on homeless mothers.
- Nakita Lovelady, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow, will investigate health disparities and violence prevention among Black men in institutional and community settings.
- Meg Gorvine, Ph.D., postdoctoral fellow, will study stress, integrative health and resilience in criminal justice settings and among people reentering the community from incarceration.
- Heather Horton, M.A., will serve as research coordinator for the center.
- Mofan Gu, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Epidemiology, will provide expertise on adverse health outcomes using social and behavioral factors.
- Ruby Welch, community health coordinator for UAMS and founder of F.E.L.O.N. (Formerly Incarcerated Empowered Leaders Overcoming Negative Stigmas), works to educate detainees on various health risks and concerns.

For more information about the center, visit

<https://publichealth.uams.edu/departmentsandunits/centers/spac/>.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state’s Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — COPD, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,876 students, 898 medical residents and four dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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