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**UAMS Invests Ashley Acheson, Ph.D., in Wilbur D. Mills
Distinguished Chair in Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Prevention**

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) College of Medicine invested Ashley Acheson, Ph.D., professor and vice chair for research for the UAMS Department of Psychiatry, in the Wilbur D. Mills Distinguished Chair in Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Prevention during a Nov. 12 ceremony.

“This chair is especially meaningful to me because of my focus on prevention — improved prevention strategies are essential for combating alcohol and other drug addictions and to do that we need to better understand what puts people at risk for addictions,” said Acheson. “Understanding what biological pathways lead to increased vulnerability to alcohol and other drug problems are essential for not only better understanding risk but more importantly changing outcomes. If we know what is altered, we could treat it early before major problems develop. I hope my work can help make this a reality.”

Acheson is a behavioral neuroscientist who joined UAMS in October 2016.

“Endowed chairs are the highest honors of academic excellence that a university can bestow upon its faculty — the medallion that Dr. Acheson will receive represents the work that has been done but also the promise of the great work that will be done,” said Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, UAMS chancellor and CEO of UAMS Health. “Dr. Acheson, I congratulate you on this well-deserved distinction. You’ve served academic medicine, UAMS and the state of Arkansas well — we know that this endowment will allow you to continue your great work going forward.”

A distinguished chair is established with gifts of at least \$1.5 million, which are invested and the interest proceeds used to support the educational, research and clinical activities of the chair holder. Those named to a chair are among the most highly regarded scientists, physicians and professors in their fields.

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The Wilbur D. Mills Chair in Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Prevention was named in honor of Wilbur Daigh Mills, and was endowed by friends of Mills, corporations, foundations and other organizations who donated funds in his honor to supplement an initial grant by the State of Arkansas. Mills was one of the most influential congressmen of the 20th century, serving Arkansas' 2nd District and the nation from 1939 to 1977. He became a champion of early prevention and recognition of alcohol and drug abuse following his own successful battle with addiction.

Mills was born May 24, 1909, in Kensett, Arkansas, in White County. He attended public schools and later graduated from Hendrix College in Conway. He obtained his law degree from Harvard University. Mills was the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, the chief tax-writing committee of the House of Representatives, a post he held longer than any other person in American history. Mills played a large role in the creation of the Medicare and Medicaid programs and was the voice for the Tax Reform Act of 1969. He died May 2, 1992, in Searcy.

“Having been an endowed chair holder, I can confirm that such endowments have a profound impact on the faculty who hold them, and on their institutions — ultimately, citizens across our state benefit from the gifts that create endowments, and from the service of those who hold endowed chairs,” said Steven Webber, M.D., dean of the College of Medicine and UAMS executive vice chancellor. “It is truly an honor today to celebrate the efforts and the philanthropic spirit of those who have made this endowed chair possible — likewise it is a great pleasure to join with others as we pay tribute to our outstanding colleague who will be the next holder of this endowed chair, so again, many congratulations to you.”

Acheson attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for his undergraduate education, receiving a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in biology. He completed his doctoral studies at the University at Buffalo – The State University of New York (SUNY) where he earned his Ph.D. in behavioral neuroscience. Later, he completed his postdoctoral training at the University of Chicago and the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA), supported by T32 fellowships from the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute of Mental Health.

In 2007, he joined the faculty at the UTSCSA Department of Psychiatry, later becoming an associate professor. At UTSCSA, he completed a KL2 Research Career Development Scholar Program and developed a research program examining behavioral and neurobiological risk factors for alcohol and other drug addictions that was funded by over \$5 million in NIH grants.

Since joining UAMS, Acheson has been awarded over \$13 million in NIH grants. His ongoing research includes the Family Health Patterns Project, a long-running study aimed at identifying behavioral and biological factors underlying risk for addictions. He also is a principal investigator on the HEALthy Brain and Child Development (HBCD) Study, the largest ever study of child brain development. The HBCD Study will offer unprecedented opportunities to study how early life influences promote risk and

resilience for addictions and other psychopathology. He hopes that his work will lead to improved addiction prevention and early intervention strategies.

“Dr. Acheson’s research career aligns exactly with the intent of this chair — the overarching goal of Dr. Acheson's program of research is to identify those risk factors as well as protective factors that relate to the development of substance use disorders, and thereby to point to avenues for prevention,” said Laura B. Dunn, M.D., chair of the Department of Psychiatry and director of the Psychiatric Research Institute. “I've been privileged to come to know Dr. Acheson since I arrived here in 2022 — he brings a very astute mind as well as wit to every encounter, and I value and respect his insights. It is a great honor to be able to participate in this exciting event today to recognize him and his important work.”

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and eight 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, Institute for Digital Health & Innovation and the Institute for Community Health Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,485 students, 915 medical residents and fellows, and seven dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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