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Northwest Arkansas Health Summit Returns April 2
Inaugural Maternal Health Research Retreat Set for April 1

FAYETTEVILLE — The 2026 Northwest Arkansas Health Summit, hosted by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Institute for Community Health Innovation, will bring community leaders and pioneers in innovative health to Fayetteville on April 2.

This year’s summit will be held from 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 2, at the Fayetteville Town Center at 15 W. Mountain St, in Fayetteville.

The theme of this year’s summit is “Where Connection Takes Root,” and will feature numerous panels focused on collaboration to improve health in Arkansas. The summit will kick off with a session by keynote speaker Neel Shah, chief medical officer of Maven Clinic, the world’s largest digital clinic for women’s and family health, and a lecturer at Harvard Medical School. He oversees the design and delivery of Maven’s care model, serving 24 million people globally in all phases of life.

As a physician-scientist, Shah has written more than 100 articles and contributed to four books and was also a term advisor to the Office of Research on Women’s Health at the National Institutes of Health. Shah has been recognized with the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Humanitarian of the Year Award from the March of Dimes and serves on the boards of Neighborhood Villages and Diana Health.

“As a world-renowned leader in health care innovation, Dr. Shah brings invaluable insight and vision that could help drive change in communities across the state,” said Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., director of the UAMS Institute for Community Health Innovation. “We are proud to host him at this year’s summit as we collaborate to build a healthier future for all of Arkansas.”

The summit will also include sessions on Food Is Medicine, an innovative approach in which nutrition is integrated directly into clinical care, maternal mental health, strengthened community-based health workforces, and more.

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There will also be two panel sessions. The first will discuss rural health transformation in Arkansas, featuring Department of Finance Secretary Jim Hudson, State Medicaid Director and Department of Human Services Secretary Janet Mann, State Secretary of Health Renee Mallory, and Arkansas Surgeon General Kay Chandler. The panel will be moderated by Arkansas Rural Health Partnership President Mellie Boagni.

The second, about health care policy in Arkansas, will include Arkansas Sen. Missy Irvin and state representatives Deann Vaught, Lee Johnson, Mary Bentley, and Aaron Pilkington. The panel will be moderated by Stefanie Pawluk of the Northwest Arkansas Council's Health Care Transformation Division.

“Each year, the Northwest Arkansas Health Summit brings together leaders, community members, lawmakers, and partners from across the state around a shared purpose: creating a better state of health for all Arkansans,” McElfish said. “This year, we’ll focus on closing critical gaps in Arkansas’ health care system while learning from one another about the innovative strategies and solutions that can move our state forward, from nutrition-based interventions to strengthening workforces within rural communities to address serious access barriers.”

To register for the summit, visit nwahealthsummit.com. The event is free to attend, but space is limited. Attendees are encouraged to register early.

Inaugural MaRCH Research Retreat

On Wednesday, April 1, the summit will be preceded by a Maternal and Reproductive Community Health (MaRCH) Research Retreat, also at the town center. Hosted by UAMS’ MaRCH Center, this half-day retreat will convene leading national experts in maternal, perinatal, and reproductive health research to foster collaboration, share emerging science, and advance community-engaged research.

The retreat will bring together investigators, clinicians, and community partners for focused discussion, knowledge exchange, and networking centered on advancing community-engaged approaches to maternal and reproductive health research.

“We are committed to building a collaborative research network dedicated to addressing Arkansas’ maternal health crisis,” McElfish said. “Through the MaRCH Center, we are bringing together the state’s brightest minds to design bold, practical solutions that improve outcomes for mothers statewide.”

Awarded by the National Institutes of Health’s Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE), UAMS’ Maternal and Reproductive Community Health Center (MaRCH) supports researchers in developing innovative, practical solutions to improve maternal health across Arkansas. The center’s work focuses on building strong research programs, expanding access to effective interventions, and supporting early-stage investigators as they develop the skills and experience needed for their research careers.

The public is invited to join the retreat's open session from 8 a.m.-1:30 p.m. on April 1. To register for the retreat, click here or visit communityhealth.uams.edu/march.

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 3,553 students and 1,015 medical residents and fellows. It is the state's largest public employer with about 12,000 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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