

UAMS News Bureau

Office of Communications & Marketing
4301 West Markham # 890
Little Rock, AR 72205-7199

uamshealth.com/news



**News Release
May 27, 2026**

Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Yavonda Chase, 501-686-8994
Wireless phone: 501-416-0354
yavonda@uams.edu

**UAMS, Community Partners Present Summit
to Address Youth Substance Use, Prevention Strategies**

LITTLE ROCK — With 60% of adolescents in substance-use treatment also meeting the criteria for a co-occurring mental illness, Arkansas health providers are being called together to tackle the crisis head on.

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, in partnership with the Blue & You Foundation for Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Department of Human Services, and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, will host “Bridges to Breakthroughs” on June 25–26 at UALR’s Donaghey Student Center.

The free, two-day summit is designed for physicians, nurses, counselors, social workers, school-based health providers, and other professionals working with youth and adolescents. Attendees will gain evidence-based strategies for preventing substance use and learn integrated treatment approaches for young people facing co-occurring mental health disorders.

“Every child deserves a bridge to hope, healing and a healthier future. ‘Bridges to Breakthroughs’ represents our commitment to connecting mental health, substance use prevention, medical care, and community support in ways that help young people move from risk to resilience,” said Jason Williams, Psy.D, MS.Ed., director of the UAMS Department of Psychiatry’s Division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. “When we build stronger bridges between providers, families, schools and communities, we create new pathways for children to thrive.”

The event’s speakers include Sharon Levy, M.D., MPH, chief of the Division of Addiction Medicine at Boston Children's Hospital and a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, who will deliver a keynote speech on the impact of substance use on the adolescent brain. UAMS’ Srinivasa Gokarakonda, M.D., and Michael Mancino, M.D., will discuss screening methods for adolescents and prescription drug misuse, respectively.

UAMS, Community Partners Present Summit to Address Youth Substance Use,
Prevention Strategies

Page 2

Allison Orford, MSW, a Canada-based social worker who specializes in adolescent substance use, will speak on the PreVenture program, a personality-targeted prevention approach that identifies youth at elevated risk and provides cognitive-behavioral interventions tailored to specific personality profiles.

Renée Watson, M.A., LAC, a clinical therapist at UAMS, will offer a perspective on modern treatment of adolescent addiction. The first day will wrap up with a panel discussion led by Laura Dunn, M.D., chair of the UAMS Department of Psychiatry and director of the Psychiatric Research Institute.

The second day of the summit will focus on ethical issues involving treating young people with substance use disorders, with Carrie Ann Carr, M.A., of Hope Enrichment Center leading breakout sessions that focus on how to navigate complex clinical realities.

“Bridges to Breakthroughs” is being hosted by UAMS’ Six Bridges Clinic along with Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield’s Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Department of Human Services’ Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health and UALR’s MidSOUTH, the community service unit of the College of Business, Health and Human Services.

Attendees can receive continuing medical education (CME) credit for their participation in this activity. To register for the summit, go to www.midsouth.ualr.edu/wconnect/ace/CourseStatus.awp?&course=C26C001.

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](#).

Like us, we’re social:    