

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWSLETTER

Stay informed with exclusive insights into women's health, research, and advocacy



April 2026 Newsletter

IWH is soliciting [faculty scholar applications](#) for a new summer 2026 BIRCWH Scholar!

The VCU NIH-funded Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) program is looking to fund a new faculty scholar on an institutional K award focused on women's health and sex differences. The award provides BIRCWH scholars with 75% salary support (up to \$100,000), along with \$25,000 in research support, a structured mentoring team, extensive access to university and national BIRCWH resources, and individualized career development plans.

Applications are due at 5:00pm on April 7, 2026. Please contact Dr. Molly Hyer (Molly.Hyer@vcuhealth.org) with any questions.



Building Interdisciplinary
Research Careers in
Women's Health

Abstracts due April 10th! The 20th Annual VCU Women's Health Research Day will be held on **April 28th, 2026 from 1:00-4:30 PM** at the Larrick Student Center. The program, presented



by the VCU Institute for Women's Health, includes a plenary symposium entitled "Midlife Matters: Integrating Menopause Research, Innovation, and Impact", a poster session showcasing women's health research by VCU faculty and students, poster awards, and a reception. **Visit [our website](#) for more information. Click [here](#) to register. To [Submit an Abstract](#), click here.**

Abstract submissions are due by Friday, April 10th. For questions regarding abstract submissions, please contact Kellyn Moody (Kellyn.Moody@vcuhealth.org).



Registration is open! The Health of Women 2026 Conference, presented by the VCU Institute for Women's Health, will be held on **Friday, May 29, 2026**, at the Hilton Richmond Hotel & Spa – Short Pump. This is a national continuing education conference for clinicians (but anyone is welcome) covering many aspects of women's health, including reproductive health, cardiovascular health, bone health, mental health, breast health, and more. [Register here!](#)

Featured IWH Research Development Group (RDG) of the Month



The highlighted group of the month is our [Addiction and Women's Health Research Development Group!](#) This group is co-chaired by Dr. Dace Svikis, Deputy Director of the Institute for Women's Health, and Dr. Caitlin Martin, Associate Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. The group is a collaborative initiative focused on building a strong network that addresses the complexities of substance use disorders in women. The overall goal of



this group is to create a vibrant community that strengthens individual efforts and ultimately enhances the collective public health impact in the area of addiction. A few examples of ongoing projects from the Addiction and Women's Health RDG are included below.

- **Mary Peace McRae, PharmD, PhD**, Associate Professor in the Department of Pharmacotherapy and Outcome Science, investigates [opioid use and HIV](#). Her work on the blood-brain barrier has advanced the understanding of why opioids make many HIV medications less effective.
- **Sunny Kim, PhD, MS, MA**, Associate Professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, specializes in examining public health issues through social technology-based epidemiological methods. She was recently involved in studies assessing [the impact of AI-powered technologies](#) in cancer prevention and control and substance abuse.
- **Monica Swahn, PhD, MPH**, Dean of the School of Public Health leads a project focused on the high prevalence and co-occurrence of [mental health concerns and substance use](#) among young women living in the urban slums in Kampala, Uganda (study team pictured right).



If you are interested in learning more about the Addiction and Women's Health RDG or joining the group mailing list, please contact Kellyn Moody (Kellyn.Moody@vcuhealth.org).

News from IWH leadership and affiliate faculty

- **Tomika Ferguson, PhD**, Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Associate Dean of Student Affairs and **Cristina Stanciu, PhD**, Professor in English and Director of the Humanities Research Lab won the Academic and Administrative Leadership Award from the [Presidential Awards for Community Multicultural Enrichment \(PACME\)](#).
- **Jacqueline Britz, MD**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Population Health, and current BIRCWH Scholar, was featured in [VCU News](#) for her work on pioneering a “bright spot” approach to the opioid crisis.

Upcoming Events

- The ROSA SCORE Center Career Enhancement Core Seminar, “Barriers and Solutions to Women’s Health Research and Clinical Care” will be on Wednesday, April 8th from 12:00-1:00pm. Click [here](#) for registration.
- The Office of Research on Women’s Health and Uniformed Services University Military Women’s Health Research Program are hosting a webinar on April 9th from 3:00-4:00pm with featured presentations on “Bidirectional Associations of Musculoskeletal Injury and mild Traumatic Brain Injury in US Service Members,” and “Impact of Sex and Reproductive Aging on Maintaining Intact Memory and Risk for Alzheimer’s disease.” Click [here](#) to register.
- Our Director of Translational Research, **Gretchen Neigh, PhD, MBA**, will be one of the featured speakers at the TEDxVCU: Illuminate event on Saturday, April 11th. Dr. Neigh’s work focuses on how stress gets under the skin- shaping the brain, immune system, and lifelong health. Click [here](#) to register for the free event.
- Emory BIRCWH and SCORE are hosting the Women’s Health Research and Leadership Lecture Series titled, “Bridging Research and Reproductive Justice: Lessons from Collaborative Dissemination on Abortion” on Wednesday, April 15th from 12:00-1:00pm. Click [here](#) to register.
- The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at VCU, in partnership with The Sexual Health Exploration Project, will be hosting a virtual symposium April 17-19th. Registration is free and open to everyone. For more information, please visit the [symposium website](#), and contact Ethan Coston, PhD (bmcoston@vcu.edu) with any questions.
- The 34th Annual Women in Science, Dentistry, and Medicine (WISDM) Leadership Conference will be on April 24th from 11:30-5:00pm. Click [here](#) to register.

Research Study Recruitment Corner

Are you looking to recruit participants for active studies? Please fill out the [Research Study Recruitment Corner Form](#) if you are interested in having your study included in the newsletter.

- Deciphering the Cognitive and Neural Underpinnings of Risk-Taking in Eating Disorders (RISK-EAT)
 - Recruiting adolescents (ages 12-17) and young adult (ages 18-25) females with and without bulimia nervosa
 - Two study visits are required:

- Visit 1: (in person or virtual) will be a ~3 hour screening visit
 - Visit 2: (in person at VCU CARI center) will be a ~3-4 hour visit
 - Two-week follow-up of online surveys and games
 - Participants will be compensated \$75 per visit and additionally compensated for engagement in the follow-up period
 - Please contact Kelsey Hagan, PhD, LP (Kelsey.Hagan@vcuhealth.org) for more information.
- Reflex Evaluation After Concussive Trauma (REACT)
 - Recruiting adolescents (ages 13-19) for 2 groups:
 - 1) diagnosed with a concussion within the last 14 days
 - 2) no history of diagnosed concussion
 - The number of study visits (~90-120 minutes each) varies by group:
 - 1 study visit for healthy controls
 - 3 study visits across 12 months for the concussion group
 - Participants will be compensated for their participation
 - Please contact Jessie Oldham, PhD (Jessie.Oldham@vcuhealth.org) or Jackson Marra-Dotts (Jackson.MarraDotts@vcuhealth.org) for more information.
- Associations of Sex, Head Injury History, and Modifiable Lifestyle Factors with Subjective Measures of Brain Health
 - Recruiting adults (ages 18-59) with a history of at least one head injury
 - The most recent head injury must have occurred at least 6 months prior
 - Participants cannot have any restrictions for unsupervised exercise participation
 - Participation requires completion of up to 13 electronic surveys over one year
 - Each survey takes ~20-30 minutes to complete
 - Participants will be eligible to win 1 of 20 \$240 gift cards
 - Please contact Sam Walton, PhD, ATC (Samuel.Walton@vcuhealth.org) for more information.
- Sex Differences in Hip Muscle Adaptations and the Link to Future Injury Following Acute First-Time Lateral Ankle Sprains
 - Recruiting adolescent and young adult participants (ages 14-30) for 2 groups:
 - Ankle Sprain: First time lateral ankle sprain within 1 month of injury
 - Healthy Control: No history of ankle sprain or other injuries
 - Participation requires 1 in-person study visit lasting ~90 minutes
 - Ankle sprain participants will be asked to complete 2 additional remote surveys (~5 minutes) at 3- and 6-months following the visit
 - All participants will receive \$50 for in-person visits. Ankle sprain participants will receive an additional \$252 for each completed follow-up survey.
 - Please contact Alexandra DeJong Lempke, PhD, ATC (Alexandra.Lempke@vcuhealth.org) for more information.

IWH Training Survey

Please complete this [survey](#) to help us gather data on training and mentoring activities of IWH Affiliate Faculty. Contact Dr. Heather Jones (hjones7@vcu.edu) with any questions.

Follow our new social media pages!

The VCU Institute for Women's Health has a new social media presence on [LinkedIn](#), Instagram, and [Facebook](#). Connect with us to stay up to date on the latest IWH news!

Do you have exciting news to share? We want to hear from you! Please share any recent career developments (grants, publications, promotions, media stories) using the [Newsletter Submission Form](#). We will feature these highlights in the next IWH newsletter.

Help us celebrate excellence by nominating standout faculty or yourself to be the next **IWH Affiliate Faculty of the Month**. Use the [Newsletter Submission Form](#), and be sure to include 1-2 sentences highlighting their impact, achievements, or what makes their work stand out.