Progress and Plans for the Grand Challenges
An Impact Report at Year 5 of the 10-Year Initiative
Every day for more than a century, social workers have been on the front lines finding innovative ways to address our nation’s toughest social problems. In 2016, the American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare launched the Grand Challenges for Social Work to harness the ingenuity, expertise, dedication, and creativity of individuals and organizations within the field of social work and beyond to champion social progress powered by science.

This ambitious effort actually began several years earlier, with the creation of a strong, evidence-based foundation for the initiative. A founding Executive Committee—which included some of the nation’s leading scientists, educators, and policy experts—reached out across the profession and developed strategic partnerships with social work’s national organizations, interest groups, and academic entities. The committee then issued a broad call for ideas for large-scale challenges to tackle and ultimately distilled a list of more than 80 submitted concepts down to the 12 Grand Challenges for Social Work. Their criteria: that a Grand Challenge must be important, compelling to the broader public, and have a science base connected to interventions that could lead to meaningful and measurable change. These were announced at the 2016 annual Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) conference—“Grand Challenges for Social Work: Setting a Research Agenda for the Future”—in Washington, DC. Multidisciplinary networks were formed to support work on each of the Grand Challenges.

In 2020, as the nation and the world’s attention focused on racial injustice and ending systemic violence against and oppression of Black people and people of color, an additional Grand Challenge was announced: the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism. Although the initiative had understood racism as inextricably linked to each of the first 12 Grand Challenges, the establishment of the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism brought greater attention to promoting culturally-grounded, upstream interventions and prevention efforts designed to eradicate racist policies, bias, and discriminatory practices.
THE 13 GRAND CHALLENGES
ARE GROUPED UNDER THREE BROAD CATEGORIES:

**INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY WELL-BEING**
- Ensure healthy development for youth
- Close the health gap
- Build healthy relationships to end violence
- Advance long and productive lives

**STRONGER SOCIAL FABRIC**
- Eradicate social isolation
- End homelessness
- Create social responses to a changing environment
- Harness technology for social good

**JUST SOCIETY**
- Eliminate racism
- Promote smart decarceration
- Build financial capability and assets for all
- Reduce extreme economic inequality
- Achieve equal opportunity and justice
Building on the existing, robust bodies of research in each of the Grand Challenge areas is a critical component of the Grand Challenges for Social Work. Scholars from across the country have engaged in myriad research efforts and have published their findings in journals too numerous to list here. Some research highlights:

- From the Grand Challenge to Advance Long and Productive Lives, network co-lead Ernest Gonzales, PhD, is conducting a study of best practices for intergenerational programs. He was also invited to present his work to help shape a research agenda on work, aging, and health at the National Academies of Sciences funded by the National Institute on Aging. Nancy Morrow-Howell, PhD, network co-lead, is leading a research project to assess the effects of tutoring on older adults’ wellbeing.

- Related to the Grand Challenge to Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment, two studies provided insights and practical recommendations for the local communities of Flint, MI (Amy Krings, PhD, Dana Kornberg, PhD(c), and Shawna Lee, PhD) and North St. Louis, MO (Yonimo Kang, PhD, Vanessa D. Fabre, PhD, and Christine C. Ekenga, PhD, MPH). Also, Praveen Kumar, PhD, Assistant Professor at Boston College, is conducting intervention research on the use of solar lamps to improve study time for children, reduce air pollution, and provide access to electricity in rural India.

- Special issues have been developed on many of the Grand Challenge topics including social isolation, productive aging, smart decarceration, and mainstreaming gender.

- Rocío Calvo, PhD, co-lead of the Grand Challenge to Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice, received a grant from the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct a study on how older Latinx immigrants navigate community resources. The findings and implications of the study, “How Social Protection Policies and Institutions Contribute to Older Immigrants’ Wellbeing and Sense of Belonging in America” will be especially critical in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work Associate Professor Megan Moore, PhD, and a university team received more than $1M from the National Institute of Justice to study intimate partner violence among youth.

- The University of Maryland and the University of Washington have created competitive research awards for PhD students. One recipient of the University of Maryland award went on to receive the 2021 Society for Social Work and Research Outstanding Social Work Doctoral Dissertation Award.

- End Homelessness network co-lead Benjamin F. Henwood, PhD, and his colleagues at the University of Southern California have been awarded a large scale Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) grant on homelessness and COVID.

- Research from the Grand Challenge to Ensure Healthy Development for Youth and the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington School of Social Work evaluated elementary-school interventions that helped children form healthy attachments to family and school, which lead to positive relationships and responsible decision-making in adulthood.

- The study “Family Centered Treatment, Juvenile Justice, and the Grand Challenge of Smart Decarceration” by a team at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, found that Family Centered Treatment shows more favorable adult criminal justice outcomes than group care, making it a potentially effective community-based service to support smart decarceration for court-involved youth.

During the last five years, the GCSW has made significant progress as a whole and on the individual Grand Challenges, particularly in the areas of research, education, policy, and practice.
**EDUCATION**

The engagement of universities and colleges, as well as professional organizations, has been central to the success of the Grand Challenges for Social Work efforts to educate the next generation of social workers to develop evidence-based interventions and policy proposals. Organizations and schools of social work across the country are weaving the Grand Challenges into their programs in a number of significant ways, from curriculum enhancements to core programming. For example:

- An entire DSW program at the University of Southern California, a post-masters fellowship at Florida State University, among a dual degree program at Colorado State University School of Social Work and the Colorado School of Public Health—all have been organized around the Grand Challenges.
- New York University Silver School of Social Work conducted a NYU Silver Student Challenge, a student competition grounded in the principles of the Grand Challenges, reflecting the unique and powerful ways that social workers are positioned to address the Grand Challenges. Topics ranged from the development of programs to eradicating social isolation, to examining food insecurity and instability in a changing environment, to ending homelessness by taking an anti-racist stance in efforts toward eviction prevention.
- The University of Denver featured the Grand Challenges in their Science for Action series, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work held a Harness Technology for Social Good yearlong lecture series.
- Many of the Grand Challenges, including Ensure Healthy Development for Youth, Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality, Build Financial Capability and Assets for All, and Harness Technology for Social Good, have developed textbooks, education modules, and webinars to train students, practitioners, and the public.
- Faculty around the country—including Azusa Pacific University and Fresno State University—have incorporated aspects of the Grand Challenges into their curricula. The University of Southern California uses a course in problem-based learning to examine the Grand Challenges. New courses have been developed to address the Grand Challenges, including courses on Smart Decarceration at the University of Chicago and University of Maryland School of Social Work.
- Countless books, book chapters, journal articles, and other publications have been written by network members and leadership team members about individual Grand Challenges and the initiative as a whole.
- More than 60 departments and schools of social work have formed the Western Consortium for the Grand Challenges, to identify, spotlight, and implement initiatives such as teaching innovations, new practices in field education, learning networks for scholarly professionals, and fresh concepts of community service.
- The GCSW has shared access to a variety of educational events, ranging from our own webinar COVID-19: Learning from History about Disaster and Economic Inequality to The Art of Policy Practice: Navigating the Legislative Process, co-branded with Influencing Social Policy (ISP), a nonprofit organization for social work educators, students, and practitioners, and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).
- The GCSW has also co-sponsored several legislative briefings.
- Members of the Grand Challenge to Build Financial Capability and Assets for All are leading a statewide policy experiment testing universal child development accounts (CDA), and findings have informed design and implementation of CDA policies in several states.
- In advance of the 2020 election, the Grand Challenge to End Homelessness released a comprehensive policy brief to educate state and federal officials on the issue.
- Members of Grand Challenges networks have contributed to several reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM).

**POLICY**

Advances in the Grand Challenges have come not only from educating students, social work practitioners, and our interdisciplinary colleagues, but by working toward policy changes at the local, state, and national levels. There has been a variety of activity on the policy front over the last five years, including:

- The annual Social Work Day on the Hill brings together students and practitioners to Washington, DC, to discuss current social work-related policy issues and learn skills to become better advocates. The GCSW has also co-sponsored several legislative briefings.
- Members of the Grand Challenge to Ensure Healthy Development for Youth have participated in creating the Colorado Statewide Strategic Plan for Primary Prevention, and have worked to promote the infrastructure necessary to increase the use of tested and effective preventive interventions in Colorado, Utah, Massachusetts, and Delaware.
- Members of our networks have provided congressional testimony related to several of the Grand Challenges.

**COVID-19 AND THE GRAND CHALLENGES**

The coronavirus pandemic raging in the United States—and the world—reminds us that there has never been a time when the Grand Challenges’ commitment to “social progress powered by science” was truer. Similarly, the message of the Grand Challenges that “the social is fundamental” is clearly paramount as we address this crisis. As we engage in fighting the pandemic, we also hope to prevent “social distancing” from counteracting the importance of our profession’s commitment to social integration, social science, and social justice as we attempt to mend the fault lines in our society that this virus is cracking open. Visit the Grand Challenges for Social Work website for COVID-19 related resources we hope will help social workers and others during this time.
Hand-in-hand with education and policy work, involving social work practitioners in the Grand Challenges is imperative to achieving “social progress through science.” During the first five years of the GCSW, there have been a variety of innovative and far reaching efforts geared toward and involving the practice community. Notably:

• Skills webinars on policy and practice have been offered regularly to help social workers become more effective advocates. Topics have ranged from Stay Home? Housing Inequities, COVID-19, and Social Welfare Policy Responses to Making Change: Messaging Your Issue for Policy Audiences.
• Several of the Grand Challenges have been featured in podcasts conducted by social workers, including Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment and Smart Decarceration.
• A PhD candidate at the University of Utah College of Social Work developed a state-of-the-art virtual reality photography-based simulation tool to help social workers assess in-home risks and protective factors for child abuse.
• Harness Technology for Social Good led a webinar series on several ways technology has been incorporated into social work practice.
• Leaders of Grand Challenges networks have been instrumental in implementing programs and tools — such as Survivorkit, MyPlan, SWVirtualPal, and GenPRIDE Center — that help social work practitioners and the people with whom they work.
• The Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health has developed four training modules for students, practitioners, and the public on prevention practice, policy, and research.

The GCSW has also strengthened its organizational and leadership structure and sought to create a sustainable funding strategy. It has invested in bolstering communications across the initiative and advancing a wide range of academic and other opportunities to share knowledge and ideas.

Growing momentum and increasing participation in the initiative over its first four years led to a reorganization in October 2019. A new, more traditional structure now includes an interdisciplinary Leadership Board with external partners and a five-member Executive Committee. These changes have strengthened leadership’s ability to facilitate the work of the 13 Grand Challenges networks, address diversity issues, and better position the initiative to secure external support and funding.

Other organizational highlights over the first five years include:

• Developing a comprehensive statement to guide all of the work of the Grand Challenges

Adopted in February 2019, this includes a Vision, Mission, Domain, Guiding Principles, & Guidelines to Action.

• Creating sponsorship opportunities

Sponsorships fund further development of research, inter-university collaboration, and a wider public understanding of the broad aims and tools of social work. Funds also support infrastructure, including administration, the 13 Grand Challenge networks, webinars, website updates, coordination across networks, communications, and vital connections with other social work organizations and partners. There have been six Premier Sponsors and 30 Sustaining Sponsors, as well as several contributing and individual sponsors since 2017. (Contributing sponsorships are $1,000, Sustaining sponsorships are $2,500 per school/organization, and Premier sponsorships are $7,500 per school/organization.)

• An active social media presence with the Grand Challenges Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter account @GCSocialWork, hashtag #Up4theChallenge, and LinkedIn page.
• A lively and informative YouTube page featuring original videos and archived webinars; and
• Colorful and compelling graphics, from logos to infographics that illustrate the initiative or show how to get involved.

Additionally, the initiative created a themed calendar for 2020 focusing on one Grand Challenge each month, using social media to highlight work to advance the field and address some of society’s largest challenges. 2020 also saw the development of materials to orient students to the Grand Challenges, including a video and other resources designed to help social work and other students find ways to join in the work.

These are only some of the highlights of the Grand Challenges for Social Work’s first five years. The best is yet to come. Next, learn about the influential work being done by each of the 13 Grand Challenge networks.
The Grand Challenge to Ensure Healthy Development for Youth responds to the observation that behavioral health problems in childhood and adolescence often have lifelong repercussions on physical, emotional, and financial well-being. Led by the Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health (CPBH), this interdisciplinary group includes more than 150 researchers, educators, and practitioners.

Since 2015, the group has advanced Seven Action Steps articulated in Unleashing the Power of Prevention, a report published by the National Academy of Medicine. It has published, presented, and advocated both within the field of social work, where it has developed new educational resources, and outside, working with local, state, and federal policymakers.

The CPBH has concentrated its efforts in three main areas:

- **Increasing** community and state infrastructure for delivering preventive interventions for behavioral health problems in children and youth
- **Scaling-up** tested and effective family-focused interventions in pediatric and health care settings
- **Preparing** the social work workforce to deliver tested and effective preventive interventions for behavioral health problems in children and youth

Over the past five years, the coalition has made considerable progress in each of these areas by:

1. **Convening** statewide meetings of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, as well as providing expert testimony to state legislators
2. **Participating** in The Collaborative on Healthy Parenting in Primary Care, an initiative of the Forum on Promoting Children’s Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Health at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
3. **Contributing** to prevention programs in Colorado (Communities That Care) and Utah (Life Skills Utah)
4. **Coordinating** with accreditation bodies, standardizing learning objectives, identifying existing programs in allied disciplines, and creating a repository of relevant course syllabi, among other actions
5. **Contributing to** A special issue of the Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research describing progress relative to the goals and seven action steps of this Grand Challenge
6. **Promoting** the infrastructure necessary to increase the use of tested and effective preventive interventions in Colorado, Utah, Massachusetts, and Delaware
7. **Authored and disseminated** four prevention training modules for social work students
8. **Delivered** ~25 keynotes and other conference presentations
9. **Published** ~20 empirical and opinion articles promoting prevention
10. **Commented in** the media on COVID-19 related childhood hunger, calling for a national task force and plan to address this urgent issue
11. **Briefed** federal legislators on “The Decarceration of Transition Age Youth with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Mental Disabilities,” as well as “The Impact of Weapons and Violence on Schools and Surrounding Communities”
12. **Developed** a robust Strategic Plan for implementing the activities of the Grand Challenge

Members of the Grand Challenge to Ensure Healthy Development for Youth look forward to engaging more people and organizations in this work and to continuing the important work underway, particularly:

- **Increasing** the interdisciplinary reach of its work
- **Advancing** the 7 Action Steps of Unleashing the Power of Prevention in additional states, communities, and educational settings
- **finding** resources to more effectively support the infrastructure of the CPBH and Ensure Healthy Development for Youth networks
- **Disseminating** the training modules more widely, including via a January 2021 webinar
- **Prioritizing** reduction of racial and socioeconomic disparities in behavioral health problems

**LOOKING BACK**

**LOOKING AHEAD**

**THE PATH TO PROGRESS**

**7 Action Steps**

- **1 Increase public awareness**
- **2 Increase public funding of prevention programs**
- **3 Implement community-assessment & capacity-building tools**
- **4 Establish & implement criteria for preventive interventions**
- **5 Increase infrastructure for preventive interventions**
- **6 Develop data systems**
- **7 Create workforce development strategies**

**THE COALITION FOR THE PROMOTION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

**NETWORK LEADERSHIP**

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**

- Kimberly Bender, PhD
  - Endowed Professor
  - University of Denver
  - kbender@law.du.edu
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
  - Associate Professor
  - University of North Carolina
  - mlippold@unc.edu
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD
  - Associate Professor
  - University of California, Berkeley
  - vs Shapiro@berkeley.edu

**STEERING COMMITTEE**

- William Aldridge, PhD
  - University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Kimberly Bender, PhD
  - University of Denver
- Gilbert J. Botvin, PhD
  - Cornell University
- Brian Bumbarger, PhD
  - Colorado State University
- Richard F. Catalano, PhD
  - University of Washington
- Kevin Haggerty, PhD
  - University of North Carolina
- Jeffrey M. Jenson, PhD
  - University of Washington
- J. David Hawkins, PhD
  - University of California, Berkeley
- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
  - University of California, Berkeley

**Contributors**

- Brian Bumbarger, PhD
  - Editor, Prevention Science
- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
  - Editorial Assistant, Prevention Science
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD
  - Academic Editor, Prevention Science

**Contributors to the 2015 Impact Report**

- Brian Bumbarger, PhD
- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**Contributors to the 2019 Impact Report**

- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**Contributors to the 2021 Impact Report**

- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**Network Leadership**

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**

- Kimberly Bender, PhD
  - Endowed Professor
  - University of Denver
  - kbender@law.du.edu
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
  - Associate Professor
  - University of North Carolina
  - mlippold@unc.edu
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD
  - Associate Professor
  - University of California, Berkeley
  - vs Shapiro@berkeley.edu

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- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
  - University of California, Berkeley

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  - Editorial Assistant, Prevention Science
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD
  - Academic Editor, Prevention Science

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- Brian Bumbarger, PhD
- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**Contributors to the 2019 Impact Report**

- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**Contributors to the 2021 Impact Report**

- Kimberly Shapiro, PhD
- Melissa Lippold, PhD
- Valerie Shapiro, PhD

**The Coalition for the Promotion of Behavioral Health**
Close the Health Gap

 Millions of Americans do not have adequate access to health care. The Grand Challenge to *Close the Health Gap* is working to redress the fundamental failure of our current, individualist model and its inability to address historical inequities in access to health care around race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, geography, sexual and gender identity, and socioeconomic status. Instead, this Grand Challenge calls for a new approach that emphasizes the centrality of the social determinants of health towards resolving these injustices.

During the past five years, network members and others have worked to *Close the Health Gap* through their research, advocacy, and teaching. They have organized three working groups and published and presented widely. They have articulated policy recommendations for state and federal legislators. And, they have expanded the network of indigenous health researchers through new training programs.

**LOOKING BACK**

During the past five years, members of the *Close the Health Gap* Grand Challenge network and their colleagues have engaged in a variety of activities. They have:

- **Promoted** Indigenous and culturally grounded, place-based research in health and well-being through publications and presentations
- **Expanded** the network of Indigenous health researchers through innovative academic preparatory programs
- **Delivered** numerous presentations at the Society for Social Work & Research and other conferences, as well as a *webinar* for the National Association of Social Workers
- **Participated** in a consensus study on "Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation’s Health,” by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- **Published** three concept papers on combating alcohol misuse, promoting health equity, and strengthening health care systems
- **Contributed** to special issues of the *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, and *Harm Reduction Journal* as well as an issue of the *International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research*
- **Wrote** an *editorial* on "The Case for a National Health Social Work Practice-Based Research Network in Addressing Health Equity" in *Health & Social Work*
- **Testified** before the *House Committee on Education and the Workforce* about expanding access to substance abuse disorder treatment
- **Briefed** federal legislators on "When a Good Life Depends on Federal Policy: ‘Addressing the Crisis in Older Adult Mental Health,’ and ‘Is Treating Depression the Answer to Solving the Opioid Crisis?’"
- **Advocated** for the inclusion of social workers in responding to the opioid crisis

**LOOKING AHEAD**

During the next five years, members of the Grand Challenge to *Close the Health Gap* network and their colleagues plan to:

- **Collaborate** with other Grand Challenges, particularly *Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment, Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality, and Eliminate Racism*, to address issues that impact health and health equity
- **Continue to advocate** for their *policy recommendations*
  1. **Focus** on settings-based research and interventions to improve the conditions of daily life
  2. **Advance** community empowerment and advocacy for sustainable health solutions and prevention
  3. **Cultivate** health innovation in primary care and community-based centers
  4. **Promote** access to health care and insurance for all
  5. **Foster** development of an interprofessional health workforce
  6. **Develop** a global health policy agenda on reducing alcohol misuse
- **Continue to challenge** structural racism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism and their adverse impact on our biosocial complex
- **Identify** leadership for the working group on Strengthening Health Care Systems and grow the working group on Population Health more strategically

**NETWORK LEADERSHIP**

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**

- **Michael Spencer**, PhD
  - Presidential Term Professor
  - University of Washington
  - mspenc@uw.edu

- **Karina Walters**, PhD
  - Professor
  - University of Washington
  - bw5@uw.edu

**WORKING GROUPS**

- **Population Health through Community and Settings-Based Research and Practice**
  - Strengthening Health Care Systems: Better Health Across America
  - Reducing and Preventing Alcohol Misuse and Its Consequences

Learn more at [nationalacademies.org/SocialCare](http://nationalacademies.org/SocialCare)
INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

An Impact Report at Year 5 of the 10-Year Initiative

To the community and partners of the Grand Challenge to Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence,

We are writing to share the impact of the Grand Challenge over its first five years. The Grand Challenge has been successful at creating a network of investigators and practitioners who have worked together to understand the nature of interpersonal violence and to develop ways to reduce its harms.

Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence

Formerly known as the Grand Challenge to Stop Family Violence, the Grand Challenge to Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence recognizes the traumatizing impact of interpersonal violence across the lifespan on individuals and families, as well as on communities and society. Whereas the former name of this Grand Challenge focused on the overlap between child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, the new framing assumes a broader mandate, grounded in the recognition that violence extends beyond the family unit. Violence is associated with power differentials between dominant and non-dominant groups (e.g., gender, race) and, as such, is perpetuated by prevailing social norms, structures, and systems. The goal of the Grand Challenge is ambitious yet specific: to reduce interpersonal violence by 10% within the decade by strengthening healthy relationships.

To this end, network members have spent the past five years publishing widely, convening inclusively, and collaborating creatively with researchers and practitioners from inside and outside the field of social work. They have also articulated and advocated for their policy recommendations. Looking ahead, they have developed a robust strategic plan to organize their activities over the next five years.

Look Back

Over the past five years, members of Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence network and their colleagues have:

- Published two working papers on ending gender-based violence, and reducing child maltreatment
- Convened over 200 practitioners, researchers, and advocates at Arizona State University for a conference on Promoting Just and Effective Solutions to End Gender-Based Violence
- Worked with the Jan Cappo Initiative to identify gaps in child welfare research and early intervention work
- Hosted a one-and-a-half-day workshop at Washington University in St. Louis which included a systems dynamics analysis exercise related to mainstreaming gender
- Secured a $6.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to create the Center for Innovation in Child Maltreatment Policy, Research and Training (CIAM) at Washington University in St. Louis as well as a $1 million grant from the National Institute of Justice to study intimate partner violence among youth at the University of Washington
- Contributed to a special issue of the journal Social Work on “Mainstreaming Gender in the Grand Challenges”
- Delivered two webinars on the implications of COVID-19 for children and families
- Contributed to the development of MyParents, an online tool designed to help students who may be experiencing dating violence evaluate their safety, make decisions, and connect to campus and community services
- Directed the AmeriCorps Survivor Link Program at Arizona State University, where members have engaged in over 18,000 hours of service across 70 community partner sites, earned $1,190,000 in scholarship funding, and implemented 161 risk-informed safety plans with domestic violence survivors
- Evaluated an anti-human trafficking initiative in Colorado (Innovate Colorado)
- Contributed to two workshops — DADS/MART and SURROUND — at the Center for Innovation in Child Maltreatment Policy, Research, and Training

Look Ahead

Over the next five years, the network to Build Healthy Relationships to End Violence will focus their work on:

1. Scientifically ground the Grand Challenge to inform future research and support other Grand Challenge goals
2. Advance the field’s understanding that healthy relationships are a major factor in ending multiple forms of violence
3. Develop a toolkit for researchers and practitioners with relevant healthy relationship definitions and interventions
4. Position themselves to approach funders to support research, policy development, and practice
5. Better prepare social workers (practitioners, students, educators, policymakers, researchers, advocates) to promote healthy relationships and intervene in violence across practice areas and social ecological levels
6. Provide a forum to discuss the re-visioning of systems that bridges research to practice and practice to research

In addition, they intend to:

- Continue to advocate for their policy recommendations
- Collaborate with other Grand Challenges around mainstreaming gender and developing approaches to violence prevention that are less carceral and more relationship-based (e.g. Promote Smart Decarceration)

Network Leadership

Richard Barth, PhD Professor University of Maryland richard.barth@umaryland.edu
Patricia Kuhl, PhD Associate Professor Washington University pkohl@wustl.edu
Shanti Kulkarni, PhD Professor UNC Charlotte shkulkar@unc.edu
Jill Messing, PhD Professor Arizona State University jill.messing@asu.edu

Steering Committee

Melissa Jonson-Reid, PhD Washington University in St. Louis michelle.jonson-reid@wustl.edu
Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, PhD The Ohio State University mgarcia@osu.edu
Megan Holmes, PhD Case Western Reserve University megan.holmes@case.edu
Todd Herrenkohl, PhD University of Michigan todd.herenkohl@umich.edu
Samuel Aymer, PhD Hunter College – CUNY samuel.aymer@hunter.cuny.edu
Dexter Voisin, PhD University of Toronto dexter.voisin@utoronto.ca

MURAL HONORS THE POSITIVE ROLE OF LATINX FAMILIES IN THE PHOENIX AREA

The SI Se Puede — Yes We Cant mural was created in collaboration with the Survivor Link program in the School of Social Work at ASU and community partner Chicanos Por La Causa.

Photo courtesy of Jill Messing, MSW, PhD

Photo courtesy of Jill Messing, MSW, PhD
The Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives** seeks to harness the skills, talents, and experience of the growing number of older adults to respond to the demands of an increasingly polarized and inequitable country. Adopting a life-course approach, the Grand Challenge seeks to advance science to inform the development of equitable policies and programs in employment, volunteering, caregiving, and education to maximize health, ensure economic security, and provide more opportunities for purposeful living for those of all ages. This Grand Challenge aims to dismantle systemic ageism, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression as they limit such opportunities.

During the past five years, output from members of the network and their colleagues has been prolific, including 120+ publications, 100+ presentations, 40+ media interviews and 17+ grants. Looking ahead, having established a solid conceptual foundation for their Grand Challenge, its members seek to translate their research into evidence-based interventions and expand their network among educators, practitioners, advocates, and students of social work at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels.

**LOOKING BACK**

During the past five years, members of the **Advance Long and Productive Lives** network and their colleagues have:

- **Published** two concept papers on increasing productive engagement in early and later life
- **Presented** at dozens of conferences and events, including the Gerontological Society of America, National Academy of Medicine, American Society of America, Drexel University, and Age Strang in Work
- **Delivered** webinars on Engagement and Entrepreneurship Research and COVID-19 and Age: Risks and Opportunities
- **Contributed** a regular column to the AGE-SW newsletter, “Spotlight on Advancing Long and Productive Lives”
- **Authored** more than 120 articles, books, chapters, reports, and briefs on topics related to the Grand Challenge, including a special issue of the *Clinical Social Work Journal* and the book, *Current and Emerging Trends in Aging & Work*
- **Secured** more than a dozen grants, including from the National Institute on Aging, U.S. Social Security Administration, AARP Foundation, RRF Foundation for Aging, and Sloan Foundation, to examine work and retirement trajectories, workforce training, and health
- **Secured** more than a dozen grants, including from the National Institute on Aging, U.S. Social Security Administration, AARP Foundation, RRF Foundation for Aging, and Sloan Foundation, to examine work and retirement trajectories, workforce training, and health
- **Testified** before a committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on developing a behavioral and social sciences research agenda for the next decade on Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias, and civic engagement in later life
- **Advanced** to the finals of the Stanford Center on Longevity’s 2018-2019 Longevity Design Challenge
- **Advocated** for enacting universal paid family and medical leave in the U.S. and strengthening the Social Security 2100 Act
- **Developed** a letter in support of paid family leave legislation in the U.S. signed by over 100 academics from all over the U.S.
- **Led economic analysis** efforts that contributed to the passage of paid family and medical leave and paid sick days in Colorado
- **Investigated** age discrimination in the workplace and studied the implications of tying Medicaid eligibility to work
- **Investigated** age discrimination in the workplace and studied the implications of tying Medicaid eligibility to work
- **Translate** research into evidence-based practice interventions

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Network members have articulated the following objectives for the Grand Challenge to **Advance Long and Productive Lives** over the next five years:

- **Continue** to advocate for their policy recommendations:
  1. Create flexible and transitional employment arrangements
  2. Provide financial support to caregivers
  3. Expand the Corporation for National and Community Service’s support for engaging older adults
  4. Elevate intersectionality and inequality in productive aging discourse
  5. Continue to produce the AGE-SW Productive Aging Spotlight
- **Publish** empirical articles on intersectionality as well as reconceptualize productive aging
- **Present** at the Gerontological Society of America on ageism, age-inclusive universities, and older workers amidst COVID-19
- **Serve** as board members, practitioners, advocates, educators and students
- **Secure** scholarship funding to recruit more racial and ethnically diverse undergraduates and master’s students into the field
- **Translate** research into evidence-based practice interventions
Eradicate Social Isolation

Recent research has demonstrated that social isolation is as dangerous to human health as smoking. Yet it does not receive nearly the same level of attention from the public, healthcare practitioners or policymakers. As such, the Grand Challenge to Eradicate Social Isolation has set out to educate the public, disseminate evidence-based practices, and advocate for policy reform, looking to deepen social connections for people of all ages.

During the past five years, network members have been studying, publishing, and presenting widely on social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan. In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of social distancing measures to slow its spread, social isolation has reached crisis levels. In response, members of this Grand Challenge have sprung into action, launching new programs, delivering webinars, publishing articles, and conducting a survey on the implications of social distancing for mental health and well-being.

Looking Back

During the past five years, members of the network for Eradicate Social Isolation and their colleagues have:

- Compiled a special issue of the Clinical Social Work Journal on eradicating social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan
- Participated in the Social Isolation Impact Summit hosted by the Motion Picture & Television Fund and the Milken Institute’s Center for the Future of Aging
- Delivered the keynote address at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa on the importance of human relationships
- Served on the ad hoc committee and contributed to the Consensus Study Report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on “Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults”
- Advocated for policy, practice, and educational changes to ensure that social isolation, particularly among older adults, receives adequate attention
- Presented a CSWE Teaching Institute: “Eradicate Social Isolation: Teaching and learning strategies for generalist and advanced curriculum”
- Published articles on the implications of COVID-19 for older adults, African Americans, and the brain itself
- Conducted a survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 related social distancing on mental health and well-being

In 2020 alone, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the network to Eradicate Social Isolation have:

- Established a helpline at Wayne State University to train volunteers to help reduce stress and social isolation among healthcare workers
- Launched a Virtual Health Ministry program in Washington, DC, in which social work student navigators link congregations at area churches with services as well as a Grandparent Reassurance Program
- Published articles on the implications of COVID-19 for older adults, African Americans, and the brain itself
- Conducted a survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 related social distancing on mental health and well-being

Looking Ahead

Network members have articulated the following objectives for this Grand Challenge over the next five years:

- Continue to advocate for their policy recommendations, using best practices gleaned from innovative approaches in the UK and other countries around the world:
  1. Increase access to social supports that strengthens social connections for children, families, older adults and people with disabilities
  2. Build more age-friendly communities that strengthen social connections
  3. Reduce barriers to social inclusion for those marginalized by racism and other forms of oppression
- Organize their research activities around a set of research questions focused on social support, social integration, and social exclusion
- Engage network leaders and national colleagues on strategies to embed strategic teaching tools into the curriculum at the BSW, MSW, and PhD levels
- Increase the scope and cohesiveness of their network to better expand and coordinate their efforts
- Include community leaders from across the country in generating strategies to eradicate social isolation and build social connection

Network Leadership

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**

Suzanne Brown, PhD
Associate Professor
Wayne State University
fb7139@wayne.edu

Robert Cosby, PhD
Assistant Dean
Howard University
robert.cosby@howard.edu

Michelle Munson, PhD
Professor
New York University
michelle.munson@nyu.edu

Erika Sabbath, ScD
Associate Professor
Boston College
erika.sabbath@bc.edu

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**

Sandra Edmunds Crewe, PhD
Dean
Howard University
sacrewe@howard.edu

Sandra Edmunds Crewe, PhD
Dean
Howard University
sacrewe@howard.edu

Michelle Munson, PhD
Professor
New York University
michelle.munson@nyu.edu

Erika Sabbath, ScD
Associate Professor
Boston College
erika.sabbath@bc.edu
End Homelessness

The Grand Challenge to End Homelessness boldly aspires to ensure that everyone has stable housing in the United States, where approximately 1.5 million people are homeless each year. Translating rigorous research into evidence-based interventions and informed political advocacy, this Grand Challenge aims to address homelessness both directly and indirectly by expanding housing options and creating greater income stability. In 2020, in the midst of a pandemic-induced recession, this Grand Challenge took on additional urgency as cities and states have begun to lift their eviction moratorium.

During the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge network have published prolifically, lectured widely, and advocated energetically for this cause. Against the backdrop of rising homelessness rates in major cities, they have articulated detailed policy recommendations for the incoming administration. Within their field, they have updated their curricula in line with the principles of Housing First and outside additional urgency as cities and states have begun to lift their eviction moratoria.

Over the past five years, End Homelessness Grand Challenge network members and their colleagues have:

- Advocated for Maryland's Ending Youth Homelessness Act, which creates a grant program to fund housing and supportive services for unaccompanied homeless youth and those at risk of homelessness and against HUD's Making Affordable Housing Work Act
- Compiled a series of essays on homelessness by policy experts. Published in advance of the 2020 election to inform candidates of possible solutions to the U.S. housing crisis, the authors call for: 1. Expanding investment in affordable housing 2. Supporting rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance 3. Shifting funds from transitional emergency programs to rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing 4. Designing homeless services around the principles of Housing First
- Presented widely on the subject, including at the University of Denver's Science for Action Conference, "End Youth Homelessness, Transforming Systems," at the National Symposium on Solutions to End Homelessness, Transforming Systems and Changing Lives, and at the National Symposium on Solutions to End Homelessness, Transforming Systems and Changing Lives, the authors call for:
  1. Expanding investment in affordable housing
  2. Supporting rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance
  3. Shifting funds from transitional emergency programs to rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing
  4. Designing homeless services around the principles of Housing First

- Presented widely on the subject, including at the University of Denver's Science for Action series, where Benjamin Henwood delivered the keynote address, "Wanna End Homelessness Be the Easy Part?" and at the National Symposium on Solutions to End Youth Homelessness, where Deborah Padgett led a session on "Implementing Community Driven Research and Evaluation in Youth Programs"
- Testified in lawsuits aiming to improve homeless services and reduce police harassment in Miami, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC
- Developed a curricular guide for teachers and students of social work around ending homelessness with the National Center for Excellence in Homeless Services and the Council on Social Work Education
- Conducted a research survey with the National Center for Excellence in Homeless Services to identify ongoing research and interested faculty, and to connect researchers across institutions
- Spoken out against myths of homelessness surrounding crime, substance use, and service resistance in such outlets as Radio Health Journal and The New York Times
- Contributed to a special edition of the Journal of Social Work Education, featuring 13 articles on how various social work programs are updating their pedagogy in line with the movement to end homelessness
- Participated in the Los Angeles Homeless Count, which directed $110 million in HUD funding to the county in 2018
- Responded to COVID-19 by commenting on and researching the implications of the pandemic for homelessness and the housing crisis more generally

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS

1. Expand investment in affordable housing through existing and new revenue sources.
2. Shift funds from transitional emergency programs to lasting solutions such as rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities.
3. Prevent homelessness or ensure its brevity by supporting rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance.
4. Ensure that the guiding principles of housing first (low barriers to housing, harm reduction, client-centered services) form the cornerstone of homeless services for adults, families, and youths.


LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next five years, network members are committed to continuing to advocate for the recommendations outlined in the original policy brief and expanded upon in End Homelessness: Policy Proposals for the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, including:

- Expand access to housing subsidies, including Housing Choice Vouchers
- Ensure that evidence-based psychosocial interventions accompany housing assistance
- Develop and evaluate housing-led interventions for specific populations including youth, older people, and veterans

LOOKING BACK
The Grand Challenge to Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment is grounded in the recognition that environmental changes are inextricably linked to human health and well-being. Environmental issues such as urbanization, population growth, and extreme weather events are also social justice issues with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of society.

Over the past five years, members of this Grand Challenge network have made tremendous progress towards “catalyzing social responses that strengthen individual and community capacities for anticipating and adapting to environmental changes.” They have launched a website, formed an Advisory Council, and generated numerous peer-reviewed articles, briefs, books, and presentations. They have encouraged their institutions to update curricula in line with the conceptual basis of the Grand Challenge. And they have forged interdisciplinary alliances, leveraging their expertise to advocate for policy changes at all levels of government.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Working with Teens to Document Environmental Disasters

Jennifer Willett, PhD, an assistant professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, School of Social Work, is exploring environmental justice issues through community-based participatory research methods. In one project, funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation, she is working with 15 high school students from Title 1 schools who serve as co-researchers to document “slow violence” — hidden environmental disasters that occur over time and space — in Nevada. The project uses photovoice — documentation via photography and storytelling — and is focused on climate disasters like wildfires and floods, infrastructure needs in low-income neighborhoods that intersect with environmental degradation, and the continued impact of historic mining processes. The team has presented its findings to various stakeholders across the region and in Washington, DC, and is currently developing actions to address these scenarios with AmeriCorps programs.

Illegal vehicle dumping is a dangerous problem in Sun Valley, a working class neighborhood in Reno, NV. Beyond being an eyesore, dumping creates fire hazards and pollutes the environment.

Photo courtesy of Youth Scientists on the Research for Change NV Team

LOOKING BACK

In a 2015 concept paper, leaders of the Grand Challenge to Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment identified four major areas for social work with respect to environmental change:

1. Disaster preparedness and response
2. Population dislocation
3. Community-level organizing and development
4. Mitigation, advocacy, and practice engagement

Over the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge network and their colleagues have engaged in activities that are helping to Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment. They have:

- Launched a new website and blog to showcase their writing and research. Recent blog posts include: “Saving for the Environment Becomes Business Business,” “Do Solar Lamps Help Children Study?,” and “From Climate Grief to Direct Action.”
- Published numerous briefs, reports, books, and peer-reviewed articles on the subject, including the book People and Climate Change, co-edited by network co-lead Lisa Reyes Mason, which “closely examines people’s lived experience, climate-related injustice and inequality, why some groups are more vulnerable than others, and what can be done about it.”
- Conducted studies that provided insights and recommendations for the local communities of Flint, MI, and North St. Louis, MO.

LOOKING AHEAD

Members of the Grand Challenge have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- Further specify the goals of the Grand Challenge and the associated actions required to achieve them
- Increase mentoring supports for earlier-stage researchers interested in joining the network
- Develop strategic partnerships with other Grand Challenges, such as Close the Health Gap and Eliminate Racism
- Pursue opportunities to effect policy at all levels — local, state, and national
- Increase involvement in local community development efforts
- Establish stronger connections between social workers and environmental justice advocates
- Continue to advocate for their policy recommendations:
  1. Adopt and implement evidence-based approaches to disaster risk reduction
  2. Strengthen equity-oriented urban resilience policies and proactively engage marginalized communities in adaptation planning
  3. Develop policies targeting environmentally induced migration and population displacement (e.g. amending the Stafford Act)

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Harness Technology for Social Good

The Grand Challenge to Harness Technology for Social Good is unique among the Grand Challenges in that it sets out not to address a specific issue or problem, but to fundamentally transform the field of social work with respect to its relationship to technology. Specifically, it aims to harness big data and deploy information and communication technology to improve the efficacy of social programs, accelerate the pace of social discovery, and reduce inequalities.

During the past five years, network members have led the field in this direction through their practice, research, teaching, and advocacy. They have served as a resource for the field, providing information and serving as a forum for people to meet and connect around the technology issues affecting them and their work.

A great deal of movement has occurred in 2020, as COVID-related social distancing measures drastically accelerated the field’s adoption of technology—from remote working and teaching to virtual conferences and telehealth. In this sense, the coronavirus pandemic brought new attention and urgency to this Grand Challenge.

Looking Back

Over the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge to Harness Technology for Social Good and their colleagues have:

1. Published numerous articles and a book, “Teaching Social Work with Digital Technology,” which aims to help educators make pedagogically sound, rational, practical, and ethical decisions about integrating technology into their social work programs.
2. Advised their colleagues and students of social work, both formally and informally, including several 25W students from USC whose final projects were focused on technology, including resource websites and apps.
3. Developed SWVirtualPal, a social media platform for social workers, as part of their work with iHeartTech, the Institute for Healthy Engagement and Resilience with Technology.
5. Pioneered novel applications of virtual reality to social work education at the University of Utah and Ball State University.

Looking Ahead

Over the next five years, Harness Technology for Social Good network members and their colleagues will work toward the following objectives:

1. Engage in policy-related efforts around the “digital divide,” which has become more striking in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Collaborate with all of the Grand Challenge networks to identify creative, effective uses of technology to address issues in each challenge area.

Network Leadership

Brendan Beal, PhD
Assistant Professor
University of Montevallo
bbeal@montevallo.edu

Stephanie Berzin, PhD
Dean
Simmons University
stephanie.berzin@simmons.edu

Claudia Coulton, PhD
Distinguished University Professor
Case Western Reserve University
coulton@case.edu

Shari Miller, PhD
Associate Dean
University of Georgia
semiller@uga.edu

Melanie Sage, PhD
Assistant Professor
University at Buffalo
msage@buffalo.edu

Jonathan Singer, PhD
Associate Professor
Loyola University Chicago
jsinger1@luc.edu
Racism permeates American society, and eliminating racism is inextricably linked to the work of each of the Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW). Indeed, the GCSW had previously developed a statement of Vision, Mission, Domain, Guiding Principles, and Guideposts to Action that clarified that “the commitment to ending racism and other injustices is fundamental throughout the Grand Challenges.” However, this statement was not strong or specific enough to express the GCSW’s commitment to eliminate the scourge of historic and structural racism.

In this context, the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism was established in 2020—a year in which the nation and the world’s attention was once again focused on racial injustice and ending systemic violence and oppression against Black people. It recognizes that the United States is built on a legacy of racism and white supremacy that has consistently and significantly affected the daily lives of millions of people. It acknowledges that today, racist policies, bias, and discriminatory practices continue to promote racial inequality in myriad ways. In response, the Eliminate Racism network will identify evidence and practice-based interventions that take on discrimination in all its forms and redress racism’s most dangerous and negative effects on the health and well-being of our country by joining the national efforts to build anti-racist systems, policies, and communities. We encourage all to share how you are working to #EliminateRacism so that we may work together to tackle this Grand Challenge.

**LOOKING BACK**

The Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism was formalized in 2020. Network co-leads and members of the wider GCSW community have been working for the past five years to establish the foundation for this effort. Among other actions, they have:

- Spoken out about social work and racism, including on the Social Work Podcast on the question of “What role do social work deans & directors play in addressing the legacy of racism and white supremacy?” and on U Rising about social work’s commitment to anti-racism
- Participated in the inaugural conference of the Collaboration on Race, Inequality, and Social Mobility in America, “Race at the Forefront: Sharpening a Focus on Race in Applied Research”
- Cosponsored a Congressional briefing on “Black Lives Matter: Social Work and the Future of Policing” along with the Grand Challenges to Promote Smart Decarceration and Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice for All
- Cosponsored a Social Work Leadership Roundtable: Town Hall on Racial Equity

**LOOKING AHEAD**

A book on the Grand Challenge to Eliminate Racism will be published by Oxford University Press in 2021. The book is edited by network co-leads Martell Teasley and Michael Spencer, and their colleague Melissa Bartholomew, and includes authors representing each of the other 12 Grand Challenges. In addition to publishing the book, members of the Grand Challenge have articulated the following objectives for the next several years:

- Focus on evidence and practice-based research that cultivates innovation to improve the conditions of daily life of people impacted by racism and facilitates systemic change on the individual, organization, community, and societal levels
- Advance community empowerment and advocacy for eradicating racism and white supremacy through solutions that create sustainable changes
- Foster the development of an anti-racist social work workforce that promotes access to resources and opportunities and encompasses transdisciplinary collaboration
- Promote teaching and learning within social work education programs that examines structural inequalities and white privilege, and their impact on individual and group outcomes
- Develop a policy agenda for eradicating racism and white supremacy from institutions and organizations, where structural racism is evident and causes the most damage
- Examine the profession of social work itself with respect to rooting out racist policies and practices

**Succeeding Together**

We want to hear about your efforts to #EliminateRacism!
Tag us on Twitter — @GCSocialWork — to share your work and inspire others!
#Up4theChallenge | #EliminateRacism
The United States has the largest incarcerated population in the world, and people of color, low-income people, and people with disabilities are substantially overrepresented. The Grand Challenge to Promote Smart Decarceration aims to reduce the prison and jail population by one million people by 2025. In doing so, it intends to redress these disparities and maximize public safety and well-being.

During the past five years, members of the Grand Challenge have published, presented, and spoken out on these issues, both within the field of social work and more broadly. The decarceration movement has gained considerable traction recently, as criminal justice reform featured prominently in the Presidential election. Following the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black men and women, the Black Lives Matter movement powerfully amplified calls for bail reform as well as police and prison abolition.

**LOOKING BACK**

During the past five years, members of the [Promote Smart Decarceration](#) network and their colleagues have:

- **Published** numerous book chapters and peer-reviewed articles, such as “Improving the Evaluation of Adult Mental Disorders in the Criminal Justice System With Computerized Adaptive Testing,” co-authored by network co-lead Matt Epperson, in the *Psychiatric Services* journal
- **Edited** a book on Smart Decarceration: Achieving Criminal Justice Transformation in the 21st Century. Co-edited by network co-leads, Matt Epperson and Carrie Pettus-Davis, the book contains 15 chapters by researchers, practitioners, and advocates providing context, concepts, and strategies for achieving decarceration
- **Developed** a curriculum guide, “Smart Decarceration Practice Behaviors for Social Work Competencies,” for teachers and students of social work. The document presents Smart Decarceration practices within the framework of the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE) nine core competencies
- **Advocated** for bail and prison reform at the local, state, and federal levels, including at the White House, where network co-lead Carrie Pettus-Davis participated in a Prison Reform Summit
- **Delivered** a Congressional briefing on “Black Lives Matter: Social Work and the Future of Policing,” along with the Grand Challenges to Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice and Eliminate Racism
- **Convened** two national conferences, “From Mass Incarceration to Effective and Sustainable Decarceration” in St. Louis in 2015 and “Tools & Tactics: Promoting Solutions to Advance the Era of Smart Decarceration” in Chicago in 2017
- **Responded** to COVID-19 by surveying prisoners about their reactions to the communication and containment strategies employed by prison officials in relation to the pandemic
- **Participated** in numerous virtual events, including a *National Institute of Justice* webinar on “The Future of Policing in a Pandemic,” hosted by the University of Utah
- **Created** new courses at schools including the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Network members have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Assemble** a special issue of *Journal of Criminal Justice and Behavior* on Smart Decarceration
- **Formulate** plans for more explicitly addressing racial equity in their work
- **Continue** to advocate for their policy recommendations to:
  1. Restrict the use of incarceration whenever possible
  2. Reduce racial and economic disparities through decarceration efforts
  3. Remove civic and legal exclusions for people with criminal charges and convictions
  4. Reallocate resources to community-based supports
Build Financial Capability and Assets for All

The Grand Challenge to Build Financial Capability and Assets for All, also known as Financial Capability and Asset Building or FCAB, ensures that all people have access to the financial policies, services, supports, knowledge, and tools that enable them to achieve financial stability and security. In doing so, the Grand Challenge responds to growing financialization, financial insecurity, and economic inequality that threaten the well-being of millions of families. It envisions a key role for social work to empower people to build financial capability and assets and inform policy that ensures inclusion and equity.

Members of the network have advanced research, policy, education, and practice initiatives to expand financial capability and grow assets. A primary focus is to document and reverse structural bias against low-income and low-wage groups, especially Black and Brown people, women, and other vulnerable groups across the lifespan. Network members proposed and are testing Child Development Accounts, a policy to reach all children with an asset account (see graphic). They have developed evidence-based curricula for social work education. Network members analyze the provision of essential financial products and services and ways to improve access. Others study direct practice approaches to family violence, problem gambling and other finance-related difficulties, the effects of asset limits in public benefits, the burden of student loans, retirement insecurity, and the potential of financial technology to improve financial capability and asset building in vulnerable households, among others.

The work of this Grand Challenge has never been more important than now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted and threatened the financial well-being of so many more families.

**LOOKING BACK**

During the past five years, Build Financial Capability and Assets for All network members and their colleagues have:

- **Studied** the first randomized, controlled experiment of universal and progressive CDAs in the United States
- **Informed** adoption and implementation of CDA policies in seven U.S. states, and FCAB education, policies, and practice **globally**, in Azerbaijan, Canada, Israel, Korea, Mainland China, Singapore, and Taiwan
- **Organized** five special issues on FCAB for leading social work and consumer science journals
- **Developed** a **Financial Social Work Certificate Program**
- **Convened** four FCAB conferences since 2015
- **Created** a social work curriculum for FCAB, a curricular guide, online modules, and a **textbook**
- **Tested** asset building in vulnerable households
- **Advanced** a policy to reach all children with an asset account (see graphic)
- **Understood** how financial technology (fintech) can be leveraged for vulnerable populations
- **Edited** a **handbook** on Financial Social Work: Direct Practice with Vulnerable Populations
- **Supported** development of FCAB courses in more than a dozen social work degree programs, with plans underway for more, and guided numerous doctoral dissertations on FCAB
- **Explored** the impact of COVID-19 on household finances in a series of articles and blog posts
- **Developed** policy briefs on lifelong asset building, financial services, financial capability and assets, and others, including "Start, Lifelong Asset Building with Universal and Progressive Child Development Accounts" and "Policy Recommendations for Helping U.S. Households Build Emergency Savings"

**LOOKING AHEAD**

In the next five years, the financial capability and asset building network will:

- **Study** the financial well-being effects of financial capability policies, programs, and practices on vulnerable groups
- **Advance** research and understanding of FCAB, including how individuals and social structures shape financial capability and assets
- **Test** social policy and intervention innovations to promote FCAB
- **Inform** policies, programs, and practices that reduce racial/ethnic inequality in financial wellbeing
- **Analyze and tackle** the financial consequences of the pandemic
- **Prepare** social workers and human service practitioners in the US and other countries with basic financial capability knowledge and practice skills, and increase specialists in FCAB
- **Leverage** opportunities for cross-grand challenge collaborations, especially with the Reduce Extreme Inequality and Eliminate Racism networks
- **Analyze and improve** how financial technology (fintech) can be leveraged for vulnerable populations
The Grand Challenge to **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality** stems from several starting observations. First, the top 20% earn 50% of the total annual income in the United States. Second, the top 1% own nearly 30% of the total wealth in the United States. Third, the impact of gaps in wealth and income are particularly pronounced in communities of color, and income and wealth gaps persist between men and women. In response, members of this Grand Challenge have called for what amounts to a new social contract to reduce inequalities in wealth and income, and to close the financial gaps among racial groups, and between men and women. Their strategies include expanding job creation, the Earned Income Tax Credit, cash transfer programs, and access to childcare, as well as strengthening labor standards and creating new policies to encourage inclusive, progressive wealth building.

During the past five years, the network supporting the Grand Challenge to **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality** has organized working groups, published and presented widely, developed a new curriculum for teaching about economic inequality, authored policy briefs, and advocated for its priorities on Capitol Hill. Network members also worked closely with the Grand Challenge to **Build Financial Capability and Assets for All**. They focused not only on the development of basic income, but on the policies and supports that relate to the acquisition of stable, living wages, and dependable family assets.

### LOOKING BACK

In 2016, members of the Grand Challenge made these policy recommendations as part of their new social contract:

1. Strengthen labor standards and reform employment policies
2. Expand active employment creation
3. Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
4. Expand child care access to enable stable employment
5. Create new, lifelong policies for inclusive and progressive wealth building
6. Develop a universal child allowance

Over the past five years, network members, their colleagues, and other social workers have taken numerous substantive actions toward these goals, including:

- Publishing numerous peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries
- Presenting multiple webinars, including two on COVID-19: “Learning from History about Disaster and Economic Inequality” and “Stay Home; Housing Inequalities, COVID-19, and Social Welfare Policy Responses”
- Co-authoring two policy briefs: “Redefining the Asset Building with Universal and Progressive Child Development Accounts” and “Convert the Child Tax Credit into a Universal Child Allowance” and advocating for these policy recommendations on Capitol Hill and participating in the March 2019 Social Work Day on the Hill
- Highlighting the work of social work and social welfare researchers who study innovative proposals, including universal basic income, secure schedules for low-wage workers, child development accounts, sector strategies in workforce development, and unconditional cash grants for new parents
- Developing a curriculum for teaching social work students about extreme economic inequality and creating a website

### LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next two to five years, the network plans to focus on policies and practices in their two critical areas, each to be supported by a working group, to design, implement and evaluate proposed solutions:

- **Equality in Work & Income** will explore how to make work benefit all employees by stabilizing earnings, increasing wages, improving working conditions, and equalizing paid time off for health and caregiving. It will also review how social and tax policy are interconnected and how to promote paid employment. The group will look at the programs that are successfully “moving the needle” on guaranteed basic income, paid family leave, minimum wage, youth employment, and child allowances.

- **Inclusive Asset-Building** will look at gross inequities in access to wealth and asset-building resources, particularly as they relate to young people and those in marginalized communities. The group will identify, describe, analyze, and suggest improvements to programs that are successful in changing the distribution of economic assets and balance sheets in the U.S., as well as reducing predatory practices.

To accomplish this work, the network will:

- Host a working conference to identify and assign action items and update the overall agenda for the Grand Challenge
- Develop Special Interest Group activities directly related to core policy initiatives
- Improve communications by updating the website and expand their social media presence
- Deepen coordination with other scholars and practitioners of social work as well as other poverty-related organizations
- Publish a guide to analyzing policies with respect to reducing economic inequality

### Network Leadership

**NETWORK CO-LEADS**
- Laura Lein, PhD  
  Professor and Dean Emerita  
  School of Social Work, University of Michigan  
  leinl@umich.edu
- Jennifer Romich, PhD  
  Professor  
  Director, West Coast Poverty Center  
  School of Social Work, University of Washington  
  romich@uw.edu
- Trina Shanks, PhD  
  Harold R. Johnson Collegiate Professor  
  Director, Community Engagement and Center for Equitable Family & Community Well-Being  
  School of Social Work, University of Michigan  
  trweil@umich.edu

### WORKING GROUPS

**Inclusive Asset-Building**
- **Focus:** Addressing inequities in access to wealth and asset-building resources
- **Strategies:** Child Development Accounts, Revised Tax Policies

**Equality in Work & Income**
- **Focus:** Making work benefit all employees
- **Strategies:** Guaranteed Basic Income, Paid Family Leave, Minimum Wage, Youth Employment, Child Allowances, etc.
Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice

The Grand Challenge to Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice recognizes glaring inequities in access to healthcare, affordable housing, quality education, and gainful employment. It sees a vital role for social work in deconstructing the underlying prejudice, bias, and stigmatization that perpetuate and exacerbate these inequities. And it sees social workers as agents of change in their communities and institutions.

Consistent with its vision of a society of equal opportunity and justice, Grand Challenge members have published and presented widely on the subject during the past five years and advocated for state and federal policies to accelerate integration and combat discrimination. For school districts, the network has also launched the School Success Project to identify and reduce disproportionate suspension and expulsion. Looking ahead, the network envisions teaming up with other Grand Challenges, such as Eliminate Racism and Promote Smart Decarceration, to further their common goals.

**A VISION OF AN EQUAL AND JUST SOCIETY**

**Healthcare**

In 2016, the uninsured rate among working-age members of the Latino community in states that had expanded Medicaid eligibility decreased from 36% to 23%. In states that opted not to expand Medicaid eligibility, the rate remained virtually unchanged.

**Education**

Although African American children and youth account for 15% of the U.S. public-school population, they represent 48% of those suspended from school, outweighing all other ethnic groups in school suspension rates, with no evidence that they engage in misbehavior at higher rates.

**Housing**

The wage gap in the United States persists. As recently as 2018, compared to every $1 that men of all races earn:

- White women working full time earn an average of $0.79
- Black women earn only $0.63
- Latina women earn as little as $0.54

**Employment**

**LOOKING BACK**

During the past five years, members of the Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice network and their colleagues have:

- **Received a $174,423 grant from the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct a study on how older Latinx immigrants navigate community resources**
- **Authored** five working papers on **addressing social stigma, integrating Latinx immigrants, supporting African American children**, **building inclusive communities**, **and reducing disparities in juvenile justice**
- **Launched the School Success Project**, which aims to "raise awareness and promote school success by reducing disproportionate suspension and expulsion of school-aged youth." Based at the University of Utah’s College of Social Work, this watchdog entity grew out of the 2017 working paper "Increasing Success for African American Children and Youth”
- **Published** numerous books and articles, including "Facing Segregation: Housing Policy Solutions for a Strugging Society," "LGBT, Stigma and Stress: How Social Workers Can Help," and the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Teaching and Social Work on "Preparing Bilingual, Bicultural Social Workers to Serve the Growing Latinx Population in America”
- **Presented** at the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research
- **Co-sponsored** a congressional briefing on "The Intersection of Health and Justice: A Look Inside County Jail," calling for better physical and mental healthcare services for people admitted to jails
- **Worked** through the Latinx Leadership Initiative at Boston College School of Social Work to “increase the number of Latinx social workers in the United States and develop social work practitioners who are equipped to work effectively with Latinx communities across the country”
- **Spoken out against the immigration policies of the Trump Administration with respect to their harmful implications for children**
- **Advocated** for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, arguing for retaining financial supports to ensure affordability for students and including social work programs in Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Members of the Grand Challenge to Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice network have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Increase** collaboration with related Grand Challenges, such as Eliminate Racism and Promote Smart Decarceration
- **Emphasize** the Grand Challenge in light of the growing racial and ethnic inequities in U.S. society
- **Continue** to advocate for policy recommendations, including:
  1. **Accelerate** Latinx immigrant integration and expand coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)
  2. **Enhance**, **expand**, and **strengthen** federal antidiscrimination laws, including the Voting Rights Act
  3. **Eliminate** zero tolerance policies in schools and promote the use of evidence-informed practices and policies to address racial disciplinary disproportionality

Sources: 2016 GCSW *Policy Brief*, 2017 *concept papers*, and the Center for American Progress *website*
The Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative was established to champion social progress powered by science. To partner with colleagues in different disciplines to make meaningful change together. To encourage collaborations far and wide to tackle our nation’s toughest problems.

Join us! And, share news about your projects related to the Grand Challenges.

Twitter: @GCSocialWork  |  #UpTheChallenge