

## HEAL Prevention Cooperative Scientist Spotlight Dr. Margaret Kuklinski

*Dr. Margaret Kuklinski, UW School of Social Work and HEWG Co-Chair*



When pursuing her bachelor's degree, Dr. Margaret Kuklinski never imagined she could merge her interest in economics and passion for social services into a single career.

After graduate training in clinical psychology, she found that the field of prevention science offered the opportunity to use her expertise in cost-benefit analysis to improve population health outcomes. As a health economist and prevention researcher, she applies economic principles to determine whether substance use interventions are worthwhile investments that will make a difference in the lives of young people.

Dr. Kuklinski is the co-chair of the HEAL Prevention Cooperative (HPC) Health Economics Work Group (HEWG), which includes HPC investigators who specialize in health economics and assess the cost-effectiveness of different types of substance use prevention interventions in adolescent and young adult populations. In September 2021, she became the first woman director of the Social Development Research Group (SDRG) at the University of Washington's School of Social Work. Pursuing organizational goals and

supporting fellow prevention researchers at her institution, Dr. Kuklinski succeeds her colleague Dr. Kevin Haggerty, also an HPC investigator, in this leadership role.

In the past decade, health economists have played an increasingly influential part in guiding substance use intervention policies and implementation. Dr. Kuklinski said the primary goal of economic evaluation is to ensure that decision makers are making sound investments in substance use prevention.

“Our work provides information that helps decision makers determine which interventions to implement—which interventions are cost-effective *and* effective,” Dr. Kuklinski said. “Health economic evaluation adds to the body of evidence that helps people decide, from among the many possible ways to improve health and well-being, which interventions make the grade, if you will. Which of them are good investments of limited public dollars?”

The HEWG provides an opportunity for HPC investigators united by a common objective of exploring the economics of prevention to systematically compare methods, troubleshoot challenges, share data, and collaborate on dissemination products. Because research projects typically include just one health economist, the opportunity to convene and collaborate with fellow economists across the country is invaluable, Dr. Kuklinski said.

“We all have to attend to how much things cost—and showing return on investment is a powerful tool,” Dr. Kuklinski said. “The HEWG offers the chance for health economists to routinely put our heads together and ask, ‘How do you handle this, how do you handle that?’ and our work is better for it.”

Dr. Kuklinski’s leadership on the HEWG and as the director at SDRG comes after an extended time away from the field. In 2001, she decided to suspend her career as a prevention scientist to focus on raising her children, now in their 20s. In 2011, she received a re-entry supplement from NIDA and returned to full-time work at SDRG. She hopes her successful rebound will inspire other researchers who are balancing family life with a career. “That funding mechanism was really important to reigniting my career,” she said, adding that SDRG has also been instrumental. “I’ll be forever grateful to NIDA and my colleagues and mentors at SDRG for supporting my growth as a prevention scientist, health economist, and leader.”

*In the coming months, we will share more inspiring stories from members of the HPC through the upcoming Women in Prevention podcast series. To learn how to share your inspiring story or nominate a colleague for consideration, please contact BeLinda Weimer, [bweimer@rti.org](mailto:bweimer@rti.org).*

Do you have substance use prevention news you want to share? Please contact Sherri Spinks, [spinks@rti.org](mailto:spinks@rti.org), to share your information or get more details on anything you’ve seen in this newsletter.