



WHC

WOMEN'S HEALTH COUNCIL
September 2017

Leadership



**Teri Ackerson, BSN, RN, SCRN, CNRN
Council Chair**

Teri Ackerson was born, raised and continues to work in the Kansas City Community. She began her nursing career in neonatal intensive care, before moving to adult intensive care. In 2009, Ackerson specialized in cerebrovascular care, and acute stroke treatment process. She has worked with the American Heart Association since 2009 in quality improvement measures for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease. In 2013 Ackerson had a stroke of her own, caused by a congenital heart defect and abnormal heart rhythm. Since her recovery, Ackerson has traveled the globe working with the American Heart Association, American Academy of Neurology and International Consortium for Health Outcomes Measurement. She works to ensure positive patient outcomes and productive lives for survivors of this #1 killer of Missouri citizens. Ackerson is currently the Neuroscience Program Coordinator at Saint Luke's Marion Bloch Neuroscience Institute. She is an active member of the Board of Directors for the American Heart Association Kansas City Affiliate. She was honored as the American Heart Association National Healthcare Volunteer of the year in 2016.



**Susan "Sue" Kendig, JD, WHNP-BC, FAANP
Council Vice Chair**

Sue Kendig is an attorney and women's health nurse practitioner with more than 30 years of experience in health care. She is a Women's Health Integration Specialist with SSM Health – St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to joining SSM Health she was a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she led the Women's Health Nurse Practitioner program for almost two decades. Active in public service throughout her career, Kendig served as an appointee to Missouri's first Women's Health Council from 2000-2004. She was a gubernatorial appointee to the Missouri Patient Safety Commission, the Missouri Task Force on Prematurity and Infant Mortality, and the Missouri Health Connection Board of Directors. At the national level, Kendig served on the CMS Medicare Evidence Development and Coverage Advisory Committee as a patient advocate. Her commitment to women's health care, patient safety and quality is evident in her numerous presentations and publications, and ongoing professional activities. Kendig is a current member of the Council on Patient Safety in Women's Health Care and co-led the development of the Council's Maternal Mental Health, Post-Partum Basics and Transition to Well Woman Care Patient Safety Bundles. She is a member of the Women's Preventive Services Advisory Panel, which guides this collaborative interdisciplinary effort to develop, review, update and disseminate recommendations for women's preventive health care services. Locally, she is honored to support health initiatives within the St. Louis region through service on the St. Louis City Board of Health and Hospitals, and the Board of Directors for Generate Health, an organization dedicated to "improving birth outcomes and building healthy communities by uniting and mobilizing the St. Louis region."

Central Region



Colleen Coble

Colleen Coble is the Chief Executive Officer of the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, a position she has held since 1988. For more than 30 years she has been an advocate for women and their children victimized by violence, and an educator on progressive approaches to community interventions to address violence against women. As a public policy advocate since 1989, Coble has obtained passage of major legislation benefiting abused and raped women: a far-reaching domestic violence arrest statute; adding lack of consent to felony rape crimes; establishment of the crime of domestic assault; criminalization of marital rape and stalking; first-time state funding for domestic and sexual violence services; funding for sexual assault evidence exams; local funding initiatives for domestic violence shelters; custody and visitation changes to protect battered women and their children; protection orders for sexual assault victims; and statewide collection of law enforcement and homicide data on domestic violence crimes. In 2009, Coble was awarded the Diane Reese Award by the National Network to End Domestic Violence for her “outstanding commitment to social justice and advocacy for battered women.” Coble is a founding member of the Missouri Battered Women’s Clemency Coalition and she received the Women’s Justice Award for Citizenship in 2010 (*Missouri Lawyers Weekly*). That same year, she also served on the Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence established to review and revise 30 years of Missouri domestic violence laws, with the subsequent 2011 legislation passing in the Missouri General Assembly with a unanimous vote. Coble has been appointed by the Missouri Supreme Court and multiple governors to serve on various statewide bodies, committees and task forces to address gender issues in Missouri. Educated as a journalist at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, Coble covered issues of government and human needs as a newspaper reporter.



Karen Edison, MD

Dr. Karen Edison is a tireless advocate for patient-centered health care having cared for rural, underserved dermatology patients using telemedicine throughout Missouri since 1995. She served as RWJ Health Policy Fellow in the US Senate where she was instrumental in the legislative expansion of Medicare reimbursement for telemedicine services. She has helped lead work with the state on health insurance access, telemedicine policy, and Medicaid data analysis, and has led efforts funded by regional foundations to improve health equity and foster health literacy for all Missourians. She served as clinical lead for Missouri’s highly successful Regional Extension Center and she serves on the Executive Committee of the Missouri Health Connection, Missouri’s state-designated health information organization. Edison’s current titles include Philip C. Anderson Professor and Chairwoman of the Department of Dermatology, Medical Director of the Missouri Telehealth Network & Show-Me ECHO and Director of the Center for Health Policy at the University of Missouri.

Central Region



Lana Zerrer, MD

Dr. Lana Zerrer, a native of Missouri, earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, and her medical degree from the University of Missouri School of Medicine. She completed a residency in internal medicine in 2002 at the University of Missouri and is board certified. Zerrer served in the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps, achieving the rank of Major, from 2002 to 2005. Her military experience included deployment to Kyrgyzstan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Zerrer began her VA career in August 2005 as a staff physician and Primary Care Provider at the Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital. In January 2007, she was appointed Director of the Primary Care Service Line at Truman VA. Zerrer served as Acting Chief of Staff between October 2009 and June 2010, and was appointed Chief of Staff effective June 20, 2010. Zerrer is a member of the American College of Physicians.

Kansas City Region



Daphne Bascom, MD, PhD

Dr. Daphne Bascom is a Senior Vice President and the Medical Director for Community Integrated Health at the YMCA of Greater Kansas City. In this newly established role at the Y, Bascom is the first physician on staff at a Y in the U.S. She provides leadership to the Y's innovative chronic disease prevention and management programs and leads the development of existing and new health care and community partnerships. Current evidence-based health interventions delivered by the Y include the Y's Diabetes Prevention Program, LIVESTRONG at the Y for cancer survivors, Enhance Fitness® for those with arthritis and blood pressure Self-Monitoring for individuals with high blood pressure. Bascom most recently was Vice President and Chief Medical Officer with Cerner Corporation. Prior to re-joining Cerner, Bascom was Chief Clinical Systems Officer for the Cleveland Clinic Health System in Cleveland, Ohio. Bascom completed her fellowship in microvascular and reconstructive surgery of the head and neck at Oregon Health Sciences University, and her medical degree, internship and residency in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. She earned her PhD in physiological sciences at the University of Oxford, Laboratory of Physiology, in the United Kingdom.



Wendy Doyle

Wendy Doyle serves as the President and CEO for the Women's Foundation located in Kansas City, Missouri. The Women's Foundation, celebrating its 25th Anniversary, promotes equity and opportunity for women of all ages using research, philanthropic investments and policy solutions to make meaningful change.

Kansas City Region



Danielle Felty, MSN, RN, NEA-OB, RNC-OB, C-EFM

Danielle Felty is the Maternal/Child Director at Liberty Hospital in Liberty, Missouri. She also works as adjunct nursing faculty at Indiana Wesleyan University in their Masters in Nursing Administration (MSN) and dual track MSN/MBA program. Over the past 18 years, Felty has been in maternal child positions in Texas, Delaware and Michigan, with the most recent 10 years of her nursing experience in leadership positions. Her memberships and activities include: National Certification Corporation Perinatal Quality and Safety Certification content team member, 2017 - present; Liberty Hospital Nurse Residency Board member; Missouri Organization of Nurse Leaders (MONL) professional development committee member, 2017; MONL program committee member, 2016; MONL nominating committee member, 2016; American Organization of Nurse Executives, 2015 - present; MONL, 2015 - present; Resolve through Sharing Bereavement Coordinator, 2014 - present; Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) Fetal Monitoring Instructor, 2013- present; American Academy of Pediatrics Neonatal Resuscitation Program Instructor, 2008 - present; and AWHONN member, 2001 - present.



Sarah Martin, PhD, MPP, MPH

Dr. Sarah Martin is the Division Manager of Community Engagement, Policy and Accountability at the Kansas City, Missouri Health Department. Martin received her PhD in Public Policy from the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley. She also received a master's degree in public policy and a master's degree in public health with an emphasis in Epidemiology from UC Berkeley and a Bachelor of Arts in political science and art history from California State University, Bakersfield. Her work focuses on the social determinants of health inequities and how public policies aggravate or heal those disparities. Martin was appointed by Governor Jay Nixon to the State Board of Healing Arts and serves on the boards of the Missouri Budget Project, the Mother Child Health Coalition, the Migrant Farmworkers Assistance Fund and Uzazi Village Prenatal Resource Center. She is active in philanthropic and political organizations around the region and nationally. Her research can be found in *Social Science & Medicine*, the *Journal of Neonatal Nursing*, as well as *Breastfeeding Medicine* and numerous governmental publications in California and Kansas City. Martin is also an adjunct instructor at the Bloch School of Management teaching graduate level courses in Health Program Evaluation, Health Economics and a course on Health and Social Equity.

Kansas City Region



Bridget McCandless, MD, MBA, FACP

Dr. Bridget McCandless is the President and CEO of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City which focuses on leadership, advocacy and provision of resources to eliminate barriers and promote quality health for uninsured and underserved residents in the Greater Kansas City area. The Foundation has made more than \$240 million in investments in six counties surrounding Kansas City. These funds are used to address opportunities for healthy communities, safety net and mental health services. McCandless currently serves on the Missouri Medicaid Oversight Committee, the Healthy KC Commission, the Urban Neighborhood Initiative and the American College of Physicians Health and Public Policy Committee. McCandless received an MD from the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine, completed her residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Virginia and received an MBA in Health Care Leadership from Rockhurst University. She has a special interest in chronic disease management, poverty medicine, health policy and population health. Prior to joining the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, she served as founder and Medical Director of the Shared Care Free Clinic.



K. Gay Purcell, MD

Dr. K. Gay Purcell is a Missouri native and attended the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she also served as Internal Medicine Chief Resident. She is now in her 18th year of outpatient private practice at Mid-America Internal Medicine and continues to love working with patients on a daily basis. She is dedicated to the education of both her patients and future generations of medical providers, and often has students rotating with her in her office. Women's Health is a special area of focus, and she is devoted to causes such as cervical cancer screening, STD education, adolescent health, contraceptive management and prevention of heart disease in women.

Northeast Region



Margaret Wilson, DO

Dr. Margaret Wilson is dean of the A.T. Still University Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine and professor in the department of Family Medicine, Preventive Medicine and Community Health, and has been with the University since 1985. Prior to her role as dean, she served as chair of the department, during which time she developed and served as course director for The Complete Doctor course which teaches communication and physical exam skills and clinical skills. Wilson graduated from Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1982 and did her post-graduate training at Grandview Hospital in Dayton, Ohio. She is board certified in family practice. Wilson served in the National Health Services Corps in Mound City, Kansas before her return to Kirksville. Wilson has been the project director for numerous HRSA PreDoctoral education grants over the years, including the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health award. She currently serves as project director for a HRSA grant, Preparing Primary Care Trainees to Transform Health Care Systems. Wilson continues to serve as a staff physician at the Northeast Missouri Health Council community health clinic where she was medical director for over 20 years. Wilson is actively involved with the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, serving on their Executive and Finance Committees. Wilson has received the Missouri Governor's Award For Excellence in Teaching in 2000, the Kirksville Osteopathic Alumni Association Living Tribute Award in 2009, the Missouri Primary Care Association Samuel Rodgers Achievement Award in 2010, the Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award in 2012, the 2015 KOAA Alumnus of the Year Award and the 2016 MAOPS Medallion Award.

Northwest Region



Padma Veligati, MD, MRCOG, FACOG, MPH

Dr. Padma Veligati is a physician practicing Obstetrics and Gynecology at Mosaic Life Care (Previously Heartland Regional Medical Center) in St. Joseph, Missouri. She attended medical school in India. Many early childhood events created a desire to help and heal sick people and become a physician. This led her into a very fulfilling career in medicine as an Obstetrician Gynecologist. She taught medical students from the University of Missouri, Columbia, during their obstetrics and gynecology clinical rotation at her hospital. She volunteered her services at the local Social Welfare Board, this a clinic catering to the needs of underserved, uninsured women. She was awarded “Woman of Excellence in Volunteerism 2008” by the YWCA. Veligati has a master’s in Public Health from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore. She completed her residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Wisconsin Medical School in Milwaukee and her residency in Family Medicine at Forbes Regional Hospital in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. She previously worked as a senior house officer and Registrar in OB/GYN Hospitals in Liverpool and Manchester, United Kingdom.

St. Louis Region



Kathi Arbini

My name is Kathi Arbini. In November 2009, I lost my only child to a heroin overdose. I have worked very hard to fight for recovery, getting awareness into schools and working on passing laws. We are losing a generation to this awful disease of addiction! I keep my son's memory alive. I will never give up.... SUDs (people with substance use disorder) DO RECOVER!



Patricia Clay, MA

Patricia Clay currently serves as the Executive Director of Treatment Communities of America. She has a master's in public administration from George Mason University, a master's in counseling from Assumption College and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Massachusetts. Clay has more than 30 years of experience in the human service field and previously has been employed as a Director at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, Administrator for the Rappahannock Regional Adult and Juvenile Drug Treatment Court programs, Social Worker III, In Home Therapist, Family Service Officer/Court Mediator (in the Probate & Family Court), State Probation Officer and Addiction Specialist. Clay relocated to Washington, D.C. in 2001.

St. Louis Region



Eboni January, MD

Dr. Eboni January is a board certified Obstetrician/Gynecologist from East St Louis, Illinois. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Chemistry and Anthropology from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She went on to participate in the Medprep post baccalaureate program at Southern University of Illinois-Carbondale. From there she received her Medical degree in 2010 from Wright State University-Boonshoft School of Medicine in Dayton, Ohio. She completed her residency training at Mercy Hospital-St. Louis. January has a strong interest in adolescent care, preventative medicine, mentorship and fitness. She established a “text coaching” fitness program in 2016 in an effort to decrease obesity amongst her patient population. This program is now available to the general public and was recently featured in *Gazelle Magazine*, *The St. Louis Argus*, Fox 2, and on KTSP.com. In June 2017 she was featured in *Delux Magazine’s* “50 Most Intriguing Women in St. Louis.” January’s passion is youth mentorship. She has been mentoring for over 10 years. In spring 2017 she launched her “Mobile Mentoring” program, where students get daily tips via text on how to become successful both inside and outside the classroom. January is the co-CEO of Pavlov’s Wellness Firm, a company focused on instituting health and wellness in small businesses and large corporations. In 2015, January helped promote a childhood obesity campaign alongside Olympic gold medalist, Jackie Joyner Kersee. Her health and wellness podcast, “The Wellness Wheel” at CBS Radio, aims to introduce all communities to a holistic approach to wellness by inviting celebrity guests to discuss different areas of wellness.



Katherine Mathews, MD, MPH, MBA

Dr. Katherine Mathews works with the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Women’s Health at Saint Louis University as the Research Division Director. As an obstetrician-gynecologist with a background in public health, international work and health care administration, she has dedicated her career to improving community health and the delivery of high quality, evidence-based and cost effective health care with a focus on low-income and minority populations. For 10 years she served as full-time faculty at the Washington University School of Medicine. During the early 2000s, she built the Siteman Cancer Center’s public health programs to improve access to cancer screening and care. She served four years as Chief Medical Officer at St. Louis ConnectCare, the specialty care organization of the region’s safety net and was co-director of Washington University’s Center for Community Based Research. She also served as Director of Clinical Services at Casa de Salud where she oversaw clinical operations, student internships and education and research partnerships. She is currently the Research Division Director for the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Women’s Health at Saint Louis University, and she continues to work on a variety of initiatives with a focus on improving pregnancy outcomes.

St. Louis Region



Mary McLennan, MD

Dr. Mary McLennan has had the privilege of being a physician for 34 years. Her medical school training was at the University of Queensland, Australia. She initially trained as a family physician and practiced in a small county town. Most of her practice involved the care of women and children. Thus on moving to the U.S., she decided to pursue training as an obstetrician and gynecologist. During her training she developed an interest in the treatment of incontinence and pelvic floor disorders and completed a fellowship in Urogynecology. Most of McLennan's career has been spent in academic medicine, with the past 18 years at Saint Louis University. Most of this time was focused on treating patients and being the residency program director. For the past three years, she has been the Chair of the department. As such, her interests have diversified into establishing programs across the spectrum of both obstetrics and gynecology, providing access to all patients, promoting academic development for the faculty and training for the residents and students. Her department sees a large volume of underserved patients, and one of the greatest challenges is how to provide interval and gynecological care to this group. St. Louis has a higher than the national average rate of perinatal mortality, so McLennan and her team face many challenges.



Denise Wilfley, PhD

Dr. Denise Wilfley is the Scott Rudolph University Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine, Pediatrics, and Psychological & Brain Sciences, and Director of the Center for Healthy Weight and Wellness at Washington University School of Medicine. Wilfley has served as Principal Investigator on multiple National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded clinical trials and has been awarded more than \$35 million in continuous NIH funding since 1994, allowing her to conduct a programmatic line of research examining the etiology, prevention and treatment of obesity and eating disorders in children and adults. Wilfley is recognized internationally as an expert in this field and her pioneering work at the intersection of eating disorders and obesity was integral to the formal recognition of binge eating disorder and to establishing the efficacy of preventive interventions and treatments for recurrent binge eating syndromes. In addition, she works at the state and federal levels to ensure the creation of policies and systems conducive to widespread access to affordable, effective care. Wilfley has authored or co-authored more than 200 publications and has held prominent roles on national boards for both obesity and eating disorders. In addition, she currently serves as Vice-Chair of the Missouri Eating Disorders Council; member of the American Psychological Association's Guideline Development Panel for Obesity; Advisor to the American Academy of Pediatrics Institute for Healthy Childhood Weight; and as a member of the Research Advisory Committees for the National Eating Disorders Association and The Obesity Society. Among other notable awards, she has received an NIH K24 Midcareer Award in Patient-Oriented Research in eating disorders and obesity and the Missouri Eating Disorders Association Founder's Award.

St. Louis Region



Denise Willers, MD

Dr. Denise Willers is an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Washington University in St. Louis. Willers has been caring for patients and teaching students and residents at Washington University since 2004. She serves as the Medical Director of the Barnes-Jewish Hospital OB/GYN Resident and Nurse Practitioner Clinic, which serves as a safety net for women from St. Louis and surrounding urban and rural areas. Willers is also a staff physician for The SPOT (Supporting Positive Opportunities with Teens), a free medical clinic affiliated with Washington University, providing care for adolescents. Willers is passionate about helping women of all ages advocate for themselves and their families to make the best choices for their health and in their relationships.



Rachel Winograd, PhD

Dr. Rachel Winograd is a Research Assistant Professor at the Missouri Institute of Mental Health (MIMH) – University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL). Her clinical, research and program development interests have revolved around alcohol and drug use, consequences and treatment. Winograd is the Project Director of Missouri’s State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis Grant and the MIMH Principal Investigator of the Missouri Heroin-Opioid Prevention and Education (MO-HOPE) Project. Her primary focus is on expanding access to medication assisted treatment and harm reduction strategies for those most in need of evidence-based care for opioid use disorders in Missouri.

Southeast Region



Sandra Jackson, EdD, LCSW, BCD

Dr. Sandra Jackson is a licensed clinical social worker with board certified diplomat status. She received her master's in social work from Fordham University in New York City, New York and doctorate of education from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Jackson has been the Local Recovery Coordinator at John J. Pershing VA Medical Center in Poplar Bluff, Missouri since June 2007. She also serves as the Local Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Coordinator and a national consultant for Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD. Jackson serves as Chair of Missouri Department of Mental Health Advisory Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse. Prior to joining the VA, Jackson held both clinical and administrative duties in various settings including community mental health, residential care and public school systems. She has dedicated her life to helping individuals, groups, couples and families to develop better ways of managing emotional stress, recovering from trauma and resolving conflict. In addition to direct clinic work, Jackson is a college instructor.



Sheryl Lynette "Ms. Sherry" Maxwell

Sheryl Lynette Branch-Maxwell, affectionately and respectfully known throughout the state of Missouri as "Ms. Sherry", is a long-time community servant with a passion for helping children, youth and teens. Over the past 30 years, Maxwell has been an anchor, innovator and pillar of strength for Missourians in the Southeast Region of the state. Maxwell's history of community service began in 1979 when she started her career in early childhood education working in daycare facilities and Head Start programs. As a result, Maxwell began directing summer food programs while she simultaneously initiated and developed numerous partnerships with community, local and state organizations for the direct benefit of the Bootheel. She currently works for Lincoln University Cooperative Extension Charleston Outreach Center in Charleston, Missouri. Maxwell provides leadership through program development and outreach for at-risk youth and their families. Her achievements include founding programs for children and families throughout the Southeast Missouri region, from Kids' Beat, Kiddie Kidz and Kidz of Distinction, Reel Fathers-Real Men, The Beat Goes On, and B.A.T.T.E.R. U.P. These programs reach children of all ages, as well as their parents and families and include senior citizens in The Beat Goes On program. Maxwell has also served on several gubernatorial boards and commissions for the State of Missouri. She was appointed by the late Governor Mel Carnahan to serve on the African-American Task Force, by former Governor Bob Holden to serve on the Missouri Commission for Volunteerism, and most recently, by former Governor Matt Blunt, where she served as a member of the Missouri Children's Trust.

Southeast Region



Karlyle Christian-Ritter, MD

Karlyle Christian-Ritter attended University of Missouri-Kansas City's six-year combined BA/MD program. Her pediatric residency was completed at Creighton University and her Neonatal Fellowship at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in St. Louis. She and her husband moved to Springfield, Missouri in 1994. Christian-Ritter practiced at St. John's Mercy for three years and then had the opportunity to join the faculty at University of Nebraska/Creighton University, working with medical students and residents at an Assistant Professor Level in a quaternary care clinical setting. In 2002, she and her family moved to Cape Girardeau. With one other neonatologist, Christian-Ritter opened the only Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit between St. Louis and Memphis as well as the NICU transport system/team. Today the NICU is a thriving unit caring for the infants of Southeast Missouri, Southern Illinois, Western Kentucky, and Northern Arkansas. She is the Director of Cape Neonatology and the Medical Director of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Saint Francis Medical Center. The unit fosters medical advancement and has made great strides in antibiotic exposure reduction, reduction in pharmacotherapy for the treatment of NAS and has received the Aim for Excellence Award from the Missouri Hospital Association for necrotizing enterocolitis reduction. Particular clinical interests of Christian-Ritter include Pulmonary Hypertension, Antibiotic Stewardship, Infant Safe Sleep Practices and Infant Mortality Reduction.

Southwest Region



Paula Baker

Paula Baker is President and Chief Executive Officer of Freeman Health System, providing vision and direction for the three-hospital, 460-bed health system headquartered in Joplin, Missouri. Baker previously served as Chief Executive Officer of Ozark Center, Freeman's behavioral health division, where she was the guiding force behind the development of the Bill & Virginia Leffen Center for Autism. She continues to provide executive leadership for the autism program. Honors include the Missouri Hospital Association Visionary Leadership Award; Joplin Citizen of the Year; Pittsburg State University Outstanding Alumni; Pittsburg State University Meritorious Achievement Award; Making a Difference to Women Award; 2008 Women of Distinction; Hero in Healthcare Award; Ten Most Influential Women; recognition by the Missouri House of Representatives for distinguished leadership in behavioral health care and designation as 2014 PAC Champion for Missouri Hospital Association Southwest District. Most recently, Baker received the Grassroots Champion Award from the American Hospital Association. Additionally, Baker was appointed to the Task Force for Examining Statewide Medicaid Delivery Models, the American Hospital Association Regional Policy Board and the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders. She serves on the Pittsburg State University Foundation Board of Trustees and on the boards of Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Four States, Arvest Bank, Connect-2-Culture, Joplin Regional Prosperity Initiative Advisory Council, Landmark Hospital-Joplin, Missouri Hospital Association, Healthcare Services Group, Vizient Mid-America and Mid-America Service Solutions, LLC. Baker holds a bachelor's degree in secondary education and a master's in clinical psychology from Pittsburg State University.



Alyson Harder, MSW, LCSW, LSCSW

Alyson Harder has worked in health care, behavioral health care, community-based care and the private sector since 1997. She began her career in Arkansas, Texas and Colorado and returned to Missouri in 2000 to focus on rural health care. Harder is committed to strategic and systemic improvements to health care, behavioral health care and education through integrative and coordinative care approaches. Her primary commitment is to assist our most vulnerable populations through enhancing the sustainability and vitality of rural communities. Harder is the Chief Executive Officer of Heartland Behavioral Health Services in Nevada, Missouri. She is the Board President of the Healthy Nevada Cerner Corporation; Nevada R-V School District Board Member; and Nevada R-V School District Wellness Committee Community Representative. She serves on the Missouri Hospital Association's Psychiatric Network; Missouri Hospital Association's Strategic Quality Council; and the Council on Families in Crisis.

Southwest Region



Katie Towns, MPH

Katie Towns graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Sports Medicine/Athletic Training and later a Master's of Public Health from Missouri State University. After many years' experience in public health and health care, Towns currently serves as the Assistant Director at the Springfield-Greene County Health Department in Springfield, Missouri. In this role, Towns has assisted in leading the department through PHAB accreditation as well as an unprecedented effort to develop a regional Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan in partnership with local health care systems. This effort has prompted a new community effort to drive cross-sectoral work that develops systems and policies that incorporate health as an element of developing Springfield's infrastructure and culture.