



WHC

WOMEN'S HEALTH COUNCIL

Leadership



Susan “Sue” Kendig, JD, WHNP-BC, FAANP Council Vice Chair

Susan Kendig, JD, WHNP-BC, FAANP 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 teaching 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, she has held appointments to CMS Medicare Evidence Development & Coverage Advisory Committee (MEDCAC) and served on the National Quality Forum Measures Application Partnership (NQF MAP) Medicaid Adult Workgroup and NQF’s Social Determinants of Health Data Integration Workgroup. Statewide she served as an appointee to the Missouri Commission on Patient Safety, the Missouri Health Connection Board of Directors, and the Missouri Task Force on Prematurity and Infant Mortality. Sue served on the Council on Patient Safety in Women’s Health Care (the Council) for seven years and is an active member of the Alliance for Innovation in Maternal Health (AIM) national partners group and Executive Committee. She has significant experience in patient safety bundle development, serving as co-lead in developing the Maternal Mental Health, Post-Partum: From Birth to the Comprehensive Postpartum Visit, and Post-Partum Basics: Maternity Transition to Well Woman Care patient safety bundles. Sue is a member of the Women’s Preventive Services (WPSI) Advisory Panel, which guides a HRSA funded collaborative interdisciplinary effort to develop, review, update and disseminate recommendations for women’s preventive health care services. She is committed to the concept of clinical and community integration as a tool to improve women’s health outcomes, and to optimize the quality and efficiency of health care service delivery. To this end, she has provided technical assistance to integrated primary care medical home/behavioral health home and other value-based care initiatives, and collective impact infant mortality reduction efforts in urban and rural communities. At home in St. Louis, Sue is honored to support local health initiatives through service on the St. Louis City Board of Health and Hospitals, and as a founding member and Board of Directors Chairperson for Generate Health STL, a St. Louis based coalition dedicated to achieving “zero racial disparities” in birth outcomes.

Central Region



Melissa Terry, MD, MBA

Dr. Melissa Terry is a full-time practicing OB/GYN physician at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO, currently serving as the Associate Division Director for the General OB/GYN Division, Associate Director of Inpatient Obstetrics and an Assistant Professor in Clinical OB/GYN and Women's Health. She graduated from the University of Missouri School of Medicine in 2000 and immediately went on active duty in the U.S. Army, completing her residency in OB/GYN at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, WA. Her first duty assignment after graduating from residency in 2004 was to the 212th MASH in Miesau, Germany, and she deployed to Pakistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2005. She left the U.S. Army in 2015 after serving for 15 years and achieving the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. During her military career, she served as the Chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology at both Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and Eisenhower Army Medical Center, as well as an Assistant Professor in OB/GYN at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences; and she was awarded the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, as well as the Army Meritorious Service Medal (x2). She returned to the University of Missouri in 2015, passionate about training future OB/GYN physicians and improving healthcare for all Missouri women.



Huvona Watkins

Huvona Watkins is a natural relationship builder with a proven record of forging lasting connections between people, organizations, and issues for positive change. She was a perfect fit when she joined the staff at the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (MOCADSV) in 2020 to take on the newly created position of Partnership Development Coordinator. In this position, she has developed community relationships that have introduced innovative and promising approaches to ending gender-based violence in Missouri. Huvona is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and has always worked in service to her community. She started her professional career as an Emergency Medical Technician, connecting patients in crisis to life-saving care. Prior to joining MOCADSV, Huvona served for more than six-years at Life Source Consultants, a local advocacy program for survivors of violence. She joined their team as the Program Director and, as her leadership skills became increasingly apparent, she transitioned to be their Executive Director. She has a passion for health equity and is committed to efforts that advance women's reproductive health. As a certified Doula, she regularly provides supportive care to pregnant women and is the founder of Angels of Empowerment, a nonprofit organization that provides birthing support and mentoring to young mothers who are survivors of abuse. Huvona and her husband have four children; she and her family enjoy spending time together, traveling, and trying local brunch spots.

Kansas City Region



Wendy Doyle

Wendy Doyle fearlessly advocates for women's economic and civic advancement by amplifying women's voices and producing results. Wendy is at the forefront of all economic policies that impact women and their families. She regularly educates and informs decision-makers and community leaders about policy solutions for women at local, county, and state levels. Translating information into action, she testifies frequently to state legislatures, publishes op-eds in state newspapers, serves as a dynamic and informative presenter, and champions systemic policy change for governments and corporations through her thought leadership. During her nine-year tenure at United WE, Wendy has led the organization to invest in research, advocacy, and policy solutions to remove economic barriers for women, including conducting 21 meaningful research studies, advocating for issues resulting in 47 policy actions, and supporting more than 175 women in securing civic appointments. Wendy is committed to impacting hundreds of thousands of women and families through transformative research, scaling United WE's fast-growing Appointments Project®, advocating for reforms that honor the legacies of women, and contributing to policy solutions that advance equal pay, paid family leave, affordable childcare and occupational licensing, among others. Since 2013, Wendy has expanded United WE's focus from serving Kansas City to all of Kansas and Missouri, and her success in the Heartland is spreading nationwide to cities including St. Louis, Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, Pittsburgh and South San Francisco. Wendy's previous experience as an executive and strategic consultant for large nonprofits provides a unique systems approach to accelerating the pace of change through partnerships. Wendy earned a B.A. from Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, and was recognized in 2021 as an Idealist of the Year by City Year. Wendy was inducted into the Missouri Public Affairs Hall of Fame in October 2021. Her personal interests include running, traveling, modern art and design, and restoring old cars.

Northeast Region



Brenda Higgins, EdD, MSN, FNP-BC

Dr. Higgins is a Family Nurse Practitioner who currently serves as the Asst. Director for Interprofessional Education at AT Still University in Kirksville, MO. She recently retired from Truman State University, where she last held the position of the Assoc. VP for Student Health and Wellness and maintained both a clinical position at the Student Health Center and a faculty position in the Nursing department. Dr. Higgins has taught a number of nursing didactic and clinical courses, including Obstetrical and Pediatric Nursing. Dr. Higgins was elected to the Adair County Health Department's Board of Trustees in 2021. Dr. Higgins is married to Jim Higgins and has two grown children, Craig Higgins, a teacher in the Kirksville RIII School District and Kristen Kennedy, a school counselor at Midway Heights Elementary School. She enjoys spending time with family, including her two grandchildren, Kai and Keeley Kennedy.

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.



Mary McLennan, MD

Dr. Mary McLennan has had the privilege of being a physician for 36 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 21 years at Saint Louis University. Most of this time was focused on treating patients and being the residency program director. For the past five 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.

St. Louis Region



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. She has been awarded more than \$60 million in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding and published more than 300 scientific articles. Wilfley is an international authority on the causes, prevention, and treatment of obesity and eating disorders, and the integrative approach she employs has resulted in transformative research in both fields. She has established effective interventions that help children and families improve their eating and activity behaviors, as well as psychosocial and weight outcomes. She has made substantial contributions to establishing the clinical significance of binge eating disorder, developing effective treatments for individuals suffering from eating disorders and obesity, such as interpersonal psychotherapy, and developing innovative and cost-effective methods for early intervention and prevention including a comprehensive digital platform for individuals across the eating disorders risk and diagnostic spectrum. Wilfley has held numerous prominent roles including serving as a member of the American Psychological Association's Guideline Development Panel for Obesity, President of the Eating Disorders Research Society, and Chair of the Pediatric Obesity Section of The Obesity Society. She currently serves as a member of the NIH Center for Scientific Review Advisory Council, Advisor to the American Academy of Pediatrics Institute for Healthy Childhood Weight, and Vice-Chair of the Missouri Eating Disorders Council. Her awards include NIH career awards, the Missouri Eating Disorders Association Founder's Award, and The Obesity Society's Oded Bar-Or Award for Excellence in Pediatric Obesity Research.



Megan Simmons, PhD, MPH

Megan Simmons, PhD, MPH, has over ten years of experience working to improve women's reproductive health through applied research, education, and advocacy. Dr. Simmons' research has primarily focused on contraceptive access and uptake among low-income and sexual minority women, as well as the roles social support and policy play in reproductive decision-making and pregnancy intention. She completed her Master of Public Health at the University of Missouri, Columbia in 2013 and earned her PhD in Health Behavior, with a focus on reproductive and sexual health, from Indiana University in 2017. In 2020, Dr. Simmons joined Missouri Foundation for Health as a Senior Research Strategist, where she oversees learning, evaluation, and research for the Foundation's unintended pregnancy and maternal health initiatives.

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. Dr. Jackson is the Social Work Executive and Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator at John J. Pershing VA Medical Center in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. She also serves as the Local Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Coordinator and a national consultant for Prolonged Exposure Therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Prior to joining the VA, Dr. Jackson held a variety of roles across her career, including front line clinician, program manager, residential treatment director and public school administrator. Her professional interests include promoting patient centered care, culturally sensitive psychotherapy, trauma-informed care and reducing barriers to access for underserved populations. She has dedicated her life to helping individuals, groups, couples and families to develop better ways of managing stress, recovering from trauma, and discovering their purpose. In her free time, Dr. Jackson enjoys volunteering, sports and going to the movies. She is married and has two children.



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



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.