

The Hub

The Hub Newsletter provides all things related to CCSN from network updates, to valuable resources, and events!



July 2025

PEOPLE AND PROGRESS

In the summer of 2019, **Deborah (Deb) Thomas**, DDiv and **Carol Williams**, PhD attended a meeting about a possible program/curriculum to bring together community members and researchers to learn together about cancer health disparities. Both Deb and Carol had previously been involved in disparities reduction efforts (Deb, with Ryan Spellecy, PhD, to identify elements in understanding and addressing barriers to trust in medicine and research and Carol with the team AHW convened that led to the formation of CCSN and its initial programs). Little did they know that six short years later, they would be transitioning to co-leader emeritae and leaving behind a legacy of thoughtful collaboration.



Deborah Thomas, DDiv (she/her)

Community Co-Leader for Research and Community Scholars | Founder and Pastor for the House of Grace Kingdom Ministry | Retired Faculty from the Milwaukee Area Technical College

challenged and had to focus to keep our momentum going. And we had to work really hard not to create a program that had already been done. We knew we wanted something different.”

The Research and Community Scholars program brings together community members and early career biomedical researchers to explore cancer health disparities from a transdisciplinary lens, understanding how different viewpoints can change the way one sees a problem as well as the solution.

“This has been an amazing journey!” remarked Deb, “When we started, I didn’t really know anyone on the team including Carol! I really thought I would do a little advising on a program and move on.”

Carol laughed, “I thought the same! Boy, were we wrong!”

“We spent much of those first meetings trying to envision what the program could be,” recalls Deb. “There was so much back and forth and sometimes it was challenging and frustrating, especially once COVID hit. We were really



Carol Williams, PhD (she/her)

Research Co-Leader for Research and Community Scholars | Joan K. Van Deuren Professor in Breast Cancer Research and Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology at the Medical College of Wisconsin

Throughout the four cohorts, Deb and Carol have overseen multiple iterations of how to help scholars gain this richer perspective.

“Development evaluation really helped us! I had never even heard of this type of evaluation before this program,” Carol exclaimed. “It gave us the tools to help us make small and some not so small changes to the curriculum. We started our first cohort in 2021 under COVID restrictions. As things opened up, we had to be responsive to the changing needs of our scholars. We kept refining how we worked with scholars and what we were offering for seminars. It has been just great!”



Carol with a Research and Community Scholar in her lab

As Deb and Carol worked through the iterations of the program and curriculum, challenges and conflicts arose. “We are both really committed to helping this program and curriculum bridge and build partnerships between researchers and the community. We believe whole-heartedly that this will make a positive difference to the health of community. This is our collective motivation,” said Deb.

This shared vision helped create the foundation of an honest and true collaboration and grew into an amazing friendship. “Deb and I would sometimes disagree or feel uncertain about the direction of the program. Then, one of us would just call the other person and we would talk through it,” Carol reflected. “The more we talked, the more we got to know each other, and we became more comfortable just being honest with each other.”

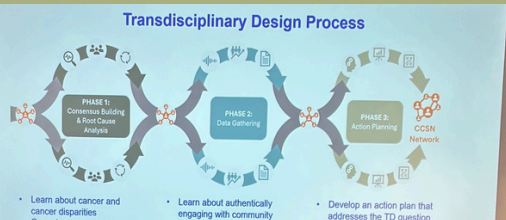
“As a minister, I am very accustomed to listening to people and trying to understand how they saw an issue,” noted Deb.

“The more time I spent with Carol, the more I realized she did something similar. As a scientist, she would seek out information, data if you will, and then reflect it back. We had these wonderful conversations, and we would just learn from each other, and we could talk through our challenges. There was no ego, just a spirit of receiving, receiving an impartation.”

“Sometimes, we had to bring issues back to our larger leadership team which included others involved in evaluation and program administration. And it was in these moments I saw how our collaboration had really deepened. We just knew what the other person was thinking,” said Carol. “But - we didn’t rely upon this assumption. It was important for both of us to continually share in the decision-making. We knew we always made better decisions together, even when we agreed.”



(Continued on Page 3)



- Learn about cancer and cancer disparities
- Come to consensus about a TD question to be explored
- Learn about authentically engaging with community and research audiences
- Develop processes in the TD work groups to collect data relating to the TD process
- Develop an action plan that addresses the TD question
- Test the action plan with external audiences
- Learn about other successful TD projects
- Develop a communication plan



Group photo of the 2024-2025 cohort

In the cohorts, scholars recognized the incredible partnership between Deb and Carol. Over the four cohorts, both Research scholars and Community scholars noted that they wanted to emulate the relationship Deb and Carol had. Program evaluator, Kristen Gardner-Volle, MS, noted, “More than one scholar shared that Deb’s and Carol’s collaborative style was exactly what they wanted to achieve. I always told them that they should focus on listening and being open to learning.”

“We really embrace the notion that we are all learners, and also, we are all experts. Both Carol and I are always looking to grow, and we try to communicate this mindset with all who enter this program,” Deb shared.

Growth has occurred in multiple ways in the Research and Community Scholars program. Scholars have grown individually in their understanding of cancer disparities and complex collaboration. The program has grown in its ability to help scholars develop a transdisciplinary orientation, and it has expanded, doubling its cohort size from eight to 16. Deb noted, “We have been very intentional in our partnership development. We recognized that there are people who want something similar to what we want and they have helped us grow this program, like Dean Equan Burrows at MATC and Pastor Walter Lanier as well as other outreach through the Milwaukee Community Journal.”

As the Research and Community Scholar program has grown and changed, it has left a deep and profound impact on all of CCSN, from bringing in new partners to impacting a shared understanding of transdisciplinary collaboration. As Deb and Carol hand over the reins to two new leaders, Simona Johnson, MBA (The Synergy Company) and Nikki Lyttle, PhD (MCW), their legacy on collaboration and partnership remains. “We are so fortunate that Deb and Carol agreed to that meeting six years ago,” shared Melinda Stolley, CCSN co-leader, “They showed us what a true partnership is like, how it is important to talk through what seems like the simplest decision and to be open to continually learning and growing. This is now central to the way in which CCSN works. We are so grateful for all they have given us.”



thank you

Deb and Carol, for your commitment to building more inclusive partnerships and elevating transdisciplinary collaboration!

WELCOME JESSICA PALMERT

Near the middle of June, Jessica Palmert (*she/her/hers*) joined the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation as the Quality and Learning Facilitator for the Mammographic Quality Initiative (MQI), which is housed within CCSN.



Jessica has been working for social change at the intersections of gender equity, racial justice and disability advocacy for over 25 years. For the first fifteen years of her career, she worked in some of Chicago's most diverse communities as a youth worker, organizer and community-based researcher. For the past decade, she has worked as a consultant coordinating equity and inclusion initiatives for schools, universities, public libraries, nonprofit organizations and companies. She has also worked as a racial healing circle facilitator and coach for Truth Racial Healing and Transformation of Greater Chicago and facilitated white affinity groups for leaders nationwide. Jessica recently launched her two young people into the world and moved back to her hometown to be closer to her parents and elder aunts and uncle. She lives with her tiny dog surrounded by a houseplant jungle in Milwaukee.

On a final note, Jessica states: *"We cannot come up with solutions for complex problems on our own. The Mammographic Quality Initiative is an opportunity to explore breast cancer disparities in Wisconsin from many different perspectives. I believe the transdisciplinary approach gives us leverage and access to solutions that we could not otherwise generate. I am honored to be a part of this important work and am grateful to WWHF for the opportunity."*

NETWORK UPDATES

Visiting the GLITC Waabigwanii Gitigaanin Greenhouse & Garden

Michael visited Amy and Emmy at GLITC from June 20th-21st. They got to spend time with Emmy in the greenhouse and garden (Waabigwanii Gitigaanin), check out the bees with Amy, and attend the Teas & Herbal Remedies workshop.



NETWORK UPDATES

Connecting the Summer Cancer Disparities Research Program to CCSN

The Summer Cancer Disparities Research Program runs from May to early August, and is open to students seeking a career path in public health, research, and medicine. The summer interns participate in a core cancer education curriculum, weekly goal setting, and discussion of work in progress. Students also participate in a variety of experiences:

- Shadowing basic scientists in their labs
- Participating in community events in the field
- Targeted mentored experience on an ongoing project in a chosen area of interest.
- Trainees complete and create a presentation on a particular topic related to cancer and cancer disparities in Southeastern Wisconsin



This year, Jayme and Michael presented on the CCSN programs, highlighting the CCSN transdisciplinary approach, and how the network addresses cancer disparities in various populations within the state. As an alumnus of the program, Jayme was delighted to connect with the students and share her personal experiences. Michael also presented on their research findings related to their work focusing on the declaration of racism is a public health crisis. Together, they provided an abundance of information on how CCSN came about and illustrated the importance of a team-based approach to addressing the complexities intertwined within cancer science.

Visit [here](#) for more information on the Summer Cancer Disparities Research Program!

CCSN Toolkit Coming Soon!

A fundamental part of CCSN is the utilization of two complementary approaches—transdisciplinary science and developmental evaluation. Taken together, the approaches nurture innovations and adaptations that will transform how we understand and address cancer disparities.

Part of our role is to share all this greatness! The toolkit will illustrate all the various tools we used while applying a transdisciplinary approach to address cancer disparities.

Visit [here](#) to sign up for the toolkit!



Community & Cancer Science Network
Toolkit

NETWORK UPDATES



Cancer Disparities Program for Research & Community Scholars

Be a part of the solution! The Community and Cancer Science Network has created a free opportunity for Milwaukee community members and the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) researchers to learn about the impact of cancer in different communities and how factors like biology, lifestyle, environment, healthcare and policy play a role. Build relationships and transdisciplinary collaboration skills while applying what you learn to design real-world solutions.

Apply Today for this FREE program!



LEARN



IDENTIFY CAUSES



COLLABORATE



END CANCER DISPARITIES

When

- Hybrid (virtual & in-person) Bi-weekly meetings
- September - May on Wednesdays from 3:30 - 5:00pm



What to Expect



Presentations from local experts, facilitated by Simona Johnson, BSN, MBA The Synergy Company, and Dr. Nikki Lytle, Medical College of Wisconsin



Collaborative discussions with community leaders and researchers from Medical College of Wisconsin on tackling cancer.



Develop a **deep understanding** of how to authentically engage different perspectives for addressing cancer disparities.



Applications Due August 22, 2025
ccsnwi.org/scholarsprogram | CCSN@mcw.edu

This program is fully funded by Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment



Community & Cancer Science Network

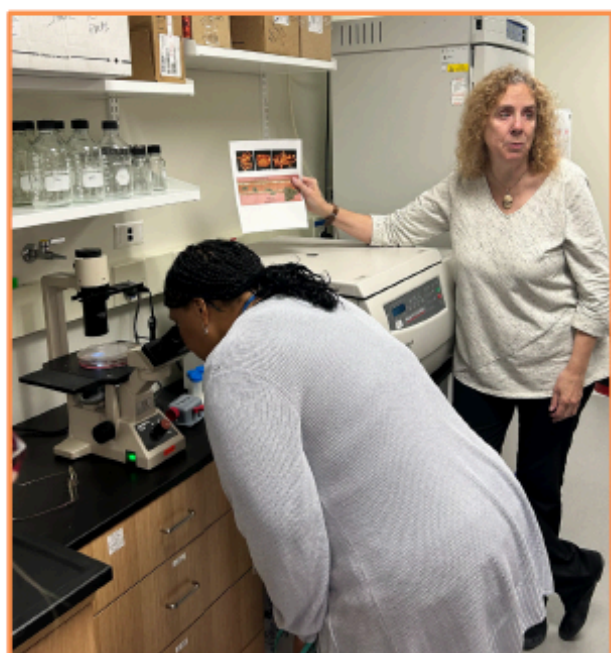
NETWORK UPDATES



Cancer Disparities Program for Research & Community Scholars

Benefits

- Developing transdisciplinary collaboration skills
- Gaining insights into Milwaukee's community and history
- Access to expertise on cancer research and contributing factors in a supportive environment
- Stimulating information to broaden understanding of cancer and healthcare



"We learned that science should collaborate with the community to address problems together, rather than offering solutions after the fact."
- 2023-2024 Community Scholar



"Through this program, we've gained new tools and perspectives to tackle issues, and it's time for institutions to implement these changes"
- 2022-2023 Research Scholar

"Our initial excitement led to meaningful discussions that shifted our focus towards improving our system based on community needs, rather than just implementing external solutions."
- 2022-2023 Community Scholar

Requirements

- Program requires access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone with internet connection and a web camera. Accommodations are available if technology requirements are a barrier.
- There is no cost to participate, but a commitment to attend the majority of sessions is expected, with occasional meetings for small group work outside of scheduled sessions.



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Community & Cancer Science Network

UPCOMING EVENTS

JOIN US

for a Bike Ride to End Cancer

Audacity, a new bike ride and community movement to accelerate cancer research, will hold its inaugural event on **Sunday, August 17, 2025, at American Family Field**. Funds raised from this event will contribute to MCW Cancer Center initiatives which will drive promising breakthroughs to end cancer.

CCSN is organizing a team - **the Community and Research Cruisers** -and you are invited to join us! You can ride with us or just come out and enjoy the time together and cheer on the riders.

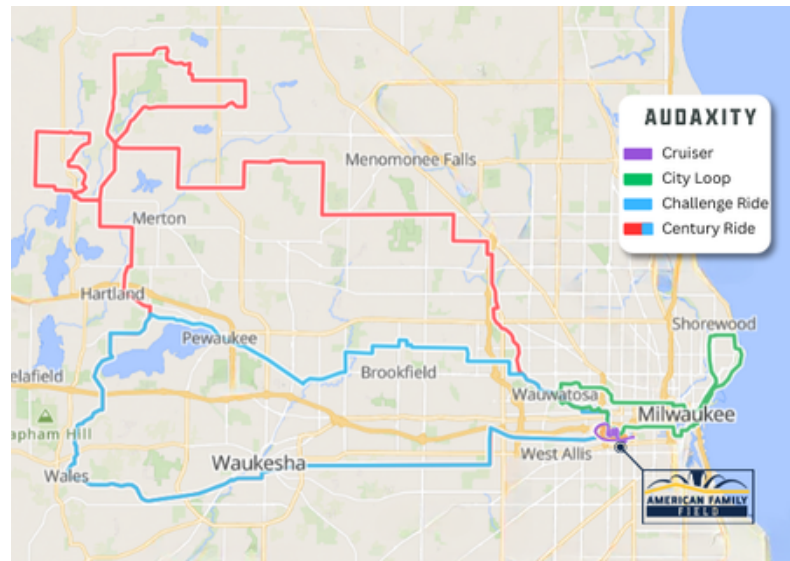
An Inside Look at Bike Routes

Cruiser Ride: A fun, family-friendly 3-5 mile loop around American Family Field, blending city sights with purpose. Whether you're a local or visiting, it's a great way to support MCW Cancer Center research while enjoying the ride.

City Loop Ride: This 25-30 mile route winds through Milwaukee, Wauwatosa, and Shorewood, mixing urban charm with scenic views. Ride along the Milwaukee River, explore green spaces, and pass landmarks like the Harley-Davidson Museum and lakefront trails. With a rest stop along the way, it's about camaraderie, exploration, and driving life-changing breakthroughs.

Challenge Ride: A 50+ mile adventure through city streets, Mitchell Park, and the rolling countryside of Lake Country. Scenic rivers, lakes, and parks make this a rewarding test of endurance, with rest stops every 15-20 miles to keep you fueled.

Century Ride: A 100-mile journey from city streets to peaceful farmland, featuring rustic roads, breathtaking views of Holy Hill, and—yes, even a chance to spot a buffalo! Explore Washington and Waukesha counties before heading back via the Glacial Drumlin Trail. With rest stops every 15-20 miles, this ride is a true test of resilience, pushing progress toward a future free of cancer



You can learn more about the ride by visiting www.audacity.org.

If you have questions about the CCSN team, please email Tobi (tcawthra@mcw.edu) or Melinda (mstolley@mcw.edu).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Celebrating 20 Years
SAVE THE DATE
WISCONSIN CANCER SUMMIT

September 24th & 25th
2025
Glacier Canyon Conference Center
Wisconsin Dells, WI





Registration is now open for the 2025 Cancer Summit!

This year's theme is Celebrating 20 Years. We will look at the progress we have made and talk about what the future might look like. As always, this is an opportunity to learn something different, and network with partners across the state!

The Summit is free, and we encourage all of our members to attend.

*Please join us for a webinar on:
Preventing Liver Cancer
on August 12, 2025 at NOON CST*



Paul Hunter MD

Professor
*Department of Family Medicine
and Community Health
University of Wisconsin
School of Medicine and Public
Health*

Webinar Objectives:

- Understand the risk factors of liver cancer across populations
- Identify prevention strategies including Hepatitis B vaccination
- Access trusted resources to support patient education

Advanced registration is required by clicking [here](#)



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

July is Designated as Sarcoma and Bone Cancer Awareness Month

Bone cancer is an uncommon type of cancer that begins when cells in the bone start to grow out of control. Primary bone cancers (cancers that start in the bone itself) are also known as bone sarcomas. **Sarcomas** are cancers that start in bone, muscle, fibrous tissue, blood vessels, fat tissue, as well as some other tissues. They can develop anywhere in the body. **Osteosarcoma** (also called osteogenic sarcoma) is the most common type of cancer that starts in the bones.

Bone is the supporting framework for your body. The hard, outer layer of bones is made of compact (cortical) bone, which covers the lighter spongy (trabecular) bone inside. The outside of the bone is covered with fibrous tissue called periosteum.

Some bones have a space inside called the medullary cavity, which contains the soft, spongy tissue called bone marrow. The tissue lining the medullary cavity is called endosteum.

Most bones start out as a softer, more flexible form of tissue called cartilage. Cells in the body then lay calcium down onto the cartilage to form bone. After the bone is formed, cartilage may remain at the ends to act as a cushion between bones. This cartilage, along with ligaments and other tissues connect bones to form a joint. In adults, cartilage is mainly found at the end of some bones that are part of a joint.

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Bone often looks as if it doesn't change much, but it's actually very active. New bone is always forming while old bone is dissolving. This helps keep the bones strong.

For more information about [bone cancer](#), visit [here](#).
For more information about [osteosarcoma](#), visit [here](#).

