

2026 AMETHIST Communications Summit

*MESSAGING, MISINFORMATION, MISTRUST,
AND MATERNAL HEALTH*

THURSDAY, MAY 14TH, 2026 | 12-4PM (EST)



Agenda

12:00 - 12:15 PM

Welcome Message

Speakers: Rebecca Hamm, MD, MSCE | Meghan Lane-Fall, MD, MSHP, FFCM |
LauraEllen Ashcraft, PHD, MSW

12:15 - 1:00 PM

Keynote Session

Speaker: Congresswoman Lauren Underwood, MSN, MPH

1:00 - 1:45 PM

Breakout Sessions

Demystifying “Little P” Policy: Highlighting ways Investigators can Impact Non-Governmental Policies

Speaker: Amanda Flicker, MD, CPE, FACOG

This session will highlight ways in which investigators can impact policies outside of the formal government space, including clinical care practices and hospital system policies

Engaging Your Partners/Audiences Early: Exploring Strategies Investigators Can Use to Build Interest in their Project Before Results are Completed

Speaker: Sara Solomon, DrPH, MPH, RD

This session will discuss strategies that research teams can leverage to build meaningful connections with their partners and target audience early in their research projects, facilitating dissemination at later stages in the project

Social Media 101: How to turn Publications into Posts

Speaker: Emily Pfender, PhD

This session will show attendees how to turn research publications into succinct and accessible social media posts to reach their target audiences

**10 Min
Break**

1:55 - 2:50 PM

Misinformation and Messaging Panel

Panel Speakers: Abike James, MD, MPH | Alexia Doumbouya, MSL, CBE, Certified Doula |
Dr. Franziska Haydanek, DO, FACOG

Moderator: Karl Stark

In this panel, speakers from across the health communication landscape will discuss the impact of misinformation in maternal health. Attendees will gain a better understanding of how misinformation is spread, its impact on patients and practitioners, how misinformation creates mistrust, and preemptive and corrective measures individuals across the maternal health spectrum can take.

**10 Min
Break**

3:00 - 3:45 PM

IMPROVE Breakout Groups

Policy & Systems Change

Facilitator: Aasta Mehta, MD MPP

Centers prioritizing policy action focused on Medicaid expansion, legislative advocacy, and structural health system reform.

Community-Centered Engagement

Facilitator: Debora Grandison

Centers addressing maternal health misinformation through community-engaged research that uses storytelling, culturally tailored communication, and grassroots partnerships to build trust and relevance.

Scientific & Professional Dissemination

Facilitator: LauraEllen Ashcraft, PHD, MSW

Centers advancing the evidence base on maternal health misinformation through peer-reviewed research, academic convenings, and the development of technical toolkits and frameworks.

Digital & Media Outreach

Facilitator: Emily Pfender, PhD

Centers leveraging social media, podcasts, newsletters, and explainer videos to translate research into accessible digital content.

3:45 - 4:00 PM

Closing Session

Facilitators: Aasta Mehta, MD, MPP and Sally Chan, PhD

Communications Summit Goal

This essential gathering will unite leading researchers, patient advocates, practitioners, and legislators to engage in meaningful dialogue about messaging, misinformation, mistrust, and maternal health in the United States. Attendees will gain access to vital resources and insights designed to support IMPROVE network teams in their ongoing research projects.

By promoting collaboration among diverse stakeholders, this meeting will help forge a strong professional network and foster partnerships that amplify our collective efforts in addressing maternal health challenges.

AMETHIST@Penn

The NIH's Implementing a Maternal health and PRenancy Outcomes Vision for Everyone (IMPROVE) Initiative aims to reduce maternal mortality, improve pregnancy, perinatal and postpartum care, and address the factors that have led to severe disparities in outcomes for marginalized groups.

The Achieving Maternal Empowerment and Transforming Health through Implementation Science and Training (AMETHIST@Penn) Implementation Science Hub at the University of Pennsylvania works to support IMPROVE Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence and other IMPROVE investigators through training, consultation, and coordination.

AMETHIST@Penn is co-directed by Meghan Lane Fall, MD, MSHP, Rebecca Hamm, MD, MSCE, LauraEllen Ashcraft PhD, MSW

Scan the QR Code to learn more about [AMETHIST@Penn](#)



Keynote Speaker

Congresswoman Lauren Underwood



Congresswoman Lauren Underwood serves Illinois' 14th Congressional District and was first sworn into Congress on January 3, 2019. She is the first woman, the first person of color, and the first millennial to represent her community in Congress.

Rep. Underwood is a registered nurse and co-founder and co-chair of the Black Maternal Health Caucus, which addresses America's Black Maternal Health crisis in Congress and advances policy solutions to improve maternal health outcomes and end disparities. Rep. Underwood is Co-Chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee and serves on the House Committee on Appropriations.

Prior to her election to Congress, she served as a Senior Advisor at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), helping communities across the country prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters, bioterror threats, and public health emergencies. As a career public servant at HHS, she also helped implement the Affordable Care Act, broadening access for those on Medicare, improving health care quality, and reforming private insurance. Rep. Underwood has taught future nurse practitioners through Georgetown University's online master's program and worked with a Medicaid plan in Chicago to ensure it provided high-quality, cost-efficient care.

She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Johns Hopkins University, and a lifelong Girl Scout. Rep. Underwood resides in Naperville, Illinois.

Breakout Sessions

Demystifying “Little P” Policy: Highlighting ways investigators can impact non-governmental policies

Amanda Flicker

Amanda Flicker, MD, CPE, FACOG is Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) and a board-certified OB-GYN with more than two decades of clinical experience. She specializes in obstetric care, labor and delivery, and the management of substance use disorders during pregnancy. She was a founding partner of the Connections Program at LVHN that compassionately provides care and connection to vital services for pregnant women with substance use disorders. A graduate of Villanova University and Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, Dr. Flicker has spent her career deeply committed to advancing women’s health, patient-centered care, and clinical excellence across the region. In addition to her role at LVHN, Dr. Flicker served as the Co-chair of the inaugural Maternal Mortality Review Committee in Pennsylvania and has spent over a decade serving the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), currently as a member of the Pennsylvania and District III executive councils.



Engaging Your Partners/Audiences Early: Exploring Strategies Investigators Can Use to Build Interest in their Project Before Results are Completed

Sara Solomon

Sara Solomon, DrPH, MPH, RD is a public health and implementation science leader with more than 20 years of experience advancing community-engaged research and practice to improve health outcomes for historically underrepresented communities. As Deputy Director of the Penn Injury Science Center, she provides leadership across its administrative, research, training, and outreach cores and directs the Penn Community Violence Prevention Program. She is also the founder and co-director of both the Penn Community Scholars Program and the REACH Initiative - two training programs designed to foster equitable, sustained partnerships between academic institutions and community organizations.

Dr. Solomon holds a doctorate in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University and serves as Board Chair for the Young Chances Foundation.



Breakout Sessions

Social Media 101: How to turn Publications into Posts

Emily Pfender



Emily Pfender, PhD is a health communication scientist and postdoctoral researcher with AMETHIST@Penn, specializing in social media, physician communication, health marketing, and medical health messaging. She earned her PhD in Health Communication at the University of Delaware, and her research focuses on how social media and misinformation influences health behaviors and decision-making, particularly in the areas of contraception and maternal health.

Misinformation and Messaging Panel

Abike James



Abike T. James, MD, MPH, is a Professor of Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology and Vice Chair of Academic Excellence and Community Engagement in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Perelman School of Medicine. As a clinician, researcher, and educator, Dr. James champions maternal health, equitable care, and the empowerment of community members in healthcare improvement efforts. She holds degrees from Dartmouth, Yale, and Harvard, and was recently named the Healthcare Award Honoree at the 2026 Greater Philadelphia Salute to Women of Achievement.

Alexia Doumbouya

Alexia Doumbouya, MSL, CBE, Certified Doula, CMHA is a nationally recognized maternal health advocate and Founder and President of Cocolife.black, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit dedicated to improving maternal health outcomes for Black and Brown moms by addressing race-related disparities and addressing Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). Driven by her own lived experiences during and following childbirth, Alexia created Cocolife.black to ensure that moms are heard, supported, and equipped with trusted resources during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Under her leadership, the organization uses community-centered programs, culturally grounded education, and collaborative partnerships to create a supportive space for moms and their communities.



Misinformation and Messaging Panel

Franziska Haydanek



Franziska Haydanek, DO, FACOG, is a board-certified OB/GYN currently working for a large healthcare system in western New York. Her clinical expertise includes high-risk obstetrics, hormone management (including PCOS and menopause), and minimally invasive gynecologic surgery, with a focus on laparoscopic salpingectomy. As a clinician and mother of three, Dr. Haydanek shares relatable, evidence-based content on women's health, breastfeeding, and parenting across platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube with a reach of over one million followers. She is the founder of *Paging Dr. Fran*, a digital platform dedicated to empowering women with practical, science-backed health information to support informed decision-making.

IMPROVE Breakout Groups

Group 1: Policy & Systems Change



Aasta Mehta

Aasta Mehta, MD, MPP is a Philadelphia-based OB/GYN and public health leader who serves as Director of the Division of Reproductive, Adolescent, and Child Health at the Philadelphia Department of Public Health. Her work focuses on reducing maternal morbidity and mortality, with particular attention to racial disparities, while she also practices as an OB/GYN hospitalist at Pennsylvania Hospital. Dr. Mehta directs the Philadelphia Maternal Mortality Review and Fetal Infant Mortality Review programs and provides leadership at the city and state levels, including roles with the Pennsylvania Maternal Mortality Review Committee, the Pennsylvania Perinatal Quality Care Collaborative, and ACOG. She completed her OB/GYN residency and women's health policy training at Drexel University College of Medicine, where she also earned a master's degree in public policy.

Group 2: Community-Centered Engagement

Debora Grandison

Debora Grandison is a patient advocate and co-investigator with the AMETHIST Policy, Dissemination, and Communication Core. As a 38-year survivor of Heart Disease, Type 1 Diabetes and Graves Disease, Debora's mission is to advocate and educate as many women as possible, through sharing her personal journey and speaking on local, national and global platforms. Debora was selected in 2019 to serve as a GoRed For Women Real Women National Spokesperson and formerly served as a member of the Oversight Advisory Committee for the AHA Health Equity Research Network (HERN) on the Disparities of Maternal and Infant Health. Debora is the Founder of "SHE SPEAKS FROM A JOYFUL HEART" where she uses the power of word to encourage, inspire and empower others. She believes that she is STILL here with the purpose of helping others understand that they too can "Rise Above" their challenges...no matter what they might be!



IMPROVE Breakout Groups

Group 3: Scientific & Professional Dissemination



LauraEllen Ashcraft

LauraEllen Ashcraft, PhD, MSW is an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology specializing in implementation science to advance equity and innovation in health and human services. She serves as Associate Director of the Dissemination & Implementation Science Core at the VA's CHERP and Co-Director of AMETHIST@Penn. Her research is funded by the NIH, VA, and Penn Medicine, and published in leading public health journals.

Group 4: Digital & Media Outreach

Emily Pfender

Emily Pfender, PhD is a health communication scientist and postdoctoral researcher with AMETHIST@Penn, specializing in social media, physician communication, health marketing, and medical health messaging. She earned her PhD in Health Communication at the University of Delaware, and her research focuses on how social media and misinformation influences health behaviors and decision-making, particularly in the areas of contraception and maternal health.



Additional Communications Events

Source Credibility and Re-Establishing Trust in Science

May 22nd | 1-2 PM EST

Facilitator: Dr. Emily Pfender, PhD

In an environment of growing misinformation and public skepticism, researchers play a central role in shaping how science is perceived and trusted. This session will explore how scientific credibility is established, challenged, and restored—and how researchers can more effectively communicate their work to diverse audiences. This interactive session is designed to encourage dialogue, reflection, and shared learning

[Register Now](#)

Patient Storytelling

May 29th | 12-1 PM EST

Facilitator: Dr. Aaron Levy, PhD

Led by Dr. Aaron Levy of the [Penn Listening Lab \(PLL\)](#) alongside a patient advocate and clinician speaker, this interactive discussion will highlight the impact and importance of patient stories, and share how to collect and share them responsibly and widely.

Attendees will leave this session understanding the value of patient stories, the care involved in their collection, and the insights they can offer when we slow down and listen.

[Register Now](#)

Communications Strategy Discussion with Penn LDI

June 11th | 1-2 PM EST

Facilitator: Julia Hinckley, JD

Join Julia Hinckley, JD of the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics ([Penn LDI](#)) for an interactive post-Communications Summit session that offers attendees the space to reflect on what they learned from the event and what they want to carry forward into their work. The session will provide practical tips for sustaining relationships with key audience members, and provide a dedicated space for participants to raise lingering questions, test ideas, and identify practical actions they are ready to bring into their communication efforts.

[Register Now](#)