

Arizona Public Health Association

2026 Annual Conference

*From Crisis to Care:
Improving Outcomes in Arizona's
Behavioral Health System*

Friday, May 1, 2026 • Desert Willow Conference Center –
Phoenix, Arizona

7:30 a.m.

Registration & Breakfast

9:00 a.m.

Welcome & Opening Remarks – Arizona Public Health
Association (Cottonwood)

9:15 – 10:15 a.m.

Keynote Address Introduced by Minnie Andrade, Molina
Healthcare CEO



Georges C. Benjamin, MD

Executive Director, American Public Health Association

"Public Health Under Siege: Building the Next Generation Health System"

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, is a nationally recognized physician leader and has served as executive director of the American Public Health Association (APHA) since 2002. In this role, he leads national efforts to strengthen public health systems, advance prevention, and promote health equity.

Previously, Benjamin served as secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, where he expanded Medicaid and improved access to care for vulnerable populations. His career also includes service as a military physician and leadership roles in emergency medicine and public health in Washington, D.C.

An expert in public health emergency preparedness, Benjamin has authored more than 200 scientific articles and book chapters. He is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and a fellow of several leading professional organizations, recognized for his contributions to improving population health.

10:25 – 11:35 a.m.

Morning Breakout Sessions

Track A – Policy, Advocacy & Systems Change (Cottonwood)
A Statewide Medicaid Initiative to Advance Behavioral Health

Taylor Vaughan, MPH; William Riley, PhD; George Runger, PhD —
Arizona State University

Track B – Population-Specific Needs: SMI (Chia)
Innovative Partnerships: Advancing Member Engagement through Peer Support at the Navigator Level and Assertive Community Treatment

Adonis Deniz Jr.; Noemi Zaragoza; — Mercy Care; Sergio Mendez —
Center for Health and Recovery

Track D – Crisis System & Court-Ordered Evaluation &
Treatment (Ocotillo)
Transforming Crisis into Hope: Innovative Mobile Crisis Solutions in Arizona

Michele Russell — La Frontera; Tenasha Hildebrand — Mercy Care

Track E – Maternal Mental Health & Perinatal Care (Desert Star)

Improving Perinatal Behavioral Health Access in Rural Northern Arizona: A Medicaid Pilot Program

Matthew Martin, Nina Russin, DBH — Arizona State University; Catherine Dobler – AHCCCS

Track F – Artificial Intelligence & Behavioral Health (Brittlebush)

Charting a Course for Digital Health in Arizona: The Arizona Digital Health Pathways Report

Matthew Buman, PhD; Stephanie Carpenter, PhD; Fang Yu, PhD — Arizona State University; Laura Goetz, MD – HonorHealth; Jeremy Greene, MS — Phoenix VA Healthcare System

11:45am – 12:55 p.m.

Networking Lunch

Lunch & Learn Session: Ocotillo Room (12:00 – 12:45)

Responding to Black Overdose Disparities Through Harm Reduction, Lived Experience, and Trusted Community Response

Shomari Jackson, *South Mountain WORKS*

RJ Shannon, *Arizona African American Council on Harm Reduction*

Monte Adams, *Arizona African American Council on Harm Reduction*

1:00 – 1:50 p.m.

1st Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Track A – Policy, Advocacy & Systems Change (Cottonwood)

Clozapine: Hope for a New Beginning

Rachel Streiff, Crystal Fox — Arizona Mad Moms

Track B – Population-Specific Needs: Serious Mental Illness (Chia)

From Lived Experience to Measurable Outcomes: Co-Designing Solutions for People with Serious Mental Illness

Roshini Moodley Naidoo, MBChB, MPH, MBA; William Riley, PhD, ASU; Beth Darling, MD, Valleywise Health; Veronica Welch, BCBS AZ Health Choice; Frances Musgrove, Arizona Mad Moms Patient Advocacy Group

Track C – Integrated Care & Community Well-Being (Ocotillo)
Trauma Recovery Centers in Arizona: Implementation in Practice

Yevheniia Varyvoda, PhD — University of Arizona; Heather Brady, LPC — CODAC Health, Recovery & Wellness; Maria Navarrete, LMSW — Chicanos por la Causa

Track E – Maternal Mental Health & Perinatal Care (Desert Star)
Maternal Mental Health – Community Doula Access

Shannon Alexander, AdvCD(DONA) — University of Arizona

Track F – Artificial Intelligence & Behavioral Health (Brittlebush)
Public Health Technology: Past, Present, Future

Moderator: Dean Jyoti Pathak, PhD, – Arizona State University; Rebecca Sunenshine, MD – Arizona State University; Susan Robinson, MPH – Arizona Department of Health Services; Theresa Cullen, MD – Pima County Health Department

1:50 – 2:00 p.m.
Afternoon Break

2:00 – 2:50 p.m.
2nd Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Track A – Policy, Advocacy & Systems Change (Cottonwood)
Beyond Healthcare: Coordinating Housing, Behavioral Health, and Community Services to Improve Outcomes for Arizonans with SMI

Alex Demyan — Contexture; Ty Rosensteel — Solari

Track A – Policy, Advocacy & Systems Change (Desert Star)

Comparing Treatment Approaches for Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

Marisa Domino — Arizona State University; Kate Dobler — AHCCCS;
Barbara Cuadras — AHCCCS

Track B – Population-Specific Needs: Serious Mental Illness
(Chia)

Helpers for Behavioral Health (HBH) Tobacco Cessation

Violet Perez-Siwik, MD; Chant Sullivan; Jonathan Brinks — University
of Arizona

Track C – Integrated Care & Community Well-Being (Ocotillo)

***Designing Integrated Care Outside Traditional Settings:
Early Findings from Terros Health’s Portable Clinical Care
Pilot***

Jessica Varney, MPH; Vanna Campion, MD — Terros Health

Track F – Artificial Intelligence & Behavioral Health (Brittlebush)

***Crafting Data - Driven Digital Twins for Precision Glucose
Control***

Hassan Ghasemzadeh, PhD — Arizona State University

***Public Health has a data problem — and AI might fix
it (or make it worse)***

Onicio Batista Leal Neto, PhD — University of Arizona

3:00 – 3:15 p.m.

Break

3:15 – 4:30 p.m.

Closing Expert Panel (Cottonwood)

Where Do We Go From Here? Strengthening Arizona's Behavioral Health System for the Next Decade

A moderated discussion featuring policymakers, system leaders, providers, advocates, and individuals with lived experience.

- **Carmen Heredia**, MSW, Sonora Strategy Partners; former AHCCCS Director — **Moderator**
- **Alisa Randall**, Assistant Deputy Director & Mental Health Commissioner — AHCCCS
- **Jess Howard**, LMSW, Senior Director — Solari Crisis & Human Services
- **Minnie Andrade** — CEO, Molina Healthcare
- **Charles Sullivan**, President & CEO — ABC Housing Corporation
- **Dede Yazzie Devine**, MBA — Lived Experience Advocate

4:30 – 4:45 PM

Conference Wrap-Up & Closing Remarks