

## RETAIN Virtual Annual Convening 2021

### Speakers



**Taryn Mackenzie Williams** is the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy. In this position, she advises the Secretary of Labor on how the department’s policies and programs affect the employment of people with disabilities and leads the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which works with employers and all levels of government to promote evidence-based policy that improves employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities.

Previously, Williams was the managing director for the Poverty to Prosperity Program at American Progress, which works on progressive policies focused on a broad range of antipoverty strategies. Before joining American Progress, she worked at ODEP on a variety of issues related to education, workforce policy, Social Security, Medicaid, and civil rights. In her role as director of youth policy, Williams led agency efforts to coordinate education and employment policy in support of improved labor force outcomes for disabled youth. From 2014 through 2016, Williams served as ODEP’s chief of staff. She also undertook detail assignments as associate director for public engagement and liaison to the disability community at the White House from 2014 through 2015 and as a policy adviser on the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions from 2012 through 2013.

Prior to joining the federal government, Williams worked as the research coordinator for leadership programs at the Institute for Educational Leadership and as the director of programs at the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues headquartered in Chicago. She holds a bachelor’s degree in public policy from Brown University and a master’s degree in education with a concentration in administration, planning, and social policy from Harvard University. She resides in Washington, DC.



**Jennifer Sheehy** is the deputy assistant secretary leading the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor. The mission of ODEP is to develop policy that increases job opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities. In 2016, she was also appointed by the President to the AbilityOne Commission. Prior to her current position, Jennifer spent 10 years at the U.S. Department of Education in many roles, including acting director of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, acting deputy commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration and special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Jennifer came to the Department of Education from the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities where she was senior policy advisor and served a detail as associate director in the White House Domestic Policy Council. Before she joined the task force staff, Jennifer was vice president of the National Organization on Disability and director of its CEO Council.

Jennifer earned a BA from Cornell University and graduated with honors from Georgetown University, where she earned her MBA. While in graduate school, she worked in marketing research with Anheuser-Busch Companies in St. Louis. Before graduate school, Jennifer also worked in marketing and management for Sheraton and Marriott.

Jennifer has received many civic and achievement awards including the 2019 Presidential Rank Award, the Accenture Women in Government "Rising Leader" award, and the Diet Coke/*Glamour* magazine "Women at Their Best" award. Jennifer lives in Washington, DC, with her husband.



## The Participant Voice: Highlighting the Voice and Experience of Former SAW/RTW Participants

**Panelists: William “Bill” Robinson**

**Moderator: Tonia Peterson**



### **William (Bill) A Robinson, III**

State of Michigan, Senior Executive  
Director of the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons

In February 2001, Mr. Robinson was shot accidentally by a fellow hunter. A Life Flight to the Macon, Georgia, trauma center saved his life; however, the accident left him without sight in his left eye and limited sight in his right eye. Mr. Robinson never lost faith, hope, or the support of family. An accomplished C-suite executive, Mr. Robinson’s employer chose to trigger his severance versus accommodating his disability. Unfamiliar with vocational rehabilitation or the skills of blindness, Mr. Robinson embarked on a journey of restoration of his roles as husband, parent, and business and community leader. Rehabilitation and blindness skills were arranged eventually through disability providers. Mr. Robinson began to passionately pursue sharing his wisdom, expertise, and life skills with businesses, individual clients, and nonprofits in late 2004. Mr. Robinson accepted the position of State of Michigan, Director of the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP) in July 2016 and began serving in that role September 26, 2016. As director of BSBP, Robinson is responsible for the state agency that provides vocational rehabilitation, independent living, and employment training services to Michigan residents who are blind and visually impaired through seven offices located throughout the state. In addition, he is responsible for the BSBP Business Enterprise Program’s Training Center located in Kalamazoo, Braille and Talking Book Library in Lansing, and Youth Low Vision Program. Mr. Robinson began his career in 1981 with Price Waterhouse, a public accounting firm known today as PricewaterhouseCoopers. Mr. Robinson served as vice president Taxes and executive committee member of the RTM Restaurant Group from 1989 to 1997. From 1997 until February 2001, Mr. Robinson helped lead National Service Industries as a member of the management committee, vice president of Mergers and Acquisitions, and CFO and senior vice president of National Linen Service. He currently serves as the president of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and represents Vocational Rehabilitation as a member of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) WIOA Information Technology Support Center’s steering committee. He previously held the positions of secretary/treasurer of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and CSAVR Region V representative. Mr. Robinson has served on various task forces with the U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

In 2017, Robinson received the “Beacon” award from the Michigan Council of Rehabilitation Services in recognition of his dedication to providing the highest quality of vocational rehabilitation services to Michiganders with low vision and blindness. In 2019, Robinson completed the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute Executive Leadership Seminar in Rehabilitation Administration. He is a frequent speaker, and he volunteers his time and talent to serve on local charitable and national boards. Mr. Robinson is married with four adult children. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a BS degree in business administration and a major in accounting.



**Tonia Peterson, MA, LPC, CRC, OTR/L**

Program Manager  
Michigan Rehabilitation Services

Tonia Peterson is a program manager with the Business Network Division. Her professional interests focus on reasonable accommodation evaluations, job analyses, assistive technology, and work–risk assessments to retain and obtain employment. Her current projects include educating and empowering metro Detroit businesses by providing them with disability awareness training, workforce solutions, and hiring incentives to assist in diversifying their workforce with people with different abilities. She was honored with the MRS Champion Award–Employee in September 2016. She is licensed in the State of Michigan as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and Licensed and Registered Occupational Therapist (OTR/L). Tonia earned bachelor’s degrees in psychology and occupational therapy and a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling and community inclusion from Wayne State University.

## Cultural Competency and Inclusivity in RETAIN Services

**Panelist: Melanie Hart**

**Moderator: Kirsten Firminger, PhD State Liaison, RETAIN TA, Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research**



**Melanie Hart.** As senior vice president for Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice, Melanie Hart focuses on elevating the strategies, values, and practices of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice across The New School. Melanie brings to this work a deep connection to the university and deep experience in social justice-based institutional management and change. Melanie is an alumna of the university's MA program in Public and Urban Policy at the Milano School, where she is presently completing her PhD. She earned her JD from the University

of Virginia School of Law and practiced law as a corporate and securities attorney before returning to public service in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors and with city agencies. Most recently, she served as the deputy commissioner for Workforce Development at the New York City Department of Small Business Services. Before that, she was the executive vice president of Community Programs and Development at the New York City Housing Authority. Melanie is also a senior legal and policy advisor for the Institute on Race and Political Economy at The New School.



**Kirsten Firminger** is a senior researcher at the American Institutes for Research with 20 years of experience understanding patient perspectives and engagement in health care systems, measurement, transparency, and research. Currently, Dr. Firminger is co-creating and directing work focused on shared measurement as a strategy to align systems with communities to advance equity. She draws on her qualitative and mixed-method training and skills to engage a wide range of stakeholders actively and equitably with both lived and

learned experience. She is experienced in inclusive project design, focused on collaboration, partnership, power sharing, accountability, and transformational relationships. Dr. Firminger also leads a team of more than 25 staff making comparative effectiveness research results understandable for lay and technical audiences for the PCOR Translation Center, under Maureen Maurer's leadership. Dr. Firminger has directed and conducted projects for the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. She earned her PhD in critical social psychology from the City University of New York and her BA degree in psychology and anthropology from the University of Michigan.

## Role-Based Discussion Groups

### *Return-to-Work Coordinators (RTWCs), Nurse Navigators*

**Facilitator: Wehmah Jones**



**Dr. Wehmah Jones** is a principal researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) with more than 18 years of experience designing, implementing, and managing research projects that focus on improving the developmental, educational, and health outcomes of youth and adult populations. Dr. Jones has methodological expertise in program evaluation, qualitative and mixed-methods research design, and implementation science. Her research and evaluation interests include mental health, youth development, school improvement, and educational and health equity. Dr. Jones also provides tailored and universal technical assistance (TA), facilitation and resource development to various education- and health-related capacity building projects. This includes her role as a state liaison and technical assistance provider for the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network (RETAIN) project, a U.S. Department of Labor-led demonstration project designed to increase employment retention and reduce long-term absences of individuals who acquire or are at risk of developing disabilities that inhibit their ability to work. Her additional TA expertise focuses on building district and school capacity to support students' social and emotional development, improve conditions for teaching and learning, and foster equitable learning environments. She also co-leads cultural and linguistic competence capacity building at AIR and engages in comprehensive action planning, resource development, and organization-wide training to support the integration of cultural and linguistic competence into all policies, practices, and projects. Dr. Jones has a Ph.D. and a master's degree in Counseling Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University.

## Workforce Representatives

Facilitator: Joe Ashley



**Joseph M. Ashley, RhD, CRC**, earned a Doctor of Rehabilitation degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from the University of South Carolina, and a bachelor of arts degree from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. He is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. Dr. Ashley has more than 30 years of experience planning, managing, directing, and innovating programs for people with disabilities that support their choice to live, work, and thrive in their communities.

Currently he is the owner and principal of Ashley Consulting, LLC, recently serving as a co-principal investigator on a NIDILRR-funded research grant, [Vocational Rehabilitation Return on Investment](#), through the University of Richmond. Additionally, Dr. Ashley serves as a subject matter expert on two Department of Labor-funded grant initiatives, RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network) project and ASPIRE (Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment). He is experienced in developing and administering state-wide programs that develop, promote, and provide opportunities and services for people with disabilities in program areas including vocational rehabilitation, workforce development, assistive technology, and business engagement. Dr. Ashley has led efforts to integrate career pathways system development and cross workforce systems alignment. He specializes in collaborative cross program system building.

Dr. Ashley served as an assistant commissioner with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) for more than 20 years, and prior to that was the assistant commissioner/director of the Field Rehabilitation Services Division, the agency state-wide VR program. He has received several awards such as the Virginia Community College System's "Workforce Innovation Expanding Opportunities Lifetime Achievement" award in 2018, the Virginia Community College System's "Expanding Workforce Opportunities" award in 2015 and 2011 and was the recipient of the first Manufacturing Skills Institute Fellow award in 2018. Dr. Ashley uses collaborative approaches to establish sustainable programs that braid and leverage resources that address identified service needs. He remains committed to this vision.



## Medical Partners

Facilitator: Julie Jacobson Vann



**Julie Jacobson Vann, PhD, MS, RN**, is a part-time senior researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and an associate professor in the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Jacobson Vann has more than 40 years of experience in health services that spans conducting research and evaluations, academic teaching, planning and delivering public health and patient care services, and leading health services and managed care organizations.

Dr. Jacobson Vann serves as a clinical expert and technical assistance liaison on the Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) program, focused on helping workers stay at or return to the workforce through care coordination after injuries or illnesses. She has served as the evaluation lead for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC) since 2016, and developed plans to conduct systematic reviews related to telehealth for persons with traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, and burns. She leads systematic reviews and environmental scans focused on implementation science and performance improvement, and provides content expertise on nursing roles, population health, health promotion and disease prevention, community-based care models, health care financing, and vaccination delivery. As an educator, Dr. Jacobson Vann teaches nursing students, in classrooms and community-based settings.

Dr. Jacobson Vann has also planned, directed, and evaluated care management and other interventions aimed at improving care and outcomes for North Carolina Medicaid beneficiaries and directs a Cochrane Collaboration systematic review of interventions aimed at increasing vaccination rates.

Dr. Jacobson Vann earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, and a Master of Science degree in health care management from the School of Business at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Her PhD in health policy and administration with a minor in epidemiology is from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, School of Public Health. Her doctoral dissertation research focused on the long-term sequelae of childhood cancer survivors.



### State Directors

**Facilitator: Derek Shields, MA, PMP, President, ForwardWorks Consulting, Inc.**

---



**Derek Shields** is a consultant and trainer for the Department of Labor’s Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network. As part of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) team providing technical assistance to RETAIN projects, Derek facilitates communities of practice, creates informational tools and resources, and provides technical employer engagement assistance.

With more than 25 years of experience in program management and disability inclusion, Derek has worked with federal and state governments and businesses on disability inclusion strategies throughout the employment lifecycle. Specifically, he has worked closely with global accommodations programs, wounded warrior transition services, and vocational and rehabilitation projects for Social Security beneficiaries and veterans centered on improving quality of life for youth and adults with disabilities in the workplace, community, and home. More recently, Derek has been a trainer and consultant for the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), for Disability:IN, and for the National Business & Disability Council, working with employers to improve disability inclusion policies, practices, and outcomes.

He is also the director of the National Disability Mentoring Coalition, a membership organization focused on increasing the awareness, quality, and impact of mentoring as a disability inclusion strategy.

A certified Project Management Professional, Derek earned his undergraduate degree from Bucknell University and his master’s degree in management and disability services from the University of San Francisco. He resides near Annapolis, MD.

Connect with Derek on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/in/derekshields](http://www.linkedin.com/in/derekshields) and Twitter at @derekshieldsFWD.

---

## Evaluation Liaisons/Technical Assistance (TA) Liaisons

Facilitators: Kirsten Firminger and Christina Jones

---



**Christina Jones** is a principal data scientist in the Technical Solutions program at AIR. Her primary interests are in data acquisition, administrative data, and data-driven decision making. Ms. Jones leads AIR's Data Science and Advanced Analytics team, is the technical assistance provider on IT and data systems for the RETAIN project, and is the project director for PatentsView.org.

Previously, Jones has acted as data engineer, server administrator, and data manager for UMETRICS grant projects, a big data initiative that combines administrative data collected from internal university systems, public science research grant funding data, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office patent data, and scientific publications to describe federal investments in research. She has extensive experience in designing and implementing administrative data collection processes, building data platforms for research use, and conducting quality control and quality assurance review for data collection and management.

## Presentation/Panel Discussion

### Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): Considerations for RETAIN Models

Panelists: Samia Amin and Larry Mandelkehr

Moderator: Mona Kilany, PhD, Deputy Director, RETAIN TA

---



**Samia Amin, MPP**, is a managing director at the American Institutes for Research where she co-leads the Workforce Policy and Programs hub. She is passionate about accelerating evidence-driven innovation in the public sector using research, behavioral insights, human-centered design, rapid-cycle learning, and evaluation. Samia's expertise lies in conducting implementation and impact studies and applying behavioral insights, human-centered design, and rapid-cycle evaluation to labor programs to drive continuous improvement.

During the last 18 years, Samia's research has addressed workforce development, employment and reemployment training, unemployment support, self-employment and entrepreneurship programs, and international development topics.



**Larry Mandelkehr, MBA, CPHQ**

UNC Health

Executive Director, Hospital Quality and Innovation

**Larry Mandelkehr** is executive director of Hospital Quality and Innovation for the University of North Carolina Health Care System. In this role, he leads the development and execution of the system-wide hospital-focused strategic quality plan and leads relationship-building initiatives and quality improvement opportunity assessment with administrative and clinical leadership at all UNC Health hospitals. Larry leads the process to establish hospital quality and safety organizational quality goals, monitors key quality and safety measures to improve patient care processes and clinical outcomes, including those included in public and private incentive and reporting programs.

Prior to joining UNC Health Care, Larry worked in engineering and marketing management, developing instrumentation and supervisory control and decision support systems for the oil and gas industry.

In his 'spare time' for the past 25 years, Larry teaches health care quality and information management at UNC's Gillings School of Global Public Health and teaches an Excel "bootcamp" at both Gillings and at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School. He is also a guest speaker and preceptor at the UNC School of Nursing.

Larry has an MBA from UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School and bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; and is a Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality.



**Mona Kilany, PhD**, is a health care policy researcher at the American Institutes for Research, with experience in mental health services and disability research. Her focus is on improving care coordination for people with multiple chronic health conditions. Dr. Kilany currently serves as the deputy project director and state technical assistance liaisons for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network (RETAIN), which provided guidance and best practices on stay-at-home/return-to-work strategies to states. She also has

overseen the development of AIR's Knowledge Hub on Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use to support primary care clinicians, specialists, people with disabilities who are taking opioids for the long term to manage musculoskeletal pain. Additionally, Dr. Kilany has expertise as a mixed-methods researcher, with experience in data collection, management, Medicaid claims data analysis, dissemination, and developing plain language research results. She holds a PhD and an MSPH degree from the Department of Health Policy and Management at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BS degree in psychology from Arizona State University.



## The Business Perspective: Engaging and Sustaining Business/Employer Partnerships for Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work

**Panelists: Brian Stierle and Jeff Cofield**

**Moderator: GeMar Neloms**



**Brian Stierle** is currently the director, Human Resources for Sysco Michigan in the Canton, MI, location. He has more than 25 years of human resource experience in manufacturing and food service. Brian created the first Diversity & Inclusion team at Sysco Michigan and has led efforts to create a more inclusive environment in the Sysco workforce. Brian is married and has one son, and he enjoys camping with his family and watching his son play football.



**Jeff Cofield** has a bachelor of science degree in personnel management and industrial relations from Auburn University. He has a master of arts degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in Counseling. Jeff has 43 years of experience in human resources and holds senior professional designations from the Society for Human Resources Management and the HR Certification Institute.

In his career, Jeff has served as a leader to resolve workplace issues of disability, discrimination, job loss, harassment, violence, injury illness, vocational training, relocation, compensation, benefits, and career planning.

He has experience in a variety of industries, union and nonunion environments, and in work locations throughout the Southeast. He has been employed by the Southern Company for 37 years. He currently serves as an HR manager for Disability Services at Alabama Power.

He is a member of the Society for Human Resources Management and Alabama Self Insurers Association. He serves on the Board of the Alabama Guaranty Trust and Steering Committee of Alabama Disability:IN, and past Chairman of the Alabama State Rehabilitation Council.



**GeMar Neloms** is a principal technical assistance (TA) consultant with AIR. Her portfolio of work involves organizational and leadership capacity building in workforce development, adult and K–20 education, health equity, disability research, and youth development.

Neloms directs RETAIN TA, the programmatic TA provider for the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network (RETAIN) demonstration project. In this role she oversees the development and delivery of capacity-building services to RETAIN state grantees who seek to improve labor force retention and reduce long-term work absences that occur when a worker acquires an injury or illness affecting their ability to work. Ms. Neloms is also the director of training for the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education where she serves as a subject matter expert and leads the design and implementation of training and TA resources to assist states on integrating data use for program management, improvement, and accountability. Her tenure at AIR has also included leading and contributing to key initiatives focused on integrating employability skills and work-based learning into career readiness efforts for states and local entities. In addition, she provides strategic planning and professional development coaching and support to individual states on adult education and career and workforce development topics. Prior to AIR, Neloms worked for and provided consulting services, professional development, and content expertise to organizations and associations focused on workforce development, health, and youth development. Ms. Neloms earned her master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Administration and her bachelor of arts degree from Oberlin College.



## Topic Room 1: Relationship Building and Sustainability: Health Care Providers

SME: Glenn Pransky, MD



### Glenn Pransky, MD, M.Occ. Health

Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts Medical School

Instructor, Harvard School of Public Health

<https://profiles.umassmed.edu/display/131670>

Dr. Pransky is an associate professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and a visiting lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health. His research and consulting practice has focused on scientific and practical investigations of disability prevention strategies, optimal treatment of musculoskeletal disorders, and work disability in older workers. He has published more than 135 peer-reviewed scientific articles and has delivered numerous keynote addresses at international conferences. He received the NIOSH Innovative Research Award in 2008, the American College of Occupational Medicine's Keogh Award for Academic Excellence in 2009, the Royal Society of Medicine's Osler Medal in 2011, and the ACOEM Health Excellence Award in 2015. Dr. Pransky received his MD from Tufts School of Medicine, an MS in occupational health from the Harvard School of Public Health; and completed a fellowship in health services research and policy at the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. He co-founded and chaired the Work Disability Prevention Scientific Committee of the International Commission on Occupational Health and is a senior editor for the *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*.

## Topic Room 2: Expert Review Panels/Advisory Boards: Composition, Engagement, and Involvement

SME: Lee Thompson, PhD, Senior Researcher



**Lee Thompson** is a principal technical assistance consultant at the American Institutes for Research. Her primary responsibilities include leading health care research, technical assistance, and outreach and dissemination projects. Drawing on more than 20 years of experience, she has expertise in engaging a variety of stakeholders, including health care leaders and professionals, health care researchers, payers, and patients and families, in health care research and quality improvement initiatives. More specifically, Ms. Thompson is

responsible for convening health care stakeholders via in-person and virtual meetings to share and disseminate evidence-based strategies and resources; implementing and evaluating quality improvement activities; and developing and disseminating evidence-based resources to transfer skills and knowledge about evidence-based engagement practices. Ms. Thompson has directed and/or led tasks on a number of projects including Research Fundamentals and Working as a Team, Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI); Learning Health System Panel, Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ); and Person and Family Engagement (PFE) Contractor for Partnership for Patients, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Ms. Thompson earned an MS degree in community development and applied economics at the University of Vermont.



## Topic Room 3: Communication Needs and Approaches between Employer and Health Care Providers

**SME: Trevis Cage, MS, Director of Communications, The Bizzell Group**

**SME: Eboni Jackson, Communications Specialist, The Bizzell Group**



### **Trevis Cage, MS**

Director of Communications  
The Bizzell Group

Trevis Cage is a results-driven project manager with more than 12 years of experience in marketing, branding, public relations, and strategic communications. Throughout his career, Mr. Cage has executed communications programs across a diverse portfolio of organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), United Nations (UN), and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Some of his career highlights include developing strategic communication and branding campaigns for the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel for Women’s Economic Empowerment and DHS Countering Violent Extremism Taskforce. He has worked in various industries including government, health, financial services, retail, sports management, broadcast media, and consumer packaged goods—successfully executing marketing initiatives to increase brand, product, and organization awareness. As director of communications for The Bizzell Group (Bizzell), Mr. Cage oversees both corporate and federal government projects, which includes strategic communication, visual media/graphic design, video production/animation, digital media, web design, marketing/branding, media outreach and written communication products. He manages Bizzell’s internal and external communications, overseeing the development, dissemination, and evaluation of products such as press releases, speeches, talking points, factsheets, presentations, web content, social media, newsletters, collateral design and production, traditional/virtual events, trainings, and webinars. He also serves as one of the communication technical assistance leads for RETAIN.

Mr. Cage holds a master’s degree in management—strategic communication from the University of Maryland University College and a bachelor’s degree in public relations from Hampton University. He is a member of the Public Relations Society of America, American Marketing Association, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

**Eboni Jackson**

Communications Specialist  
The Bizzell Group

Eboni Jackson is a strategic communications professional with a passion for targeted, creative, innovative, and results-oriented communications and marketing projects. Ms. Jackson is well revered and sought after for her technical and creative writing skills, as well as her ability to produce high-impact traditional and digital marketing material for diverse audiences and clients. Ms. Jackson leads the strategic development and execution of social media content for The Bizzell Group, DOL RETAIN, and other clients. Her experience with paid and earned social media, SEO, and digital media campaigns via platforms such as Facebook Ads and Google Analytics helps move clients from traditional marketing and media activities into 21st century digital strategies. Ms. Jackson is a self-proclaimed humanitarian who extends her strategic experience and insights into her communications work for various clients including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), and National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

Ms. Jackson received a bachelor's degree in strategic communications from High Point University. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering in her local community and manages the operations of her own pop-up thrift boutique focused on sustainability and inclusivity in fashion.

## Topic Room 4: Relationship Building and Sustainability: Social Determinants of Health Wraparound and Referral Services

SME: Mark Humowiecki, JD

**Mark Humowiecki**

General Counsel and Senior Director for National Initiatives

Mark Humowiecki leads the National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs, a new initiative of the coalition that seeks to coalesce a new field of health care and build a national movement to improve outcomes for individuals with the most complex needs. Previously Mark led the coalition's advocacy, communications, and governance efforts. Before joining the coalition, Mark served as deputy executive director of the New York State Workers' Compensation Board and spent 6 years practicing employment and civil rights law. Mark earned his bachelors and law degrees from Yale University.

## COVID-19 and Long Haulers: Techniques to Address Brain Fog and Promote Return-to-Work

**Panelists: Gitendra Uswatte, PhD; Edward Taub, PhD; and Kristine Lokken, PhD**

**Moderator: Leslie Dawson**



### **Gitendra Uswatte, PhD**

Professor of Psychology and Physical Therapy  
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Gitendra Uswatte earned his doctorate in clinical health psychology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in 2001 and is currently professor of psychology and physical therapy there. His undergraduate degree is from Princeton University. He has developed objective methods for remotely monitoring the effect of rehabilitation treatments on how much patients actually use their impaired extremities at home. In collaboration with Edward Taub, PhD, he has developed an expanded form of CI therapy for individuals with plegic hands, a method for delivering CI therapy on a telerehabilitation basis, and an adaptation of CI therapy for cognitive impairment. Dr. Uswatte's contributions to the field of physical rehabilitation were recognized by the Division of Rehabilitation Psychology of the American Psychological Association with the Mitchell Rosenthal Early Career Research Award in 2008, selection to fellow status in 2011, election to president in 2013, and Roger Barker Distinguished Research Contribution Award in 2020.



**Edward Taub's** training is in behavioral neuroscience. He is university professor in the Department of Psychology at The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and director of the CI Therapy Research Group there. Taub has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of how the brain controls movement, physiological signals can be transformed by biofeedback to control bodily functions, psychological principles can be applied to greatly enhance rehabilitation after brain injury, and the brain changes to support acquisition of new skills after brain injury, i.e., neuroplasticity.

Taub earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Brooklyn College and a doctorate in psychology from New York University. His early, basic research overthrew the dominant view of motor control at the time, Sherrington's reflex theory, and gave rise to the concept of central, i.e., brain, motor control. This work was the basis for his invention of a highly effective form of

physical rehabilitation for impairment of movement after stroke and other neurological injuries known as Constraint-Induced Movement therapy or CI therapy. His early work has also laid the foundation for the discovery that rehabilitation of movement, along with changes in the structure and function of the brain that support it, are possible long after brain injury takes place. Principles derived from CI therapy underlie the development of the new form of cognitive rehabilitation that is the subject of this proposal.

Taub's contributions have been recognized by the top awards from the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Association for Psychological Science for outstanding, lifelong contributions to the field. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Humboldt Research Award from Germany, and served as president of the Psychology section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Biofeedback Society of America (AAAS). The Society for Neuroscience named CI therapy as one of the top ten translational neuroscience accomplishments of the 20th century and in 2010 as one of the most exciting areas of research in neuroscience. UAB recently designated the development of CI therapy as the single most significant scientific contribution within the institution in its 50 years of existence.



**Kristine Lokken PhD**

Director of Psychology Consultation-Liaison Service; Associate Professor, Neuropsychologist  
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Dr. Kristine Lokken is an associate professor and chief psychologist in the UAB Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurobiology. She earned her PhD in clinical psychology from the University of North Dakota. She specializes in neuropsychology, health psychology, and forensic neuropsychology. Through the course of her career, she has been in teaching, clinical, and research roles at the University of Alabama, the Birmingham VA Medical Center, and UAB. Dr. Lokken also co-founded two outcomes-based precision brain health institutes: (1) Brain Health Institute in Birmingham and (2) Brain Health & Research Institute in Seattle, WA. The clinics focus on using tailored, research-driven multimodal protocols for the prevention, stabilization, and restoration of cognitive function. Dr. Lokken is currently a key clinician in the Post-COVID Treatment Program at UAB and a member of the UAB neuroCOVID Working Research Group. Dr. Lokken has a passion for helping people protect and restore brain health. She publishes on and lectures extensively on brain health.



**Leslie Dawson, MA, CRC**

State Administrator, Business Relations Program  
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services

Leslie Dawson is the state administrator of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Service's Vocational Rehabilitation Business Relations Program. Leslie is responsible for developing and maintaining partnerships with business and industry within Alabama, as well as nationally, to assist companies with their disability and inclusion needs, including the recruitment, employment, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Leslie travels state-wide, providing disability- and employment-related trainings to employer partners on such topics as disability etiquette and awareness, ADA, Return to Work/Stay at Work initiatives, and other disability and employment related topics. She has more than 20 years of experience working with businesses to retain workers with injuries, illnesses, and disabilities in the workplace. Leslie began her career with ADRS as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in 1997, moved into a business relations position in 2004, and became the state administrator of the VR Business Relations program in 2017. Mrs. Dawson earned her master's degree in vocational rehabilitation counseling from the University of Alabama and is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. She is also a mother of three amazing boys ages 23, 19, and, yes, 10 years old.



**Role of Return-to-Work Coordinators and Interventions Designed to Prevent Workplace Disability**

**Presenter: Glenn Pransky, MD**



**State-to-State Exchange: A Deeper Dive**

**Moderator: Derek Shields, MA, PMP, President, ForwardWorks Consulting, Inc.**



- Kirsten Firminger, PhD, Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research and State Liaison RETAIN TA
- Julie Jacobson Vann, Ph., MS, RN, Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research and State Liaison, RETAIN TA

- Wehmah Jones, PhD, Principal Researcher, American Institutes for Research and State Liaison RETAIN TA
- Mona Kilany, PhD, Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research and Deputy Director/State Liaison RETAIN TA
- Ann Outlaw, MA Technical Assistance Consultant, American Institutes for Research and State Liaison, RETAIN TA

**Ann Williams Outlaw** is a technical assistance consultant at AIR. She has more than 14 years of experience, the past 8 years dedicated to developing expertise in disability research, technical assistance, and knowledge translation. At AIR, Outlaw is a state technical assistance liaison and contributor to technical assistance resources for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network (RETAIN), which provides guidance and best practices on stay-at-home/return-to-work strategies to states. Outlaw also conducts a variety of knowledge translation (KT) activities including leading outreach to consumer organizations, developing, and disseminating web-based conferences and trainings for international audiences, creating and maintaining digital communities dedicated to sharing KT resources, and leading a technical working group to identify pressing needs of jobseekers with autism spectrum disorder. Outlaw also coauthored a systematic review of empirical literature describing the effectiveness of school-to-work interventions for people with autism spectrum disorder and participated in the identification, and increasing utilization, of effective practices linked to successful employment outcomes for people with autism.

Prior to her work at AIR, Outlaw was a policy analyst at the Texas Council on Family Violence and has worked with community service providers as an advocate for many populations including student survivors of dating violence and sexual assault, homeless youth, people with HIV/AIDS, and people with autism and other disabilities. Outlaw earned her MA in gender studies from the University College, London, and her BSW from the Jane Adams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago.