

# 22ND CLEARING THE AIR IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR CONFERENCE



working together to tackle  
**THE ROOT CAUSES**  
of tobacco-related health disparities



**TUESDAY  
MARCH 11, 2025**

**VIA ZOOM**



UNIVERSITY  
*of* ARKANSAS  
AT PINE BLUFF  
1873

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Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office

March 11, 2025

Dear Participants,

On behalf of the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, we are delighted to welcome you to the 22nd Annual Clearing the Air in Communities of Color Conference. This year's theme, "Working Together to Tackle the Root Causes of Tobacco-Related Health Disparities," highlights the importance of our collective efforts in addressing these critical issues.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for joining us. Your commitment to learning, sharing, and applying new knowledge is vital to making a difference in our local communities. We hope that the insights and strategies discussed during this conference will empower you to create meaningful change and improve the health outcomes in your communities.

Thank you for being a part of this important event. Let's work together to clear the air and build a healthier future for all.

Sincerely,

*Marian S. Evans*

Marian S. Evans, DrPH, TTS  
Coordinator  
Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office

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Pine Bluff, AR 71601  
[misrgo@uapb.edu](mailto:misrgo@uapb.edu)  
870-575-8253

# DAY 1

# TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2025

9:00 a.m. - 9:05 a.m.

## WELCOME REMARKS

Marian S Evans, DrPH, Project Coordinator, Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office (MISRGO)

## INTRODUCTION OF FACILITATOR

Ruthie Johnson, Project Specialist, Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office

*Summit Facilitator: Ms. Kenya Eddings, Executive Director, Arkansas Minority Health Commission*

9:05 a.m. - 9:10 a.m.

## WELCOME REMARKS

Ms. Kenya Eddings

9:10 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

## KEYNOTES

### Tobacco Use and Health Disparities

Jennifer Cofer, DrPH, MPH, CHES, Executive Director, EndTobacco Program  
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

*Facilitator: Marian S. Evans, DrPH, Project Coordinator, MISRGO*

10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

### Organizations Working to Make a Difference in Tobacco Related Health Disparities

Yvanka Hall, Executive Director, Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition - Menthol Free Communities

Chris Bostic, Policy Director, ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) – ASH Programs  
How Communities Can Engage Innovatively

*Facilitator: Marian S. Evans, DrPH, Project Coordinator, MISRGO*

11:00 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

## BREAK

11:14 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

## MINORITY RESEARCH CENTER ON TOBACCO AND ADDICTIONS

### Research Efforts to Look at Tobacco Use and Abuse on College Campuses

Derek Slagle, PhD., Director of the School of Public Affairs, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

*Facilitator: Marian S. Evans, DrPH, Project Coordinator, MISRGO*

12:00 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.

## CLOSING SPEAKER

### My Story: Struggles and Successes of Becoming Tobacco Free

O'Brennan Moss, Tobacco Prevention Coordinator, Future Builders, Inc.

*Facilitator: Ebony Conley, PhD, Executive Director, Future Builders, Inc.*

1:00 p.m. - 1:20 p.m.

## WRAP-UP AND EVALUATION

# PLANNING COMMITTEE

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**Dr. Calvin Johnson**

Director  
*MISRGO*

**Dr. Marian Evans**

Project Coordinator  
*MISRGO*

**Dr. Cynthia Troutman**

Interim Program Director  
Assistant Professor  
*Graduate Addiction Studies Program*

**Ruthie Johnson**

Project Specialist  
*MISRGO*

**Patricia Edwards**

Project Specialist-Outreach  
*MISRGO*

**Carmelo Abraham**

Accountant  
*MISRGO*

**Connie Robinson**

Administrative Specialist  
*MISRGO*

**Earnette Sullivan**

Program Manager  
*Minority Research Center on Tobacco & Addictions*

**Katherine Donald**

Executive Director  
*Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas*

**Linder Conley (Retired)**

Former Executive Director  
*Future Builders, Inc.*

**Trena Mitchell**

Executive Director  
*Arkansas Cancer Coalition*

**Miriam Karanja**

Director of Programs  
*Arkansas Cancer Coalition*

## SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

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**OPENING KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

*Facilitator: Dr. Marian S. Evans, MISRGO*

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**Tobacco Use and Health Disparities**

**Dr. Jennifer Cofer, Executive Director, EndTobacco Program, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center**

1. Understand and differentiate between health equality and health equity;
2. Assess how tobacco use rates vary across subsets of the population;
3. Recognize how the tobacco industry targets certain population groups.

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

*Facilitator: Ruthie Johnson, MISRGO*

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**Organizations Working to Make a Difference in Tobacco Related Health Disparities**

**Yvonka Hall, Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition**

1. Recognize how the tobacco industry has been aggressively marketing menthol-flavored cigarettes to Black Americans and has resulted in Black smokers;
2. Understand that menthol cigarettes have had a devastating and disproportionate impact on the health of Black Americans;
3. Realize that menthol makes cigarettes even more addictive and harder to quit.

**Menthol Free Communities**

**Chris Bostic, ASH (Action on Smoking and Health)**

1. Recognize the importance of educating policy makers and the public about tobacco prevention and the tobacco industry;
2. Understand the relevance of information and education about tobacco prevention and legal remedies to prevent death and disease caused by tobacco;
3. Understand the importance of working for strong public policies at the local, national and global level.

**Minority Research Center on Tobacco and Addictions**

**Derek Slagle, PhD., University of Arkansas at Little Rock**

*Facilitator: Dr. Marian S. Evans, MISRGO*

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1. Recognize the importance of established tobacco free policies on college campuses and universities;
2. Introduce challenges of initiating tobacco-free policies on college campuses and universities;
3. Share successes of adopted tobacco-free policies on college campuses and universities.

**CLOSING SPEAKER**

*Facilitator: Ebony Conley, Future Builders, Inc.*

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**My Story: Struggles and Successes of Becoming Tobacco Free**

**O'Brennan Moss, Future Builders, Inc.**

1. Sympathize with the struggles one encounters in an attempt to stop using tobacco products;
2. Identify key strategies used to quit smoking;
3. Understand the role support systems play in becoming tobacco free.

# SPEAKERS



## JENNIFER COFER, PhD

Jennifer is the Executive Director of the EndTobacco® Program at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. Employing 25 years in public health and tobacco control, she collaborates with internal and external partners to promote tobacco control initiatives and evidence-based best practices in policy, prevention, and cessation. She has a strong career in policy campaign coalitions working to adopt tobacco control policies, including hundreds of smoke free air ordinances in southern states, multiple state tobacco tax increases, college and university tobacco-free campus policies, establishment of tobacco retail licenses in Texas, and raising the age to 21 to sell tobacco in Texas.

She currently leads a portfolio of programs and people working in adolescent tobacco prevention programs, tobacco treatment programs, tobacco control policy, public health coalitions, and increasing capacity and knowledge through provider trainings on how to treat tobacco and nicotine addiction.

Jennifer was most recently awarded the 2024 College-Based Leadership Award from American Public Health Association Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Section. She volunteers on the Leadership Board of the American Lung Association in Texas and serves on two external academic advisory boards. She has been a certified health education specialist (CHES) for 25 years. Jennifer holds a bachelor's in health education and a master's in public health from the University of Southern Mississippi; and a Doctorate in Public Health (DrPH) in Community Health Practice and Health Policy from UTHealth Houston School of Public Health.



## YVONKA MARIE HALL, MPA, RA, CTTS, GRMS

Yvonka M. Hall, MPA is the Executive Director of the nationally recognized Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition. She received a Master of Public Administration from Texas Southern University and a Bachelor of Arts from Notre Dame College. She is a proud graduate of John Marshall High School in Cleveland, Ohio and a 2019 inductee into the Alumni Hall of Fame. The Cleveland Plain Dealer named her the HomeGrown Hero for her work addressing food insecurity during the pandemic. The significance of her life, leadership and accomplishments were selected for The HistoryMakers archives for the Library of Congress recognizing notable African Americans.

The 1974 murder of her mother Yvonne Boston Hall dramatically changed her life; her childhood promise to use her life to help others has led to the creation of cutting edge programs and impacted thousands of people's lives. She was named as 100 Women to Know in America.

She is a mother, grandmother and activist deeply impassioned and involved in social justice activities locally and nationally. Her work is designed to address equity issues in the community and highlight the need for policy in calls to declare racism a public health crisis. She was honored as a Black Green Woman in 2021. She was named to the National Environmental Protection Agency National Justice Advisory Committee where she serves as the chair for the Farmworkers and Pesticides Workgroup. In 2023, WEWS News Channel 5 she was named one of fifty Everyday Heroes Making a Difference in Cuyahoga County.

She is a member of numerous local and national organizations. She is a nationally recognized Congressional award winning health disparities expert. She was named a Health Innovator to Watch by the Boston Congress of Public Health in 2024. Crain's Cleveland Business recently named her as a Notable Leader in Health Care. She speaks all over the country about effectively engaging the African American Community the Art of Community Engagement.

She is an activist, leader, influencer, humanitarian, speaker, researcher and philanthropist

# SPEAKERS



## CHRIS BOSTIC, JD

Chris Bostic is an attorney and the policy director at Action on Smoking and Health, based in Washington, DC. He has over 20 years' experience in tobacco policy at the local, national, regional and global levels. Chris co-chairs the global steering committee for Project Sunset, a campaign to phase out the sale of commercial tobacco products, and chairs the U.S. committee.



## DEREK R. STAGLE, PhD

Derek R. Slagle, Ph.D. (he/him/his) is the Director of the University of Arkansas Little Rock (UALR) School of Public Affairs (SPA); tenured Associate Professor; and Director of the UALR Survey Research Center. As SPA Director, Dr. Slagle oversees the state of Arkansas' only academic survey research center, the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium (which includes the state's only accredited Certified Public Manager program), undergraduate political science program, multiple minors and certificate programs, and the state's highest ranked, accredited Public Affairs program. He is an Arkansas Governor-appointed Commissioner (2019-2022; 2023-2025) for the Governor's Advisory Commission on National Public Service & Volunteerism and has administrative/ fiduciary oversight for Arkansas' Service (e.g., AmeriCorps) and Volunteerism priorities. He was selected to be on the roster as a Fulbright specialist by the U.S. State Department and Fulbright Commission. He has contracted with over 40 different state agencies, nonprofits, and for-profit companies on over 60 different contracts, grants, and applied research projects. His research in Public Affairs Education, Higher Education, Health Policy, & State Government have been published in a variety of academic journals. His applied research has led to over 50 Arkansas acts signed into law and numerous other administrative reforms.



## O'BRENNAN MOSS

O'Brennan Moss, also known as Obafemi of the hip-hop group MCE is a Tobacco Prevention Coordinator, urban farmer, homeschooling father, and dedicated community servant. He joys in sharing his insights on tackling tobacco-related health disparities in communities of color.

O'Brennan uses his artistic platform and community involvement to address critical social issues. As Tobacco Prevention Coordinator for Future Builders Inc., he works to dismantle the root causes of tobacco-related health disparities within communities of color. Combining his experiences as a musician and community organizer, O'Brennan brings a unique and multifaceted perspective to this important work.

# FACILITATORS



## **RUTHIE M. JOHNSON, MA, BS**

Ruthie M. Johnson currently works as Project Program Specialist/Program Monitor for the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office (MISRGO) at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). She has held this position since 2003 and has garnered an even greater love for the fight against tobacco. Prior to this position she worked in the School of Business and Management for 18 years as a Program Manager for the Mid-South Delta Consortium funded through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Ms. Johnson holds a BS in Business Education and MA in Management and Leadership. A long time employee of UAPB (37 years), she is a Certified Grants Specialist (CGS), Certified Grants Evaluator (CGE), Tobacco Treatment Specialist (TTS), Abstract Reviewer (10+ years) for the American Public Health Association (APHA) and continues to serve on the Arkansas Tobacco Control Advisory Board.



## **MARIAN S. EVANS, DrPh**

Marian S. Evans is the Program Coordinator for the Minority Initiative Sub-Recipient Grant Office and the Interim Director of the Minority Research Center on Tobacco and Addictions at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. She holds a Master of Public Health Degree from Tulane University in New Orleans, LA and a Doctorate in Public Health from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, AR. She has over 25 years in community based program planning and implementation, capacity building, program evaluation and policy development. Dr. Evans has extensive grant writing and grant evaluation experience and manages over \$2 million dollars in grant funding. She recently became a certified Tobacco Treat Specialist through the MD Anderson training program. Her research interests are policy and community public health development in minority and rural communities.



## **DR. EBONY CONLEY, PhD**

Dr. Ebony Conley is the Executive Director of Future Builders, Inc., a grassroots community-based organization with offices in Wrightsville and Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She holds master's degrees in Mathematics and Business Administration and a doctoral degree in Leadership. Her expertise spans education, community development, and public health initiatives. Under her leadership, Future Builders leads initiatives in HIV and other STDs; Tobacco Prevention with the program Y.O.U.T.H. (Youth Opposing Unhealthy Tobacco Habits), which empowers young people in tobacco prevention efforts; senior volunteer service through AmeriCorps Seniors; and various community development programs aimed at improving overall health outcomes. Driven by a deep passion for helping others, Dr. Conley believes her purpose is to serve, working tirelessly to create meaningful change and build a healthier future for communities across Arkansas.



## **KENYA EDDINGS**

Kenya L. Eddings, a native of Little Rock, Arkansas is the executive director of the Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC). She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor Chemistry and African-American Literature from Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama and Master of Public Health from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans, Louisiana. Prior to joining the AMHC, she served as the Worksite Wellness Director for the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH).

Kenya is humbled to have been appointed Vice-Chair of Governor Asa Hutchinson's Food Desert Work Group and to the City of Little Rock's Food Desert Task Force. She is a member of Delta Omega Public Health Honor Society, Leadership Greater Little Rock Class XXIII, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and served on various civic/community boards including the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts (formerly Arkansas Arts Center), Junior League of Little Rock, Quapaw Quarter Association, and ACANSA. Kenya is the co-founder with Garbo Hearne, founder of Hearne Fine Art, of Kuumba Arts Collective, an art appreciation group for young professionals of color and is the founder of Today's Communiqué, a web-based and social media platform designed to promote experiences and opportunities with a specific emphasis on communities of color that empower, educate, and entertain in central Arkansas and beyond.

# YOUTH AND TOBACCO USE

*Youth use of tobacco in any form is unsafe.*



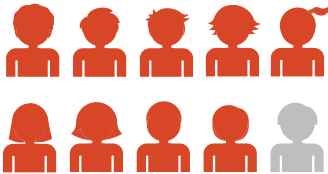
If smoking continues at the current rate among youth in this country, **5.6 million of today's Americans younger than 18 will die early from a smoking-related illness.**<sup>1</sup>



## BACKGROUND

**Preventing tobacco use among youth is critical** to ending the tobacco epidemic in the United States.

Tobacco use is started and established primarily during adolescence.<sup>2,3</sup>

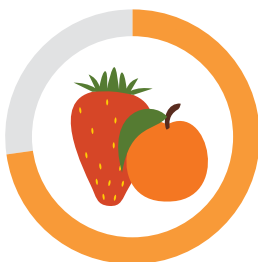


Nearly **9 out of 10** cigarette smokers first tried smoking by age **18**, and 99% first try smoking by age 26.<sup>1,3</sup>



**Each day** in the United States, **more than 3,200 youth aged 18 years or younger smoke their first cigarette**, and an additional 2,100 youth and young adults become daily cigarette smokers.<sup>3</sup>

**Flavorings in tobacco products** can make them more appealing to youth.<sup>4</sup>



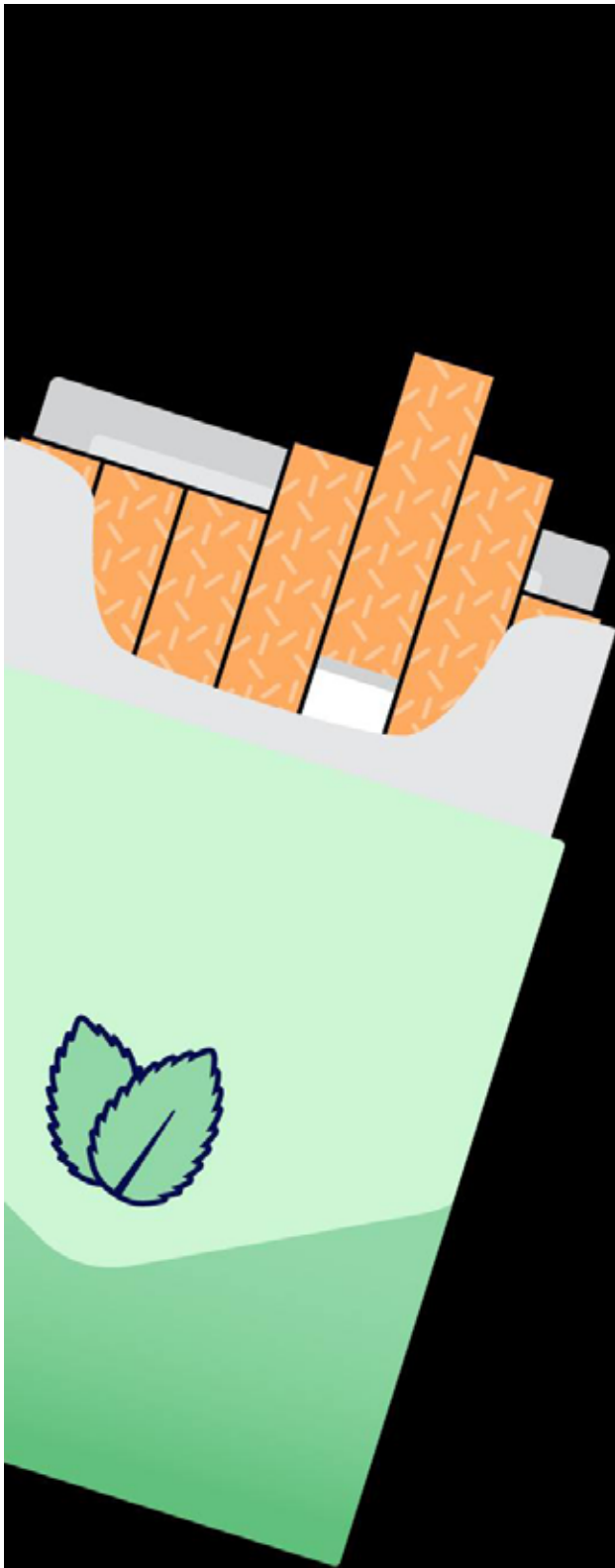
**73%**  
of **high school students**



**56%**  
of **middle school students**

who used tobacco products in the past 30 days reported using a flavored tobacco product during that time.





Tobacco companies  
**aggressively market**  
**menthol cigarettes to**  
**Black and African American**  
communities.

Commit to health equity:  
**[bit.ly/3XrM57C](https://bit.ly/3XrM57C)**



