

THE CENTER FOR INNOVATION IN SOCIAL WORK & HEALTH



**20
24** ANNUAL
REPORT

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A Letter from the Dean



It has been an exciting and transformative year for the Center for Innovation in Social Work and Health (CISWH) at the Boston University School of Social Work. We were thrilled to welcome Dr. Tami Gouveia as the CISWH Director and Paul Farmer Professor of the Practice in 2023. Under her visionary leadership, CISWH has sharpened its strategic focus, expanded both domestic and global partnerships, and enhanced its research and policy initiatives. Further, Dr. Gouveia's development of a comprehensive discovery and practice ecosystem—through three innovative labs—

has positioned CISWH for long-term growth and greater impact on a broad scale. CISWH serves as a bridge between social work, public health, and health care, fostering partnerships between researchers, practitioners, educators, policymakers, and communities. CISWH's mission to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations aligns with the core values of Boston University, as it works to promote social justice and advance the well-being of all individuals and communities.

As we continue to navigate the complex and evolving landscape of health and social challenges, the need for innovative, collaborative, and systems-based solutions has never been more urgent. CISWH is at the forefront of this work, exemplifying a forward-thinking approach to addressing critical issues such as health equity, social justice, and population health.

At the BU School of Social Work, we take immense pride in the ways CISWH enhances the academic and professional experiences of our students, strengthens the global impact of our research, and elevates the contributions of our faculty and staff. As we look toward the future, I am confident that CISWH will continue to be a powerful catalyst for change, benefiting both the field of social work and the communities we serve. I am deeply committed to supporting its mission and vision and look forward to the work that lies ahead.

Barbara Jones
Dean, School of Social Work
Boston University

A Letter from the Director



The complexity of challenges people experience worldwide highlights the urgent need for us to collaborate across different disciplines, identities, lived experiences, and ideologies. Social workers play a crucial role in bridging divisions and bringing people together for this important work, leading the way in turning crises into opportunities for deep connection, lasting joy, and transformative change toward justice. For nearly a decade, the Center for Innovation in Social Work and Health (CISWH) at the Boston University School of Social Work

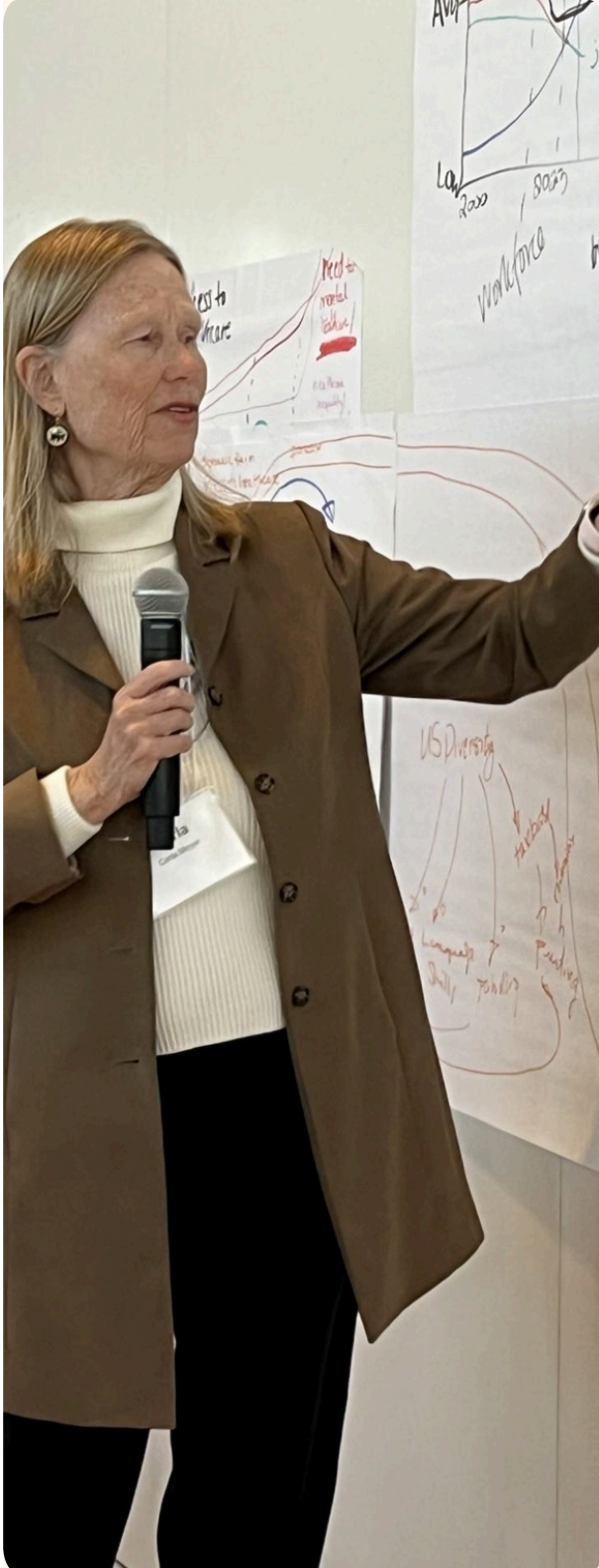
has been committed to elevating the role of social workers by building partnerships with community and social work leaders, developing innovative teaching and training models, and researching programmatic and policy solutions to advance equitable health and well-being globally.

In this year's report, we share our new strategic mission and portfolio aimed at achieving the justice-centered change we all deserve and desire. We proudly feature our diverse team of researchers, practitioners, affiliates, and student fellows, whose interdisciplinary expertise spans social work, public health, academia, health policy, business, and policy advocacy. This report highlights key projects, publications, events, and partnerships that are central to our collaborative efforts to advance social work's influence on health equity. We are excited to introduce our emerging learning and field building ecosystem, which includes the Health Equity Research Lab and the Social Work Innovation Lab. Additionally, our new Power Building and Leadership Lab elevates social work's value and will harness our collective power to influence policy and drive systemic change.

As we move forward, we remain committed to advancing health equity and justice through our collaborative efforts and innovative initiatives. With a growing focus on leveraging technology, interdisciplinary learning, and new tools and methods, we are excited about CISWH's role in transforming the future for social good.

Tami Gouveia
Director, Center for Innovation in Social Work & Health
Paul Farmer Professor of the Practice
Boston University

Our Strategic Mission



During her six-month listening tour, Dr. Gouveia engaged in over 100 one-on-one interviews, led eight focus groups to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), relaunched the CISWH team, and reviewed CISWH documents, reports, and materials. All this information was synthesized by the planning team and summarized into a briefing packet for twenty strategic planning thought partners, including board members, CISWH research staff and fellows, BUSSW faculty, and external stakeholders.

CISWH and its strategic planning thought partners used the FASTBreak™ participatory systems mapping method to develop a theory of change and strategy portfolio, addressing the core question:

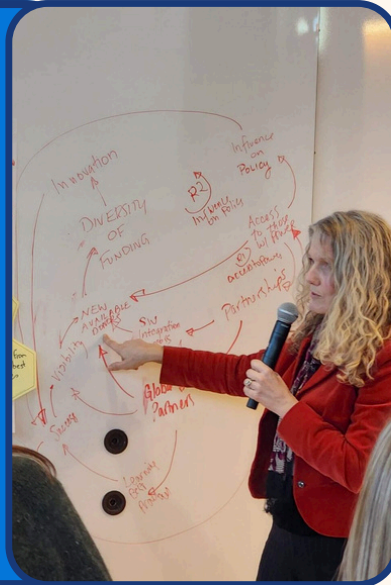
How do we build and leverage social work power for equitable health and well-being nationally and globally?

Working in small teams, participants identified key themes, explored system dynamics, and drafted initial causal maps. These ideas were combined into a comprehensive systems map to identify important structures and potential areas of influence. This work informed CISWH's theory of change.

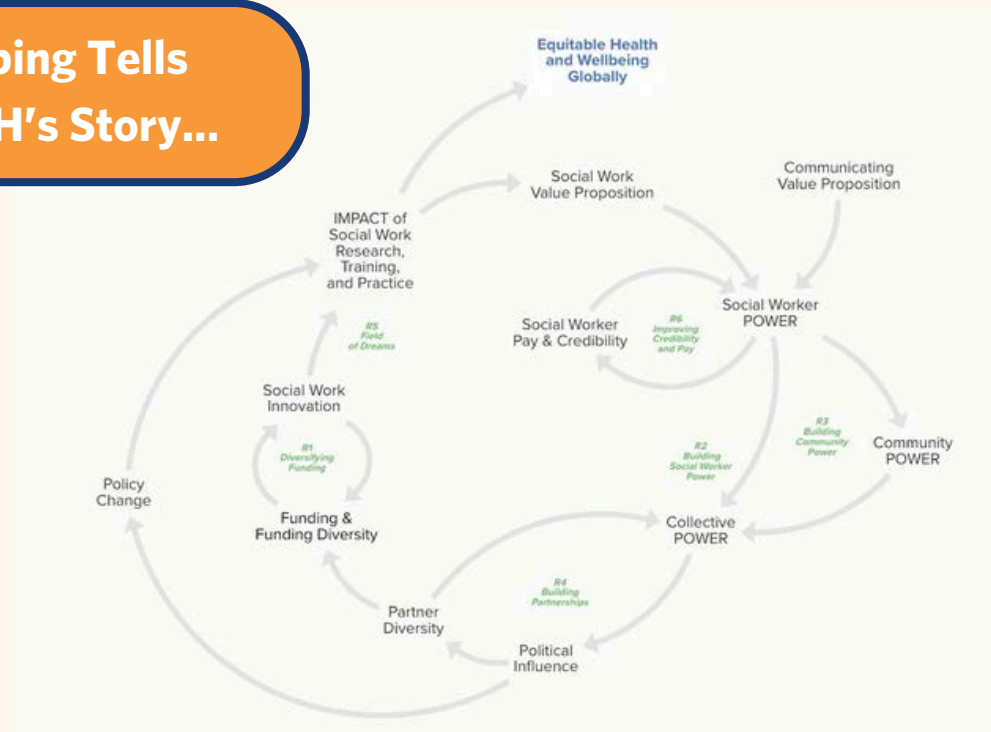
Our Strategic Mission

CISWH's Theory of Change

To supercharge innovation in social work research, training, and practice to build social work and collective power for influence on the political agenda for equitable health and well-being globally.



Mapping Tells CISWH's Story...



Our Field Building Ecosystem

Discovery and Practice Ecosystem



Social Work Innovation Lab

- Workshop new ideas and social work innovations
- Prototype new intervention and policy models
- Build cadre of community and social work experts



Health Equity Research Lab

- Research in health equity and health justice
- Monitoring and evaluation expertise
- Planning, convening, and technical expertise

Social Work Field Building



Power Building and Leadership Lab

- Value proposition and social work platform
- Leadership training and certificate programs
- Policy portfolio for systems change

Our Impact

We worked in ...



13 states



5 countries

We appeared in ...

26

news stories,
interviews,
and podcasts



And published ...



14

academic papers,
research briefs,
and reports



We received ...

14 grants

for a total of ...

\$1.5 million+

We partnered with ...

50+

organizations



We spoke at ...



21

national and
international
conferences

We hosted

10

events



with a total of

1720+

attendees

We received ...

26054

unique website
visitors

And reached ...

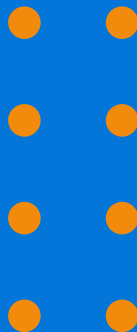
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users on Facebook
and Instagram

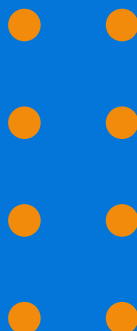
Events and Publication Highlights

At a Glance

Two hybrid and three virtual events highlighting social work leadership



Blogs, journal articles, and podcasts featuring CISWH's work



Events

- Shaping the Future of Health and Public Health, a Conversation with Dean Barbara Jones, Dr. Tami Gouveia, and Prof. Linda Sprague-Martinez
- Social Work Leadership in Substance Use Treatment with Dr. Nabila El-Bassel and BUSSW Faculty
- Ballots to Better Health, a three-part virtual series with national experts on the role of social workers in combatting disinformation, advancing policy, and ensuring fair elections

Publications

- The Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network for Children with Medical Complexity Seven-Part Supplement, *Pediatrics*
- Why More Social Workers Should Run For Office, *Social Work Today*
- CISWH Director Tami Gouveia Advocates for Including Social Workers in Healthcare Industry, *Deloitte Health Forward*
- CISWH Experts Share Best Practices for Ensuring Human Dignity in Care for Children with Medical Complexity, *OPENPediatrics Complex Care Journal Club Podcast*

Social Work Innovation Lab

At a Glance

Created guidelines for a humanistic model of care for children with medical complexity

Piloted an inter-professional virtual reality simulated learning on SDoH



CISWH's Social Work Innovation Lab draws inspiration from established social innovation labs and aims to cultivate a dynamic and collaborative learning environment. Here thinkers and doers test and apply new tools and methods to facilitate systems thinking and whole-system solutions to achieve greater impact in complex environments. Our lab is designed as a purposeful space where we bring together internal and external stakeholders from different professional backgrounds, lived experiences, identities, and expertise to share their diverse perspectives in an innovative and generative atmosphere.

We seek to promote innovation, inclusivity, and community voice as we bring together a cadre of community members, academic researchers, and practice-based experts to innovate and test solutions that address our most complex social problems that impede health equity and the ability to thrive.





Virtual Reality: Interprofessional Simulated Learning About Social Determinants of Health

A team of faculty and students at CISWH and Boston University School of Social Work (BUSSW) are collaborating with the BU School of Medicine and the Nutrition Department to train students in assessing patients' social needs using virtual reality simulated learning in multidisciplinary care teams.

Prof. M. Emilia Bianco (BUSSW), CISWH director Dr. Tami Gouveia, and CISWH student fellows Zoë Richman (MSW'25) and Abdul Haseeb Hamza (MSW'25) are applying their expertise in social work and the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) to train medical and nutrition students to assess and address clients' social needs, particularly those from marginalized populations, in healthcare settings.

The project team developed a VR learning environment that places groups of medical, social work, and nutrition students in a simulated interaction with an avatar—currently a Black woman patient named Beth. Through the simulation, learners refer to questions on a virtual touch tablet to ask Beth about her SDoH, such as: What is your living situation? Are you

currently unemployed? Do you have trouble paying for medicines? Following the interview, students are transported to another VR scenario, where they engage in an interprofessional dialogue to collaboratively make decisions about the patients' needs and possible referrals.

"We were pleasantly surprised by how well the other disciplines embraced the social work perspective. They saw us as experts in understanding the larger context in which patients live."

-Zoë Richman, CISWH Fellow

The course aims to teach students how to connect clients with essential services, emphasizing the unique expertise social workers bring to healthcare teams.

The project's third pilot, set to begin in November 2024, will test how well the updated curriculum works, how the required readings for students integrate into the curriculum, whether the facilitator's guide is effective and easy to follow, and how students across disciplines interact through the course.

Humanism: The Future of Care for Children with Medical Complexity Virtual Café Series

CISWH senior staff who led the HRSA-funded Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network to Advance Care for Children with Medical Complexity (CMC CoIIN) project are now leading a series of six virtual cafés where social workers, family leaders, healthcare and public health professionals, policy leaders and researchers discuss strategies to improve the quality of life for children with medical complexity (CMC) and their families.

The Future of Care for Children with Medical Complexity Virtual Café series focuses on advancing policy, clinical practice, research, and interdisciplinary professional education by taking a human-centered, holistic, and family-driven approach, funded by the prestigious Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health.

The cafés are co-facilitated by family partners, who provide input into the design of each café session, co-facilitate many of the didactic presentations, and lead breakout sessions to identify key challenges, opportunities and strategies to advance the quality of life for CMC

and their families. This ensures that practical next steps center the priorities of families of CMC and address their ongoing experiences of bias.

"This is such an important body of work. As a bereaved parent of a child with CMC, it can be difficult to figure out which levers to pull to make things better for other families. Participating in this series feels like a very concrete way to be moving towards meaningful change."

-CMC Café Family Partner

After the café sessions are complete, the café faculty of national- and state-level experts, 60% of whom are family faculty, highlight the key priorities to build a more patient- and family-centered model of care. The end result? A written call to action around family-driven humanistic care vetted by the café's expert faculty of family colleagues, healthcare professionals, and social workers—offering a systems-level roadmap to jumpstart transforming care at the system-level.

Health Equity Research Lab

At a Glance

Studied the efficacy of an intervention for substance use in Black & Latino men

Collaborated with Boston Children's Hospital to evaluate DCF referrals

Evaluated a social-emotional learning intervention for migrant children



While the Health Equity Research Lab is a new way of articulating our innovative research portfolio, the strong foundation of health equity research is not new to the research team at CISWH. In fact, health equity research has been the core of our work for the last nine years. Research in the Lab spans different aspects of social work and public health—from studying effective interventions for homelessness prevention, identifying humanism in care for children and families with medical complexity, and testing strategies to increase access to healthcare for Black women living with HIV, to studying effective interventions for substance use among Black and Latino men.

CISWH's growing and diverse body of work will continue to inform new methods and models the team will explore in CISWH's other labs and offer insights for the development of new training and practice opportunities to foster social work learning and strengthen social work leadership.





Colors of Kindness Evaluation Study

In 2024, CISWH collaborated with the Amal Alliance to design and perform an evaluation for Colors of Kindness, a mobile trauma-informed social-emotional learning program that helps asylum-seeking children 3 to 5 years old living in shelters in Massachusetts cope with trauma and disruption and communicate their feelings. Led by principal investigators, Dr. Tami Gouveia, Prof. M. Emilia Bianco, and Dr. Serena Rajabuin, the CISWH team seeks to determine the effectiveness of this program, as well as to explore families' humanitarian needs to inform social work practice and advocacy efforts.

The Colors of Kindness program deploys two mobile learning busses that bring the 10-session intervention to shelters and temporary migrant housing facilities across the Metrowest Boston area. Children are guided to recognize, express, and manage their emotions through movement, breath work, social-emotional learning, and other age-appropriate activities.

To assess the effectiveness of the program, the CISWH team asks

parents and teachers to evaluate the children's emotional states using a standardized scale, similar to those used in pediatric healthcare settings. This quantitative data is complemented by qualitative insights gathered from parents, teachers, and children offering a holistic view of the program's impact.

"Parents have their own wisdom and knowledge, so we want to learn from them how to best support them. This is directly related to our social work values."

-Prof. M. Emilia Bianco

The evaluation also involves understanding the complex realities these children face. It will document the migratory journeys of the families, their access to healthcare, food security, and other factors that might influence the children's emotional well-being.

The CISWH team expects to begin the evaluation at the end of October 2024. Looking ahead, the Colors of Kindness project has the potential to be replicated on a larger scale if positive results are found.



SURE Housing Initiative

CISWH and the Corporation for Supporting Housing (CSH) launched a new initiative to implement, adapt, and evaluate housing interventions among individuals with HIV nationwide. The SURE Housing project examines the ways a person's housing status intersects with their HIV diagnosis and other factors, including substance use and behavioral health to provide improved, rapid rehousing solutions across multiple sites in the U.S.

Beginning in 2023, 10 nationwide implementation sites were chosen, and by December, each had launched their rapid rehousing program. As of September 2024, the sites have enrolled over 400 individuals, all facing the dual challenge of HIV and unstable housing.

The CISWH team hosts monthly 90-minute evaluation virtual meetings to provide evaluation-related technical assistance and to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and connection, alongside a series of in-person site visits to monitor evaluation activities and document implementation data.

"One of our sites has decided to really home in on people with felony convictions. We're learning that it's possible to obtain and secure housing for people who are facing a lot of barriers. These program sites are still able to work with private landlords to get these clients housed. That's a hopeful takeaway for me."

*-Allyson Baughman
CISWH Project Director*

This coming year, the initiative will continue enrolling clients and analyzing the data collected, with a particular focus on how the implementation of these services affects client outcomes, such as viral suppression and retention in HIV care.

The team is focused on creating dissemination products that will share the lessons learned with other organizations across the country. The ultimate goal is to increase the implementation of housing services among Ryan White-funded organizations, which serve HIV-positive individuals.



Social Worker Impact on DCF Reports at Boston Children's Hospital

Prof. Christina Lee, Research Director, continues a study launched last year to understand trends in Department of Children and Families' (DCF) referrals to psychosocial services for children in Boston Children's Hospital's (BCH) pediatric emergency department, both before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A related goal is to examine what happens to patients when social workers are involved or not involved in care.

Through this partnership with BCH, the research team hopes to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted DCF referrals for these services, as well as the outcomes of children who were referred.

The research team, which includes experts in child welfare and policy at BUSSW, medicine, and public health, is examining the demographic characteristics of families involved in these cases, and how different social factors—such as race, income, and family dynamics—play a role in referrals.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research team is an important concept highlighting how CISWH and BUSSW collaborate with hospital executives, social workers, doctors, and other clinical researchers in a hospital setting that can be replicated in other projects.

The team, which includes Dr. Mihoko Maru, CISWH research consultant, and Prof. Thomas Byrne, CISWH faculty affiliate and BUSSW associate professor, is preparing to move the data from BCH to CISWH to begin analysis. This DCF data has never been analyzed before in its history at Boston Children's Hospital, and the research team plans to pair it with census data to understand the social demographics of the patients.

As the project progresses, Prof. Lee hopes that the findings will lead to more interdisciplinary studies that could inform hospital practices and elevate the role of social work in these clinical settings.



Substance Use Harm Reduction in Latinx and Black Adults

Prof. Christina Lee, in partnership with Dr. Christine Pace, Executive Medical Director of Population Services and Complex Care Management (CCM), part of the Affordable Care Organization at Boston Medical Center, is leading a federally funded study to test the effectiveness and implementation of an evidence-based culturally adapted stigma mitigation intervention (CASMI) delivered by community health care workers (CHWs) in partnership with social workers and nurses, to reduce harms related to substance use among Latine and Black adult primary care patients.

CHWs are trained to deliver the single session 40-minute intervention, which focuses on the patient's self-report of using substances to cope with the emotional toll of systemic racism and marginalization using an affirming trauma-informed approach. By acknowledging these realities, the intervention offers a path toward healing and recovery.

"We tailor the information to be health disparities-based because Black and Latino people experience more health problems related to their substance use, probably because they're not receiving early interventions. We've had people share information with family members and many have decided to change just based on the fact that they didn't understand how their substance use was affecting their health."

*-Dr. Christina Lee
CISWH Research Director*

As the study moves forward, Prof. Lee and her team will continue to collect data on the effectiveness of the intervention as well as a cost analysis and will explore the feasibility of scaling it for broader use in primary care settings. With promising early results and testimonials from both patients and healthcare workers, the study has the potential to destigmatize substance use and transform how it is treated in Black and Latine populations.

Power Building & Leadership Lab

The Future At a Glance

Capturing the
Value of Social
Work

Social Work
Leadership
Identification Project

Social Work and
Healthcare
Certificate (w/
Rush University)



The Power Building and Leadership Lab is CISWH's newest lab. Its role is to cultivate and provide dynamic opportunities for social work professionals, students, and emerging leaders to build and hone leadership skills in areas like health and public health social work, advocacy, policy reform, and program development to drive systemic change, address social inequalities, and effectively lead organizations or initiatives. CISWH experts are developing and testing workshops and certificate programs, creating networking and co-learning opportunities, and identifying other opportunities to support social work in healthcare and public health settings.

"The Power Building and Leadership Lab is where social work's commitment to equity and dignity meets our determination to achieve greater influence for the greater good."

-Dr. Tami Gouveia, CISWH Director





Advocacy and Political Social Work for Greater Influence

Dr. Tami Gouveia joined social work partners from the National Association of Social Workers, the Coalition for Social Work and Health, the Congressional Research Institute on Social Work and Policy, and American Promise on six separate occasions for meetings and advocacy events on Capitol Hill. If passed these federal bills would increase Medicare reimbursement rates for social workers, expand the scope of reimbursable social services across healthcare settings, expand telemedicine services to include behavioral health, strengthen loan forgiveness for social workers, and

protect voting rights and access to the ballot box.

Advocacy for the field, for our clients and communities, and for free and fair elections is central to ethical social work practice. CISWH will continue to build its policy portfolio, offer trainings and workshops to strengthen political social work, and implement research and other projects to support the social work workforce and to rebuild social work's power and influence for the greater good.



Photo Credit: National Association of Social Workers

Global Social Work Initiatives

At a Glance

Delivered mental health training to practitioners in Nicaragua



Since its founding, CISWH has been dedicated to building the social work, community health worker, and public health workforce in communities around the world. Our team continues to build engaging, community-driven, meaningful, and long-term partnerships with community leaders, social work and public health practitioners, and decision-makers in low- and middle-income communities around the world.

For nearly 10 years we have been co-creating and delivering workshop trainings and other curriculum to providers and leaders in Nicaragua. We are leveraging the insights we have gained from developing and testing this effective model to inform new partnerships with the University of Global Health Equity, Partners in Health, and Sazana Ishema Aging Center in Rwanda.





Trauma-informed Social Work Training in Nicaragua

CISWH continues its partnership with the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-UNAN-CUR Estelí and the Superemos Foundation to train social work, psychology, and nursing students in cultural perspectives and intrafamily violence. This year, CISWH graduate fellow David Andrade (MSW'24) joined CISWH Global Social Work Director, Prof. Luz López in Estelí, Nicaragua to deliver teaching, in-person seminars, consultations, and visits in rural areas to support families impacted by violence.

In February, the CISWH team traveled to Nicaragua as part of an annual medical brigade consisting of DotHouse Health and BU-affiliated social workers, doctors, and nurses. Working with health professionals from the Nicaragua Ministry of Health and the Superemos Foundation domestic violence (DV) program staff, CISWH trained UNAN-CUR students as well as nurses and community health workers in rural communities, and lawyers working with reported cases of DV, so they can integrate trauma-informed care approaches when working with families.

"There is no substitute for this experience as a student. Being in Nicaragua and seeing how students and practitioners approach their work differently because they have a different level of access to resources--it was cool to see how there are a lot of different ways to do social work, but at the same time it all comes down to being kind and developing relationships."

-David Andrade, CISWH Fellow

The CISWH team also traveled to rural areas to offer support to families. Over the years, the Superemos Foundation has taught the CISWH team the nuances of each community, allowing CISWH to build trust with families and take a more tailored approach to their care.

This interdisciplinary training model has been expanded beyond Estelí, to the towns of Somoto and La Trinidad and it will continue to be expanded to other regions of Nicaragua. Long term, the team hopes to replicate the model in other countries, emphasizing the key role of social work in psychosocial health.

Future & Emerging Projects

Driving Change

New social work capacity building projects in Rwanda

Capturing the Value of Social Work

Identifying and Bringing Together Social Work Leaders



CISWH is looking forward to cultivating and strengthening new partnerships as we refine our strategy portfolio and metrics for success. Currently, we are pursuing two projects in Rwanda. The first is in partnership with Sazana Ishema Aging Centre and the second is with the University of Global Health Equity founded by Paul Farmer and Partners in Health. These projects will put CISWH's social work expertise at the center as we advance global social work research and co-design and implement courses and workshops in mental health assessment and support, social determinants of health, and interdisciplinary learning.

Two other projects—Capturing the Value of Social Work and the Social Work Leadership Identification Project—will position CISWH as a national and global leader in establishing the economic case for social work and in bringing social work leaders together to elevate the field for greater influence on health equity worldwide.



Advisory Board



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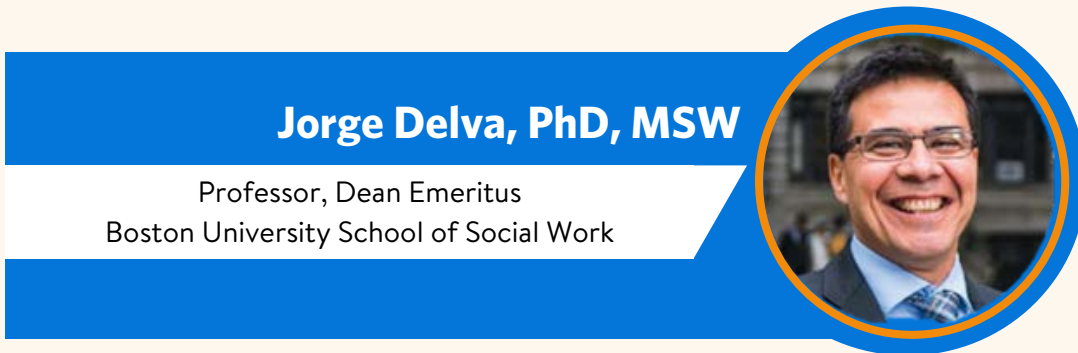
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Claudine Lavarin, MPH

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Emily Lamunu, MSW

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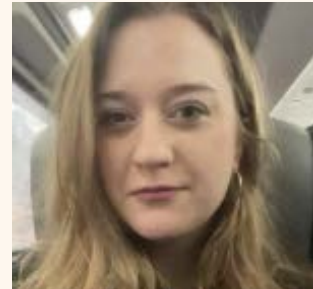
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Eugenia Tseng
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