



**AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF HEALTH BEHAVIOR**
**A MULTIDISCIPLINARY SOCIETY OF HEALTH
BEHAVIOR SCHOLARS AND RESEARCHERS**

Lisako McKyer, PhD, MPH, FAAHB
President AAHB

Lara McKenzie, PhD, MA, FAAHB
Immediate Past President AAHB
<http://www.aahb.org>

March 8, 2020

Dear Academy Members and Colleagues:

As President (Lisako) and Immediate Past President (Lara) of the American Academy of Health Behavior, we are pleased to welcome you to the 2021 Virtual Scientific Meeting – *“Transforming the narrative to meet emerging health behavior challenges.”* While the format and venue are quite different than originally planned, we believe that we have retained the most meaningful elements from our typical in-person meetings – scientific rigor and opportunities to interact directly with and learn from the best health behavior researchers.

We have a very strong line-up of speakers and an exciting meeting agenda that includes, for the first time ever, our own AAHB event similar to TEDx. The focus of this year’s meeting is to equip members with the skills to expand and adapt their research and “get ahead of” new health problems that emerge when the general narrative becomes confusing. During the conference we will offer skills-based trainings that can be applied to any health behavior topic to make our scientific narrative more relevant and expand our content’s reach.

The delivery format is quite different, and probably timely given the on-going COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on how we live, learn, work, and play. While we could not convene in Napa, CA last March, the cancellation provided us with valuable time to experience, for ourselves, multiple virtual conferences. We learned our likes and dislikes, what worked well, and what did not. Those lessons-learned were integrated into the planning of this virtual meeting and include:

1. All-day virtual conferences are taxing: Keep it short and simple;
2. In-person conference agendas do not always translate well for online delivery: Be innovative; and
3. Meetings without interaction are boring: Be engaging and fun.

Short and Simple: Sessions are spread throughout the month and kept brief (60 minutes), with the exception of the two plenary days which are a mere three hours each with breaks.

Innovative: Not only is the conference being delivered virtually, the presentations themselves are highly innovative and are exemplary reflections of the conference theme.

Engaging & Fun: A hallmark feature of AAHB Scientific Meetings is the design; conference conditions that facilitate informal, yet meaningful discussions of science, while also having fun! We worked to ensure the virtual meeting retains these features throughout the entire month!

For the full agenda including the slate of presenters, topics and social events, visit: <https://aahb.sched.com>

Awards conferred by AAHB are quite meaningful due to the criteria and review processes. Cancelling the 2020 in-person meeting in Napa meant we could not properly recognize AAHB award winners for that year. We decided, therefore to not select Research Laureate and Judy K. Black awards for 2021, so that we can fully recognize our 2020

winners during this year's virtual meeting. In addition, we hope to have an extra special *in-person* award event at our 2022 meeting that will enable us to properly celebrate honorees for 2020 through 2022.

Planning for our annual meeting is a task requiring a considerable amount of effort and time. The Board of Directors and the Conference Planning Committee have worked for over two years to prepare the 2020 program, albeit we could not enjoy it in its entirety due to the cancellation. Nevertheless, we thank Dr. Julie Merten for her easy-going leadership and determined vision in coordinating our conference, Dr. Jay Maddock for serving as Program Chair (professional arm-twister), and Dr. Philip Massey for directing the 2020 research review and poster abstract process (a monumental effort requiring great attention to detail). All members of the Conference Planning Committee dedicated their time to bring us a top-notch slate of speakers and research.

The hard work completed by the 2020 Conference Planning Committee helped smooth the way for the 2021 Conference Planning Committee. Indeed, we were able to implement most of the originally-planned sessions that so many of us eagerly looked forward to. The effects of Dr. Jay Maddock's professional arm-twisting were still felt by presenters - most whose presentation you will finally have the opportunity to experience! Still, the 2021 Conference Planning Committee faced the daunting task of translating the original conference scope and agenda into a format suited to virtual delivery. We owe Dr. Sam Towne our gratitude for serving as 2021 Program Chair, and Dr. Erika Thompson for her herculean effort in coordinating our research review and poster sessions--these look quite different than before which resulted in steep learning curves for us all. We extend our appreciation to Dr. Annie Nguyen, who does not have an official title for the valuable function she filled - coordinating strategies to ensure our participants are highly engaged and having fun.

We also thank each of the Board members who dedicate their time and energy to serving the Academy throughout the year and the person who keeps us all moving forward--Joanne Sommers, our Executive Director, who ensures that the day-to-day operations of the Academy run smoothly and efficiently!

This year your feedback is critically important. We set up sessions so that you evaluate each day, and share with us the feedback that is so critical for us to improve this experience for everyone. We look forward to receiving your feedback regarding this year's meeting and events.

Welcome, and best wishes for an engaging and enjoyable (still the) 20th Annual Scientific Meeting in 2021!



Lara McKenzie, PhD, MA, FAAHB
AAHB Immediate Past President



E. Lisako Jones McKyer, PhD, MPH, FAAHB
AAHB President

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