

Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being 2025 - 2026 Newsletter

Message from the Director

Young children in our local communities, the United States, and around the world are currently facing extremely challenging circumstances. This reality makes our work as researchers concerned about young children's well-being more relevant than ever. The Boston University Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being (EC Institute) is actively promoting, conducting, and sharing research that offers new approaches to sustaining children's development, health, and well-being. We achieve this by fostering collaboration among early childhood researchers from various disciplines at BU.

The EC Institute focuses on bringing together researchers and community partners providing opportunities to discuss important topics affecting young children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. With over 100 faculty affiliates from across BU, we design and conduct research that moves beyond individual disciplinary approaches. Our work, known as convergent research, blends knowledge and methods from different fields to address complex problems in practice and policy. Research supported by the EC Institute has made an impact in communities from Massachusetts to Louisiana, as well as internationally in Lesotho, South Africa, Peru, and other countries in the Global South.

Over the past five years, we have worked hard to establish the EC Institute as a hub at BU for research on young children's well-being, building capacity and creating innovative, forward-thinking research. We look forward to continuing this work next academic year and growing by adding new research programs and collaborations. I want to end by expressing my sincere gratitude to Dean Penny Bishop at Wheelock College and to our generous donors, whose financial support has made all this work possible. In light of the many challenges currently affecting the well-being of young children, we find hope in the unwavering commitment of BU researchers and our community partners to building a more just and supportive world for the next generation.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dina C. Castro
Director, BU Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being

Leadership:

Dr. Dina Castro, Director
Wheelock College

Dr. Ruth Paris, Associate
Director for Research
School of Social Work

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Dr. Stephanie Curenton-
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Dr. Peter Rockers,
School of Public Health

Dr. Amanda Tarullo,
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Annual Keynote Lecture

Dr. Adnan A. Hyder honored the Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being by speaking at the 2025 Annual Keynote Lecture. Dr. Hyder's lecture on *Challenges to Child Health and Well-Being: A Global Perspective on Complex Systems* urged attendees to recognize that the landscape of global child health has fundamentally shifted, calling for new approaches to research, policy, and care. This lecture was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Prof. Lindsey Locks, Sargent College, featuring professionals with expertise in global child health and development including Dr. Betzabe Butron-Riveros, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Dr. Aisha Khizar Yousafzai, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Alice Tenjiwe Kabwe, Universal Baby Project and Daura Education, and Dr. Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Wheelock College.



Research on Tap

This Spring, the BU Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being co-hosted a Research on Tap event with the Institute for Equity in Child Opportunity and Healthy Development at the School of Social Work, sponsored by the BU Office of Research. Researchers from across Boston University came together to discuss the inequities facing children in immigrant families and the policies and practices that support their healthy development. The event was co-hosted by Dr. Dina Castro, Wheelock College, and Dr. Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, School of Social Work and featured presentations by Dr. Steven Schmidt, College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Carmen Rosa Noroña, Boston Medical Center, Dr. Hayford Avedzi, Sargent College, Dr. Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, School of Public Health, Dr. Cristina Brinkerhoff and Dr. Ruth Paris, School of Social Work, Dr. Yasuko Kanno and Dr. Zachary Rossetti, Wheelock College.

Faculty Highlight



Dr. Ruth Paris is a Professor of Clinical Practice at BUSSW and Associate Director for Research at the BU Wheelock Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being. A nationally recognized expert in infant and early childhood mental health, her community-engaged research focuses on attachment-based, trauma-informed interventions for families facing severe adversity, including substance use disorders and trauma. Dr. Paris' pioneering work advocates for treating the caregiver and child together as a "dyad," shifting the paradigm of

early relational healthcare. Her recent research spotlights include Project BRIGHT, a therapeutic parenting intervention embedded in addiction recovery that was highlighted in the APA Monitor for transforming healthcare by showing that mental health support must begin at birth. Additionally, her study published in Psychological Trauma evaluated the positive impacts of Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), proving that relationship-based, trauma-informed therapy delivered by bilingual and bicultural clinicians significantly reduces anxiety, depression, and parenting stress for Latin American immigrant caregivers.

As Dr. Paris steps out of her leadership role at the Institute for Early Childhood Well-Being, we extend our deepest, most heartfelt gratitude for the years dedicated to supporting its growth. Ruth, THANK YOU, your vision and leadership as a founding member and the Associate Director for Research greatly contributed to shaping the future of our institute. Best wishes in your next chapter!

Community Connections Luncheon



This Spring, we hosted our first Community Connections Luncheon, bringing together Boston University researchers and community organizations to share innovative collaborations, identify needs, and foster new partnerships supporting young children's well-being. The event featured a panel discussion with community partners who have long-standing collaborations with Boston University researchers, followed by a Q&A and round-table discussions on priorities for future partnerships.

The panelists were Cheryl Milchev from ABCD Head Start and Children's Services, Aditi Subramaniam from the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Sue O'Donnell from the Institute for Health and Recovery, and TeeAra Dias from Boston Public Schools. From this event, new ideas emerged for convergence research in early childhood well-being and potential grant-seeking collaborations.

Research in Progress

Our Research in Progress meetings are an opportunity to promote convergent research by engaging early childhood researchers in cross-disciplinary conversations about their ongoing research and its impact in the community. This year we had meetings in September, October, and April.

- In September, we heard from researchers across Boston University on topics ranging from child sleep and behavioral health to early childhood education's impact on family and community health to the construction of Afro-Peruvian identity in early childhood. The presenters included Dr. Amanda Tarullo, College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Genevieve Guyol, School of Medicine, and Dr. Kyle DeMeo Cook, Dr. Dina Castro, and Dr. Milagros Calderon-Moya from Wheelock College.
- In October, presentations focused on the connection between family economic stability and child well-being. Topics included a longitudinal study on an anti-poverty program in Uganda, policy equity for immigrant families in the U.S. tax and transfer system, and how childcare constraints affect family health and material hardship. Presenters were Dr. Peter Rockers and Dr. Stephanie Ettinger DeCuba, School of Public Health, and Dr. Dolores Acevedo-Garcia and Dr. Pamela Joshi, School of Social Work.
- In April, doctoral students presented their ongoing research on young children and families. Topics included aligning children's developmental needs with early educator preparation, family language policies and bilingual practices among multilingual immigrant mothers, and child mental health practitioners' experiences implementing the DC 0-5 diagnostic framework in Massachusetts. The presenters were Pratima Patil, and Alba Franco, Wheelock College, and Yibin Yang, School of Social Work.

