

2025 UNITY in Public Health Research Conference Showcases Student-Led Innovation in the Fight Against Misinformation

Project UNITY's 2025 conference brought together 220+ leaders and students to present actionable, equity-driven solutions for today's health crises.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, August 18, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 2025 UNITY in Public Health Research Conference made waves in Chicago last week, spotlighting a new generation of leaders boldly reimagining the future of healthcare. Hosted by national nonprofit [Project UNITY](#), the event drew over 220 attendees — including physicians, educators, and digital health pioneers — for an evening that showcased youth-led innovation, community-centered interventions, and actionable solutions to today's most urgent health challenges.



Morish Shah, Executive Director; Pranav Mehta, Executive Director; Justin Chang, MPH, Senior Director of Education

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Today showed us that the future of healthcare is in good hands.”

Dr. Geeta Nayyar, MD, MBA

The conference's keynote was delivered by Dr. Geeta Nayyar, MD, MBA, nationally recognized digital health leader and author of *Dead Wrong: Diagnosing and Treating Healthcare's Misinformation Illness*, who emphasized the urgency of training youth to combat misinformation.

The conference marked the culmination of Catalyst Academy 2025, Project UNITY's eight-week interdisciplinary public health innovation program for high school students. Designed at the intersection of public health, medicine, and digital health, Catalyst Academy equips students with the mindset, tools, and purpose to lead systems level change in their own communities — not years from now, but today.

Throughout the summer, 52 students from across the United States engaged in a rigorous and

emotionally resonant educational experience. Catalyst Academy's curriculum was designed with the intention of sparking purpose. Students explored topics like health equity, climate change, misinformation, and artificial intelligence through hands-on activities, real-world case studies, and mentorship from national leaders. Each lesson challenged them to think critically, connect personally, and apply what they learned to real communities.

The program included modules on epidemiology, health policy, environmental health, global health systems, and behavioral science, all paired with expert-led sessions from institutions such as the Food and Drug Administration, Harvard Medical

School, UC Davis, and NYC Health + Hospitals. Students also received mentorship from graduate students at institutions such as George Washington University, Yale, and UCLA and participated in public health debates, stakeholder interviews, and a holistic wellness challenge focused on the Eight Dimensions of Wellness.

Students applied their learning by developing original, community-based health interventions addressing issues such as maternal mortality, cardiovascular disease, substance use, and colorectal cancer. Their work was grounded in public health theory and systems thinking — including frameworks like the Socioecological Model and the Quintuple Aim — and accompanied by rigorous literature reviews and research poster presentations. The Conference served as their capstone moment. Students unveiled their final projects onstage, presenting data-informed, locally grounded solutions to an audience of healthcare professionals, researchers, educators, and public health leaders.

One team in California developed a comprehensive, four-phase intervention to reduce the prevalence and severity of general anxiety disorder for low-income youth aged 14-18 years old in San Diego, California. Their intervention includes building a culturally responsive website, certifying and training digital navigators, and enhancing community outreach through school-based outreach. Another team in Ohio proposed a multifaceted intervention to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates. Through a maternal mobile clinic, social media, and distribution of personalized “new mother” bracelets, this team hopes to drive health equity and community awareness in new and creative ways. These were not hypothetical ideas — they were pragmatic,



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Geeta Nayyar, MD, MBA, Author of *Dead Wrong: Diagnosing and Treating Healthcare's Misinformation Illness*

community-rooted solutions supported by evidence and partnerships.

Students took the stage not as learners, but as changemakers, communicating their interventions with confidence, data, and purpose. “Catalyst Academy isn’t just a program to learn public health — it applies public health to motivate students how to lead compassionately, empathetically, and impactfully,” said Justin Chang, MPH, Senior Director of Education at Project UNITY. “We didn’t build this program to spark interest. We built it to train leaders.”

Throughout the summer, students explored the intersection of healthcare systems, policy, and technology. They wrote public health thought pieces, developed career roadmaps, and reflected on their identities through mentorship sessions. From stakeholder engagement to digital health simulations, every aspect of Catalyst was designed to prepare students for the complexity — and possibility — of leading in health.

“We launched Catalyst to light a spark,” said co-founders Pranav Mehta and Morish Shah. “What we’re seeing now is a movement — young people standing at the frontlines of innovation, taking ownership of the future of care.”

In the months ahead, students will partner with clinics, schools, and nonprofits to pilot and scale their projects. In Spring 2026, they’ll reconvene to share impact reports, publish in the UNITY Journal, and mentor the next cohort of Catalyst scholars — creating a ripple effect of youth-led public health leadership across the country.

As misinformation spreads, health inequities deepen, and trust in systems erodes, Catalyst Academy offers a new model for the future of healthcare. One that is interdisciplinary, emotionally intelligent, grounded in equity, and driven by the belief that students are not the future of healthcare — they are already part of its present.

About Project UNITY:

Project UNITY is a youth-led nonprofit transforming how the next generation prepares to lead in healthcare, public health, and digital health. Founded in 2020, UNITY operates as a national innovation lab and training ecosystem where high school students, college students, and young professionals build solutions that address urgent public health challenges, combat misinformation, and advance health equity. Through personalized education, mentorship, and scalable community innovation, Project UNITY builds interdisciplinary leaders not just to enter the system — but to shape its future.

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