Deborah F. Tate, PhD, Named Director of UNC Nutrition Research Institute

UNC-Chapel Hill names Deborah F. Tate, PhD, director of the Nutrition Research Institute, where she will lead the next era of precision nutrition research.

KANNAPOLIS, NC, UNITED STATES, September 8, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Deborah F. Tate, PhD, has been named director of the UNC Nutrition Research Institute, where she will lead the institute's research, strategic direction, and continued advancement of precision nutrition science.



Deborah F. Tate, PhD, NRI Director

Nutrition Research Institute

UNC Nutrition Research Institute

Tate has served as interim director of the NRI since April 2024, guiding the institute through a period of transition while strengthening operations, expanding collaboration, and positioning the NRI for long-term growth.

"Dr. Tate has provided steady, thoughtful leadership during a pivotal time for the NRI," said Penny Gordon-Larsen, PhD, vice chancellor for research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "She brings the right combination of scientific excellence, collaborative spirit, and institutional understanding to lead the institute forward, and I am confident she is the right person for this role."

An internationally recognized behavioral scientist, Tate is a professor in the Department of Nutrition at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and holds a joint appointment in the Department of Health Behavior. Her research focuses on precision nutrition, obesity and diabetes prevention, digital health interventions, and the use of emerging technologies to support health behavior change.

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>
> *Penny Gordon-Larsen, PhD, Vice Chancellor for Research*

Serving as director has given Tate a broader view of the institute's scientific strengths and opportunities.

"As a faculty member, I was naturally focused on advancing my own research program and collaborations," Tate said. "As director, I've had the privilege of seeing the full breadth of talent across the institute and how our collective contributions are far greater than any one lab. It has reinforced my belief that the NRI's greatest strength is our people and the collaborative environment that allows innovative ideas to flourish."

Her permanent appointment will allow the institute to build on that momentum with a greater focus on long-term priorities.

"Becoming permanent director doesn't change my commitment to the NRI, but it allows me to focus more intentionally on long-term priorities and investments that will position the institute for sustained success," Tate said. "I'm excited to work alongside our faculty, staff, trainees, and supporters to build on the strong foundation already in place."

Precision nutrition has been central to the NRI's mission since its founding. Nearly two decades ago, founding director Steven Zeisel, MD, PhD, helped advance the understanding that genetic and metabolic differences can influence individual nutrient requirements and health outcomes.

"Precision nutrition isn't something we added to our mission; it's why the NRI was created," Tate said. "Our researchers are building on that legacy by exploring how genetics, metabolism, the microbiome, behavior, and other factors interact to shape health across the lifespan."

Tate said advances in genomics, metabolomics, microbiome science, wearable technologies, and artificial intelligence are creating new opportunities to understand individual responses to nutrition and translate discoveries into better approaches to preventing and managing chronic disease.

"Nutrition science is entering a new era," Tate said. "We now have tools that allow us to understand nutrition in ways that weren't possible even a decade ago. That creates tremendous opportunities to generate knowledge that can improve health across the lifespan."

As director, Tate will lead the NRI as it continues advancing precision nutrition research, developing scientific talent, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and expanding the institute's contributions to nutrition science in North Carolina and beyond.

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