

# NCCIH Coalition for Whole Person Health Outreach and Education Day

## Meeting Summary

November 1, 2024

The [NCCIH Coalition for Whole Person Health](#) held an “Outreach and Education Day” on November 1, 2024, in the Natcher Conference Center, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Bethesda, Maryland. The Coalition is an independent, national, self-organized group of nonprofit organizations that raises awareness about the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), NIH, and how research can inform integrative, interprofessional, patient-centered, and whole person care. Representatives from over 60 organizations working in complementary and integrative health joined staff and speakers from NCCIH, NIH, and several other Federal agencies. Attendance at this meeting was by invitation.

### Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mary Beth Kester, M.S., director of the NCCIH Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation and moderator of the meeting, welcomed the attendees. She introduced Helene M. Langevin, M.D., director of NCCIH, for the opening presentation, “NCCIH Leadership in Whole Person Health.” Dr. Langevin discussed NCCIH’s current collaborations on [whole person health](#) across NIH, particularly the NIH Whole Person Initiative (with 19 partnering NIH Institutes, Centers and Offices [ICOs]). NCCIH also partners with some agencies outside NIH on this work, such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) (VA).

### NCCIH Leadership in Whole Person Health

Dr. Langevin discussed whole person health as a concept, why it makes sense, and why the time is right for it. She compared the predominant approach in biomedicine of analysis (e.g., breaking down the whole person into components) and reliance on drug treatment with another approach going in the opposite direction: synthesis from components into the whole person and the presence of complementary and integrative health. Dr. Langevin discussed other topics, including NCCIH’s model of a bidirectional health-disease continuum; systems biology; resilience (including a [2023 article in \*Stress and Health\*](#) that Dr. Langevin coauthored and the [Trans-NIH Resilience Working Group](#)); salutogenesis (the process by which individuals move from a less healthy to a healthier state); multisystem and multiscale deep phenotyping; and an NCCIH conceptual map (in six “layers”) of whole person health and related research. She saw “starting in the middle”—i.e., the layer of organs and physiological systems—as key for such studies.

Dr. Langevin highlighted additional NCCIH activities: (1) a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) co-sponsored by 18 NIH ICOs, [RFA-AT-24-010](#), Whole Person Research and Coordination Center (Whole Person RCC) U24 (Clinical Trial Not Allowed); (2) NCCIH’s partnership with the CDC on developing a Whole Person Health Index; (3) the planned addition of that index, when completed, to the NIH [All of Us](#) Research Program’s [partnered research](#)

[studies](#); and (4) NCCIH's recent funding opportunity for the [REsearch Across Complementary and Integrative Health Institutions \(REACH\) Virtual Resource Centers](#) initiative.

### **Research Across Complementary and Integrative Health (REACH) Centers**

Lanay M. Mudd, Ph.D., deputy branch chief of the Clinical Research in Complementary and Integrative Health Branch and program director in the Division of Extramural Research, NCCIH, presented in more detail about the [REACH Virtual Resource Centers program](#). Dr. Mudd explained how REACH aligns with the [NCCIH Strategic Plan FY 2021–2025](#), including with enhancement of the complementary and integrative health research workforce. She discussed NCCIH's funding and pathways for [training and career development](#) opportunities and the types of institutions that partner in REACH projects. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, one REACH Center was funded, and NCCIH anticipates funding up to two more in April 2025. Dr. Mudd did a deep dive on the [RAND REACH Center](#), the first REACH Center awarded, and its accomplishments in Year 1. She closed with NCCIH's vision of the future for the REACH Centers.

### **NIH Whole Person Initiative**

A presentation on the "NIH Whole Person Initiative" was given by Elizabeth Ginexi, Ph.D., program director in the NCCIH Clinical Research in Complementary and Integrative Health Branch, and Emrin Horgusluoglu, Ph.D., program director in the NCCIH Basic and Mechanistic Research in Complementary and Integrative Health Branch; both branches are within the NCCIH Division of Extramural Research. Dr. Ginexi and Dr. Horgusluoglu described the development and growth of the Center's interest in whole person health research following a landmark workshop in 2021, "[Methodological Approaches for Whole Person Research](#)." They provided further detail on NCCIH's conceptual map of the whole person and related research.

NCCIH has been sharing its interest in whole person health with other NIH ICOs and other Federal agencies. In 2024, the NIH Whole Person Initiative with 19 partnering ICOs was launched. The first step for this initiative is to fund a Whole Person Research and Coordination Center to transform the ability to conduct whole person research (based on NOFO [RFA AT-24-010](#), to be awarded in May 2025). The new center will be integral in coordinating the initial and future research programs in whole person health research. Its elements, objectives, roadmap, and timeline were presented.

### **Partnerships in Whole Person Health Research**

A session on "Partnerships in Whole Person Health Research" rounded out the morning's events. The session was moderated by Benjamin Kligler, M.D., M.P.H., executive director of the VA's Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.

The first speaker, Grace C. Y. Peng, Ph.D., program director and director of Mathematical Modeling, Simulation, and Analysis at the [National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering](#) (NIBIB), NIH. Dr. Peng introduced NIBIB and provided examples of programs that show systems thinking and integration and are relevant to whole person health: the [Interagency Modeling and Analysis Group](#) (IMAG); the [Multiscale Modeling \(MSM\) Consortium](#) of investigators; the NIH Common Fund's [Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society \(ComPASS\)](#) program and [Bridge to Artificial Intelligence](#) (Bridge2AI) program; and research on [digital twins technology](#) for biomedical applications. Dr. Peng

commented that whole person health research is finally doing what many people have dreamed of for decades.

Next, Jeffrey D. White, M.D., director of the [Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine](#) (OCCAM), [National Cancer Institute](#) (NCI), explained NCI's activities related to whole person care. He opened with NCI's Whole Person Care Working Group, including its preliminary definition of whole person care. The other relevant NCI and OCCAM activities presented were the [NCI Cancer Moonshot Tolerability Consortium](#); projects under the [Helping to End Addiction Long-term® Initiative, or NIH HEAL Initiative®](#), and a Request for Information (RFI), [NOT-CA-24-061](#), Seeking Input To Identify and Explore Experiences Utilizing the Whole Person Perspective and Evidence for its Value in the Care of People with Cancer. On this RFI, NCI's work was aided by partners such as grantees, applicants, responders to NCCIH's [RFI: Identification of a Set of Determinants for Whole Person Health](#) (2022), and the [NCCIH Coalition for Whole Person Health](#).

The NOFO [RFA-AG-25-002](#) was for a Consortium for Palliative Care Research Across the Lifespan (U54 Clinical Trial Required). OCCAM has been working on a study called "Survey of U.S. Ayurvedic Professionals Regarding Helping People with Cancer" (recruitment has closed and the results are being analyzed). It is part of an effort at OCCAM to encourage more dialogue, understanding, and possible collaboration between Ayurvedic health professionals and Western biomedical health professionals and researchers.

Stephen J. Blumberg, Ph.D., described how whole person health will be incorporated into the 2025 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). Dr. Blumberg is director of the Division of Health Interview Statistics, [National Center for Health Statistics](#) (NCHS), CDC. The [NHIS](#) is the longest-running health survey in the United States, and its topics range broadly across the health of the civilian noninstitutionalized U.S. population. Whole person health will be a topic in the 2025 survey. Dr. Blumberg discussed the need for self-report measures of whole person health. NCCIH has been partnering with the CDC on a measure for the survey, to be called the Whole Person Health Index.

NCCIH had been working on such a measure, and Dr. Blumberg talked with Dr. Langevin about possibly using it for the 2025 NHIS. The measure went ahead for this purpose and underwent initial testing by the NCHS in 2024. Dr. Blumberg presented some findings as well as the modification of some questions. The 2025 NHIS will launch in January 2025, with data available in summer 2026. In closing, Dr. Blumberg discussed use of radar charts for NHIS analysis.

Dr. Kligler, the session moderator, gave the final presentation, on whole person health in the VA. He defined the [Whole Health program](#), which is an approach to health care within the Veterans Health Administration that supports people's health and well-being. Whole Health represents a transformation in clinical health care to a system of health and well-being from the disease care system. Dr. Kligler discussed the program's goals, the complementary and integrative health approaches available, data on use and some outcomes, and the program's key domains and signs of well-being. He saw Whole Health as the start of a transformation in the United States and at NIH. Dr. Kligler has observed strong uptake of the program's approach across the Federal Government's health agencies and in the U.S. Department of Defense.

During a Q&A session following the final presentation, there was an important discussion of language and the use of the terms “whole person health” versus “whole health.” Dr. Langevin said terminology around the topic of whole person health has been under discussion at NCCIH for the past 5 years. Dr. Kligler said that the VA does not see “whole person health” and “whole health” as conflicting; the VA, NIH, and other organizations do this work together to help move toward their common target.