

Panel Speakers



David Horton – Radford City Mayor

David Horton has served as mayor of Radford since 2018, following years of community leadership through the Radford Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Radford, and other local organizations. A longtime Radford University professional, he has spent his career connecting people, organizations, and community resources to support the vitality and well-being of the Radford community.



Justin Griffith – Commonwealth's Attorney, Pulaski County

Justin Griffith serves as the Commonwealth's attorney for Pulaski County, overseeing felony prosecutions and promoting community safety. Recognized as a public health hero, he collaborates with local organizations to address systemic health challenges and is a board member of InStill Mindfulness, a nonprofit dedicated to cultivating mindful practices to improve well-being in the community.



Natalie Cook – Assistant Professor of Public Health, Virginia Tech

Natalie Cook is an assistant professor of public health at Virginia Tech whose work focuses on health equity, program evaluation, and community-based research. She developed and directs BEARTH Village, a community-engaged perinatal equity initiative in Roanoke that brings together research, lived experience, and community partnerships to improve maternal and child health.



John Clair – Blacksburg Chief of Police

John Clair, a fourth-generation police officer and U.S. Army veteran, serves as chief of police for the town of Blacksburg and is the immediate past president of the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police. With more than 25 years of public safety experience, he is deeply committed to the health, safety, and wellbeing of the community, emphasizing trust, meaningful community partnerships, and a service-centered approach to policing.



Erika Dalton – Community Paramedic and Program Developer, Pulaski County

Erika Dalton is the founding community paramedic for Pulaski County, where she has developed a proactive, patient-centered program focused on bringing care and support directly to individuals in their homes. Through education, care coordination, patient advocacy, and strong community partnerships, she works to address barriers to care, prevent avoidable emergencies, and help individuals with complex needs better navigate the healthcare system.



Katie Thompson – Director, Pulaski Office of Prevention and Recovery

Katie Thompson is the director of Pulaski County's Office of Prevention and Recovery, where she leads collaborative, whole-family approaches to prevention, recovery, and community wellbeing. A Pulaski county native with a background in education and human services, she works with community partners to strengthen access to mental health and recovery services, build resilience, and help individuals and families thrive.



Jill Burcham – P.U.S.H. Ministries, Galax

Pastor Jill Burcham is the founder of P.U.S.H. Ministries, a community outreach organization serving individuals and families facing addiction, homelessness, incarceration and reentry, and other life challenges. Through partnerships with courts, recovery programs, and community organizations across Southwest Virginia, she helps individuals develop practical plans, access resources, and build the support and structure needed to move forward.

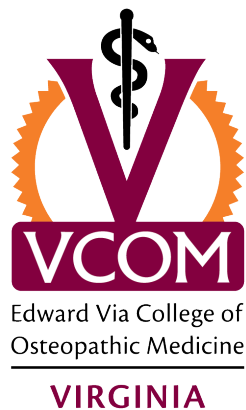


2nd Annual VCOM-VDH Symposium

A Culture of Health: Connecting Medicine, Communities, and Action

September 23, 2026

Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine
Blacksburg, Virginia



CORE Symposium 2026

A Culture of Health: Connecting Medicine, Communities, and Action

Wednesday, September 23, 2026 | 9:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

9:30-9:45 AM | Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome from VCOM Leadership	Dean Ronald Januchowski, DO
Celebration of Collaboration	Bernard Kadio, MD, MPH, PhD
Overview of the Day and Transition to Keynote	Bernard Kadio, MD, MPH, PhD

9:45-10:30 AM | Keynote Address

Keynote Introduction	Jess Nicholson, MAT
Keynote Address	Julia Gohlke, PhD, MS Professor of Environmental Health Department of Population Health Sciences Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech
Audience Q&A	James Mahaney, PhD

10:30-11:00 AM | Poster Session #1 Community Research Poster Presentations

11:00-11:15 AM | Snack and Networking Break

11:15 AM-12:15 PM | Panel Discussion Health Happens Everywhere:
Lessons from Leaders Beyond Healthcare

Introductions and Moderated Discussion	James Mahaney, PhD
Audience Q&A	James Mahaney, PhD

12:15-12:45 PM | Poster Session #2 Community Research Poster Presentations

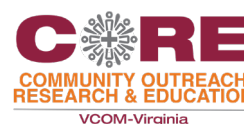
12:45–1:00 PM | Community Partner Awards and Closing Remarks

Acknowledgements, CORE Mentor of the Year Awards, Student Poster Award, and Closing Remarks	Bernard Kadio, MD, MPH, PhD
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Learn More

Community Outreach Research and Education (CORE) Program at VCOM-Virginia is a student-driven research initiative developed in close partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs) and practicing physicians.



Contact Jess Nicholson at jnicholson@vt.vcom.edu or visit www.vcom.edu/core.

Julie Gohkle, PhD , MS

2026 Keynote Speaker

Julia M. Gohlke, PhD, MS, is a professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech, where she also serves as co-director of the Rural Environmental Health PhD Training Program. Her research focuses on environmental epidemiology, climate and health, developmental and reproductive health, disaster-related exposures, and environmental justice, with particular attention to rural and underserved communities. Across this work, she explores how the places and conditions in which people live, work, and build their lives shape health and how scientific findings can be translated into meaningful public health action.

Gohlke's research has examined the health effects of extreme heat, flooding, air pollution, environmental contaminants, climate change, and other environmental exposures, including their relationships with maternal and infant health and other health outcomes. Her interdisciplinary approach brings together epidemiology, spatial and computational methods, toxicology, and community-engaged research to better understand environmental health risks and identify opportunities for communities to respond to them. Her work has included collaboration with residents, health departments, healthcare organizations, schools, researchers, and other community partners to understand local priorities and develop approaches that can improve health.

Gohlke earned her BS in biology from the University of Michigan and her MS and PhD in environmental health from the University of Washington. She completed postdoctoral training at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and served as an AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellow with the U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Change. She has led or contributed to numerous projects funded by NIH, NASA, NSF, and other organizations and has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.

In addition to her research and teaching, Gohlke has contributed to environmental health science and public health policy through service with organizations including the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, the World Health Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and multiple NIH study sections. Her contributions have been recognized with awards including the F. Clarke Fraser New Investigator Award and the Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action Climate and Health Teaching Award.

Through her work connecting environmental science, public health, community knowledge, and action, Dr. Gohlke illustrates the interdisciplinary and community-centered approaches needed to address complex health challenges and the importance of looking beyond clinics and hospitals to the environments and communities that shape health every day.



Professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech

Co-Director of the Rural Environmental Health PhD Training Program