

Elevating the Academy
American Academy of Health Behavior Presidential Note

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AAHB members and friends,

My introduction to the Academy began when my doctoral advisor and mentor, Andrea C. Gielen, ScD (AAHB Fellow and Research Laureate) encouraged me to attend the 2005 annual meeting in Charleston, SC. Finding a professional home should be (but isn't always) as easy as having your mentor simply point you in the right direction. At the first AAHB meeting I attended, I immediately felt like I had "found my people." We shared a passion for improving health, a commitment to excellence in research, and best practices for applying research to practice. I felt immediately invested in and welcomed by the Academy. Attending the Academy annual meetings helped to put faces and personalities to the work of leaders in health behavior research that I had previously only been familiar with on paper. Interacting with these leaders in the intimate setting of the Academy helped to shape my own research. I have been an active member of the Academy since 2007 serving in various roles on the Board and on councils such as Chair of the Professional Development and Mentoring Council, Chair of the Annual Meeting Planning Committee, and Member Delegate.

As president, my vision for the Academy will focus on three areas: Mentorship, Growth, and Inspiration.

Mentorship at Multiple Levels (multi-level mentorship). I believe that continued progress in health behavior research will in part be made by mentoring and training new health behavior researchers and scholars. The development and realization of the AAHB Research Scholars Mentorship Program is a strong vehicle for mentoring and training junior researchers while simultaneously involving senior members of the Academy. These unique interdisciplinary collaborations around shared interests include documenting outcomes, innovating around interventions to encourage healthy behaviors, and ultimately sharing evidence-based results to the largest audiences, be they individuals, policy makers, communities, or the nation. As president, I will work with the Board to continue to offer both formal and informal mentoring and professional development opportunities and to brainstorm ways to facilitate increasing the offerings and impact of mentorship.

Growth, While Retaining the Standard of Excellence. Serving in various elected positions and council chair roles has afforded me a view of the inner workings of the Academy, including budgeting, sponsorship, strategic planning, introduction of a new journal, annual meeting planning, membership structure and fees. I have seen the policies bend and flex to accommodate a growing membership base of health behavior research students, professionals, and scholars, allowing our organization to become more inclusive, diverse, and equitable. As president, I will encourage this type of growth of the membership while retaining the standard of excellence founding members and others should expect. The importance of membership growth as a

strategy is two-fold: we need to expand our membership base so as to not be completely reliant on the annual meeting for financial survival and to expand the influence of our members' work; which will help ensure the survival of the Academy into its third decade and beyond.

Inspiration (What is the next big thing for The Academy?). I am passionate about innovation and “thinking big.” The process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something and to be creative is not always an approach that is associated with scholars and researchers, however, my own work, along with the work of our Academy members proves that creativity, inventiveness, innovation, imagination, and originality are what give our field inspiration and the energy to move forward. As president, I will apply this passion to encourage the Board and members to submit new ideas, and try new approaches to collaborations, mentoring, and research, while supporting our foundation and mission.

I look forward to the next year as president of the Academy and working with the membership, past presidents, founding and charter members, and the board to mentor, grow, and inspire health behavior research. I hope to see all of you in March at the 20th Annual Scientific Meeting at Embassy Suites by Hilton in Napa Valley, California where we will challenge ourselves with the following theme, “Transforming the Narrative to Meet Emerging Health Behavior Challenges.”

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lara McKenzie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lara B. McKenzie
2019-2020 American Academy of Health Behavior President