

Presidential Note:
Understanding the Past While Looking to the Future*
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**Adapted from my inaugural speech at the 2022 American Academy of Health Behavior Annual Meeting in Key Largo, FL.*

I attended my first AAHB meeting in 2011 in Hilton Head, SC, as a doctoral student. In order to supplement the costs of attending the conference, I signed up to be a paid student helper. One of my tasks was to stand at the doorway to the poster session and hand out drink tickets as people entered. I remember handing ticket stubs to Dr. Larry Green and Dr. Meredith Minkler and being in awe of that moment because I had studied from textbooks written by these superstar researchers. As a student, you forget that the people who write these intellectual papers and theories and frameworks are real people and there I was at an AAHB meeting having a conversation with them and getting feedback on my dissertation research.

I tell this story when people ask me what drew me to the Academy in the first place. That meeting made an impression on me as an emerging scholar but it is also an example of what we strive for in AAHB. To create these wonderful, unique opportunities where established researchers and students are in the same room engaging with one another. To create a space where meaningful achievements are held up and celebrated but at the same time, new scholars are encouraged, inspired, and mentored to reach greater heights. To collectively elevate and advance the field of health behavior research.

It is my belief that every Board of Directors has to balance two tensions within this organization. We have to be historians, which means looking to the past to learn our rich history and understanding the motivations behind our mission and values (https://aahb.org/mission_statement). But we also have to look ahead and position the Academy for success in the next 15, 20, 25 years. That task calls us to be courageous and willing to challenge ourselves as an organization. This year we are celebrating our 25th year, our silver anniversary. This is a testament to the staying power of the Academy and we are here today because every founding member, past president, and board of directors navigated us here. As we move forward and look to the next 25 years, my hope is that we continue to be an organization that creates unique spaces to promote our value of inclusive excellence and to advance the field of health behavior research and its translation to real-world solutions.

We took on a rebranding effort this past year (2021-2022). There are two distinct marks that visually represent the Academy. The seal (Figure 1) is an emblem that we use on awards and that represents our history and tradition. The logo (Figure 2) is a contemporary, visual representation of our aspirations.



Figure 1. The AAHB seal



Figure 2. The AAHB logo used up to 2022

While a seal is meant to be steady and constant, a logo can and should shift along with an organization's growth. The conversation around a logo change started two boards ago and looking back at meeting minutes and notes from a strategic planning effort that was undertaken eight years ago, there were rumblings of it then as well. The last board took this effort on in earnest after much discussion, consultation with members, and collection of data. In a survey, we asked members to describe the Academy in three words (Figure 3). Many members called the Academy their research home. They described the scholarly activities promoted by this organization as excellent, transformative, and meaningful. Many also described the Academy as collaborative, supportive, and welcoming. Some people describe the Academy as a "family." However, members also told us that these traits were not well reflected in our logo. As an organization, we want our branding to be the best possible representation of what we do and the values that we stand for. Our evaluation process told us that an evolution was needed.

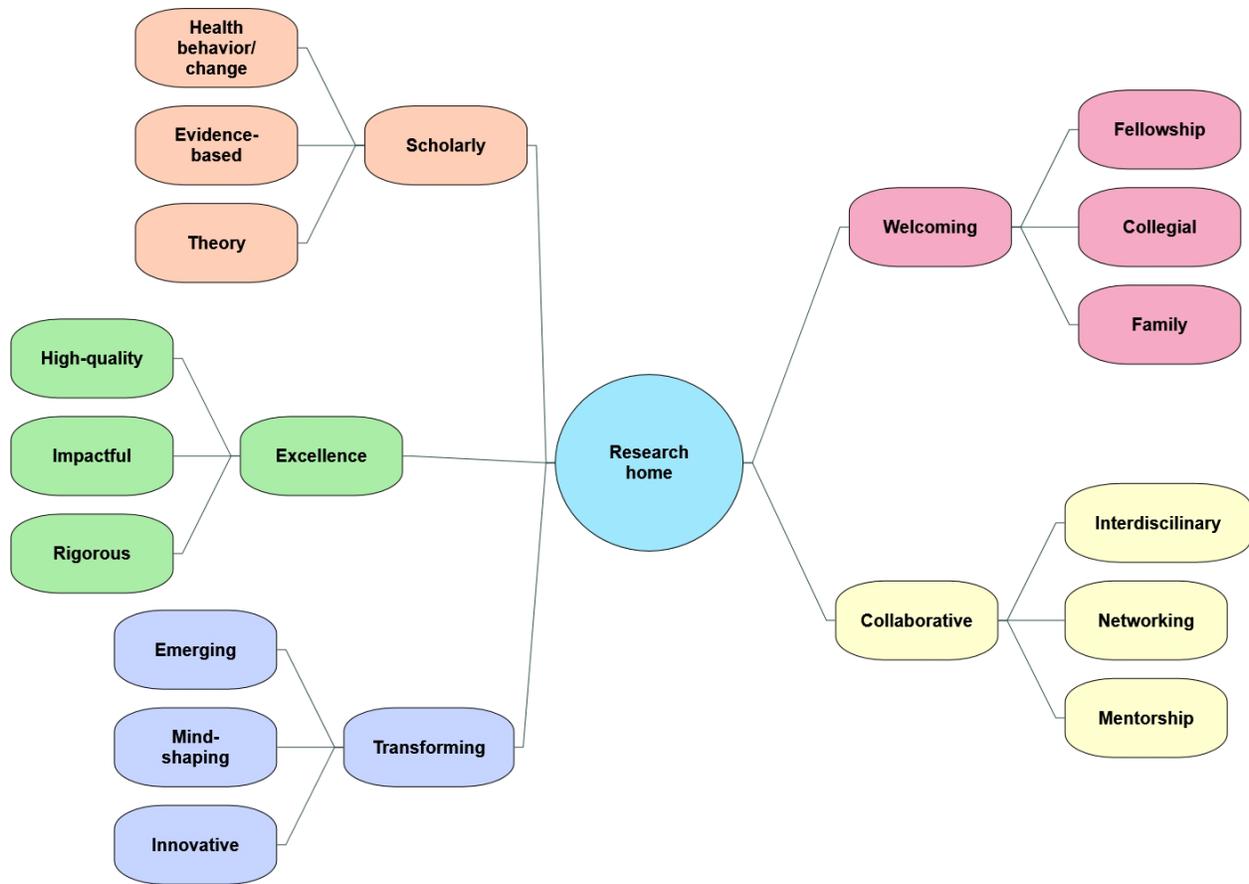


Figure 3. Thematic responses to the member survey question, “What does AAHB mean to you?”

Armed with this information we engaged a graphic designer who worked with us over several months and many drafts to arrive at a new logo and tagline (Figure 4). The image depicts two figures. The figure in the front is supported by the figure in the back, as our future is supported by our past, and they simultaneously reach upward and forward representing our aspirations for advancing health behavior and translational research. Our seal remains unchanged.



Figure 4. The AAHB logo redesigned and implemented in 2022

As we celebrate our silver anniversary, I look to the words some of our founding members. Drs. Elbert Glover, Robert McDermott, and Mohammad Torabi spoke at the opening session of the annual meeting in Key Largo and two words come to me when I reflect on what they shared — “courage” and “opportunity”. The founders, under Glover’s leadership, saw an opportunity to transform the field of health promotion and health education through this new professional organization and they had the courage to try. They dared to envision an organization that would transform the field from one dominated by missions centered on teaching and service to one with “a stronger research foundation in which discovery would be valued as a means of improving practice and enhancing population-based health” (McDermott & Glover, 2010). The Academy has always dared to be different and transformative and to push the envelope on health behavior science. Opportunity and courage.

Over the next year, we will be looking at new opportunities to provide content and engage members outside of the annual meeting, for example through workshops and webinars on cutting-edge research topics. The board will continue to have discussions about student involvement in the Academy with an eye towards fostering and encouraging the next generation of leaders, while also looking at ways to strengthen and retain our membership base. This organization is unique precisely because a student can sit next to someone like Dr. Meredith Minkler and listen to a talk given by someone like Dr. Larry Green, as I did 2011. The 2023 conference planning committee will be looking at ways to continue offering different abstract presentation formats aside from the traditional poster presentation. I also look forward to working with Drs. Paul Branscum and Kenneth Ward, the editor-in-chief and associate editor, of our official journal, *Health Behavior Research*, to support new and exciting efforts for developing and growing the journal.

The 2023 annual meeting will be in San Francisco, CA, and theme is: “The science of identities: Measurement & methods for translational health behavior research.” This theme was developed by members of the Diversity and Equity council led by Dr. David Seal, with significant contributions from Dr. Lisako McKyer. The theme recognizes that health behavior research is fundamentally concerned with the actions of people within a given environment, but that individuals and environments are highly complex and interactive, and health behavior science must evolve alongside our understanding of these complexities. With this in mind, the meeting will offer forward-thinking presentations and discussions on topics such as theoretical and conceptual frameworks that consider the complexity of identities, challenges, and solutions to measuring the intersectionality of identities across the life course, and meaningful translation of research into sustainable long-term systemic and environmental changes. Discussions will be guided with an eye towards the development of strategies designed to contribute to health equity.

There were some expectations to return to Napa, CA, which was the location planned for our March 2020 meeting, which was cancelled because of the pandemic. The board considered returning to Napa, but ultimately choose San Francisco for several reasons. Although the location is beautiful, Napa resorts are costly and difficult to travel to. When we select locations that are not accessible, either geographically or financially, we send a message of exclusion and that is not who we are. We are an organization that celebrates excellence and we do not need to be exclusive to promote excellence. During our first meeting of the new Board of Directors, I asked the board

to think about their roles and what it means to be a board member and we talked about being good stewards of the organization. Part of that means making prudent choices when necessary to help this organization build our financial reserves and stay in good financial standing. Through some tough negotiating, we were able to secure a favorable contract with the venue in San Francisco and I believe it is a choice that will help us stay in good financial health.

When I ran for president, I promised that if entrusted with the role, I would lead with active listening, and honest and transparent communication. Toward that end, I invite you to reach out to me with your thoughts, ideas, wishes, hopes, and dreams, and even complaints about the Academy. I am here to listen and my door is wide open.



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(American Academy of Health Behavior President, 2022-2023)

Reference

McDermott, R. J. and Glover, E. D. (2010). Formation and early history of the American Academy of Health Behavior. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 34(5), 563-572.
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