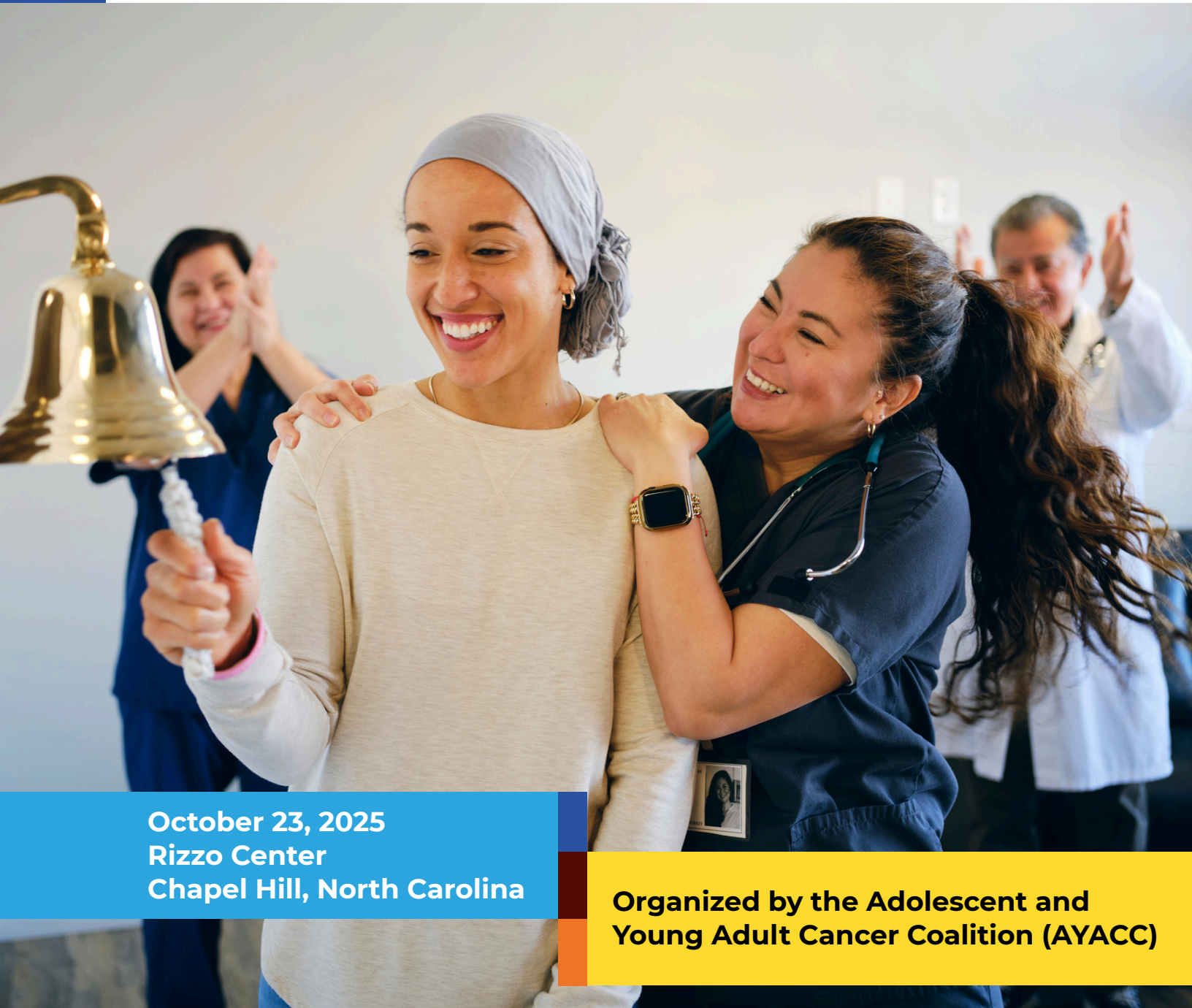




Adolescent & Young Adult
CANCER COALITION

AYACC 2025 CONFERENCE

Implementing Improvements in AYA Care for Vulnerable Populations



**October 23, 2025
Rizzo Center
Chapel Hill, North Carolina**

**Organized by the Adolescent and
Young Adult Cancer Coalition (AYACC)**



Dear Colleagues and Partners,

Welcome to the AYACC 2025 Conference. We're thrilled to bring together a cross-professional community dedicated to improving care for adolescents and young adults (AYAs) affected by cancer.

This year's theme—Implementing Improvements in AYA Care for Vulnerable Populations—reflects our commitment to equity, practical change, and collaborative problem-solving. We'll explore real-world strategies that bridge the gap between innovation and impact, particularly for AYAs facing systemic barriers.

We're also excited to debut the AYACC Network, a new tool designed to connect professionals and centralize trusted resources. We're honored to gather with so many dedicated individuals who share a deep commitment to advancing care and improving outcomes for AYA patients

Thank you for being here and for the work you do to uplift this incredible community.

Warm regards,

Christopher Terry

PRESIDENT, AYACC

Rachel Westlake

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AYACC



ABOUT AYACC

OUR MISSION

We are a national group of healthcare professionals, nonprofit leaders, researchers, and advocates working together to enable the delivery of transformative care for adolescents and young adults with cancer.

OUR VISION

All AYAs with cancer have access to a state-of-the-art system of care that serves their unique needs and circumstances and provides them the optimal opportunity to survive and thrive.



OUR CORE VALUES

Sharing Knowledge for Equity – We believe that sharing knowledge openly elevates our collective wisdom and facilitates equitable care, so we generously share our successes, challenges, and innovations.

Trustworthy Leadership – We provide trustworthy leadership, offering expertise, representation, and meaningful value for the diverse community of AYA professionals.

Open Spirit of Engagement – We meet each other with openness and curiosity, believing in the strength of community and that our best selves lift up one another.

Camaraderie – We practice kind and earnest collaboration, connected by our dedication to the AYA community.

Intentional Dynamism – We gather joyfully with palpable energy and a shared belief in catalytic change, fueled by our love for all those connected by AYA cancer.

WHAT YOU'LL EXPERIENCE TODAY:

- ✓ Implementation Science Keynote
- ✓ Educational Sessions
- ✓ Breakout Sessions – Structured small-group learning with peers
- ✓ Poster Presentations – Research, programs, and ideas worth spreading
- ✓ CE Credit – Through MAHEC. Learn more at ayacc.net/conference-2025

SPECIAL FEATURES: AT A GLANCE

ARCHIE BLEYER AWARD

Recognizing transformative leadership in AYA oncology

AYACC PLATFORM LAUNCH

Explore a new digital home for cross-sector learning and collaboration

NETWORKING & POSTER SHOWCASE

Refreshments, research, and rich conversations

NC AYA SYMPOSIUM (OCT 24)

Expand your experience by attending Friday's sister event hosted by UNC Lineberger



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE



8:00 – 8:45 AM **Opening Session: Vulnerable Populations & Implementation Science**
Welcome, land acknowledgement, and keynote address introducing implementation science frameworks for AYA cancer care, with emphasis on vulnerable populations. The session will explore practical methodologies for bridging research and practice.

8:50 – 9:40 AM **Issue 1: Language and Cultural Health**
This panel will examine how language barriers and cultural factors impact AYA cancer care for vulnerable populations. Discussion will address communication across language barriers, neurodiversity in clinical settings, and developing culturally responsive care practices.

9:40 – 9:50 AM **Break**

9:50 – 10:40 AM **Issue 2: Social Support for Vulnerable AYAs**
This panel explores diverse approaches to social support for vulnerable AYA cancer populations. Discussion will highlight barriers to effective social support and promising approaches in both clinical and community settings.

10:40 – 11:55 AM **Breakout Session 1:** Interactive small-group discussions focusing on Issues 1 & 2. Participants will share challenges from their own settings and exchange practical implementation ideas.

12:00 – 1:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00 – 1:50 PM **Issue 3: Emotional Health & Wellbeing for Vulnerable Communities**
This panel will address approaches to emotional and mental health support for vulnerable AYA cancer populations. Speakers will share insights about interventions and delivery models that have shown promise in reaching underserved communities.

1:50 – 2:40 PM **Issue 4: Rural Health Access for AYA Cancer Care**
This panel will address challenges faced by rural AYA cancer patients and those who serve them. Discussion will highlight approaches to bridging geographic barriers, including telehealth, regional coordination, and community partnerships.

2:40 – 3:55 PM **Breakout Session 2:** Interactive small-group discussions focusing on Issues 3 & 4. Participants will collaborate on developing actionable strategies for their communities.

4:00 – 4:20 PM **Common Themes & Emerging Ideas:** Integration of insights, shared experiences, and innovative approaches that emerged from the day's sessions.

4:20 – 4:40 PM **Archie Bleyer Award Presentation**

4:40 – 5:20 PM **Platform Launch Introduction to AYACC's new digital platform for professional networking, resource sharing, and collaboration.**

5:30 – 7:15 PM **Networking Reception & Poster Session Opportunity to connect with colleagues and view research posters in an informal setting.**



Adolescent & Young Adult
CANCER COALITION

MEET OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER



GISELLE PEREZ, PHD

Dr. Giselle Perez specializes in working with young adults and in supporting individuals and their caregivers affected by cancer and other rare or chronic illnesses.

Her clinical work focuses on navigating treatment-related and life transitions, addressing the social and emotional challenges that arise after a cancer diagnosis or treatment.



Her work explores the physical, psychosocial, and biobehavioral (e.g., stress hormone) impacts of stress, as well as the effectiveness of stress-reduction interventions.

By implementing behavioral and implementation science, she identifies and applies strategies at the patient, provider, system, and community levels to enhance access to and quality of care.



She helps patients manage **stress, anxiety, and medical uncertainty**, and she supports the adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors to improve overall wellbeing.

Dr. Perez's research program aims to develop innovative approaches to improve cancer prevention, care delivery, and health outcomes—especially for populations historically overlooked by the healthcare system.



AYACC 2025 FEATURED PANEL

Language and Cultural Health

This panel will examine how language barriers and cultural factors impact AYA cancer care for vulnerable populations. Discussion will address neurodiversity in clinical settings, communication across language barriers, and developing culturally responsive care practices.



RONNY BELL
PHD, MS



JOELYS GONZALEZ
BISONO



CHINOMSO NWOZICHI
PHD, RN, CMSRN, OCN,
FAAN

with moderator



POOJA RAO, MD



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REGISTER NOW AT [AYACC.NET](https://www.ayacc.net)

AYACC 2025 FEATURED PANEL

Social Support for Vulnerable AYAs

This panel explores diverse approaches to social support for vulnerable AYA cancer populations. Discussion will highlight barriers to effective social support and promising approaches in both clinical and community settings.



NICK IANNARINO,
PHD



TONYA HICKS



BRYNN FOWLER
MPH



KIMBERLY MILLER
PHD, MPH

with moderator



ABBY WESTERMAN



Adolescent & Young Adult
CANCER COALITION

REGISTER NOW AT AYACC.NET

AYACC 2025 FEATURED PANEL

Emotional Health & Wellbeing for Vulnerable Communities

Mental health is a critical but often overlooked part of cancer care. This session will highlight interventions and delivery models designed to reach underserved populations with the support they need most.



DELTRA JAMES



ANAO ZHANG,
PHD



MEGAN GILMAN,
MD



AUSTIN WATERS,
PHD

with moderator



Annah Abrams, MD



Adolescent & Young Adult
CANCER COALITION

REGISTER NOW AT AYACC.NET

AYACC 2025 FEATURED PANEL

Rural Health Access for AYA Cancer Care

This panel will address challenges faced by rural AYA cancer patients and those who serve them. Discussion will highlight approaches to bridging geographic barriers, including telehealth, regional coordination, and community partnerships.



LAUREL (LAURIE)
LYCKHOLM, MD



ERIN M. MOBLEY,
PHD, MPH



ANNE KIRCHHOFF,
PHD, MPH



HOWLAND ^a(HAL)
E. CROSSWELL, MD

with moderator



ANDREW SMITHERMAN, MD



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REGISTER NOW AT AYACC.NET

AYACC Breakout Sessions

From Evidence to Action. These sessions transform insight into practical strategies for vulnerable AYA communities.

After each set of panels, join an interactive small-group breakout by choosing one issue topic. Come prepared with a 1-minute story:

- A barrier you've faced with the issue topic, OR
- Something that worked (even partly)
- Include your role/region and one key insight

Panelists will float as subject matter experts, adding perspective and answering questions as you share challenges and ideas.

10:40 – 11:55 AM | Breakout 1

Choose one: Language & Cultural Health or Social Support for Vulnerable AYAs

2:40 – 3:55 PM | Breakout 2

Choose one: Emotional Health & Wellbeing for Vulnerable Communities or Rural Health Access for AYA Cancer Care

BREAKOUT FACILITATORS



Lauren Ghazal, PhD, FNP-BC

Dr. Ghazal is an assistant professor and researcher at the University of Rochester School of Nursing and the Wilmot Cancer Institute. Her research focuses on improving the health and quality of life of adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer survivors. Lauren also holds a clinical practice as a family nurse practitioner in primary and urgent care settings.



Caroline Dorfman, PhD

Dr. Dorfman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke, where she also serves as the Co-Director for the Division of Behavioral Medicine and Neuroscience. Within the Duke Cancer Institute, Dr. Dorfman is the Director of Research and Behavioral Medicine for the Teen and Young Adult Oncology Program. Dr. Dorfman's research focuses on developing, implementing, and evaluating psychosocial and behavioral interventions designed to meet the needs of cancer survivors and their partners/families. She is particularly interested in conducting research to address the unique needs of adolescent and young adult cancer survivors.

CONFERENCE FACULTY

Annah Abrams

Annah Abrams is a child, adolescent, and adult psychiatrist specializing in the care of children and adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with cancer. She is the Director of the AYA Cancer Program at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), where she leads clinical and programmatic efforts to address the unique psychosocial needs of AYA patients. She also serves as Director of Pediatric Psychosocial Oncology at MGH and provides consultation across pediatric oncology services. Her academic work centers on the psychiatric care of medically ill children and adolescents. She co-edited *Pediatric Psychosocial Oncology: A Textbook for Multidisciplinary Care* and has been an active contributor to the development of national standards for psychosocial care in childhood and adolescent cancer.

Ronny A. Bell, PhD, MS

Ronny Bell, PhD, MS is the Fred Eshelman Professor and Chair of the Division of Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy at the Eshelman School of Pharmacy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Dr. Bell is also Deputy Associate Director of Community Outreach and Engagement for the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center. Dr. Bell received his undergraduate degree in Public Health Nutrition from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Public Health (1985) and his Master's (1988) and Doctorate (1993) in Foods and Nutrition from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Bell completed a post-doctoral fellowship in Gerontology and completed a Master's in Epidemiology (1996) from the Wake Forest School of Medicine. Dr. Bell is a native of rural eastern North Carolina and is an enrolled member of the Lumbee tribe of eastern North Carolina. His research focuses on understanding and addressing disparities in chronic diseases in underserved populations, with an emphasis on rural and American Indian communities. He is a member of the North Carolina Minority Health Advisory Council. He co-leads the Southeastern American Indian Cancer Health Equity Partnership (SAICEP), a collaboration between the Community Outreach and Engagement programs at the three NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers in North Carolina. He currently serves as Editor-In-Chief for the North Carolina Medical Journal. He previously served as Co-Chair of the Healthy North Carolina 2030 Task Force.

Hal Crosswell, MD

Currently living, working and playing in Upstate SC, Hal is MUSC, Louisville and Emory-trained for Medical School through Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Fellowship, but first and foremost, he is a Tarheel and a baby-blue father of 2.75 graduates of UNC (son is a senior!). His interest in AYA blood disorders and cancer care developed in fellowship and grew as he established practice in Upstate SC, serving a wide geographic region of approximately 10 counties with currently about 1.5M population. He developed the first AYA program in SC in 2012, has served as voting member and AYA lead for the Upstate Carolina NCORP (NCI Community Oncology Research Program) and continues to serve young adults with Spartanburg Regional Healthcare Center/Gibbs Cancer Center.

Caroline Dorfman, PhD

Caroline Dorfman, PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke where she also serves as the Co-Director for the Division of Behavioral Medicine and Neuroscience. Within the Duke Cancer Institute, Dr. Dorfman is the Director of Research and Behavioral Medicine for the Teen and Young Adult Oncology Program. Dr. Dorfman's research focuses on developing, implementing, and evaluating psychosocial and behavioral interventions designed to meet the needs of cancer survivors and their partners/families. She is particularly interested in conducting research to address the unique needs of adolescent and young adult cancer survivors.

Brynn Fowler, MPH

Brynn Fowler, MPH is the AYA Program Manager at Northwestern Medicine and Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago, IL. Brynn received her master's in public health at the University of Utah where she worked with researchers to investigate AYA medication adherence and program development. Brynn has been involved in various capacities in AYA oncology for 10 years now in both Utah and Illinois, ranging from research to program development and implementation. Brynn has a deep passion for working with AYAs and loves all of the different hats she gets to wear in her work. Brynn lives in Chicagoland with her husband and three small children.

CONFERENCE FACULTY

Lauren Ghazal, PhD, FNP-BC

Lauren Ghazal, PhD, FNP-BC, is an assistant professor and researcher at the University of Rochester School of Nursing, and the Wilmot Cancer Institute. Her research focuses on improving the health and quality of life of adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer survivors. Lauren also holds a clinical practice as a family nurse practitioner in primary and urgent care settings.

Megan Gilman, MD

Dr Megan Gilman is medical director of Duke Onco-Psychiatry. She is board certified in Consult-Liaison Psychiatry, having completed a fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in 2018. Dr Gilman provides medication management and supportive therapy to adult cancer patients and their families, with a special focus on the AYA population. She is involved with the Teen Young Adult Oncology program at Duke Cancer Institute and has been an active member of AYACC since 2022. Dr Gilman is building a Psychiatry program within Duke Oncology with an emphasis on clinical research, medical education and excellent patient care.

Joelys Gonzalez Bisono

Joelys Gonzalez is the Programs and Partnerships Manager at the Patient Empowerment Network (PEN) and a Master of Social Work student at Rutgers University, graduating in December 2025. She leads national programs that advance health equity, health literacy, and culturally responsive education for patients living with cancer and their care partners. As a bilingual Spanish speaker, Joelys develops resources and outreach that ensure underrepresented communities have equitable access to care. She also supports patients directly through the Cancer Support Community Helpline, providing navigation and emotional support.JJ

Tonya Hicks

Tonya Hicks is a passionate community and global breast cancer advocate and a proud 6-year survivor of triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). As a dedicated member of several local breast cancer survivor organizations, Tonya uses her voice and story to educate and empower others—especially younger women of color—on the importance of early detection and awareness. Her mission is rooted in the belief that knowledge can save lives, and she is committed to breaking down barriers to information, support, and care in underserved communities.

Deltra James

Deltra James is a patient advocate, poet, podcaster, and death doula living with Triple Negative Metastatic Breast Cancer. She facilitates support groups for organizations such as Bright Spot Network and speaks on topics like parenting with cancer, dating after diagnosis, creativity as a healing tool, and end-of-life planning. She has been featured in Cancer Health Magazine, Wildfire Magazine, People, The Washington Post, and NPR. Deltra lives in New England with her daughters, a few comforting cats, and a colorful collection of wigs.

Nick Iannarino, PhD

Nick Iannarino is an Associate Professor of Health Communication at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Nick's research considers the unique social support practices and challenges experienced by AYA cancer survivors, their close social network members, and the healthcare practitioners and hospital administrators that work with them.

CONFERENCE FACULTY

Anne Kirchhoff, PhD, MPH

Anne Kirchhoff, PhD, MPH Dr. Kirchhoff is a tenured Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Utah School of Medicine and at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) Investigator in the Cancer Control and Population Sciences Research Program. As a health services researcher, her program primarily concerns evaluating patient outcomes related to healthcare access, cancer late effects, and environmental exposures. Her team develops and tests interventions for childhood, adolescent and young adult cancer survivors, with a focus on addressing the social and financial consequences of cancer.

Laurel (Laurie) Lyckholm, MD

Laurie Lyckholm is a professor of hematology/oncology at the West Virginia University Cancer Institute. She is also a palliative care specialist and trained in medical ethics. She has spent her life teaching, researching and caring for vulnerable patients with cancer and blood problems, in prison and under-resourced urban environments. She provided rural cancer outreach care in Iowa and Virginia for over 20 years. Early in her career, when she herself was an AYA, she cared for many young adults with cancer. With her AYA program partner, pediatric hematologist/oncologist Dr. Patrick Tomboc, and a deeply passionate interdisciplinary team, she is developing an AYA cancer program at WVU, and with support from West Virginia's Mountains of Hope, she is assisting with the development of AYA programming through West Virginia and other parts of Appalachia. She sees the challenges faced by rural-based and especially AYA patients when trying to navigate their cancer care. Her goal is to offer AYA patients the same gold-standard of care and quality of life that patients receive in more populous, richly resourced, and less geographically-challenging environments.

Kimberly Miller, PhD, MPH

Kimberly Miller, PhD, MPH, is a tenured Associate Professor in the Department of Population and Public Health Sciences at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California. Her research centers on cancer prevention and survivorship, focusing on behavioral and healthcare system factors that contribute to disparities in cancer outcomes. She investigates how children, adolescents, and young adults diagnosed with cancer engage with healthcare and experience quality of life, developing tailored care models for medically complex and underserved populations, including racial/ethnic minoritized groups and immigrant communities. Dr. Miller leads a multidisciplinary team, serves as a senior investigator with the Los Angeles Cancer Surveillance Program, and is the founding co-director of The Center for Young Adult Cancer Survivorship Research, a collaborative initiative across multiple comprehensive cancer centers.

Erin M. Mobley, PhD, MPH

Erin M. Mobley, PhD, MPH is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Gastrointestinal Surgery and Surgical Oncology in the Department of Surgery at the University of Florida, College of Medicine in Jacksonville, Florida. Dr. Mobley's research focuses on pediatric, adolescent, and young adult cancer survivorship using health services research and implementation science methods. As a pediatric cancer survivor herself, her passion is to lead research initiatives focused on access to care, insurance, financial toxicity, employment and educational attainment, clinical trials, fertility, aging, and other disparities or inequities experienced by younger cancer survivors over the lifespan. Prior to joining the University of Florida, Dr. Mobley completed a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in the Center for Young Adult Cancer Survivorship Research at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California. She earned her PhD in Health Services and Policy from the University of Iowa and her Master of Public Health and Bachelor of Science from Florida State University.

CONFERENCE FACULTY

Chinomso U. Nwozichi, RN, RM, RPHN, PhD, CMSRN, OCN, FAAN

Chinomso Nwozichi, PhD, RN, CMSRN, OCN, FAAN is a distinguished oncology nursing scholar, educator, and advocate committed to advancing equitable cancer care, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations. As an Assistant Professor at Kennesaw State University, he teaches advanced pathophysiology at both the graduate and undergraduate levels and leads innovative research initiatives focused on cancer symptom management, quality of life, and reducing disparities in care. His research includes the development of the Time Toxicity Index to evaluate treatment burdens, efforts to improve colorectal cancer screening among African immigrants in the United States, and advancing cancer care for persons with intellectual disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, and related dementias. Dr. Nwozichi is deeply engaged in exploring the unique challenges faced by these populations and developing person-centered strategies to support their cancer journeys. He is the Founder and President of the Oncology Nursing Society of Nigeria and mentors a growing network of emerging African nurse leaders. He also serves as Vice President (Academics) of the Mu Phi At-Large Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. Dr. Nwozichi holds certifications in medical-surgical and oncology nursing and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing. With a global perspective shaped by his professional experiences in Nigeria, India, the Philippines, and the United States, Dr. Nwozichi's transcultural oncology research emphasizes the psychosocial, cognitive, and systemic factors influencing cancer care across diverse settings. His scholarship remains rooted in a strong commitment to advancing patient-centered care and eliminating barriers for those who are often

Giselle K. Perez, PhD

Dr. Giselle Perez specializes in working with young adults and in supporting individuals and their caregivers affected by cancer and other rare or chronic illnesses. Her clinical work focuses on navigating treatment-related and life transitions, addressing the social and emotional challenges that arise after a cancer diagnosis or treatment. She helps patients manage stress, anxiety, and medical uncertainty, and she supports the adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors to improve overall wellbeing. Dr. Perez's research program aims to develop innovative approaches to improve cancer prevention, care delivery, and health outcomes—especially for populations historically overlooked by the healthcare system. Her work explores the physical, psychosocial, and biobehavioral (e.g., stress hormone) impacts of stress, as well as the effectiveness of stress-reduction interventions. By implementing behavioral and implementation science, she identifies and applies strategies at the patient, provider, system, and community levels to enhance access to and quality of care.

Pooja Rao, MD, MSCE

Bio: Dr. Pooja Rao is the founding director of the Penn State Health Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Program. She is a clinician-scientist whose research focuses on improving the psychosocial health needs of AYA cancer survivors across the cancer continuum. She is passionate about AYA care and feels her patients are her best teachers. Dr. Rao earned her medical degree from the University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry, Rochester, N.Y. She pursued a combined Internal Medicine-Pediatrics residency at Brown University Alpert Medical School, where she realized her calling to take care of adolescents and young adults with cancer. She continued her fellowship training in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Dr. Rao has a Master of Science degree in Clinical Epidemiology from the University of Pennsylvania. She has translated her passion for advocacy for issues relevant to AYA cancer survivors into national-level clinical and research collaboratives collaborations. She is the chair of the AYA subcommittee of the Big 10 Cancer Research Consortium Population Science Working Group. She is the institutional representative for the Children's Oncology AYA Responsible Investigator Initiative.

CONFERENCE FACULTY

Andrew Smitherman, MD

Through combined training in internal medicine and pediatrics, and subsequent training in pediatric hematology/oncology, Dr. Smitherman developed both research and clinical interests in improving survivorship care and outcomes for children, adolescents, and young adults (AYAs) with cancer. As an Associate Professor of Pediatrics and the Medical Director for the UNC Lineberger AYA Cancer Program, he co-leads clinical programs and initiatives to improve AYA cancer outcomes. His current work examines accelerated aging in AYA survivors using measures of frailty, decreased muscle mass, physical function, and biological biomarkers to describe the impact of cancer and its treatment on the aging process in AYAs.

Austin R. Waters, PhD

Austin R. Waters is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and the Harvard LGBTQ+ Health Center of Excellence. He received his PhD in Health Policy and Management from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and his MSPH from the University of Utah. His research focuses on prevention, access, and outcomes among cancer survivors and caregivers with an emphasis on LGBTQ+ and adolescent and young adult (AYA) populations. The common threads of his research revolve around health equity, health-related social needs, economic instability, interventional approaches, the influence of policy, and technology use.

Abby Westerman

Abby Westerman is Co-Founder and volunteer CEO of the b-present Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to improving social support for adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with cancer. Since co-founding b-present in 2017, she has led collaborations with survivors, supporters, health professionals, and researchers to understand and address barriers to social support in the AYA cancer experience. Drawing on her 34-year career as an engineer and project manager, Abby brings deep expertise in leading teams, managing complex programs, and solving hard problems. Guided by her personal experience as a bereaved caregiver and her commitment to the AYA community, she has dedicated the last nine years to advancing research, developing resources, and building solutions that empower patients, families, and supporters.

Anao Zhang, PhD, MSW

Dr. Anao Zhang is an associate professor of social work at the University of Michigan and the clinical research director of the Adolescents and Young Adults (AYA) Oncology Program at Michigan Medicine. Zhang is a health and mental health intervention researcher with a primary research interest in psycho-oncology and adolescent and young adult cancer survivorship. An intervention researcher by training, Zhang contextualizes his work using the social determinants of youth health framework, and aims to develop and deliver integrated and empirically supported mental health treatment to individuals with co-morbid physical and mental health condition, e.g., AYA cancer survivors with depression. Zhang is also an applied quantitative methodologist who uses advanced statistical methods to support his research, including meta-analysis, structural equation modeling, analyzing experimental data, causal inference and machine learning. Zhang serves as an associate editor for the Journal of Psychosocial Oncology, and the deputy chair of survivorship SIG at the International Psycho-Oncology Society. Clinically, Zhang is a licensed clinical social worker, a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers, and a diplomate of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy. Zhang has over five years of clinical experience in various hospital settings and specializes in solution-focused brief therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy. Zhang's teaching interests include advanced clinical social work practice, clinical social work practice in integrated healthcare, inter-professional education, and advanced quantitative methods in social work research. Zhang received his PhD from the University of Texas at Austin where he also completed the graduate portfolio program in Applied Statistical Modeling. Zhang received his MSW from the University of Pennsylvania.



HONORING EXCELLENCE IN AYA CANCER CARE

THE ARCHIE BLEYER AWARD RECOGNIZES BOLD VISION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT ONCOLOGY. NAMED IN HONOR OF DR. W. ARCHIE BLEYER—WHOSE FOUNDATIONAL WORK ESTABLISHED THE AYA ONCOLOGY FIELD—THIS AWARD CELEBRATES PROFESSIONALS WHO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO, IMPROVE OUTCOMES, AND INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS.

THE 2025 RECIPIENT WILL BE ANNOUNCED LIVE DURING TODAY'S CEREMONY. **WE THANK ALL WHO CARRY FORWARD THE LEGACY OF INNOVATION AND IMPACT.**

INTRODUCING AYACC NETWORK

The AYACC Network is a purpose-built digital space created to connect professionals, simplify resource access, and spark collaboration throughout the AYA cancer community.



FEATURES:



Searchable national partner database



Map with resource overviews & community members



Gamified learning & badge system



Community discussion forums



Dedicated partner landing pages

Explore the demo today and sign up for early access.

This platform is just the beginning—we'll continue building with your feedback to ensure it serves the needs of everyone supporting AYAs.

MEET THE **AYACC BOARD**



KAREN ALBRITTON

Karen Albritton, MD, is an oncologist specializing in the care of adolescents and young adults. She is board certified in both pediatric and medical oncology and has particular expertise in sarcoma. Her research focuses on access to care and outcomes for AYAs with cancer, and she has been active with the Children's Oncology Group, National Cancer Institute and advocacy organizations to improve policy and standards of care for this underserved group. She is currently Director of AYA Oncology at Cook Children's Medical Center and at Baylor Scott & White All Saints- Fort Worth in Fort Worth, Texas.



ANDREA BETTS

Andrea Betts, PhD MPH, is a young adult cancer survivor and translational scientist whose research aims to improve AYAs' health care and quality of life. She is Assistant Professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth Houston) Houston, School of Public Health, and contributes to multiple state and national AYA and cancer survivorship research collaboratives. Her research focuses on AYA survivorship care and oncofertility care and outcomes. Informed by her lived experience as an AYA, Dr. Betts is passionate about community-engaged research—partnering with the AYA community to ensure research addresses AYAs' priorities.



SIMON DAVIES

From its 2013 inception until 2025, Simon led Teen Cancer America, transforming health services to support AYA's with cancer. He built on the successful model of Teenage Cancer Trust, UK that he led for 13 years. His early career was in the management of substantial health services in the fields of Learning Disability and Mental Health. Awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Education by University of Coventry for the advancement of professional education in AYA cancer, Simon has an international reputation for bringing about change within health systems. He served on Boards of the Adolescent and Young Adult Alliance and Critical Mass before becoming a founding director of the AYACC.

MEET THE **AYACC BOARD**



CAROLINE DORFMAN

Caroline Dorfman, PhD is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke where she also serves as Co-Director for the Division of Behavioral Medicine and Neuroscience. Within the Duke Cancer Institute, Dr. Dorfman is the Director of Research and Behavioral Medicine for the Teen and Young Adult Oncology Program. Dr. Dorfman's research focuses on developing, implementing, and evaluating psychosocial and behavioral interventions designed to meet the needs of cancer survivors and their partners/families. She is particularly interested in conducting research to address the unique needs of adolescent and young adult cancer survivors.



KAYLA FULGINITI

Kayla Fulginiti, LCSW, OSW-C is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and the Senior Director at Elephants and Tea. She has been involved in the adolescent and young adult (AYA) oncology space since 2007, first as a Hospital Social Worker in Adult Oncology and then as a Pediatric Oncology Social Worker and School Program Coordinator. Throughout her career, she has always advocated and emphasized the importance of AYA support by assessing and raising awareness about AYA needs through direct clinical care, research, community engagement, and serving on advisory boards for various nonprofit organizations.



LAUREN GHAZAL

Lauren Ghazal, PhD, FNP-BC, is an assistant professor and researcher at the University of Rochester School of Nursing, and the Wilmot Cancer Institute. Her research focuses on improving the health and quality of life of adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer survivors. Lauren also holds a clinical practice as a family nurse practitioner in primary and urgent care settings.



SIDNEY HENDERSON-KUSHNER

Sidney Henderson-Kushner founded the national nonprofit Connecting Champions as a 19-year-old in memory of his friend Lauren. The organization asks kids and young adults with cancer, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and connects them with a mentor to help them achieve a brighter future. Sidney graduated with a degree in Applied Mathematics from Brown University and was named a top 100 student entrepreneur in the nation by Stanford University in 2013. In 2021, he gave a TED talk: "How one question can forever change the life of a child with cancer." He was a plenary speaker at the Global Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Congress and a recipient of the Bridge Award by the Hospital Educators and Academic Liaisons Association. His research on the unmet needs of young people with cancer was recently published in the peer-reviewed journal, Continuity in Education.

MEET THE AYACC BOARD



HEATHER HIGHTOWER

Heather Hightower, MEd, MSN, RN, FNP-BC, CPHON is the nurse for the Adolescent and Young Adult Program at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. They have been a nurse for 10 years working with both adult and pediatric oncology patients. Heather's focus is equitable and inclusive oncology care for all patients and advocating for their medical and psychosocial needs.



JOHN MOLINA

Dr. John Molina is an Associate Staff Physician at the Cleveland Clinic's Taussig Cancer Institute and an Assistant Professor of Medicine of the Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University. He is a member of the Division of Leukemia and Myeloid Disorders with a focus on Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Acute Leukemia and Cellular Therapy. Dr. Molina completed fellowship training in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology and Adult Hematology and serves as the Adult Oncology Lead for the Cleveland Clinic's Integrated Program for Young People with Cancer. He is the Medical Director of the Inpatient Cellular and Immunotherapy Service overseeing the inpatient delivery of immune effector cell therapies at the Cleveland Clinic. Dr. Molina is also an Associate Program Director for the Adult Hematology/Oncology Fellowship and the Program Director for the Advanced Fellowship Training Program, and he serves on the American Society of Hematology's Committee on Training.



POOJA RAO

Pooja Rao MD, MSCE is the founding director of the Penn State Health Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Program, at Penn State Children's Hospital. She is a clinician-scientist whose research (funded by a KL2 grant) focuses on improving the psychosocial (emotional, mental and social) health needs of AYA cancer survivors across the cancer continuum. She is passionate about AYA care and feels her patients are her best teachers, who largely inform her research. She has translated her passion for advocacy for issues relevant to AYA cancer survivors into national-level clinical and research collaborative collaborations. She is the chair of the AYA subcommittee of the Big 10 Cancer Research Consortium Population Science Working Group. She is the institutional representative for the Children's Oncology AYA Responsible Investigator Initiative.



STU SIEGEL

Dr. Stu Siegel, Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine (retired) at the Keck USC School of Medicine (KSOM) was the Head of the Pediatric Hematology-Oncology Division at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and at KSOM from 1976 until 2013 and was the co-founder of the USC/Norris Cancer Center AYA Oncology program which he headed until his retirement in 2015. He has been integrally involved in the development of the field of AYA Oncology from its onset. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the LiveStrong AYA Cancer Alliance, followed by the Critical Mass Board, and now as a founding member of the AYACC Board. He was the second recipient of the Archie Bleyer Trailblazer Award. His research has focused on models of care for AYA patients.

MEET THE AYACC BOARD



ALISON SILBERMAN

Alison Silberman is the CEO of Stupid Cancer, Inc., a national nonprofit dedicated to empowering individuals affected by adolescent and young adult cancer by ending isolation and fostering community. Alison brings a wealth of knowledge and passion to her role. Her commitment is deeply personal, having been shaped by her own caregiving experience. She is devoted to ensuring that adolescents and young adults navigating cancer treatment and survivorship are supported, understood, and accepted. For over 20 years, she has been dedicated to community service, serving as a mentor, team member, and member of the Young Leaders Cancer Council of LIVESTRONG, as well as a volunteer coach with Girls on the Run NYC.



LAUREN SPIKER

Lauren Spiker, M.Ed., is the Founder and Executive Director of 13thirty Cancer Connect, a community-based nonprofit dedicated to helping adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with cancer live their very best lives - TODAY! Lauren has been a fierce advocate for AYAs with cancer since the death of her 19-year-old daughter in 2000 when she experienced, first hand, the gap in age-appropriate support for this group of cancer patients and survivors. Bringing over 30 years of organizational development experience helping leaders, in a wide variety of industries, develop sound strategic plans, effective leadership skills, and motivated work teams, Lauren is committed to advancing the mission of the AYA Cancer Coalition.



CHRISTOPHER TERRY

Christopher Terry, MD is a hematology-oncology physician with a focus on delivering high-quality care to underserved and rural communities. Chris received his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He then completed a combined Internal Medicine - Pediatrics residency program at Brown University, where he stayed an additional year to serve as Chief Resident. Chris specialized in hematology and oncology by returning to Thomas Jefferson in Philadelphia for fellowship training. During this time, Chris combined his passion for sports and medicine by founding a non-profit organization called Athletes Fighting Cancer, which utilizes the power of sport to improve lives impacted by cancer. Most recently, Chris served as the Medical Director of Oncology and Infusion Services at Sturdy Health, a community-based practice in southern New England. Chris remains a strong advocate for the role of exercise oncology, expanding access to care and improving outcomes for adolescent and young adults with cancer.



VINAYAK VENKATARAMAN

Vinayak is a medical oncologist and Director of Sarcoma Pathways at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Instructor in Medicine at Harvard Medical School, and Affiliated Faculty in the McGraw/Patterson Center for Population Sciences. He is a nationally-recognized expert in the care of patients with bone and soft tissue sarcomas, and the care of adolescent and young adults (age 15-39 years old) facing cancer. His passion is to improve access, care, and outcomes for sarcoma and AYA survivors by developing innovative, tech-enabled, care delivery programs that proactively address their unmet needs over time, with a particular interest in the role of exercise and movement in cancer care. He was born and raised in Rochester, NY, obtained a BSE in Electrical Engineering from Princeton University, received an MD from Duke University School of Medicine, completed combined residency in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at Massachusetts General Hospital, and completed Medical Oncology fellowship at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Brigham & Women's Hospital.

MEET THE AYACC BOARD



ABBY WESTERMANN

Abby Westerman is Co-Founder and volunteer CEO of the b-present Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to improving social support for adolescents and young adults (AYAs) with cancer. Since co-founding b-present in 2017, she has led collaborations with survivors, supporters, health professionals, and researchers to understand and address barriers to social support in the AYA cancer experience. Drawing on her 34-year career as an engineer and project manager, Abby brings deep expertise in leading teams, managing complex programs, and solving hard problems. Guided by her personal experience as a bereaved caregiver and her commitment to the AYA community, she has dedicated the last nine years to advancing research, developing resources, and building solutions that empower patients, families, and supporters.



JULIE WOLFSON

Julie Wolfson, MD, MSHS is an Associate Professor of Pediatric Hematology-Oncology and member of the Institute of Cancer Outcomes and Survivorship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Her work has examined the impact of treatment site and other aspects of care delivery on outcomes among AYAs with cancer. She continues to examine questions related to the interplay of health system factors (ACCL16N1CD) and individual factors (A041501-HO1 substudy) on delivery of therapy (active work examining both domains combined). She also serves AYAs across UAB pediatric and adult oncology as the Director of the UAB-COA-O'Neal AYA Oncology and Oncofertility Program. After an undergraduate degree in English from Harvard, she completed medical school at the University of Florida, pediatrics residency at Massachusetts General Hospital, and fellowship at Children's Hospital Los Angeles during which she completed a degree in health services research (MSHS) at the UCLA School of Public Health.



RACHEL WESTLAKE

Rachel Westlake is the Executive Director of the Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Coalition (AYACC), a national nonprofit dedicated to improving outcomes for adolescents and young adults with cancer by supporting the professionals who serve them. In her role, she collaborates with the Board of Directors, committees, and partners to steward AYACC's strategy and operations, including governance, fundraising, programming, and partnerships. She oversees AYACC's national conference and was part of the planning and facilitation of the inaugural gathering, which set the stage for the Coalition's continued growth. She also guides development of the AYACC Platform, a new digital hub designed to connect professionals, reduce silos, and expand access to trusted resources across the field. Rachel is a two-time AYA cancer survivor, diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma at ages 15 and 35. She is also a Board Certified Patient Advocate and educator whose work in healthcare self-advocacy has shaped programs for survivors and young adults with disabilities and healthcare professionals.

VENUE: RIZZO CENTER, 150 DUBOSE HOME LANE, CHAPEL HILL, NC
Hotel courtesy blocks are available now at ayacc.net/conference-2025



REGISTRATION INCLUDES:

- ✓ **Conference sessions**
- ✓ **CE credit**
- ✓ **Meals & refreshments**
- ✓ **Networking reception**
- ✓ **Poster session**
- ✓ **Priority access to the AYACC Platform**

CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATION

The Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Coalition (AYACC) is a national nonprofit dedicated to improving outcomes for adolescents and young adults facing cancer by supporting the professionals who work with them. We unite healthcare providers, researchers, nonprofit leaders, and advocates through collaboration, education, and advocacy to transform AYA cancer care.

CONTACT US

For additional information about the conference or sponsorship opportunities:

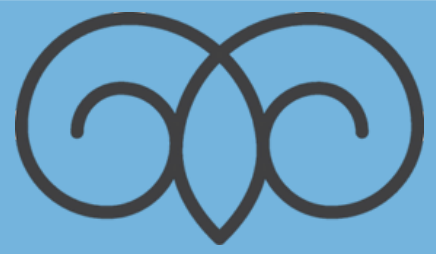


Website: [AYACC.net](https://ayacc.net)



Email: conference@ayacc.net

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO



EVENT NAME

WE LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU TO THE RIZZO CENTER

Always a home, anchored in tradition where natural beauty awakens inspiration and continual growth. Prepare to enjoy tranquil gardens and flexible event space.

WHAT TO WEAR

Our event space and overnight rooms are located throughout three spacious buildings. Our dining for lunch and dinner is primarily in the Historic Dubose House, a short walk across the property. Comfortable shoes are a must!

PARKING INSTRUCTIONS

Day guests: Upon arriving, turn right at the Gate House. The event parking lot is on the right as you drive up the hill. The meeting is in the Magnolia Ballroom, which is in Loudermilk Hall. Loudermilk Hall is the first brick building as you cross over from the parking lot.

Overnight guests: Upon arriving, turn right at the Gate House and proceed to check in at McLean Hall, which is the second brick building on your left. Circle around to unload your luggage and check into your guestroom. After you have checked in, follow the driveway down behind the building and park in the parking lot. If the lot behind McLean is full, you will need to return to the event parking lot you passed as you entered the facility.

MEADOWMONT GRILL

Located on the first floor of McLean, a full hot breakfast buffet awaits all overnight guests.

Hours: Monday –Friday

6:30am –9:30am

Saturday – Sunday 6:30am–10:00am

SHAFFER KENAN SPORTS BAR

Come relax by the fire pit, catch a game on the multi-screens or play your own game of pool with friends. This indoor/outdoor oasis awaits after a long day of meetings.

Hours: 5:30pm –11:00pm daily, kitchen closes at 10:00pm

GETTING TO THE HOTEL

From RDU Airport

Take I-40 West to Exit 273B (Hwy 54 towards Chapel Hill). Turn right at the 4th traffic light (Meadowmont Lane). Turn right into Paul J. Rizzo Conference Center. Check-in is the second building on the left, McLean Hall

[Property Map](#)

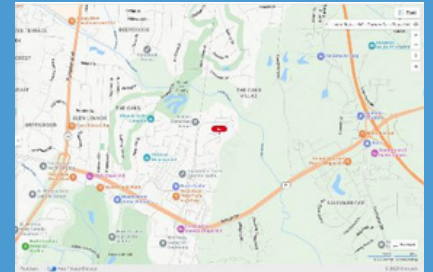
[Local Weather](#)

Check-In: 3:00pm

Check-Out: 12:00pm

Find us on the map

150 DuBose Home Lane
Chapel Hill, NC 27517



We look forward to seeing you.

<https://www.destinationhotels.com/rizzo-conference-center>



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CHAMPION PARTNERS



PREMIUM & NONPROFIT PARTNERS



BECOME A SPONSOR

Are you a nonprofit or other stakeholder interested in gaining visibility at this conference? **Reach out to admin@ayacc.net.**

What is the Purpose of the Study?

To identify functional genomic pathways through which social and psychological conditions influence gene regulation and alter health outcomes in AYA cancer patients; and define the role of such effects in structuring health disparities in post-treatment survivorship.

Who is Eligible?

- AYA cancer survivors aged 18-39 years
- Diagnosed with HD, NHL, or Leukemia (ALL only)
- Completed therapy within the past 3 years

Sign-Up!



What Does This Study Involve?

5 times over 2 years



Complete the online surveys.



Provide blood samples.



Gift Cards!



Meet the Study Chair!

Dr. Bradley Zebrack is an AYA Cancer Survivor

QUESTIONS? Contact us at ayasocialgenomics@umich.edu



Through bold healthcare innovation and the healing power of the arts, we make possible age-appropriate care and creative connection to help young people survive and thrive.



Transforming the Cancer Experience for Young People

TCA partners with health systems nationwide to create services and systems tailored for young people with cancer. To date, we have:

Partnered with 71 health systems to **design and implement dedicated adolescent and young adult (AYA) cancer programs.**

Consulted and collaborated on research with leading medical institutions.

Trained more than **1,500 healthcare professionals in AYA-specific care.**

Positively impacted outcomes for **thousands of young people and their families.**

Engaged 75 artists in Play it Back, **our groundbreaking music program** that gives young people with cancer a **powerful outlet for self-expression and healing.**



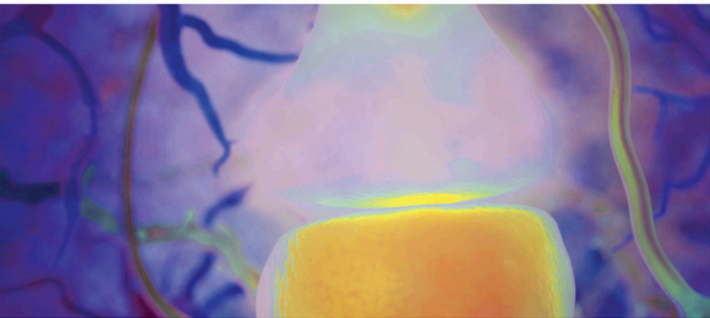
Young people with cancer can't wait. The time to act is now and we need you to make this happen.

Join Us at www.teencanceramerica.org
or e-mail info@teencanceramerica.org



TRANSFORMING LIVES. REDEFINING POSSIBILITIES.

Jazz Pharmaceuticals is proud to sponsor AYACC Conference 2025



Jazz Pharmaceuticals is a global biopharmaceutical company whose purpose is to innovate to transform the lives of patients and their families. We are dedicated to developing potentially life-changing medicines for people with serious diseases — often with limited or no therapeutic options.

We're here to help
your patients.

And provide education for you.



A blood cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming for your patients. Blood cancer patients, including those with leukemia, lymphoma, myeloma, myelodysplastic syndromes and myeloproliferative neoplasms can find hope, education, guidance and support from Blood Cancer United.

Blood Cancer United provides **free** educational resources for healthcare professionals, including accredited CE/CME webinars and non-accredited podcasts, fact sheets, and videos. Resources are designed to help you stay informed, support shared decision-making, and address the unique needs of patients with blood cancer.

Our Information Specialists complement the care you provide with **free**, in-depth personalized services that connect patients to financial assistance, patient education (including booklets, podcasts and webinars), online and in-person support, nutrition consultations and the Blood Cancer United Clinical Trial Support Center for assistance with clinical trials.

For you: Earn free CE/CME credit for participation in healthcare professional education.

Please contact us at 800-955-4572
or go to BloodCancerUnited.org/CE



CE/CME
programs



Patient
programs



Podcasts



Booklets and
fact sheets



One-on-one
services
for patients



AYACC 2025 CONFERENCE

SPONSORSHIP & AD OPPORTUNITIES

Amplify Your Impact. Show Up for AYA Cancer Care.

HIGH-VISIBILITY SPONSORSHIPS

Align your brand with a mission-driven, high-engagement event reaching 200+ cross-sector professionals.

LEVEL	INVESTMENT	INCLUDES
Trailblazer Partner	\$30,000	Breakout session sponsor, exhibit placement, 3 reg passes, half-page ad, featured newsletter & social media mention.
Collaborator Partner	\$20,000	Exhibit placement, 2 reg passes, quarter-page ad, verbal recognition.
Champion Partner (\$40,000) – SOLD OUT		

NONPROFIT SPONSORSHIP PACKAGES

Affordable opportunities to connect, collaborate, and raise awareness.

LEVEL	INVESTMENT	INCLUDES
Premium Sponsor	SOLD	Full table, 2 reg passes, quarter-page ad, X-banner, logo in program, verbal recognition.
Partner Sponsor	\$600	Half table, 1 reg pass, logo during breaks, X-banner. Limited availability
Exhibitor Sponsor	\$400	Half table, 1 reg pass, org listed in program. Limited availability



ADD-ONS

Banner Display at Evening Reception	\$200
Additional Nonprofit Rep	\$75

AD PLACEMENT – OPEN TO ALL

Extend your visibility in our Digital Conference Magazine (June–October distribution).

Quarter-page	\$200
Half-page	\$300
Full-page	\$500
Full-page Advertorial	\$600

AD UPGRADES ARE AVAILABLE FOR SPONSORSHIP PACKAGES

Let's Build the Future of AYA Care—Together.



Contact: admin@ayacc.net



Learn more: ayacc.net



Thank You for Being Part of This Movement

Your presence here helps drive change in how we serve AYAs! **Together**, we can make life and outcomes better for this special population.

Share Your Feedback:

ayacc.net/conference-2025

(Available post-event)

Stay in the Loop:

Sign up for AYACC Network updates and join our mailing list at ayacc.net

