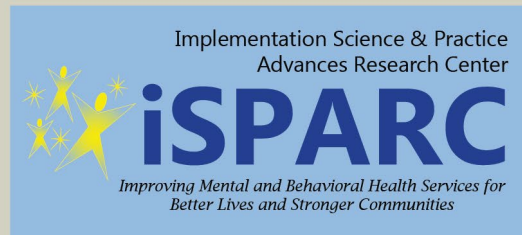


2025

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH



Implementation Science & Practice Advances Research Center
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, UMass Chan Medical School
A Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Research Center of Excellence



© 2025 UMass Chan Medical School.
All rights reserved.

Executive Summary

We are grateful to the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) for its ongoing support of the Implementation Science and Practice Advances Research Center (iSPARC). iSPARC is a DMH Research Center of Excellence (CoE) located within the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at UMass Chan Medical School. In FY25, iSPARC continued to leverage DMH's investment to rapidly translate research findings into their implementation within best practices for individuals with lived experience, their families, and the providers who serve them across the Commonwealth.

This year, we were happy to welcome Dr. Kathryn Sabella as our new iSPARC Deputy Director. Kathryn Sabella, PhD, is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research, at iSPARC. Dr. Sabella's research aims to a) create new knowledge and understanding about the needs and experiences of young adults with serious mental health conditions, and b) apply that knowledge to the development, testing, and implementation of age-appropriate and culturally appealing evidence-based practices that can improve the lives of these young adults. She is Co-PI of the Community Inclusion and Reflective Collaboration Center, a research and training center funded by NIDILRR that seeks to improve the community participation outcomes of young adults with serious mental health conditions who have been marginalized or experienced social disadvantages. During Dr. Sabella's 15 years at iSPARC, in addition to helping establish and now leading the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research, she has meaningfully contributed to multiple research studies, built her own research portfolio, forged effective relationships with a wide array of staff and faculty, and contributed to strategic planning, operations, and faculty development activities. We are grateful to Dr. Melissa Anderson, our previous Deputy Director, for her work, which was integral to the iSPARC programs, and in particular, for her contributions to the Workforce Enrichment and Community Engagement Programs.

In FY25, iSPARC provided extensive technical assistance (TA) to support the DMH and its partners in strengthening clinical practice and workforce development. Intensive TA efforts focused on evaluating the Office of Inpatient Management's aggression-management pilot using an implementation science framework, supporting fidelity and sustainability of the Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS) Hiring Packet and Foundational Training

Curriculum, and issuing a summative report on Peer Support Supervision Guidelines with recommendations to institutionalize peer support within ACCS. iSPARC also collaborated with the MGH Center for Psychosocial and Systemic Research on peer workforce priorities, delivered an ACCS Coaching Webinar to nearly 150 staff statewide, and developed sustainability tools to embed best practices into ACCS contract monitoring. These initiatives underscore iSPARC's role in advancing evidence-based, recovery-oriented practices across Massachusetts.

iSPARC continued to advance a diverse portfolio of innovative, community-engaged research to improve the lives of people with behavioral health conditions. The Public Mental Health and Implementation Research Program fostered faculty collaboration, grant development, and mentorship, resulting in 17 grant submissions and 8 new awards. Faculty collaborations led to new grants and mentorship opportunities, while iSPARC programs expanded their impact through innovative interventions and community partnerships. Highlights include the launch of the first psychotherapy trial for Deaf individuals, national leadership in perinatal mental health through the \$21M *Pathways to Perinatal Mental Health Equity* study, and continued advances in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, vocational rehabilitation for veterans, and youth transition supports. Programs addressing justice-involved populations drove reforms in prison classification, parole, and service access, while others strengthened implementation science, employment outcomes, family resilience, and women's mental health. Across all initiatives, iSPARC engaged people with lived experience, disseminated findings nationally, and trained the next generation of researchers to ensure sustainable, evidence-based improvements in mental health care and outcomes.

iSPARC's Mission

iSPARC promotes the recovery and quality of life of individuals with behavioral health conditions across the lifespan. We partner with individuals, support networks, and community groups to conduct innovative research, provide implementation support, and disseminate promising and evidence-based practices. Our mission improves behavioral health systems and services and advances public knowledge.

Overall, our vision is to improve lives and strengthen communities by advancing behavioral health services and systems.

iSPARC Faculty & Staff

iSPARC is home to investigators from the UMass Chan Medical School Departments of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences & Population & Quantitative Health Sciences (PQHS). Our PQHS partners contribute expertise in implementation research and public health research conducted by and for communities that have long been underrepresented as beneficiaries of evidence-based and promising services.

iSPARC faculty are nationally and internationally recognized for their research in:

- Psychosocial intervention development
- Implementation science
- Public services and supports
- Clubhouse and vocational rehabilitation models
- Forensic/legal and human rights issues
- Child, parent, and family mental health
- Transition age youth/young adults
- Perinatal mental health
- Deaf mental health and addiction treatment

Internal to UMass Chan, we collaborate with investigators embedded in the Departments of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Population & Quantitative Health Sciences, Family Medicine & Community Health, Preventive & Behavioral Medicine, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Emergency Medicine, and *for*Health Consulting (formerly known as Commonwealth Medicine). External to UMass Chan, we partner with investigators from other UMass campuses, Boston University, as well as national and international institutions to optimize our resources. These relationships enable us to build a bigger and stronger iSPARC to help meet the many challenges faced by DMH, those served by DMH, and the Commonwealth more broadly.

Technical Assistance Highlights

The iSPARC Technical Assistance Program is responsible for providing basic technical assistance services and intensive implementation support to MA DMH and its contracted providers. Highlights from this program for FY25 include:

- **Inpatient Aggression-Management Pilot Evaluation:** We worked with the DMH Office of Inpatient Management (OIM) to begin an implementation-science based evaluation of OIM's multimodal intervention program to reduce aggressive behavior on inpatient units.
- **Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS):**
 - We completed the full implementation of the Hiring Packet and Foundational Training Curriculum for ACCS and shifted our work focus to fidelity, usability, and sustainability.
 - We finalized a Fidelity/Feasibility Report showing high levels of use and usefulness across agencies of the Hiring Packet and Foundational Training Curriculum.
 - We developed a sustainability survey tool to embed into ACCS contract monitoring meetings.

➤ Peer Support Workforce:

- We issued a Summative Report on Peer Support Supervision Guidelines with three key recommendations to strengthen peer roles in ACCS.
- We collaborated with MGH's Center for Psychosocial and Systemic Research and DMH Recovery Directors on aligned peer workforce priorities.

➤ Training & Workforce Development:

- We delivered an ACCS Coaching Webinar to 148 ACCS staff, highlighting strength-based coaching models and practical implementation tools.

Highlights of Collaborations with DMH and Other State Agencies

In addition to technical assistance-related collaborations, iSPARC faculty and staff collaborate with DMH and other state agencies to further the missions of these organizations and to better meet the needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth. Highlights of our collaborations during FY25 are outlined below.

- **Community & Workforce Capacity:** Colleen McKay helped to expand tobacco-free initiatives in Worcester through the Central MA Tobacco-Free Community Partnership, engaging local partners such as The Worcester Community Action Council, El Buen Samaritano Food Program, and Pernet Family Health Services. The team, including iSPARC staff, integrated tobacco education and cessation resources into community events and food distribution sites, promoted statewide campaigns like ENUFF Day, and provided multilingual educational materials. iSPARC also supported the Behavioral Health Workforce Training Clearinghouse (*forHealth Consulting*) by providing technical assistance, developing training resources, and planning an online training on the Role of Peer Supporters for Community Behavioral Health Center staff.
- **Culturally Responsive Care:** Dr. Melissa Anderson advanced Deaf mental health initiatives with Dr. Margaret Guyer and Carol-lee Aquiline (MA DMH) through DeafYES! Trainings and a statewide needs assessment. These initiatives included a three-day Deaf-accessible mental health and suicide prevention training for providers and interpreters, community-engaged curriculum development, and mapping of mobile crisis services to improve access and equity for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals.
- **Juvenile & Criminal Justice Reform:** Drs. Gina Vincent and Spencer Lawson strengthened youth diversion and criminal justice practices. Initiatives included piloting Thinking for a Change (CBT-based violence prevention) in DMH provider agencies, supporting evidence-based decision-making in parole and reducing delays in release,

and training diversion screeners across nine Massachusetts cities on risk assessment and case planning. The team also examined racial and ethnic disparities in the MA Department of Correction's Objective Prison Classification System and provided data-informed recommendations to reduce inequities.

- **Court & Community Partnerships:** Drs. Dara Drawbridge and Michelle Crist supported Family Treatment Courts, Project NORTH, and community-based initiatives such as the Shannon Community Safety Initiative (Fitchburg, Gardner, Leominster) and COSSUP Diversion to Care. These projects provided implementation support, training, data infrastructure, and quality improvement activities to enhance recovery, treatment, and community safety outcomes.
- **Young Adult Mental Health & Employment:** Dr. Michelle Mullen and Debbie Nicolellis advanced HYPE course training and career development programming in Young Adult Access Centers. The team trained staff on HYPE courses, collected outcome data, and developed a Young Adult Access Center Toolkit to inform and improve future career support services. Dr. Kathryn Sabella supported the Healthy Transitions (HT2) evaluation project and continued work on the Young Adult Access Center Toolkit.



Highlighted Collaborations with Other State Organizations and Federal Agencies

The work we do in iSPARC extends beyond the Commonwealth. In FY25, iSPARC partnered with state and national organizations to translate research into practice and inform policy. These collaborations focused on strengthening behavioral health and justice systems, supporting youth and families, and advancing evidence-based interventions. The examples below highlight how these efforts are driving innovation and system change across the country.

- **Youth Justice Reform:** Dr. Gina Vincent developed Colorado’s statewide detention risk tool, trained Oregon judges, and delivered national juvenile justice trainings to improve evidence-based decision-making.
- **Reentry & Recovery:** Dr. Spencer Lawson strengthened Indiana’s Integrated Reentry and Correctional Support (IRACS) Program with data-driven improvements and implementation support.
- **Youth & Young Adult Supports:** Dr. Michelle Mullen expanded HYPE (Helping Youth on the Path to Employment) and Focused Skill & Strategy Training (FSST) executive functioning training to Mississippi, New Jersey, and North Carolina to improve educational and employment outcomes.
- **National Mental Health Impact:** Dr. Shaobing Su advanced immigrant family mental health research in New York City, Dr. Megan Kelly created Acceptance and Commitment Therapy resources and social integration app for veterans with mental health conditions, and Drs. Nancy Byatt and Chris Sheldrick led a CDC-funded evaluation of Perinatal Psychiatry Access Programs.

iSPARC Funding Sources FY 2025 and Impact

The investment that DMH makes in its funding of iSPARC as a Research Center of Excellence provides an impressive return on this investment in the Commonwealth.

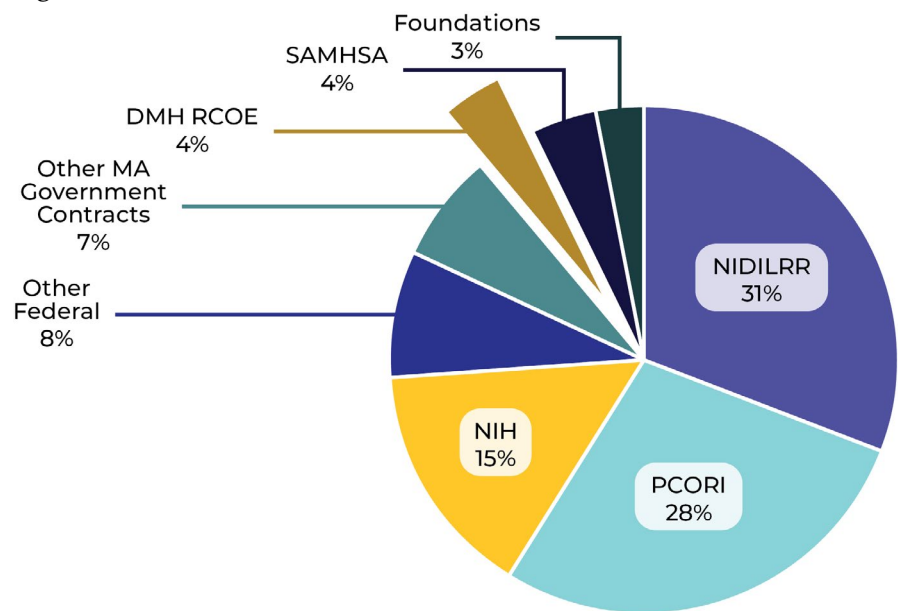
Every \$1 invested by DMH in FY25 yielded a return of \$25.81 to the Commonwealth to fund our portfolio of research, training, technical assistance, and service delivery.

iSPARC leverages DMH funding to sustain a broad portfolio of research and community-focused activities that strengthen the Commonwealth’s behavioral health services. DMH funding supports iSPARC in the following ways:

- Provides salary and program funding for staff and investigators who conduct research on serious mental health conditions, ensuring the development of evidence-based practices and policy-relevant findings.

- Supports the delivery of technical assistance and consultation to the Massachusetts DMH workforce and leadership, helping to inform service delivery and program improvements.
- Provides the resources necessary for faculty development, grant reviews, and mentoring, fostering the growth of the next generation of behavioral health researchers.
- Supports the dissemination and training on mental health innovations directly in community settings, ensuring real-world impact.
- Sustains meaningful community engagement, centering the voices of people with lived experience and their family members so that their perspectives inform all aspects of the research and service work.

Chart 1. Funding Sources



In FY25, iSPARC made significant strides to build on our already strong foundation:



Managed a research portfolio totaling **\$26,751,598** in grants and contract funding



Submitted **17** new grant and contract proposals



Were awarded **8** new grants and contracts



Published **75** peer-reviewed journal articles



Submitted **54** peer-reviewed journal articles



Gave **159** presentations to a total of approximately **22,000** attendees

Icons by freepik on Flaticon.com

Top 5 Research Moments of FY25

We are very excited about the work we have done this fiscal year. The Top 5 we're most excited about are:

1. The **Law & Psychiatry Program**, directed by **Dr. Gina Vincent**, advanced several high-impact projects in FY25. A multi-state study on youth violent reoffending highlighted the role of protective factors in reducing risk, with findings disseminated nationally through briefs and webinars. The team also examined racial equity in the MA Department of Correction's prison classification system, informing reform discussions with the MA Legislature. Ongoing collaborations with the MA Parole Board focused on reducing delays in parole releases, while new initiatives included the *Responsivity Project* to improve service access for justice-involved youth and a pilot test of the *Thinking for a Change* intervention with DMH providers.
2. **DeafYES!** achieved major milestones in FY25 under the leadership of **Drs. Melissa Anderson** and **Alexander Wilkins**. The team launched the first-ever full-scale psychotherapy trial for Deaf individuals (*Signs of Safety*), supported by a \$3.6M National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) grant, and completed adaptation of *Motivational Enhancement Therapy (Deaf-MET)* for Deaf ASL users, with a pilot trial slated for 2025. They also created and delivered a three-day training for providers and interpreters to better serve Deaf individuals in crisis, receiving enthusiastic feedback. Additionally, DeafYES! earned national recognition as an NIH *Build UP Trust Challenge* finalist for their innovative Vital Signs outreach, which has already reached thousands through community events and online dissemination.
3. The **National Collaborative for Implementation Support**, led by **Dr. Dara Drawbridge**, strengthened implementation capacity in justice and community systems across FY25. With the MA Office of Community Corrections, they trained staff, designed new tools, and improved risk-need-responsivity practices in Community Justice Support Centers. They established advisory boards composed of individuals with lived experience and young adults to guide program development and policy reform. The National Collaborative for Implementation Support also supported Project NORTH by developing data infrastructure and training navigators to deliver recovery supports. Their national profile grew with a \$1.4M National Institute of Justice (NIJ) award to test whether implementation science frameworks improve probation case management for persons of color.
4. **Lifeline for Families**, led by **Dr. Nancy Byatt**, advanced large-scale national projects to support families' mental health. Its flagship \$21M PCORI-funded *Pathways to Perinatal Mental Health Equity* study recruited 27 of 32 sites nationwide, adapting interventions to reduce inequities in perinatal care. The team developed a comprehensive *evaluation roadmap* for Perinatal Psychiatry Access Programs, aiming to standardize evaluation and strengthen sustainability.

5. The Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research, directed by Dr. Kathryn Sabella, continued to lead the field in improving outcomes for youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions. In FY25, the Center secured a new round of NIDILRR RRTC funding (awarded to Drs. Marsha Ellison and Michelle Mullen) through 2029 to expand research on career development, human capital, and policy innovation. Key initiatives included the *Peer Academic Supports for Success (PASS)* program, which produced a full set of manuals and completed beta testing at Rowan University, and the *Focused Skill and Strategy Training (FSST)* program, which showed promising effects on executive functioning, education, and employment outcomes. Community-engaged work remained central, with robust participation from young adult and family advisory boards whose lived experience directly shapes research and practice.

2025 Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Research Centers of Excellence Conference

On May 29, 2025, iSPARC and the MGH Center of Excellence for Psychosocial and Systemic Research co-hosted the Annual Conference of the DMH Research Centers of Excellence. The theme of this virtual conference was [Promoting Youth Mental and Behavioral Health: Understanding and Addressing Risk and Protective Factors to Improve Youth Well-Being and Outcomes](#). Over 300 individuals attended the conference, including DMH staff, individuals with lived experience, family members, providers, and clinicians. (See [page 65](#) for conference additional details). The conference included opening remarks by Brooke Doyle, MEd, LMHC, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health. Featured speakers included Gina Vincent, PhD, UMass Chan; Cheryl Y.S. Foo, PhD, Mass General Brigham & Harvard Medical School; Daphne Holt, MD, PhD, Mass General Brigham & Harvard Medical School; Michelle Mullen, PhD, UMass Chan; and Vanessa Iroegublem, BA, Mass General Brigham.

2025 ANNUAL Research Centers of Excellence Conference

Promoting Youth Mental and Behavioral Health
Understanding and Addressing Risk and Protective Factors to Improve Youth Well-Being and Outcomes

Thursday May 29, 2025 12:30 – 4:30 PM EDT Zoom Meeting

Featured Speakers

- Gina Vincent, PhD, UMass Chan
- Cheryl Y.S. Foo, PhD, Mass General Brigham & Harvard Medical School
- Daphne Holt, MD, PhD, Mass General Brigham & Harvard Medical School
- Michelle Mullen, PhD, UMass Chan
- Vanessa Iroegublem, BA, Mass General Brigham

With opening remarks by Brooke Doyle, Commissioner of Mass DMH. Perspectives of people with lived experience will be included.

Register

<https://umassmed.zoom.us/joining/register/Ko0Fga0QRyuHizLnxihWwQ>

See the full agenda on our website:
https://www.umassmed.edu/isparc/about-our-center/DMH_Conference/

MASS DMH iSPARC UMass Chan MEDICAL SCHOOL Massachusetts General Hospital Center of Excellence for Psychosocial and Systemic Research

CMEs for physicians and CEUs for Psychology, RN, Social Work, OT, and LMHC are available. ASL interpreter services will be provided.