



CULTIVATING REAL-LIFE CHANGE

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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 at UMass Chan Medical School. In FY24, 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.

iSPARC's work has focused on key strategic priorities for DMH. First, this year, the iSPARC Technical Assistance Program contributed to work on elucidating key factors involved in reducing the incidence of inpatient aggression at DMH-funded facilities. This collaborative effort with DMH and the Massachusetts General Hospital Center of Excellence for Psychosocial and Systemic Research, was an excellent and fruitful collaboration to understand patient and environmental factors that could be targeted in improving the experience of both staff and patients at DMH-funded inpatient facilities. We look forward to our continued partnership on this critical work in FY25.

iSPARC also made substantial strides in targeting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within our Center, including workforce enrichment and our research program. We offered several DEI-focused seminars this past year to our iSPARC staff and faculty (e.g., quantitative methodologies that highlight DEI factors, education on microaggressions, research focused on improving the behavioral health of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds) and we included key discussions on diversity at our iSPARC retreat. Our iSPARC DEI survey indicated that we have made progress in hiring a more diverse workforce at iSPARC. We have also developed an action plan for addressing key DEI areas, including more DEI trainings for staff and faculty, and DEI-focused professional development seminars. In FY24, we made plans for the establishment of an iSPARC DEI committee to continue this focused work. In addition, Dr. Kathryn Sabella, the Director of the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research was awarded a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) on

community living and participation among transition age youth with serious mental health conditions from disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized backgrounds. This RRTC involves several critical research and knowledge translation projects to improve the behavioral health of transition age youth from marginalized backgrounds. This exciting RRTC involves several faculty members from across iSPARC engaging in this much needed research.

In FY24, iSPARC had an impactful retreat that brought staff and faculty together to discuss our work and the future of the center. In this retreat, we clarified our center's values that permeate our research, technical assistance, community engagement, and knowledge translation work. These values, Support/Compassion, Inclusion, Trust, Respect, Collaboration/Teamwork, and Communication have helped to ground iSPARC in how we work together and with our shareholders. We have instituted a Values Award where staff and faculty recognize each other and themselves for living up to these values in their work. We will continue to integrate these values into the work we do as a Center and how we interact with the community.

FY24 was an excellent year of growth and achievements for iSPARC. Our Center has initiated several new and innovative projects to improve the behavioral health of individuals with mental health disorders. We welcomed five new members to our faculty — including two new members, **Lourah Kelly, PhD**, and **Shaobing Su, PhD**, and three staff members who transitioned to the faculty, including **Michelle Mullen, PhD**, **Spencer Lawson, PhD** and **Michelle Crist, PhD**. Additionally, we successfully recruited **Xihan Yang, PhD**, as a postdoctoral fellow to work in **Dr. Su's** Family Resilience and Child Development (FRCD) Lab. With each new addition to our Center, we were attentive to engaging colleagues who embody the mission and values of iSPARC and DMH.

iSPARC's Mission




iSPARC and DMH strive to support and meet the mental health needs of individuals across the lifespan to live, work, and meaningfully participate in their communities. We are fiercely committed to these values:

- Applying person-centered, family-focused, and trauma-informed approaches to our research;
- Developing, evaluating, and implementing evidence-based practices to ensure highest quality of care; and
- Promoting cultural and linguistic equity of mental health services and resources.

To practice these values, we conduct research in partnership with the people whose lives are most affected—individuals with lived experience, their families, and the providers who serve them—recognizing that those with lived experience have expertise that is essential to conduct impactful research and investigators without lived experience cannot provide that expertise.

Technical Assistance Highlights

The iSPARC Technical Assistance/Consultation and External Funding 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 FY24 include:

- The iSPARC Technical Assistance program supported the DMH Office of Inpatient Management by conducting facilitating listening sessions with DMH hospital staff on strategies DMH can use adopt to prevent, treat, and manage patient aggressive behavior. Staff feedback will be used to inform the development of strategies for inpatient aggression management.
- The TA/Consultation Program continues to work closely with DMH to improve fidelity to its Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS) model among contracted agencies statewide. In FY24, iSPARC completed the full implementation of the following two products: (1) ACCS Best Practice Structured Interview Process for Clinicians (“Hiring Packet”), a structured hiring packet for ACCS clinicians is geared towards hiring qualified individuals with a diversity and inclusion lens, and (2) the ACCS Foundational Training Curriculum Packet, a training curriculum that contains ten training modules designed to cover foundational principles and ACCS practices for all personnel types, from direct care staff to clinicians. These products are publicly available on the [DMH website](#)  and the [iSPARC Technical Assistance webpage](#) .
- The Guidelines for Supervision of [Peer Supporters in Massachusetts ACCS](#)  (“Guidelines”) is a document produced by the ACCS Peer Support Supervision Workgroup in collaboration with iSPARC. The Guidelines list eleven core values, identify a practice phrase for each value, and suggest separate steps to follow to practice the value, both for the Peer Supporters and for the Supervisors. The Guidelines are one of four recommendations in the report titled The Status of Peer Support Supervision in ACCS. The pilot and then full implementation roll-out of the Guidelines in ACCS agencies were directed by three Peer Support Supervision Guidelines committees. These committees were comprised of peer leadership from the five area ACCS agencies and facilitated by four DMH Directors of Recovery and an Agency Director of Recovery Services. iSPARC assisted some committees in identifying Peer Supporter agency representatives and provided technical assistance and resources to the Peer Support Supervision Guidelines committees throughout the process. In June 2024, iSPARC organized a meeting of all five Peer Support Supervision Guidelines committee facilitators to review the process used in each area and to consider consensus recommendations for next steps. The committee facilitators, in collaboration with iSPARC, will send a summative report and recommendations to DMH in FY25.
- iSPARC created a FY24 work plan to develop a Coaching Model approach for ACCS staff related to increasing staff skills for delivering evidence-based practices (EBPs). To begin, iSPARC conducted an extensive literature search on

coaching models and enabling factors for setting up an agency coaching culture. iSPARC created and distributed a baseline survey regarding perspectives about and utilization of staff coaching and supervision to representatives from ACCS provider agencies between December 2023 and January 2024. The response rate was high, with 17 out of 18 agencies completing the survey. iSPARC submitted a final report on the survey results with recommendations to DMH in March: *ACCS Implementation Enhancement Project: Stage 2 Coaching Evaluation Results*.

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 FY24 are outlined below.

- Dr. Margaret Guyer, MA DMH Director of Research and Workforce Development, **Dr. Melissa Anderson**, and the **DeafYES! team** are collaborating to disseminate Deaf mental health training and Deaf-accessible suicide prevention training across the Commonwealth. The Deaf and hearing co-led team from Massachusetts is using SAMHSA Transformation Transfer Initiative (TTI) funds administered by National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) executive summary 11 to prepare community stakeholders to better serve Deaf people who are in crisis. One of their major initiatives is the establishment of an annual three-day training for mental health providers and interpreters who work in the field of Deaf mental health. Leveraging community-engaged development and implementation approaches, this training will provide attendees with comprehensive education on mental health experiences of diverse Deaf people; how to provide services through an intersectional lens; the impact of language deprivation; communitybased suicide prevention efforts; and formal assessment of suicide risk. The training format includes didactic presentations by Deaf and signing experts, breakout rooms with hands-on practice opportunities, a lived experience panel, and screening training films such as the Deaf-accessible adaptation of [Question. Persuade. Refer. \(QPR\) a Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training](#) ². This work will continue through June 2026.
- Throughout FY24, work on the Young Adult Access Center Toolkit continued to be finalized based on ongoing conversations with **Dr. Kathryn Sabella**, Heidi Holland, Director, MA DMH Young Adult Transitional Services, and Betsy Edes, MA DMH Program Director.
- In FY24, the Central Massachusetts Tobacco-Free Community Partnership (CMTFCP) continued to work on issues of food insecurity and transportation for the Department of Public Health. In August 2023, **Colleen McKay** and **Noriasha**

Mensah published [Resources for Addressing Food Insecurity and Other Social Determinants of Health in Worcester, Massachusetts](#) ², a list of resources available in the Worcester community to help families and community partners navigate local and state resources to address food insecurity and other social determinants of health.

- In partnership with the Executive Office of the Massachusetts Trial Court, Project NORTH: Implementation Support designs and deploys the data infrastructure for Project NORTH, provides training and resources to navigators, and supports Project NORTH in the development of quality assurance and improvement activities. Project NORTH offers confidential and voluntary court-based recovery support navigation, transportation to court and court-mandated treatment, and rent for up to 90 days in a certified and participating sober home to court users. The project team includes **Dr. Dara Drawbridge**, **Dr. Michelle Crist**, **Jinnia Baiye**, **Emily Zitek**, **Joshua Rumbut**.
- Starting in April 2023, **Dr. Gina Vincent** and the Law & Psychiatry Program and iSPARC team (**Dr. Maryann Davis**, **Rachael Perrault**, **Morgan Rao**, and **Kayla Carew**) initiated an Environmental Scan of effective youth and young adult early violence intervention programs and practices for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Child, Youth and Family Services. This work is funded by SAMHSA as a part of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. The team worked closely with Dr. Kelly English, Deputy Commissioner Child Youth & Family Services, and Omar Irizarry, DMH Director of Cross Agency Initiatives. In FY24, the team made recommendations to DMH after completing a comprehensive environmental scan to identify effective, feasible, and sustainable early violence intervention and crisis services for youth and young adults (aged 12 to 25) that may be most appropriate for expansion or adoption in Massachusetts. The team provided a full report and set of recommendations to DMH about potential programming to implement in Massachusetts.

iSPARC Faculty & Staff

In FY24, iSPARC made significant strides to build on our already strong foundation:



Managed a research portfolio totaling **\$15,445,962** in grants and contract funding



Submitted **29** new grant and contract proposals



Were awarded **10** new grants and contracts



Published **67** peer-reviewed journal articles



Submitted **50** peer-reviewed journal articles

iSPARC is home to investigators from the UMass Chan Medical School Departments of Psychiatry and 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, Population & Quantitative Health Sciences, Family Medicine & Community Health, Preventive & Behavioral Medicine, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Emergency Medicine, and *forHealth* 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.

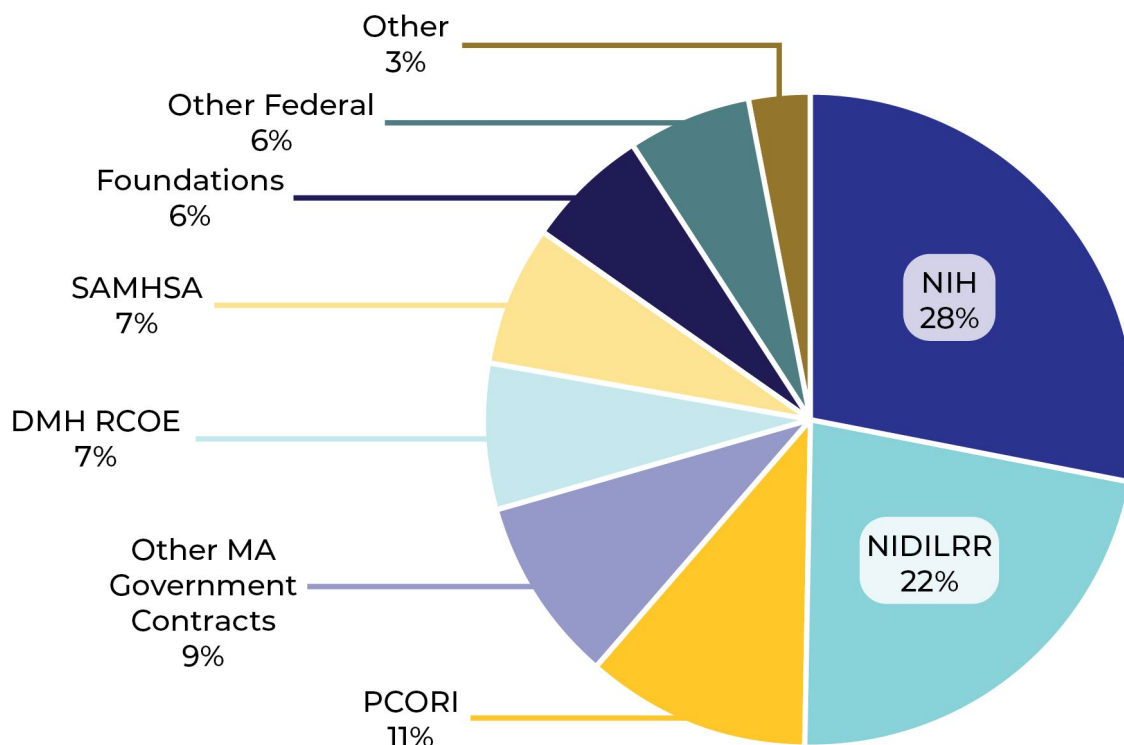


iSPARC Funding Sources FY 2024

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 FY24 yielded a return of \$13.40 to the Commonwealth to fund our portfolio of research, training, technical assistance, and service delivery.

Chart 1. Funding Sources




Top 5 Research Moments of FY24

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

1. Dr. Melissa Anderson was awarded a 3.6-million-dollar grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) to conduct the first-ever full-scale psychotherapy clinical trial in the Deaf community. This study will compare Signs of Safety, a Deaf-accessible therapy toolkit for treating alcohol use disorder and PTSD, to treatment as usual. Additional details of this award are in [Appendix A](#).
2. In a four-year project funded by the National Institute of Justice through the W.E.B. Du Bois Program of Research on Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Justice System, Drs. Spencer Lawson and Gina Vincent of the Law & Psychiatry Program are

collaborating with the MA Department of Correction to (1) examine the magnitude and drivers of racial and ethnic disparities in their Objective Point Base Classification System, (2) facilitate adjustments to their classification system to reduce observed tool bias and disparities, and (3) pilot the adjustments to evaluate their differential (or equitable) impact on custody level placements and access to programming.

3. In dual partnership with Postpartum Support International, one of our longtime community collaborators, **Dr. Nancy Byatt** was awarded a \$21 million contract from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) to conduct the national [Pathways to Perinatal Mental Health Equity](#)  (Pathways) study. Pathways was proposed in direct response to concerns expressed by Lifeline for Families' Individuals with Lived Expertise of Perinatal Mental Health Conditions Advisory Council about ongoing gaps and inequities in perinatal mental health care. In the Pathways study, they will compare a healthcare system-focused intervention, PProgram in Support of Moms (PRISM), to a healthcare system and community-level-focused intervention, Healthcare-Community Partnership, in 32 obstetric practices in seven states across the U.S. Additional details of this award are in [Appendix A](#).
4. **Dr. Shaobing Su** started work on her National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD)-funded R00, *Effects of Early and Prolonged Parent-Child Separation: Understanding Mental Health among Separated-Reunited Chinese American Children*. This grant supports mixed-methods community-based participatory research about early and prolonged parent-child separation and child mental health among separated-reunited Chinese immigrant families.
5. In September 2023, **Dr. Kathryn Sabella** and Dr. Elizabeth Thomas at Temple University (co-PI), were awarded a new NIDILRR-funded Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) aimed at improving the community participation outcomes of transition age youth with serious mental health conditions from backgrounds that have been marginalized or disadvantaged. The CIRC Center will partner with youth to generate new knowledge regarding developmentally appropriate interventions and key systems and policy issues, and provide training, dissemination, and technical assistance activities to a variety of interested parties (e.g., youth, family members, providers). Additional details of this award are in [Appendix A](#).