



October 2025 Consortium Public Health Experts

Bryon Backenson holds a master's degree in Epidemiology from the University at Albany and has served New York State as an epidemiologist for over two decades. He has been Director of NYS Department of Health's Bureau of Communicable Disease control since 2020 and is a longtime assistant professor at UAlbany. His areas of expertise include communicable disease, epidemiology and data, COVID-19, communications, and emergency preparedness.

Luke Grandis has nine of years of public health experience working for both community-based and governmental not-for-profit organizations. After spending six years working directly with the community through syringe service programs and advocacy organizations, Luke completed his own NYSPHC Fellowship with the NYS Office of Drug User Health where he gained skills in contract management, overdose data to action projects, and developing educational materials for funded programs. Luke now serves as a Health Program Coordinator I at the Bureau of Hepatitis Health Care and Epidemiology within the NYS Department of Health's AIDS Institute where he manages several contracts across three initiatives: Hepatitis C care and treatment, Hepatitis C innovative models of care for people who inject drugs, and Hepatitis C community mobilization. Luke has a Bachelor of Science degree from SUNY New Paltz and is dedicated to improving the health outcomes of people who use and inject drugs in New York State.

Samantha Hidalgo is a passionate public health professional dedicated to advancing equity through community-driven solutions, systems change, and cross-sector collaboration. She currently serves as the Public Health Program Manager at the Buffalo Center for Health Equity, where she manages active grant funding across ten projects and has helped secure new funding to support health equity initiatives. With a Master of Public Health from the University at Buffalo, Samantha brings a strong academic foundation and hands-on experience in research, education, and nonprofit leadership. She has held fellowships with the Institute for Nonprofit Practice and the University of South Florida's PHEARLESS program, where she designed and led a capacity-building initiative, the *Health Equity Ambassador Program*. Samantha also serves as a mentor to emerging public health professionals through UB's Envisions Mentoring Program. Her work is grounded in cultural humility, health equity, and a deep commitment to marginalized communities. She is a proud alumna of the Delta Omega Gamma Lambda Chapter of the National Public Health Honorary Society.