



**Search for Chief of Staff**  
**Pennington Biomedical Research Center**  
**Baton Rouge, LA**

**THE SEARCH**

The Pennington Biomedical Research Center, a world-renowned academic research institute, seeks an organizational and strategically adept individual as its inaugural Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff will be a vital partner to Executive Director Dr. John Kirwan, working to advance strategic planning efforts, align organizational priorities, translate vision into action, and coordinate implementation across the Center. This role presents a unique and exciting opportunity to guide and contribute to the overall direction of this innovative, fast-moving, and complex organization leading metabolic research.

At the forefront of medical discovery as it relates to understanding the causes of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and dementia, [Pennington Biomedical Research Center](#) is affiliated with Louisiana State University and conducts basic, clinical, and population research. The Center includes basic science, clinical research, and population and public health, enabling both focused research and translational science. Research at Pennington Biomedical is supported broadly by multiple [NIH Research Centers](#), and includes 550 employees with approximately 65 faculty and 20 postdoctoral fellows who comprise a network of 44 laboratories and 13 highly specialized core service facilities. Pennington Biomedical is located within state-of-the-art research facilities on a stand-alone 222-acre campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Chief of Staff will serve as an administrative extension of the office of the Executive Director, acting as a proxy for the Executive Director and guiding strategic initiatives. Collaborating with faculty and administrative leadership, the Chief of Staff will have a firm grasp of the many complex projects taking place across Pennington Biomedical, connecting the dots, enhancing information flows, and ensuring strategic alignment. They will cultivate an enterprise mindset and culture of continuous improvement across the organization, implementing operating procedures that streamline decision-making and increase the Center's effectiveness, always prioritizing quality and impact. The Chief of Staff will also be responsible for interfacing with Pennington Biomedical's wide array of external stakeholders including NIH representatives, elected officials, and donors. The successful candidate will be an effective communicator, relationship builder, and strategic thinker capable of optimizing time and resources to empower important scientific advances. Experience in a similar chief of staff role is highly desirable. All

candidates must demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the role of a chief of staff in a biomedical research institute setting.

Pennington Biomedical Research Center has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in conducting this important search and to help identify outstanding candidates. All inquiries, applications, and nominations for this opportunity should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

## **PENNINGTON BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH CENTER**

### **Overview**

Pennington Biomedical Research Center is a public-private partnership that over the past three decades has become a global leader in nutrition research and metabolic health. Located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the Center's mission is to discover the triggers of chronic diseases through innovative research that improves human health across the lifespan.

At the forefront of medical discovery as it relates to understanding the causes of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and dementia, Pennington Biomedical is affiliated with Louisiana State University and conducts basic, clinical, and population research. As a state entity, the Center has a particular focus and commitment to helping Louisiana's residents to live longer and healthier lives.

### **Research**

Over the last 30 years, Pennington Biomedical's world-renowned scientists have made remarkable discoveries that have improved the way Americans exercise, eat, and age and greatly advanced society's understanding of obesity, diabetes, dementia, and other chronic diseases. Researchers have contributed to nearly every obesity and diabetes drug on the market, developed obesity and lifestyle interventions, and are a leading provider of nutrition science for the U.S. military.

The Center's 550 employees perform research activities across 752,000 square feet of state-of-the-art laboratories, clinics, conference spaces, and offices located on a tranquil 222-acre urban campus in Baton Rouge. The Center's research enterprise includes approximately 65 scientists and more than 20 postdoctoral fellows who comprise a network of [44 laboratories](#) supported by lab techs, nurses, dietitians, and support personnel, and [13 highly specialized core service facilities](#). Research at Pennington covers ten areas: obesity; diabetes; epidemiology & prevention; genomics & molecular genetics; neurobiology; neurodegeneration; nutrient sensing & signaling; cancer; physical activity & health; and developmental biology.

### *Centers & Institutes*

Pennington Biomedical is proud to house three NIH-funded research centers. This prestigious designation is awarded to institutions with groups of established investigators working in areas of scientific emphasis as defined by the National Institutes of Health. The goal of NIH-funded centers is to power the discovery process and advance science by facilitating and enhancing their collaborative efforts. The NIH-funded research centers are the [Louisiana Clinical & Translational Science Center](#) (LA CaTS), the [Nutrition Obesity Research Center](#) (NORC), and the [Metabolic Basis of Disease Center](#) (MBDC). Three additional centers include the Department of Defense funded [Center for Military Performance & Resilience](#) (CMPR), the [Institute for Dementia Research and Prevention](#) (IDRP), and the [Institute for Dementia Research and Prevention](#) (IDRP).

Pennington Biomedical is also home to the [Metamor Institute](#), a partnership between Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, the Office of the Governor of Louisiana, Louisiana Economic Development (LED), LSU Health New Orleans School of Medicine, and the Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation. Metamor is uniquely focused on bariatric surgery and the advanced treatment of obesity and diabetes.

### **Science Education, Training & Community Outreach**

Pennington Biomedical serves as a premiere training institution, source of free health and nutrition resources, and trusted expert within the general public and biomedical research community. The **Division of Scientific Education** supports and works with faculty, postdoctoral fellows, students, and the lay community through outreach activities that train the next generation of scientists, foster multidisciplinary scientific enrichment and collaboration, attract new investigators with relevant complementary expertise, and provide a conduit between researchers and the lay community.

### **Business Development & Economic Impact**

Pennington Biomedical's Office of Innovation & Commercialization works to advance the Center's innovations, support the research enterprise, and collaborate with entrepreneurs and external partners on translational research and commercialize innovations. By moving discoveries and interventions from the laboratory to the marketplace, Pennington Biomedical has improved countless lives through diagnostic, treatment, and prevention breakthroughs, and has a strong economic impact on the Baton Rouge region and the state of Louisiana.

Since its inception in 1988, the Center has brought in \$1.14 billion in grant funding. In FY 2021-2022 operations supported an estimated economic output of \$137 million, \$54 million in earnings, and 865 jobs.

## Pennington Biomedical Vision 2028

Pennington Biomedical recently engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process, conducting interviews with dozens of stakeholders to identify top priorities for advancing the Center's vision in meaningful ways. The plan presents key actions that respond to stakeholder input, maximize resources, and advance priorities and provides a tactical roadmap for achieving strategic goals. The five focus areas outlined in the plan are:

1. **Organization & Culture:** How can the organization's structure and operations best support its scientific vision and goals?
2. **Research Drivers & Determinants:** How does Pennington Biomedical define its scientific identity and continue to capitalize on opportunities as a world-class research center?
3. **Brand Identity, Marketing & Communications:** How can the Center better present its brand to both existing and new audiences? How can it better market its expertise, research, and innovation in local, national, and global markets?
4. **Finances, Fundraising & the Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation:** How can the Center and the Foundation expand fundraising capacity to better support the Center's work?
5. **External Partnerships:** How can the Center nurture partnerships that provide new revenue streams?

## LEADERSHIP

### Executive Director John Kirwan, PhD

John Kirwan, PhD, Executive Director of Pennington Biomedical Research Center, is an internationally renowned obesity, diabetes and nutrition scientist whose professional expertise includes over 30 years of research, teaching and service in the obesity and diabetes fields. His exceptional record of excellence in diabetes-related research, including the discovery that type 2 diabetes can often be cured by surgical alteration of the intestines and stomach, made him the perfect choice for taking the lead at Pennington Biomedical in January 2018.

Kirwan leads an internationally acclaimed biomedical research program focused on diabetes, obesity, nutrition and exercise. He is currently Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on 10 U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants, and to date, he has generated more than \$70 million in research funding, most of which has come from NIH and the food, pharmaceutical, and medical device industries. He has published 300 scientific papers related to diabetes and metabolism in prestigious peer-reviewed journals, including the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *Diabetes* and *Diabetes Care*.

Most recently Dr. Kirwan served as the director of the Metabolic Translational Research Center and professor of molecular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. He also held faculty appointments at Case Western Reserve University as a professor of physiology and of nutrition.

Kirwan received his clinical physiology training at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, MO.; his PhD in human bioenergetics at Ball State University, Muncie, IN.; his master's degree in exercise biochemistry from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.; and his bachelor's degree (Hons) from the University of Limerick, Ireland.

### **THE ROLE: CHIEF OF STAFF**

The Chief of Staff will work closely with the Executive Director to drive strategic initiatives within the organization and play a pivotal role in optimizing the Executive Director's time and resources. This position requires exceptional leadership skills, strategic thinking, and the ability to navigate complex topics.

#### **Major Responsibilities:**

- Work directly with the Executive Director to align organizational priorities, streamline decision-making processes, and translate vision into actionable strategies.
- Oversee implementation of strategic plan, including participation in key task forces.
- Lead and oversee key projects, initiatives, and special assignments, ensuring timely execution and delivery while maintaining a focus on quality and impact.
- Coordinate with leadership, faculty, research staff, and support teams to enhance information flow and collaboration.
- Work with leadership to identify opportunities for cross-functional initiatives.
- Facilitate buy-in on efficient framework(s) for achieving organizational goals.
- Act as a liaison between the Executive Director's office and internal and external stakeholders, including federal funding agencies and foundations, pharmaceutical and food industries, state government, donors, and community organizations.
- Assist in managing organizational change by driving strategic initiatives and promoting a positive and adaptive culture.
- All other duties as assigned.

### **KEY OPPORTUNITIES + CHALLENGES**

The inaugural Chief of Staff will step into an innovative, fast-moving organization at an exciting moment as the Center is poised to realize its newly articulated Vision 2028. Specifically, the Chief of Staff will address the following opportunities and challenges:

### **Provide strategic partnership and support to the Executive Director**

In addition to leading Pennington Biomedical, Dr. Kirwan is the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on 10 NIH grants and leads the Louisiana Clinical & Translational Science Center. Dr. Kirwan also oversees 16 full-time direct reports including a senior leadership team made up of six Associate Executive Directors. Given this broad and complex portfolio, the Executive Director seeks an inaugural Chief of Staff to serve as a thought partner, resource, and support.

The Chief of Staff will work directly with Dr. Kirwan to anticipate needs, articulate organizational priorities, translate vision into actionable strategies, and coordinate implementation in partnership with senior leaders. To this end, the Chief of Staff will guide strategic initiatives outlined in the Pennington Biomedical Vision 2028 and represent the Executive Director and the Center at a range of internal and external meetings. The Chief of Staff will be counted on to take on responsibilities and decisions that enable Dr. Kirwan to achieve gains in productivity, effective project management, and impact. The Chief of Staff will ensure the Executive Director is fully informed of critical issues impacting the Center while protecting his time, so that Dr. Kirwan can focus on the strategic rather than the tactical.

### **Direct organizational initiatives and coordinate activities across the Center**

A successful Chief of Staff will possess a strong sense of curiosity and excitement about the Center's complex and varied work that spans basic, clinical, and population research, as well as training, outreach, and business development and will develop a nuanced understanding of the projects taking place across Pennington Biomedical. The Chief of Staff will serve as a fulcrum between administrative and programmatic leadership, equipping administrative divisions to provide the necessary support to program areas, and monitoring and holding accountable administrative and programmatic leadership to ensure that supports are delivered to the best of the Center's capacity. They will be responsible for facilitating communication, collaboration, and coordination across disparate teams, looking for opportunities to enhance information flows and facilitate cross-functional projects. They will keep track of progress on key initiatives and ensure that action items are completed in a timely and responsible way. With a deep understanding of the organizational landscape and institutional priorities, the Chief of Staff will identify and bring together internal and external stakeholders needed to drive key projects and garner buy-in, adoption, and strategic alignment.

### **Build an enterprise mindset and champion values of a high-performing, sustainable organization**

As outlined in the Pennington Biomedical Vision 2028, the Center has committed to adopting an enterprise mindset, a stance that requires all team members to transcend individual and department identities and consider the impact of their individual work on the organization as a whole. The Chief of Staff will play a critical role in building this intentional culture, cultivating trust between faculty, staff, leadership, and stakeholders. They will be responsible for identifying and instituting organizational structures and systems that increase transparency, facilitate cross-department collaboration, reduce

inefficiency, and improve internal communication vertically and horizontally. To augment workflow and support scientific efforts, they will develop, implement, and enhance processes and practices that support and hold leaders and staff across the Center accountable for delivering and advancing projects. They will be iterative and mission-driven in their approach, promoting an organizational culture of collaboration, communication, and innovation.

### **Cultivate and maintain strong external relationships**

As a world-renowned research center that is part of the LSU System and a highly active member of the Baton Rouge region, Pennington Biomedical engages with a wide array of external stakeholders including but not limited to faculty and administrators across the LSU system and all academic medical centers in the state, NIH representatives, elected officials, outside academics and researchers, community members, donors, and philanthropic organizations. As a key liaison for the Executive Director, the Chief of Staff will be an effective communicator, adept at accurately representing the Center's work and priorities, and comfortable interfacing with diverse groups. The Chief of Staff will play an important role in deepening relationships, building the capacity for these partnerships to be as productive and proactive as possible.

### **EXPERIENCE, SKILLS + QUALIFICATIONS**

Pennington Biomedical seeks a Chief of Staff who is a strategic thinker, consummate multitasker, seasoned project manager, and effective communicator and relationship builder.

Required qualifications for the Chief of Staff position include the following:

- Master's degree in Business Administration, Public Administration, or related field.
- Minimum of 5 years of experience in a senior leadership role, preferably in a research, healthcare or academic setting.
- Excellent communication skills, both written and verbal, with the ability to engage effectively with diverse stakeholders.
- Strong analytical and problem-solving abilities using data-driven approaches.
- Exceptional organizational skills and attention to detail; ability to manage multiple priorities.
- Prior success in strategic planning and project management.
- Must maintain strict confidentiality and discretion.

### **APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES**

Confidential inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and letters of interest responding to the opportunities and challenges outlined above) should be sent electronically to the Isaacson, Miller executive search team via the link below.

**Dan Rodas, Partner**  
**Amble Ryan, Senior Associate**  
**Nicole Sancilio, Senior Search Coordinator**  
**Isaacson, Miller**

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/pennington-biomedical-research-center/chief-staff>

*Pennington Biomedical Research Center and LSU believes diversity, equity, and inclusion enrich the educational experience of our students, faculty, and staff, and are necessary to prepare all people to thrive personally and professionally in a global society. We celebrate diversity and are committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion. We actively seek and encourage qualified applications from persons with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Persons needing accommodations or assistance with the accessibility of materials related to this search are encouraged to contact the Office of Human Resource Management at [hrm@pbrc.edu](mailto:hrm@pbrc.edu).*