



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

Search for the Director, Center for Engagement in Disability Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
School of Health Professions
Birmingham, Alabama

THE SEARCH

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) seeks a visionary and accomplished research leader to serve as the Director of the Center for Engagement in Disability Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (CEDHARS or Center). Established in 2019, CEDHARS focuses on advancing the health and well-being of people with disabilities through inclusion science. With a central focus on community engagement and inclusivity, CEDHARS bridges the gap between scientific discovery and real-world application, ensuring research outcomes directly benefit individuals with disabilities and their input shapes research activity.

As a [University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Center \(UWIRC\)](#), CEDHARS promotes interdisciplinary research and education. The Center aims to spearhead cutting-edge research, pioneer innovative strategies, and train the next generation of leaders in disability studies. CEDHARS draws together more than 100 members spanning eight schools across UAB. The Center was recently renewed for another five-year cycle and is poised for further growth and impact.

UAB is an exciting place for a research leader. Research at UAB spans all disciplines, ten schools, 25 UWIRCs, and one of the nation's largest academic health science centers. The University's R1 status speaks to the institution's commitment to high-impact research and innovation. UAB received more than \$774 million in research grants and extramural awards in FY2023, keeping UAB in the top one percent of all NIH-funded institutions, including private, public, and international organizations. UAB aims to continue its research success, charting a path to [\\$1 billion in research expenditures](#).

The forthcoming Director, while being appointed by the Vice President for Research, will report to the Dean of the School of Health Professions. This position is unique in its structure, as it straddles both the school-level and university-level realms. The Director will not only seek new opportunities for partnership, alignment, and growth but also serve as a member of the Council of Center Directors, a governance body for University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Centers. This dual capacity offers a singular opportunity to shape the research trajectory and discovery initiatives of CEDHARS throughout the UAB enterprise. The

ideal candidate for the Director of CEDHARS will be an inclusive leader dedicated to fostering accessibility and equity, have national recognition and scholarly distinction in disability science research, and have a record of sustained extramural funding. Candidates must have a PhD, MD, or equivalent terminal degree and a record commensurate with appointment at the rank of Professor or Associate Professor.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's story is one of remarkable growth in size, quality, reputation, and impact. UAB traces its roots to the 1859 founding of the Medical College of Alabama and the 1936 establishment of the Birmingham Extension Center of the University of Alabama. In 1945, the University's Medical Center was founded in Birmingham, and in November 1966, the Extension Center and the Medical Center were administratively merged to form the "University of Alabama in Birmingham," an organizational component of the University of Alabama (in Tuscaloosa). In 1969, UAB became an independent institution, one of the autonomous universities within the newly created three-campus University of Alabama System.

UAB is the only public, four-year degree-granting university in the state's largest metropolitan area and serves as the biomedical university for Alabama. The UAB schools of medicine, health professions, dentistry, optometry, nursing, and public health are co-located in downtown Birmingham, along with the schools of engineering, business, education, and arts and sciences, which facilitates greater interdisciplinary collaboration. With more than 23,000 employees, UAB and its affiliated health system is the largest single employer in Alabama and generated a \$12.1 billion economic impact on the state in 2022. UAB received \$774.5 million in research grants and extramural awards in FY23, marking a \$247.5 million increase in funding over the past five years and a 73% growth over the past nine years.

The UAB campus is in the heart of downtown Birmingham, a city that has enjoyed revitalization in recent years with the advent of numerous residential, sporting, music, and outdoor entertainment developments. Birmingham is also a foodie town, home to a James Beard Foundation award-winning bar and grill and many other acclaimed restaurants that receive rave reviews, and a burgeoning craft brewery scene.

UAB School of Health Professions

The School of Health Professions is the fastest-growing school at UAB, offering more than 35 programs at the certificate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The School is organized into five departments: Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences, Health Services Administration, Nutrition Sciences, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy, and is home to several [centers and institutes](#). The School also offers an

honors program for undergraduates, an undergraduate degree in Disability Studies and Rehabilitation Science, along with degree offerings in rehabilitation science through an interdisciplinary partnership with the departments of occupational therapy and physical therapy. SHP students, faculty, and staff are committed to improving the health and well-being of people everywhere through collaboration, service, and innovative research.

CENTER FOR ENGAGEMENT IN DISABILITY HEALTH AND REHABILITATION SCIENCES

CEDHARS was established in 2019 with a mission to perform cutting-edge inclusion science research, train future students and research, and develop innovative approaches to promote the health and well-being of people with disabilities. The Center is a UWIRC, established through the Office of Research. In the fall of 2023, CEDHARS was re-funded for another 5-year cycle and will have the prestigious UWIRC designation through fiscal year 2029.

Inspired by Jim Charlton’s work promoting inclusion for people with disabilities – “nothing about us without us” – CEDHARS adopts an inclusion science approach, ensuring that people with disabilities are included in all stages of the research process. Inclusion science is a term developed by CEDHARS leadership to describe the practice of ensuring that any research-related activity linked to health and well-being includes people with disabilities as a priority. The Center’s vision is to be the global leader in inclusion science and evidence-based breakthroughs that improve the well-being of people with disabilities. Inclusion science is considered a solution to the challenge that people with disabilities are largely excluded from scientific research studies that have the potential to positively impact health and well-being. This approach aims to generate comprehensive and integrative solutions applicable to the 61 million Americans living with disabilities, eliminating the need to retrofit research for the disability community. The Center also aims to recruit researchers, staff, and students with disabilities to UAB to further advance inclusion science.

The Center's research spans translational and implementation science, with an emphasis on addressing the health and well-being of people with disabilities. Faculty associated with the Center receive support from the CDC, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). CEDHARS augments research through a [pilot funding program](#) to support the career development of investigators engaged in disability health and inclusion science and to advance scientific discovery.

Core Facilities

CEDHARS is organized into five [core facilities](#) that support trainees, fellows, grant recipients, and established investigators whose research interests align with the Center’s mission. The facilities are located at the WHARF—the Center’s new Wellness, Health, and Research Facility—on the campus of the [Lakeshore Foundation](#), a leader in sports science for athletes with disabilities. The core facilities include:

- The Active Video Gaming and Virtual Reality Lab is a state-of-the-art adapted gaming space that provides single- and multi-player adaptive video gaming opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities. The lab is dedicated to advancing research in accessible exergaming programs aimed at improving health and increasing physical activity among individuals with disabilities.
- The Adaptive Human Performance Lab is a 3,000-square-foot facility that offers comprehensive services focused on exercise, nutrition, physical activity, and health assessments to enhance the physical and psychological well-being of people with disabilities.
- The Community Engaged Dissemination and Implementation Sciences core is dedicated to advancing the integration of community-engaged research within dissemination and implementation science to enhance the translational impact of disability-inclusive scholarly work, practice, and policies. The core evaluates and improves health and rehabilitation interventions, programs, and policies for individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions and provides consultative services to support evidence-based practices in clinics and community settings.
- The Data Coordinating Center core provides comprehensive services in data analysis, data capture, data management, and study design to enhance investigator productivity and advance research in disability health and rehabilitation science.
- The Rehabilitation Engineering and Behavioral/Health Promotion Technology core offers behavior and rehabilitation technology development, intervention, and evaluation services. The core utilizes telehealth technology to facilitate successful interventions in at-home or community settings and to promote behavior adherence.

Advisory Board

CEDHARS introduced a stakeholder advisory board (SAB) in 2022 to offer advice and recommendations to the Director and CEDHARS leadership team. The SAB exists outside of the governance structure of the Center but plays a key role in shaping its work. CEDHARS leadership meets quarterly with advisory board members. SAB members represent a cross-section of people with disabilities, caregivers of people with disabilities, public and private sector organizations related to disability, and academics whose research expertise is in related fields. There are nine advisory board members; each serves a two-year term, which can be renewed.

Engagement

The engagement of people with disabilities and a wide range of stakeholders is the guiding force and key differentiator for the Center. CEDHARS focuses on public and community-based events to create meaningful opportunities for engagement on a broad scale. CEDHARS symposia and events not only provide an opportunity to share knowledge developed and translated by its researchers but also to create

regular avenues for the community to inform the Center's work and direction, ensuring its relevance and impact. These events create meaningful feedback loops and communication channels within the community.

- [The 2024 CEDHARS Symposium](#) focused on addressing ableism in research, healthcare, and higher education and featured keynote speakers, sessions featuring experts from these fields, a poster session, and moderated breakout groups.

ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The Director will be a School of Health Professions faculty member who leads, promotes, and advances the mission of CEDHARS through strategic leadership, scholarly engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration while managing the Center's administrative and fiscal operations. This includes overseeing the Center's collaborative research efforts, supporting pilot and training funding, recruiting and mentoring investigators, and providing strategic oversight for the Center's enrichment and community engagement efforts. The new Director will be integral in leading efforts to enhance CEDHARS's position as a leading center for disability research. At UAB, the Director serves as a Council of Center Directors member – a governance body for University-Wide Interdisciplinary Research Centers.

While no one individual will necessarily exemplify every quality, the successful Director will bring many of the following professional and personal qualifications:

- Significant and consistent record as a funded investigator, ideally with a focus on disability
- Demonstrated scholarly distinction in disability research, rehabilitation sciences, public health, or a related discipline
- Lived experience and/or interest in disability
- Commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse research community, ensuring equity and accessibility in all aspects of the Center's activities
- Demonstrated success in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, both within academia and with external stakeholders, to drive innovative research and initiatives
- Engagement with research centers through active collaboration, direct contribution, and/or leadership
- Ability to effectively communicate the Center's mission and research findings on a national level to enhance support and impact
- Creative and strategic thinker who enjoys implementing solutions to address complex research challenges
- Excellence in mentoring faculty, staff, and trainees
- Financial acumen with experience in budget management and resource allocation
- PhD, MD, or equivalent terminal degree; be eligible for tenure at the rank of Associate Professor or Professor

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DIRECTOR

Establish and solidify the Center's identity

The Center recently marked its first five years. The next Director will build from this foundation to set out a clear and distinguished brand for CEDHARS, fostering understanding and engagement in its work on campus and beyond. The Director will engage with faculty, staff, and the Center's advisory board to enhance and articulate the Center's mission, objectives, and distinct contributions in inclusion science. Additionally, developing a comprehensive marketing and communication plan will be essential to elevate the Center's visibility and ensure its work reaches a wider audience. By promoting its research strengths, emphasis on community engagement, and dedication to inclusion, the Director can genuinely set the Center apart and continue on a course to become a nationwide leader in disability science.

Enhance disability research and collaboration at UAB

The Director will amplify disability research and collaboration by building upon established pathways for collaborative efforts, high-impact research initiatives, and innovative scholarly activities. UAB has a strong network of dedicated investigators focused on disability research, including ongoing key partnerships with the NIDILRR-funded Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Recreational Technologies ([Rec-Tec](#)), the three NIDILRR-funded Model System Centers within the [Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation](#), and the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability ([NCHPAD](#)). Attracting new investigators to engage in disability research and encouraging faculty across all disciplines to contribute to advancements that lead to tangible, 'experienced and seen', change for people with disabilities will be crucial goals for the next Director. The Director will also collaborate with other researchers, centers, and clinicians at UAB to encourage disability inclusion in their work and to support the improvement of services they provide to people with disabilities.

Emphasizing mentorship and professional development opportunities will be key in nurturing the next generation of researchers dedicated to improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities and addressing health inequities. Key objectives will be engaging researchers and new collaborators in disability health and rehabilitation science through funding and support of pilot projects and developing a formal mentoring and development program available to researchers across disciplines. The successful leader will offer guidance and nurture professional growth, encouraging not only individual project success but also providing support that contributes to the well-being of the team and the overall vibrancy of CEDHARS.

Optimize and expand resources

As CEDHARS moves forward, there is an opportunity to optimize and strategically expand resources. The incoming Director will manage finances and resources with a forward-thinking approach. They will build strategic partnerships and secure external funding to advance the Center's mission. Developing a

comprehensive financial plan that includes diverse streams of revenue and funding sources will be crucial. As part of ensuring sustainability, the Director should demonstrate effectiveness through formal and ongoing evaluation strategies. The Center will need to define clear metrics of success and a process for measuring them. By optimizing existing resources and seeking new opportunities for financial growth, the successful director will ensure the Center's sustainability and allow it to expand its reach, support groundbreaking research, and make meaningful contributions to the field.

Cultivate an inclusive and collaborative culture

The Director will play a key role in sustaining a supportive and inclusive environment within the Center; such a culture is essential to achieving CEDHARS's mission. As the convening force for the group, the Director will establish a strong rapport with the CEDHARS leadership team, including the Co-Director and core leaders, and recognize and maximize their contributions. The Director will model excellent and transparent communication. The Director will review, approve, ensure, and celebrate the team's accomplishment of goals and strategic initiatives and inspire continued achievement.

Contribute to the advancement of inclusion science

The Director has a remarkable opportunity to position the Center as a global leader in inclusion science, setting a standard for others to follow. By continuing to produce robust and influential research, CEDHARS can solidify its reputation as a model for disability-focused research centers. The successful leader can continue to build the concept of inclusion science--ensuring that any research-related activity linked to health and well-being includes people with disabilities as a priority--to the mainstream of academia and research. For CEDHARS, disability inclusion is not an add-on, but the ethos of the Center's engagement. A key focus will be on advancing translational research that bridges the gap from bench to bedside to community, ensuring that scientific discoveries are effectively implemented in real-world settings. The Director's leadership will be instrumental in driving the Center's mission forward, ensuring the research conducted under their guidance improves the well-being of people with disabilities.

ABOUT BIRMINGHAM

UAB's campus is centrally situated in downtown Birmingham. Located in the heart of the Southeast, Birmingham is a metropolitan city of one million people and a thriving nexus of medicine, banking, research, and development. It is a short drive from Atlanta, Nashville, New Orleans, Memphis, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the Gulf Coast beaches. Birmingham has been recognized as an "All-America City" by the National Civic League as one of the top 10 American cities to live and work and one of the top 10 entrepreneurial and job growth hot spots in America.

Birmingham, with 99 diverse neighborhoods, has more green space per capita than any other major city in the nation. It has been designated Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation for nearly 30 years in a row. It is home to Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve with 14 miles of trails, 1,000+ acres of biodiverse

urban forest, and 150 species of birds. It is also home to Red Mountain Park, with 15 miles of trails, and Alabama's largest dog park – named one of the “10 Great Southern Dog Parks” by *Southern Living Magazine*.

Downtown Birmingham has enjoyed a revitalization in recent years, with the development of nearby [Railroad Park](#) — a national award-winning urban park — and its adjacent Regions Field — a national award-winning stadium that is home to the minor league [Birmingham Barons](#). Two professional and minor league sports teams put down roots in the city in the past decade, including the [Birmingham Stallions](#) of the United States Football League and the [Birmingham Squadron](#), an American professional basketball team based in Birmingham. The team is the NBA G League affiliate of the National Basketball Association (NBA)'s New Orleans Pelicans. These projects and teams have kickstarted major growth in surrounding districts, including craft breweries, boutique shops, restaurants, loft and apartment buildings, innovative workspaces, and hotels.

Birmingham is also a renowned culinary destination, named America's “Next Hot Food City” by *Zagat's* and Top 10 “Unexpected US Cities with a Surprisingly Good Food Scene” by *Fodor's*. The Magic City is also home to seven James Beard Award-winning chefs and restaurants.

There are a host of attractions only a short walk from UAB's campus, including the Birmingham Civil Rights District National Monument. This area encompasses the historic sites that played significant roles in the Civil Rights Movement – places such as the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Kelly Ingram Park, and the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#)—and is a major destination for visitors from around the world.

Birmingham's cultural scene is thriving with museums, galleries, theatres, and live music venues. Birmingham is home to multiple music, art, and film festivals, including the Sidewalk Film Festival, which *USA Today* named one of “Ten Great Places for a Fabulous Film Festival.” In addition, Birmingham has a professional ballet company, a professional opera company, the Alabama Symphony Orchestra (based at UAB's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center), a [School of Fine Arts](#), the [Jazz Hall of Fame](#), and the restoration of the historic [Lyric Theatre](#) and [Alabama Theatre](#).

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Confidential nominations, inquiries, and applications (including a CV and cover letter) should be sent to:

Amy Segal, Partner

Annah Wells, Associate

Olivia, McVicker, Managing Search Coordinator

Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-alabama-birmingham-school-health-professions/director-center-engagement>

Unless explicitly stated in the job posting, it is UAB's expectation that all employees will reside in the state of Alabama as of the date the employment begins.

Have accommodation or access needs?

Isaacson, Miller and UAB are committed to creating an inclusive environment and welcome applications from candidates with disabilities. If you have any accommodation or access needs, we are happy to provide reasonable accommodations.

UAB is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and family-friendly environment in which all faculty and staff can excel and achieve work-life balance irrespective of, race, national origin, age, genetic or family medical history, gender, faith, gender identity and expression as well as sexual orientation. UAB also encourages applications from individuals with disabilities and veterans. A pre-employment background check investigation is performed on candidates selected for employment.