Conference Speakers

Thank you to the leaders sharing their experience and ideas with Ohio's 211 network today.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Kara B. Wente

Director, Ohio Department of Children and Youth

In August 2023, Governor Mike DeWine nominated Kara B. Wente to be the Director of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY).

Kara has spent her career advocating for children. Before being nominated to lead DCY, she served as the Director of the Governor's Children's Initiative and was the Chief Operating Officer for Future Ready Columbus. With more than 20 years in dedicated state service, Kara has extensive experience in serving the most vulnerable children and families in Ohio. She used data as an accountability tool for systemic change during her time as the Assistant Director of Health and Human Services at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and led several large-scale system and policy changes as Deputy Director at the Office of Family Assistance.

Kara's hometown is Celina, Ohio, but she currently lives in Dublin. She holds a Master's in Education and Allied Professions from the University of Dayton and a Bachelor's in Psychology from The Ohio State University.

PRESENTERS

Tanya Kahl

Director, Ohio 211 · Vice President, Community Impact, United Way of Summit & Medina

Tanya Kahl has recently taken on the role of Ohio 211 Director. She has served on the board of Ohio 211 since 2014, representing the United Way of Summit & Medina where she serves as Vice President of Community Impact. Tanya is excited to oversee the new partnership with Ohio Department of Children and Youth and statewide expansion of 211 in Ohio.

Tanya has over 25 years of experience in non-profit management and is passionate about systems change. Tanya has a Master of Public Administration from Kent State University and a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Spanish from the Ohio State University. She lives in Mogadore, Ohio with her husband and enjoys trips to Columbus to visit her daughters who are both attending the Ohio State University. In her free time, Tanya loves to spend time outside, travel, and read.

Gavi Begtrup, Ph.D.

Resource Database Consultant, Ohio 211

Gavi Begtrup, Ph.D., is a physicist turned systems builder who specializes in making fragmented systems work as one. After earning his Ph.D. in physics at UC Berkeley, Dr. Begtrup served as a policy advisor to Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, then as CEO and CTO of a venture-backed medical device company. As Director of 211 Innovation at United Way of Greater Cincinnati, he rebuilt a 50-year-old 211 serving more than 50,000 households a year, developing programs and integrations with service providers and Cincinnati Children's Hospital. Today he is the principal of Polymath Strategies, advising nonprofits, executives, and cross-sector initiatives on data strategy, system integration, and operational execution. He works with 211 systems, including Ohio 211, on quality, innovation, and infrastructure.

Jennie Pollak

Executive Director, Michigan 2-1-1

Jennie Pollak has worked in the field of Community Navigation (I&R) for 20 years, serving in many roles within 2-1-1 at both the local, regional and state levels. Jennie started her career as a Community Navigation Specialist and Database Curator, and has also served in leadership as a 211 Center Director and stewarding statewide coordination. She is the Executive Director of Michigan 2-1-1, and active in both Inform Michigan and Inform USA, serving on committees, as a conference presenter, currently serving as President of Inform Michigan, and appointed Chair of the Inform USA Standards Committee.

She holds a Master's degree in Social Work, with concentration on Organization & Community Practice from Michigan State University.

PANELISTS

Latisha Chastang

Human Services Administrator, HEAP and CSBG Section, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Latisha Chastang serves as the Human Services Administrator for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) and Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Section at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. In this role, she oversees client services, quality assurance, operations, community services programming, and home energy assistance initiatives across the state.

Before joining the State of Ohio, Latisha was the Director of Emergency Assistance at IMPACT Community Action, serving Columbus and Franklin County. She managed a $75 million budget and led a team of 45 employees. Her journey in community action began in 2005, when she accepted a temporary position as a Community Intake Specialist; an opportunity that sparked her long-standing commitment to public service.

Latisha holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration and Human Resources from Franklin University and a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management and Leadership from Capella University. She is also a Certified ROMA Implementer and a Board Governance Consultant through BoardSource®.

Beyond her professional work, Latisha remains actively engaged in her community. She serves on the Board of Health for Franklin County Public Health and is a member-at-large with the National Association of Local Boards of Health.

Latisha is the wife of Dr. Carl Chastang, celebrating 25 years together, and the proud mother of two adult children, Cameron and Danielle, along with two beloved dogs, Dashie and Chloe.

Amy Riegel

Executive Director, Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)

Amy Riegel is the Executive Director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO), where she leads statewide efforts to advance housing affordability, prevent and end homelessness, and strengthen communities through advocacy and systems change. With more than 20 years of experience across nonprofit leadership, local government, healthcare, and community development, Amy has led initiatives in housing development, health equity, workforce development, and poverty reduction. Prior to COHHIO, she directed more than $50 million in affordable housing investments at CareSource and helped launch the nationally recognized Healthy Beginnings at Home initiative. A TEDx speaker and frequent keynote presenter, Amy regularly speaks at local, state, and national events on housing, homelessness, community development, and the social determinants of health. She serves on several local, state, and national boards.

Beth Kowalczyk

Chief Executive Officer, Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Beth Kowalczyk is Chief Executive Officer of the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, where she leads a statewide network advancing aging services, Medicaid integration, and community-based care for older adults.

A longtime policy leader, Beth previously served more than a decade as the Association's Chief Policy Officer, helping shape Ohio's approach to long-term services and supports and positioning Area Agencies on Aging as key partners in an evolving healthcare landscape.

Her career spans state government leadership on programs including SNAP and TANF, legal advocacy with Ohio legal services organizations, and elected service on Worthington City Council, where she served as President Pro-Tem.

Beth has been recognized with Advocate of the Year honors for her leadership in aging and public policy and serves on the Board of Directors for the HealthPath Foundation of Ohio.

She holds a B.A. from Kent State University and a J.D. from New York University School of Law.