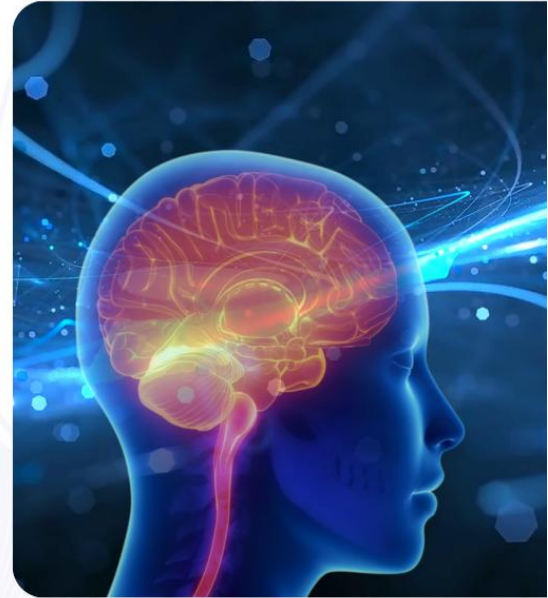


2026 PEDIATRIC NEUROSCIENCES RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

Accelerating Neuroscience through
Synergistic Collaborations

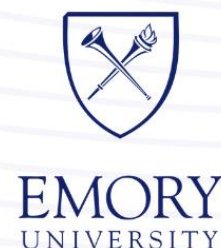


SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

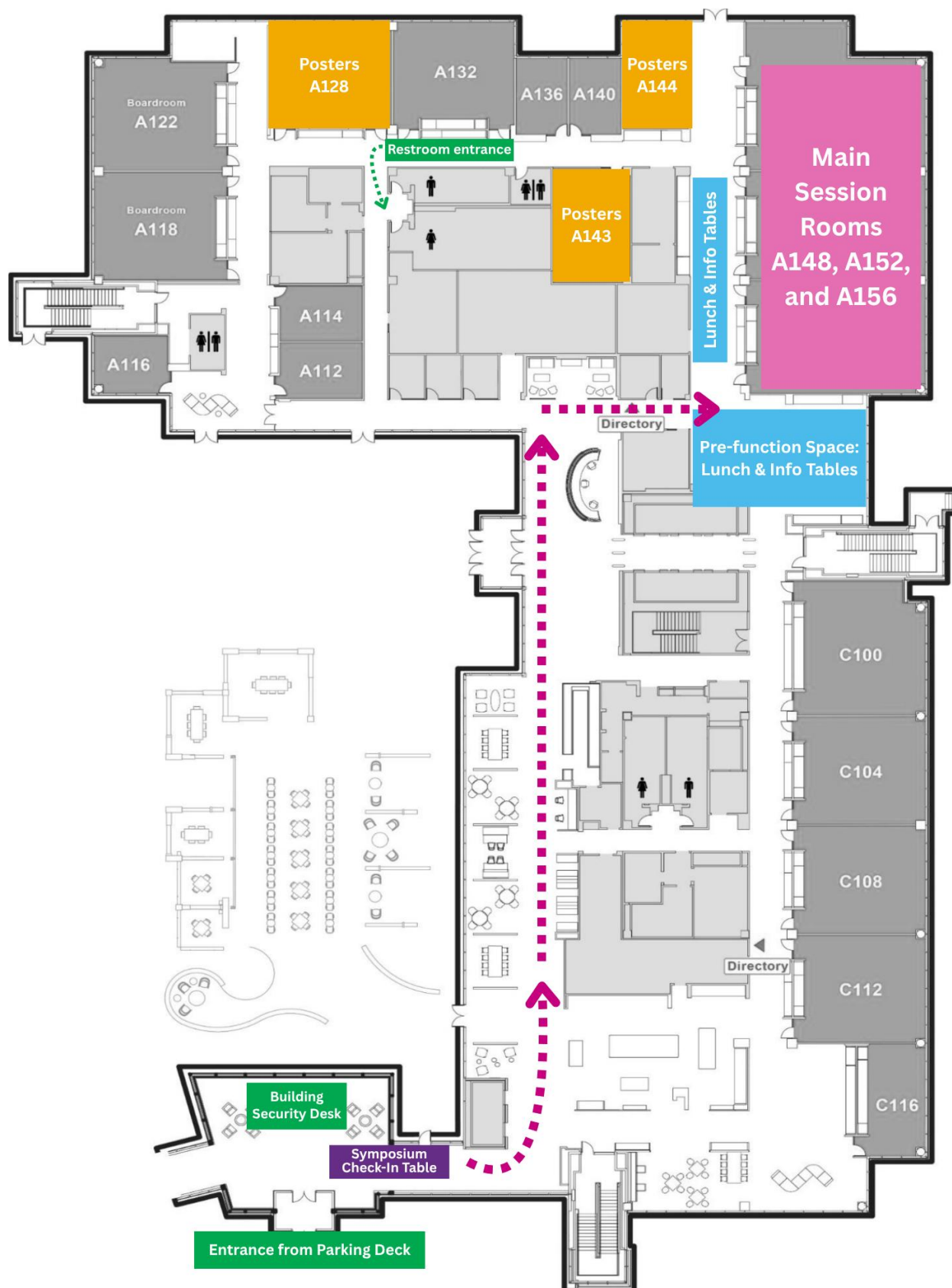
September 18, 2026

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Support Center

Presented by:



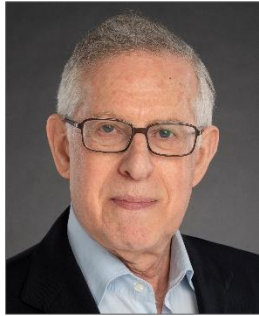
SYMPOSIUM MAP



AGENDA

9:30 – 10:00	Check-In and Continental Breakfast
10:00 – 10:05	Opening Remarks
	Timothy R. Gershon, MD, PhD Professor of Pediatrics Director, Children's Center for Neurosciences Research Emory University School of Medicine Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Jessica Raper, PhD Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Neurology Division Associate Director, Children's Center for Neurosciences Research Emory University School of Medicine Core Scientist, Emory National Biomedical Research Center
10:05 – 10:30	Advancing Rare Neuroinflammatory Disease Research Through a Rare Disease Clinical Research Network: ARISEN
	Grace Gombolay, MD, MSc, FAAN, FCNS Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Division of Pediatric Neurology Director, Pediatric Neuroimmunology and Multiple Sclerosis Clinic Emory University School of Medicine Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
10:35 – 11:00	KIDS-STAT: A Collaborative Clinical Research Model for Accelerating Neuroscience in Pediatric Traumatic Brain Injury
	Laura S. Blackwell, PhD, ABPP-CN Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Neurosurgery, Emory University School of Medicine Neuropsychologist, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
11:00 – 11:15	Break
11:15 – 12:00	Keynote: Why Academic Study Groups Are Essential to Therapeutic Development for Rare Neurologic Disorders: The Example of Spinal Muscular Atrophy
	Richard S. Finkel, MD Director, Center for Experimental Neurotherapeutics George J. Pedersen Endowed Chair in Neurotherapeutics Department of Genomic and Translational Neuroscience St. Jude Children's Research Hospital
12:00 – 1:20	Poster Session, Lunch, and Info Tables
	View the abstract book HERE
1:20 – 1:30	Poster Awards and Closing Remarks

SPEAKERS



Richard S. Finkel, MD, is Director of the Center for Experimental Neurotherapeutics at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, Tennessee, USA. He received his undergraduate degree in Chemistry from Washington and Jefferson College and his MD degree from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, then completed training in pediatrics, neurology and neuromuscular medicine at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. His clinical practice and research interests have focused on genetic disorders in children affecting nerve and muscle development, especially spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), muscular dystrophies, inherited neuropathies, and metabolic disorders. Dr. Finkel has participated in over 50 clinical trials to better understand these diseases, create tools to measure the safety and impact of new treatments, and investigate new drugs for these serious diseases. Current interests include early identification and treatment of babies with SMA through newborn screening and exploring the potential of delivering prenatal therapy to the fetus. He has published over 300 peer-reviewed manuscripts and book chapters and is an associate editor for a leading textbook and medical journals. Dr. Finkel has received several awards for his research and teaching including the Bengt Hagberg memorial lecture in 2017, the Sidney Carter Child Neurology Award from the American Academy of Neurology in 2018, and was a co-awardee of the International Prize for Translational Neuroscience of the Gertrud Reemtsma Foundation of the Max Planck Institute in 2019. He was elected to the Association of American Physicians and named to the Time100 most influential individuals in healthcare in 2025.



Laura Blackwell, PhD, ABPP-CN, is a board-certified pediatric neuropsychologist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) and Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Neurosurgery at Emory University School of Medicine. She co-directs the Pediatric Neuropsychology Fellowship Program at CHOA and serves as one of the principal investigators in the Pediatric Neurotrauma Lab, a joint CHOA–Emory research effort. Her research centers on examining acute and chronic biological markers of injury, with particular interest in inflammatory markers and whether their elevation, potentially reflecting secondary injury cascades, predicts worse outcomes. Her work looks beyond biology alone, examining how a child's premorbid psychological, behavioral, and environmental history interacts with injury severity to shape recovery trajectories.



Grace Gombolay, MD, MSc, FAAN, FCNS is an Associate Professor at Emory University and Director of the Pediatric Neuroimmunology and Multiple Sclerosis Clinic at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. She completed medical school at Johns Hopkins, pediatric neurology residency at MassGeneral Hospital and then fellowship in pediatric multiple sclerosis (MS) and neuroimmunology at Harvard, Boston Children's, and MassGeneral Brigham. She has expertise in neuroinflammatory diseases. She is MPI of an NIH U54 Rare Disease Clinical Research Network called ARISEN, which is a multi-center prospective patient neuroinflammatory registry for autoimmune encephalitis, Rasmussen syndrome, and NORSE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who generously contributed their time, expertise, and support to this event!



Symposium Sponsors:

Alexion Pharmaceuticals
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Planning Committee:

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Jessica Raper, PhD
Gillian Glauber
Stacy Heilman, PhD

Neal Laxpati, MD, PhD
Bryan Philbrook, MD
Yuri Shishido, PhD, ABPP

Poster Judges:

Nisarg Desai, PhD
Stacy Heilman, PhD
Fiza Laheji, MD
David Marcus, PhD, ABPP-CN

Jessica Raper, PhD
Mar Sanchez, PhD
Yuri Shishido, PhD, ABPP
Jennifer Wong, PhD

Info Table Representatives:

Anna Alford, CIP – Children’s IRB
Joshua Chandler, PhD – Pediatric Metabolomics & Biomarkers Core
Scott Gillespie, MS, MSPH – Pediatric Biostatistics Core
Julie Hawk, PhD & Megan Vallowe, PhD – Pediatric Research Development Core
Sarah Marie Huban, MA, CIP, CHRC – Clinical Trials
Mimi Le, PhD – Clinical and Translational Discovery Core
Nicole Pribut, PhD – Emory Center for New Medicines
Joy Staulcup – Center for Systems Imaging Core
Anisha Thompson, MPH, CIP – Emory IRB

Event Volunteer Team:

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Russ Dieter, MHA
Chelsea Driver, MS

Maryam Ehteshami, PhD
Mary Anne Geryak, MS

Thank you to all our presenters and attendees – your participation truly made this event special!

How did we do?

Please complete our brief feedback survey [HERE](#) to share your thoughts!

