



May 2026



+LiM Lab NEWSLETTER

Yá'át'ééh! (Welcome!)

Greetings to all from our +Language is Medicine Lab (+LiM Lab) team! We are so excited for this new phase of our work and to share the first issue of our newsletter series with you. There is a lot we want to share!

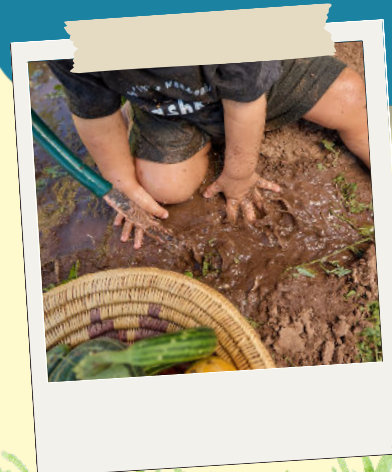
First, we would like to introduce ourselves. The +LiM Lab is the broad term used to refer to our different projects. Together, our main goal is to support children and their caregivers by providing resources for early language development. We are excited to formally introduce our lab and team members to you all.

In this newsletter, you will find the latest updates on our projects, community resources, and more about how we continue to support Indigenous children and their families. We wish you a warm and colorful spring!

Ahéhee' (Thank you)

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What is the +LiM Lab?

We are a range of individuals from all different backgrounds and education who are passionate in providing early childhood intervention to prevent delays in young children. We strongly believe in positive child/caregiver interactions. All while honoring Indigenous caregiving practices.

+Language is Medicine Lab is a broad term for our different projects that fall under our lab.

First, we have the **ASCENDING Beyond Barriers** study. This study aims to examine the successes and challenges experienced by families living on and off tribal lands. A better understanding of the challenges families face when accessing services for their child with communication disorders will allow us to better target and support their needs in these specific areas.

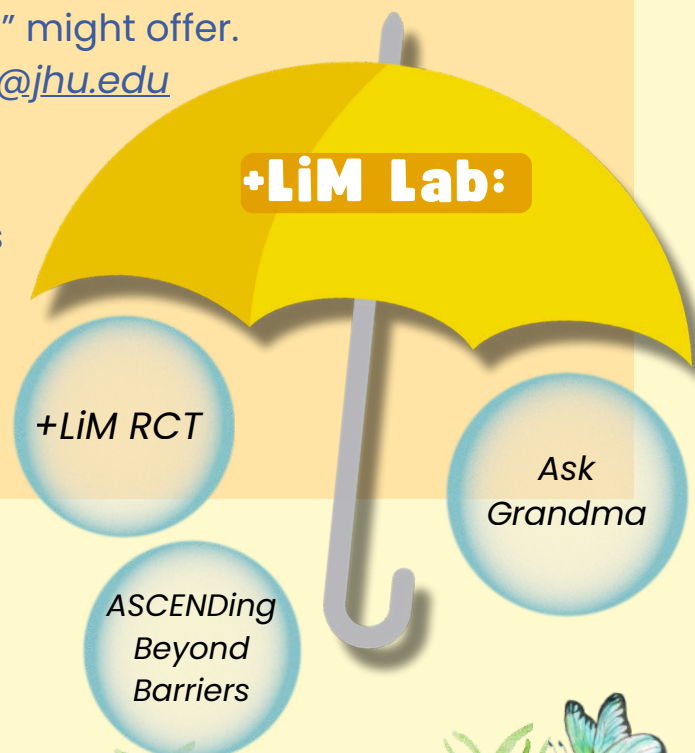
Contact: Kristen Tallis at ktallis1@jhu.edu

Next, we have the **Ask Grandma Project**. In this project, we developed a mobile health education app that uses an AI-based response system. Caregivers can ask questions about their child's developmental milestones, and the app provides feedback in a compassionate and easy-to-understand way, similar to what a "grandma" might offer.

Contact: Joshua Allison-Burbank at jalliso8@jhu.edu

Lastly, we have the **+Language is Medicine Randomized Controlled Trial**. This study was generously funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). More details on the next page!

Contact: Jessica Meese at jmeese1@jh.edu



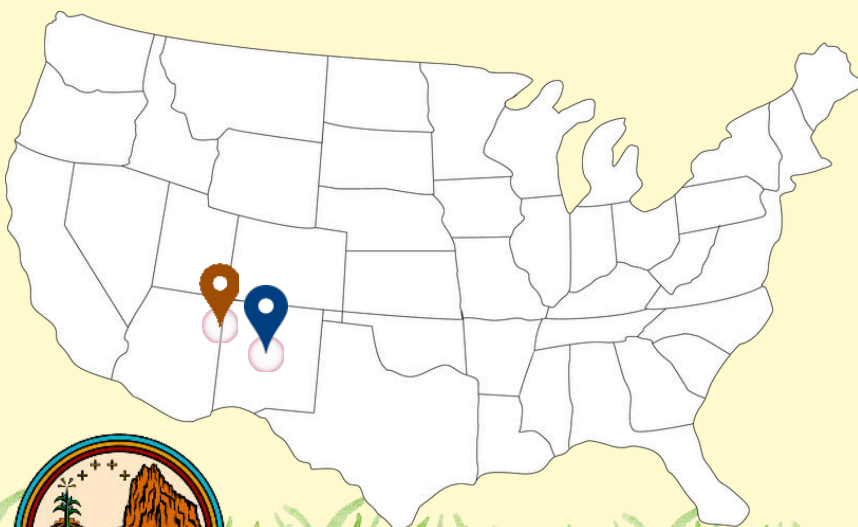


What is the +LiM: Randomized Controlled Trial?

The +Language is Medicine project began as a pilot study in Shiprock, NM, based on Dr. Allison-Burbank's work on the Navajo Nation, which indicated a strong need for early language support for Indigenous children and their families, as well as gaps in access to services and culturally responsive resources.

We received additional funding to extend our study to larger areas within the Navajo Nation. Currently, we have two +LiM home visiting teams. One is based in **Albuquerque, NM, to serve the Eastern Agency**. The second is based in **Fort Defiance, AZ, to serve the Fort Defiance agency**.

During these home visits, our health educators will provide caregivers of infants and toddlers ages 9–24 months with a five-lesson curriculum. Screening tools will track each child's progress over time. After completion of the lessons, a three-month follow-up session will be conducted, and results will be shared with participating families. If additional support is needed, we will provide information about local early intervention programs.



ASCENDING Beyond Barriers:

The ASCENDING Beyond Barriers: Advancing Equity in Early Intervention for Native Infants and Toddlers Study Project (funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the National Institutes of Health) aims to understand how early intervention (EI) systems work for Native families with young children and where gaps exist. The team is building partnerships with tribal communities and EI programs in Oregon, Arizona, Minnesota and Florida, developed interview tools, and is currently conducting cognitive interviews with Native providers to make sure questions are clear, respectful, and relevant. These early steps are helping shape a study that reflects real community experiences. The project will begin recruiting participants this summer 2026 to learn directly from caregivers and providers. Our recent hire is Kristen Tallis, MPH who serves as the study coordinator.

Ask Grandma:

Over the past two years, Ask Grandma, Inc. (funded by NE Arc and Remarkable Accelerator) has grown from an idea into a working app prototype designed to help Native families with infants and toddlers support their children's development. The app includes simple tools like milestone tracking, short learning tips, and a "Grandma" chatbot for guidance, all shaped by input from families and early childhood providers to make sure it feels useful and culturally relevant. The team has secured early funding and is now working to finish the full version of the app. They are seeking additional funding to complete development and testing, with plans for a soft launch in Fall 2026 and to partner with tribal home visiting programs to try the app in real-world settings.

+Language is Medicine RCT:

Our team of health educators are currently completing virtual training modules in preparation for working with families. Our larger team will gather in May for in-person training in Albuquerque, NM. We are in the process of submitting our initial application to Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) with Johns Hopkins University and the Navajo Nation.



Meet Our Team!



Joshua Allison-Burbank, PhD, CCC-SLP

Diné/Acoma

Principal Investigator/Speech-Language Pathologist
Albuquerque, NM

Jessica Meese, MS, CCC-SLP

Diné

Speech-Language Pathologist/Senior Research
Coordinator
Albuquerque, NM



Elizabeth Kushman, MPH

Co-Investigator/+LIM Curriculum Lead
Michigan

Lisa Martin, MPH

*Ojibwe Nation/Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of
Chippewa Indians*
Co-Investigator
Michigan



Natalie Pak, PhD, CCC-SLP

Speech-Language Pathologist/Co-
Investigator
University of South Florida

Felix Muñiz, PhD

*Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian
Community*
Statistician
Arizona/Hawaii





Jay Buzhardt, PhD

Co-Investigator
University of Kansas



Kimberly Belone

Diné
Fort Defiance Site Coordinator
Fort Defiance, AZ



Kristen Tallis, MPH

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Research Associate/ABQ Site Coordinator
Albuquerque, NM



Justin Giehm

Diné
+LiM Health Educator
Albuquerque, NM



Tonya Tolino

Diné
+LiM Health Educator
Albuquerque, NM



Ashelyne Toledo

Diné
+LiM Health Educator
Fort Defiance, AZ



Valorie Coho-Mescal

Diné
+LiM Health Educator
Fort Defiance, AZ



Community Highlight

1. If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

2. What is your favorite movie quote?



Joshua Allison-Burbank PhD, CCC-SLP

1. My superpower would be to be in two places at once. I would love to be in the cornfield planting and growing while also being at circle time with Native preschool children.

2. My favorite movie quote is: "You got a dream. You gotta protect it... If you want somethin', go get it. Period." - The Pursuit of Happyness (2006)

Resources

Upcoming Events:

- May 20, 2026: +LiM Community Advisory Board Meeting on Zoom
- June 15-18, 2026: Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board Conference in Tsaile, AZ

More events will be shared in the next newsletter!

Diné Bizaad Spotlight:

Language (saad) is how your child uses their understanding and knowledge of words to communicate their ideas, wants, and needs



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