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Editorial: Educational approaches for promoting neurodivergent health, well-being, and thriving across the life course

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Educational approaches for promoting neurodivergent health, well-being, and thriving across the life course](#)

Neurodivergent individuals—including those with autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, and other developmental differences—are underserved in health and education sectors. To date, health and education services and supports are largely siloed in that they are implemented and evaluated in their respective areas and, as a result, do not provide holistic support. In addition, most of the education and healthcare supports for this population are developed according to the medical model of disability. As a result, there are limited neurodiversity-oriented supports that align with health-promotion, support educational achievement, and ultimately seek to promote wellbeing and thriving.

In response to these gaps in research, clinical practice, and education, we put forth a Research Topic focused on educational approaches for promoting the health, wellbeing, and thriving of neurodivergent individuals across the life course. The purpose of our Research Topic was 2-fold: (1) to highlight promising approaches and evidence-based strategies for improving health, wellbeing, and thriving for those with disabilities in educational settings, programs, or interventions; and (2) to identify barriers or challenges to developing, implementing, evaluating, scaling, or sustaining such approaches.

This Research Topic is comprised of eight innovative research articles that offer important contributions to the field. These contributions align with broader efforts to rupture siloes between education and health disciplines for those with disabilities and adopt a neurodiversity-oriented lens. Many of these articles reflect collaborations across neurotypes, prioritize lived experience as an essential form of expertise and knowledge, and are in service of the primary goal of the neurodiversity movement: to support the quality of life, health, wellbeing, and thriving of neurodivergent people. Importantly, these articles span the life course, with articles focusing on childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood.

The intersection between health and education is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the [Rizk et al.](#) article. The authors utilized the National Survey of Children's Health to test the association between current educational service use and six medical home primary

care components. In light of their findings, the authors called for greater coordination between these systems and generated recommendations to advance this goal. The authors' utilization of a large and robust dataset increases the impact and generalizability of these findings.

Several of the articles presented in this Research Topic shed light on the overlapping health and education needs, experiences, and perspectives of autistic college students—a rapidly increasing yet underserved population. First, [Nelson et al.](#) published a scoping review of 156 international studies that aimed to identify, map, and characterize literature that enumerates and describes supports for autistic post-secondary students. This review noted that college campuses lack support regarding communication, vocational, financial, and sexual health. This review also highlighted important next steps for higher education institutions, including bolstering access to services and individualized supports, addressing stigma, enhancing interpersonal connections on college campuses, and diversifying the accommodations offered. Second, a needs assessment study with undergraduate students from [Hotez et al.](#) further emphasized the ongoing need to address stigma toward neurodivergent people in post-secondary environments, despite increased awareness and acceptance of neurodivergence on college campuses.

Two additional articles centered their analyses on the intersections of health and education earlier in development, with a focus on adolescence and youth. [Gillespie-Lynch et al.](#) describes a participatory approach to iteratively adapting a game design workshop to empower autistic youth and promote self-determination—a key developmental capacity for neurodivergent individuals in both education and healthcare. In addition to highlighting the utility of interest-based informal learning supports, this research highlighted the value of utilizing multi-modal assessment strategies in evaluating these and other neurodiversity-aligned intervention programs. Other articles in this Research Topic further support the utility of tailored educational approaches and their implications for health and wellbeing. As an example, [Pugatch et al.](#) examined the engagement of adolescents with ADHD in a narrative-centered game-based program to prevent and address substance use in this population.

A critical component of health and education programs is cultural relevance. Indeed, many of the studies highlight the importance of tailored and individualized approaches that address the intersection of other identities and statuses with neurodivergence. [Lindly et al.](#) describes the adaptation of the Parents Taking Action program for Dine (Navajo) parents of autistic children. This article shed light on the importance of community engagement in creating and enhancing programming to support neurodivergent individuals and their families.

Taken together, this Research Topic highlights the importance of developing, implementing, and evaluating services, supports,

and programs for neurodivergent individuals, particularly during key developmental periods. These supports should be individualized and tailored utilizing community engagement and participatory methods. Ideally, such supports would address intersectionality, cultural factors, and systemic barriers to health, wellbeing, and thriving in both health and educational settings. Assessment approaches that deploy multiple modalities can ensure more inclusive studies that reflect a more diverse sample of neurodivergent individuals. We look forward to witnessing the advancement of the research, clinical practice, and education recommended in this Research Topic.

Author contributions

EH: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **HB:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **LS:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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