

OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION

MIT Department of Economics
 77 Massachusetts Avenue, E52-301
 Cambridge, MA 02139
alden15@mit.edu
<https://aldencheng.com>

HOME CONTACT INFORMATION

1107 S 4th Street, Apt 3
 Champaign, IL 61820
 Mobile: 510-520-9675

MIT PLACEMENT OFFICER

Professor Stephen Morris
semorris@mit.edu
 617-253-5193

MIT PLACEMENT ADMINISTRATOR

Mrs. Shannon Robinson
shmay@mit.edu
 617-324-5857

EMPLOYMENT	National Bureau of Economic Research Postdoctoral Research Associate (with David Molitor)	2023-present
	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Gies Health Initiatives Research Scholar	2023-present
EDUCATION	Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Economics PhD, Economics <i>Advisors: Amy Finkelstein, Alberto Abadie, Jonathan Gruber</i>	2017-2023
	University of California, Berkeley BA, Applied Mathematics, Economics, Statistics <i>Highest Distinction in General Scholarship</i>	2012-2016
REFERENCES	Professor Amy Finkelstein MIT Department of Economics 50 Memorial Drive, Building E52 Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142 afink@mit.edu	Professor David Molitor University of Illinois 340 Wohlers Hall, 1206 S. Sixth St. Champaign, IL 61820 dmolitor@illinois.edu
	Professor Julian Reif University of Illinois 340 Wohlers Hall, 1206 S. Sixth St. Champaign, IL 61820 jreif@illinois.edu	
FIELDS	Primary Field: Health Economics Secondary Fields: Applied Econometrics, Labor Economics	
SEMINAR/ CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS	ASSA Annual Meeting (scheduled)	2027
	NBER Summer Institute Workshop on Aging	2026
	NBER Emerging Challenges in Long-Term Care and Caregiving	
	NBER Economics of Chronic Disease	
	NBER Health and Healthcare Variations across the Population	
	NBER Economics of AD/ADRD Meeting (poster)	
	Annual Health Economics Conference	
	Economic Science Association 2026 World Meetings	
	American Society of Health Economists	

MIT Economics

ALDEN CHENG

OCTOBER 2026-- PAGE 2

	Economics of Mental Health Workshop	
	Advances with Field Experiments	
	Midwest Health Economics Conference (discussant)	
	Midwest Economics Association Conference	
	CausNetS, Satellite of NetSci 2026	
	University of Illinois Chicago	2025
	Imperial College London	
	Midwest Econometrics Group Conference	
	Advances with Field Experiments	
	Indiana University Bloomington	2024
	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Econometrics Seminar)	
	American Society of Health Economists	
	Midwest Health Economics Conference	
	University of Massachusetts Amherst (online)	
	Seoul National University	2023
	Yonsei University	
	International Health Economics Association Webinar	
PROFESSIONAL SERVICE	<i>Referee:</i> American Economic Review; American Economic Review: Insights; Review of Economics and Statistics; American Economic Journal: Economic Policy; Journal of the European Economic Association; Journal of Public Economics; Journal of Health Economics; American Journal of Health Economics; The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy; Review of Economics of the Household	
FUNDING, FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS	NBER Research on the Economics of Alzheimer's/Dementia (READ) Grant, with Martin Hackmann. Co-PI (award pending). <i>The Economics of Roommate Assignment for Individuals with AD/ADRD: Implications for Spending, Resident Outcomes, and Care Delivery.</i>	2026
	Best Paper in Aging and Long-Term Care at the American Society of Health Economists (ASHEcon) Conference	2026
	Best Paper Award at the Economics of Mental Health Workshop	2026
	Sahin (1963) Presidential Fellowship, MIT	2017
	Mark A. Schimbor Prize:	2016
	Best Undergraduate Research in Economics, UC Berkeley	
	Steve Goldman Memorial Prize:	2016
	Highest Academic Achievement in Economics, UC Berkeley	
	University Medal Finalist, UC Berkeley	2016
	Percy Lionel Davis Award:	2016
	Excellence in Scholarship in Mathematics, UC Berkeley	
	Dean's Honors, UC Berkeley	2013-2015

RESEARCH PAPERS

Patient Peer Effects: Evidence from Nursing Home Room Assignments

(with Martin Hackmann). **Job Market Paper**. NBER Working Paper 34538.

We provide causal evidence that peer effects among nursing home roommates generate mortality impacts comparable to provider quality differences. Using room availability at the time of admission as instruments for room assignments, we estimate that assignment to a roommate with dementia increases 90-day mortality by 7%, relative to being assigned no roommate. Effects differ sharply by patient type: patients with dementia benefit substantially from cognitively healthy roommates, whereas mortality of patients without dementia does not depend on roommates' cognitive health, implying a unidirectional positive externality. We find that room assignment policies that exploit peer effects can reduce mortality by 4%.

The Illusion of Health Care Exceptionalism? Evidence from Nursing Homes. Under Review.

Limited consumer responsiveness to provider quality has long been viewed as a defining feature of health care markets. I show that this apparent exceptionalism partly reflects a failure to distinguish consumer preferences from provider-imposed constraints on access. I estimate mortality-based nursing home value-added, validate the estimates with a distance-based IV, and incorporate them into a structural model of consumer demand and selective admissions by nursing homes. Conventional demand estimates imply zero demand for quality on average, whereas accounting for unobserved rejections reveals positive but modest demand. Despite supply-side constraints, counterfactual simulations suggest that demand-side interventions can improve allocation and outcomes.

From Peer Effects to Network Evolution: Evidence from the Illinois

Workplace Wellness Study (with Damon Jones, David Molitor, and Julian Reif)

We randomly assigned eligibility and financial incentives for a two-year workplace wellness program to 4,834 employees. Friendship network data were collected at baseline and again one and two years after randomization. Participation in health screenings rose by 4.2 percentage points for each additional coworker assigned to treatment, and by 6.4 percentage points for each additional coworker induced to participate as a result of treatment. The program also shaped network dynamics: eligibility increased the probability of being listed as a coworker by others in subsequent years by 9 percent, and the intervention increased network homophily along some dimensions. Behavioral spillovers amplified the effect of the intervention on screening participation by 6 percent, while dynamic spillovers through network evolution increased future participation by about 0.8 percent of baseline.

Racial Segregation and Disparities Across Nursing Homes: Mechanisms, Interactions, and Policy Tradeoffs

Racial minorities are disproportionately admitted to lower-quality nursing homes, but the forces generating segregation across facilities need not be the same as those generating racial gaps in quality. Using nationwide administrative data on nursing home residents in the U.S. from 2000–2010, I show that neighborhood sorting explains an important share of across-facility

segregation, yet substantial disparities remain in the quality of nursing homes that different racial groups are admitted to, even conditional on fixed effects for zip code of prior residence. I then document three additional mechanisms that may drive across-facility segregation and disparities: (i) race-based admissions policies, where nursing homes become less likely to admit minority residents when capacity is strained; (ii) in-group preferences, whereby shocks to the minority share at nursing homes lead to persistent changes in the racial composition, and (iii) heterogeneity in responsiveness to quality, where information shocks lead to larger changes in where White residents are admitted. To quantify the contributions of these explanations, I estimate a two-sided matching model with latent choice set constraints in three large states, using distance and short-run within-facility occupancy shocks for identification. Counterfactual simulations show that neighborhood sorting and race-based admissions policies are complementary drivers of segregation: while the sum of their individual contributions accounts for just over one-half of segregation, eliminating both simultaneously reduces segregation by 85–90 percent. In contrast, the drivers of disparities do not always align with drivers of segregation and vary substantially across states as well as between Black-White and Hispanic-White comparisons within states, implying that policies which reduce segregation need not reduce—and may even worsen—disparities for some minority groups.

Avoiding Regulation: Evidence from Nursing Homes (with Riley League). NBER Working Paper 35849.

We study strategic responses by firms to threshold-based regulations. We document extensive bunching in response to additional staffing requirements for California nursing homes with at least 100 beds. To estimate the regulation's effect on staffing, we develop a novel treatment-effects estimator for threshold-based regulations under precise manipulation, by decomposing firms into response types based on counterfactual and realized staffing and size, separating causal effects from selection. We estimate that higher staffing above the threshold is nearly entirely due to selection, with low-staffing facilities manipulating their size to avoid the regulation. These size distortions limit access, particularly for disadvantaged patients.

Estimation of Regression Discontinuity and Kink Designs with Multiple Running Variables [R Package]

In regression discontinuity designs with multiple running variables (MRD), units are assigned different treatments based on whether their values on several observed running variables exceed known thresholds. In such designs, applied work commonly analyzes each running variable separately, estimating a single-dimensional RD design in the first running variable after limiting the sample to the set of individuals qualifying on the second threshold, and vice versa. In this paper, I propose a new estimator for MRD designs using thin plate splines that improves upon the applied practice in two ways. First, the estimator can be used to estimate the conditional average treatment effect at every point on the boundary separating treated and untreated units, and second, it provides efficiency gains by using the entire sample. I also develop analogous estimators for multidimensional regression kink (MRK) and multidimensional regression discontinuity/kink (MRDK) designs. I establish

theoretical properties for these estimators, before presenting simulation results showing that they perform well in finite samples. Finally, I demonstrate the performance of my MRD estimator with two empirical applications: Londoño-Vélez, Rodríguez, and Sánchez (2020) on the effect of financial aid on college enrollment, and Keele and Titiunik (2015) on the effect of political ads on election turnout. Open-source software is available for implementing the proposed methods.

Selection on Unobservables in Discrete Choice Models

Selection on unobservables is an important concern for causal inference in observational studies, and accordingly, previous papers have developed methods for sensitivity analysis for OLS, binary choice models, instrumental variables, and movers designs. In this paper, I develop methods for sensitivity analysis for a setting that has not been previously studied — discrete choice models. In particular, I derive bounds for the omitted variables bias under an assumption about how much the consumer values the omitted variable(s) relative to the included control variables, and about the relationship between the omitted variable and the variable of interest. I provide theoretical results for my bounding procedure, and demonstrate its performance in simulations. Finally, I show in several empirical applications that my procedure produces economically meaningful bounds.

PAST WORK

Does Fake News Affect Voting Behavior? Evidence from Big College Football Games

Challenges in Measuring Mental Health Trends

Cigarette Consumption and Tax Salience

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Mixed Beam Murine Harderian Gland Tumorigenesis: Predicted Dose-Effect Relationships if neither Synergism nor Antagonism Occurs (with Nopphon Siranart, Eleanor A. Blakely, Naval Handa, and Rainer K. Sachs). *Radiation Research*, 2016.

RELEVANT POSITIONS

Research Assistant to Professor Nikhil Agarwal	2018
Research Assistant to Professor Amy Finkelstein	2017
Research Assistant to Professor David Card	2016
Research Assistant to Professor Stefano DellaVigna	2016

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

14.01 Principles of Microeconomics	2022
Teaching Assistant to Professor Sara Ellison	
14.01 Principles of Microeconomics	2020
Teaching Assistant to Professor Jonathan Gruber	
14.30 Introduction to Statistical Methods in Economics	2020
Teaching Assistant to Professor Alberto Abadie	

CITIZENSHIP

Singapore

GENDER: Male

LANGUAGES

English, Mandarin