Leveraging Community Expertise to Advance Health Equity

Speaker Biographies

Eva H. Allen is a senior research associate in the Health Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her work focuses on the effects of Medicaid policies and initiatives on disadvantaged populations, including people with chronic physical and mental health conditions, pregnant and postpartum women, and people with substance use disorders. Allen has played a key role in several federal demonstration evaluations, as well as research projects on a range of topics, including opioid use disorder and treatment, long-term care services and supports, and health care partnerships with other sectors to address the health and social needs of communities. Her current work also includes a focus on incorporating health and racial equity lens in research and policy analysis. Allen is experienced in qualitative research methods and adept at communicating complex policy issues and research findings to diverse audiences. Allen holds an MPP from George Mason University, with emphasis in social policy.

June Gipson currently serves as the president and chief executive officer of My Brother’s Keeper Inc. in Ridgeland, Mississippi. She has worked in the public health arena for more than 20 years. During her tenure, she has worked diligently as an educator and health professional to implement an array of community-oriented programs that focus on improving the health and wellness of minority communities. Most recently, Gipson has expanded her service range into the clinical arena with the establishment of Mississippi’s first LGBTI primary health care clinic, Open Arms Healthcare Center. This vibrant, patient-focused health care center provides innovative, preventive, clinical, and mental health care services to underserved, underinsured, and underrepresented populations in Mississippi, with emphasis on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex communities. Gipson holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from the University of Southern Mississippi, a master’s degree in education administration from William Carey College, a specialist degree in education leadership, and a doctoral degree in philosophy in urban higher education from Jackson State University.

Deborah Golding is the lead project officer for the Health Equity Zone initiative (HEZ) within the Health Equity Institute at the Rhode Island Department of Health. In this role, Golding supports the implementation of the Health Equity Zone initiative through mentoring and empowering team members and serving as a conduit for community voices at the department to foster community leadership and power and elevate residents as experts in their lives. She serves as the initiative liaison to multiple internal and external programs and policy initiatives to advance health equity and improve the social and environmental determinants of health, including the department’s Racial Justice Roundtable and American Forests’ Tree Planting for Climate Resilience and Human Health project. She also spearheaded an inclusive, multiagency positive youth development initiative called Dare to Dream, which is now in its thirteenth year. Out of that effort came an annual conference, a nationally recognized youth advisory initiative, a youth internship program, and a credit-earning holistic health program for middle and high school students. Golding brings to her role a diverse background of prior experience in learning and special health care needs, adolescent transition to adulthood, holistic nutrition, and many years in the independent and college bookstore business. She holds a bachelor’s degree in community development and leadership and public administration from College Unbound through Charter Oak State College.
Maggie Gómez, is the Colorado state director for State Innovation Exchange (SiX), a national resource and strategy center that collaborates with state legislators to improve people’s lives through transformative public policy. Gómez has dedicated nearly two decades to grassroots community organizing with women and communities of color to build deep power for collective action and policy wins. Before SiX, she led grassroots organizing and policy efforts for paid sick leave and paid family medical leave insurance and led statewide policy tables and coalitions focused on achieving health justice and racial equity for immigrants and people of color in Colorado. Gómez is a deeply connected movement leader eager to support the leadership of people of color across the state. She earned a master’s degree in social work from the University of Denver.

Jennifer M. Haley is a research associate in the Urban Institute’s Health Policy Center. Haley’s current work includes assessing how states and communities can improve health equity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, barriers to enrollment in publicly subsidized health insurance coverage, coverage gaps for postpartum women, and challenges to accessing the safety net for children in immigrant families. She also conducts research on other issues related to Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and coverage and care for children and families. Haley holds a master’s degree in sociology from Temple University.

Mona Shah, a senior program officer in the Research-Evaluation-Learning unit, joined the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2014. As both a researcher and expert in health policy, Shah is involved in the process of understanding and measuring key health and health care issues essential to the foundation’s overarching strategy to move our nation toward a culture of health. Before joining the foundation, Shah served as associate director of federal relations at the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network in Washington. Her other prior experience includes leading epidemiologic research at the United States Military Cancer Institute, the New York City Department of Health, and the School of Public Health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. Her published research covers cancer disparities, incidence and mortality, tobacco use, obesity, asthma, and use of and access to clinical prevention services. Shah is a founder of Subcontinental Drift, a nationwide South Asian American artistic coalition that fosters and provides a supportive and inclusive community for creative expression, community engagement, and positive social change. Shah earned her bachelor’s degree in biology and society from Cornell University, a master’s degree in epidemiology from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and a doctoral degree in epidemiology from the George Washington University.

Hemi Tewarson is the executive director of the National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP), a nonpartisan forum of policymakers throughout state governments learning, leading, and implementing innovative solutions to health policy challenges. Tewarson joined NASHP from the Duke University Margolis Center for Health Policy, where she had been a leader of the center’s emerging state policy portfolio, including COVID-19 testing and containment, vaccine distribution and education, coverage and health system reform, Medicaid system improvements, and addressing equity within and beyond the pandemic. Previously, Tewarson served as the director of the Health Division at the National Governors Association’s Center for Best Practices, overseeing a broad project portfolio including Medicaid transformation and coverage, Medicaid data systems, health care delivery and payment system reform, workforce, opioids, behavioral health, and social determinants of health. She also served as senior attorney for the Office of the General Counsel at the US Government Accountability Office, where she addressed Medicaid and related health care topics for members of Congress. Tewarson holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and a master of public health degree and juris doctor degree from the George Washington University.