

# Advancing Rural Health Equity through Partnerships, Data, and Finance

## Speaker Biographies

### Opening Remarks

**Rekha Balu**, is the director of federal equity initiatives and co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she leads research and policy programs that deploy analytics and evidence to inform federal agencies on how to advance equity. Balu joins Urban from MDRC, where she was a senior fellow and director of the Center for Applied Behavioral Science. She launched a portfolio of studies and designed interventions tackling challenges in human services, K-12 education, and the transition to postsecondary education. She has partnered with federal agencies and grantees around the country to help them base their decisions on data and evidence. In 2019, as a fellow with the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the US General Services Administration, she developed trainings, intervention designs, and field trials for federal agencies. She has an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, a master of education degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a master's degree in economics from Stanford University. She earned her doctorate in the economics of education from Stanford University.

**Elaine Crutchfield**, is the Director of Program Support Services at Communities Unlimited. Dr. Crutchfield joined Communities Unlimited (CU) in October of 2001. She leads the Healthy Foods Program, GIS Mapping, Research and Data Analysis, IT and Communications. She specializes in evaluation, program development, geospatial data and information, data administration, training, curriculum design, and organizational assessment. Under Dr. Crutchfield's leadership, CU continues to advance and be at the forefront of IT; Communications is telling the story of underserved people and communities with a multichannel approach, including a podcast. She began leading the Healthy Foods Program after its launch and began partnering with community champions, local partners and farmers to address food deserts and health disparities in the Mississippi River Delta. CU's GIS Mapping services have expanded and work with communities and water and sewer systems in collaboration with CU's Environmental Services and Community Sustainability Programs. Dr. Crutchfield is collecting and disseminating research and data analysis of decades of data collected by Communities Unlimited's staff in rural areas to illustrate trends better and identify correlations with national data.

**Tom Morris**, is the Associate Administrator for Rural Health Policy in the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In that role, Tom oversees the work of the Office of Rural Health Policy, which is charged with advising the Secretary on rural health issues. The Office, which has an annual budget of \$317 million, administers a range of research and capacity-building grant programs that serve rural communities. In 2015, Tom received the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service. A North Carolina native, Tom came into government as a Presidential Management Intern and has work experience in the U.S. Senate as well as various policy and program positions within HRSA and HHS.

### Panel - Financing Rural Health Equity: Ways to Address Needs

**Emily Burleson**, is an Advocacy & Research Project Manager at Partners for Rural Transformation. She researches and advocates for rural regions of persistent poverty and the CDFIs serving these regions by

mobilizing capital where it typically does not flow. She advocates and researches a broad swath of topics and sectors, including affordable housing, financing community projects, disaster resilience, reliable infrastructure, and more. She is a recent graduate of George Mason University's Master of Social Work Program. While in undergraduate and graduate school she worked and assisted on several research studies. Emily also has experience in the disaster-relief field, as she previously was a Disaster Resilience Coordinator for Eastern Kentucky communities. She strives in her professional and personal life for a thriving rural America that is healthy, safe, and sustainable foundation, from which, will generate local and familial wealth.

**Alex Lawson**, is the Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at HOPE. Leveraging more than a decade of experience in leading strategic economic mobility initiatives at high-performing social impact firms, Alex has helped deploy more than \$200 million to communities of color by creating programs that aim to close the opportunity gap in homeownership, entrepreneurship, education, food systems, climate justice, and financial services. In his current role, Alex leads a team of project managers and supports the executive leadership team in developing and implementing the corporate strategy. Before joining HOPE, Alex worked in corporate finance and founded a college preparatory middle school in Jackson, MS, where he currently resides and plays an active role in the community. In 2019, Alex was appointed by the Mayor of Jackson to chair the Board of Commissioners for the Jackson Redevelopment Authority. He also serves as the Chairman of Mississippi Votes and works internationally with numerous economic justice and human rights advocacy groups. Alex graduated from Millsaps College, earning a bachelor's degree and MBA from the college's Else School of Management.

**Bonita Robertson-Hardy**, is a workforce and economic development professional committed to connecting the public sector, private sector, and nonprofit communities. Since joining the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group in 2021, Bonita has worked to highlight the importance of equitable rural prosperity by lifting up the diverse voices of rural practitioners and researchers. A native of New Orleans, Bonita works to build relationships, influence policy, and advocate for equity and opportunity in public and private organizations.

**Katrina Badger**, is a program officer with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, focusing on efforts to support healthy, equitable communities. At the heart of this work is creating social, economic, and environmental conditions that allow communities and their residents to thrive. She brings a particular focus on marginalized communities and populations. Currently, Katrina is engaged in the Foundation's work to understand the unique opportunities and challenges of supporting thriving rural communities and regions where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. She previously led the 2016 strategic assessment of the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps program, which compares the health of nearly 3,000 counties in the United States and supports local community efforts to tackle the social, economic, and environmental influences on health, and continues to play a lead role in setting the strategic direction of the program. Katrina joined the Foundation as a program associate in 2014 to support the integration of efforts to achieve health equity and foster adoption of global lessons across the Foundation's work. Before joining the Foundation, Katrina was senior associate at Grant Thornton where she served as the primary developer of a large-scale initiative to assess the effectiveness of psychological health programs across the Department of Defense, and led a team supporting the Defense Health Board, which provides independent recommendations on health programs, policy, and research to the Secretary of Defense. In prior roles as a neighborhood liaison with the New Orleans Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Engagement and as director of operations for a non-profit, REACH NOLA, Katrina worked to improve access to, and quality of, programs and services for the poorest and most marginalized people

in New Orleans. Her early years providing direct care and interpretation/translation services in a variety of health and mental health settings ignited her passion for this work.

### **Panel - Promising Models to Address Rural Health Challenges**

**Patty B. Molina**, MPH is the Senior Director of Community Health Services at Mariposa Community Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center in Nogales, Arizona. The department was founded in 1991 and has a well-established Community Health Worker delivery model to implement a spectrum of health promotion and disease prevention programs based on model programs and best practices adapted to the Spanish-speaking, Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant community served in Santa Cruz County Arizona. Ms. Molina has developed and managed federal, state, and foundation funded community-based programs at the US-Mexico border. She has implemented numerous health education programs on breast cancer, colorectal cancer, diabetes, physical activity and nutrition, tobacco use prevention, asthma, environmental health, and maternal child health to name a few. She has designed education and training materials on public and preventative health issues for rural communities. Facilitated group process among community members to identify needs, gaps in service, existing resources, and response strategies. Ms. Molina has also served as the lead co-principal investigator in various research projects at Mariposa Community Health Center and currently serves as Co-chair for the University of Arizona's Prevention Research Center Community Action Board. A graduate of the University of Phoenix with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and a Master's in Public Health with a concentration in Community Health Leadership. Native to the Nogales area, she has been married to her husband Ramiro for 27 years and raised three daughters.

**Mary Otwell**, is a Licensed Certified Social Worker, the President of the School-Based Health Alliance of Arkansas, and the School-Based Health Clinics Coordinator for Little Rock School District in Little Rock, Arkansas. She earned her Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in 2014 and her Master of Social Work from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2017. She has worked in school-based health for the past five years and currently oversees four school-based health clinics including primary, dental, vision, telehealth, and behavioral health care. Mary serves over 60 school-based health clinics in her role as President.

**Allison Seigars**, is the Executive Director of Rural Health Projects, Inc. and serves as the Managing Director for the Rural Health Association of Oklahoma. Serving in both roles, she has developed and maintained many long-term partnerships with other individuals and organizations in the region and state. In addition to overseeing both organizations' operations and a staff of 13, Ms. Seigars serves on a variety of boards and committees throughout northwest Oklahoma. Ms. Seigars has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern Oklahoma State University and a Master of Science from Oklahoma State University. She is an active member of Central Christian Church, serving in a variety of roles. She enjoys traveling, reading, and spending time with her husband and three children, ages 10, 8, and 4.

**Anne Junod**, is a senior research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center's climate and communities practice area at the Urban Institute, where her research centers on the community dimensions of natural resource and energy development, access, and related justice and climate issues. Junod has conducted quantitative and qualitative research examining the social, environmental, and economic impacts of climate change and natural resource and energy development in urban and rural communities across the United States, focusing on risk, sociopsychological and economic impacts, energy transitions, and energy and environmental justice. Before joining Urban, Junod was a USDA-NIFA fellow, where she led a nationwide study of the community impacts of hydrocarbon export

activity and infrastructure in the United States. Junod has an MS in rural sociology from South Dakota State University and received her PhD in environment and natural resources specializing in environmental social science from Ohio State University's School of Environment and Natural Resources.

### **Panel - Partnerships for Identifying Needs and Tracking Progress on Promoting Rural Health Equity**

**Sydney Howard**, is the data analyst for the University of Kentucky Center of Excellence in Rural Health. Dr. Howard has over 15 years of experience working with rural populations, including her extensive research in rural healthcare workforce capacity. Dr. Howard's research has been used on the national and state legislative floors to support the expansion of student loan repayment programming in Kentucky. A native of eastern Kentucky, located in the beautiful Appalachian Mountains, Dr. Howard continues to be invested in her hometown. She is active in local civic initiatives and serves as an elected member of the local school board, where she hopes to inspire bright young minds to live and work in rural. Dr. Howard holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and a Master of Science in Experimental Psychology from Morehead State University. Dr. Howard completed her Doctorate in Public Health at Capella University.

**Carla Willis**, is a principal research associate at the Urban Institute. Willis previously served as the director of performance, quality, and outcomes within the Georgia Medicaid program, overseeing multi-disciplinary teams focused on predictive analytics, quality measurement, and performance improvement. Most recently, Willis designed two value-based purchasing programs for Medicaid members receiving managed care, while also working to define and operationalize improvement for the state's 2021 Quality Strategy. Willis serves on multiple committees, including the National Committee for Quality Assurance Technical Measurement Advisory Panel and the Georgia Maternal Mortality Review Committee. She is a member of the 2021-2022 Emerging Leaders Program funded by the Milbank Memorial Fund. She has recent publications in *Contraception* and *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. Much of her interests involve using health policy levers to improve maternal and child health outcomes and reducing the rate of maternal mortality, particularly for women of color in Medicaid programs. Prior to joining Georgia Medicaid, Willis was an associate project director at the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) where she led both the Medicaid Policy and Business Team and GHPC's Health Reform Work Group. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Office of the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and worked as a health policy analyst at the Government Accountability Office.

**Anna Morgan**, is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center. Her research interests include accessibility to public transportation, affordable housing, evictions, and racial equity. Before joining Urban, Morgan worked as a research assistant in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. Her projects focused on the revitalization of shrinking cities in the Rust Belt and the water affordability crisis across U.S. cities. Morgan holds a BA in American studies with a concentration in urban studies and a minor in music from Wellesley College.

### **Closing Remarks**

**Corianne Payton Scally**, is a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute where she explores affordable housing and community development policy and practice from large cities to rural towns. From evaluating federal programs to assessing philanthropic investments, Scally's research focuses on multiple social determinants of health—from the affordable housing supply to quality drinking water to access to health and human services—and the policy environments and stakeholder capacities that affect community opportunity and well-being. Scally leads

mixed method research projects, directing extensive primary data collection via site visits, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, and analysis of secondary and administrative data to evaluate program processes, performance, and outcomes. Recent studies have focused on how technical assistance is provided to housing organizations, how service coordination works for residents of public housing, how to preserve and increase affordable rental housing supply through innovative finance and collaboration, and how to improve rural data and support asset-based development via a national typology of rural census tracts. Her work has been published in books, research reports, policy briefs, and refereed journals and featured on NPR, Marketplace, the Washington Post, and USA Today. She started her career as a housing and community economic developer and earned tenure as an associate professor of urban planning. From 2015-2016, she led data and research initiatives at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service under contract with the Urban Institute. She received her PhD in urban planning and policy development from Rutgers University.