

# EMERGING LEADERS OF COLOR FELLOWSHIP

## Biographies for 2023 Fellows and Advisors

### Fellows

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#### Angela Osmar

Angela Osmar is a community advocate whose interests include racial equity in medicine, improving black maternal mortality, and addressing issues impacting marginalized communities' livelihood, such as safe and clean communities, racial wealth gaps, and education. Osmar started her post-college career as a youth program coordinator in foster care and, after a year, entered the sexual and reproductive field as a federal policy intern for Power to Decide. Once she completed her internship, she landed a role with the Planned Parenthood Federation of America's public policy team. She now works as a public policy specialist, tracking and managing federal rules and regulations relevant to the organization's work. Osmar graduated from Stetson University in 2019 with a bachelor of science degree in health psychology. She is also an alumna of Public Allies, an AmeriCorps service branch. She was born and raised in Florida and currently resides in Central Florida.



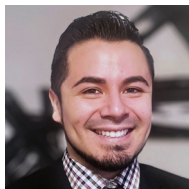
#### Echohawk Lefthand

Echohawk Lefthand is an enrolled member of the Dine' (Navajo) Nation and has been a public health champion for over 10 years. His knowledge of public health is intertwined with his understandings of Indigenous ways of being, with prevention as the center. He currently serves as an administrator for the Office of Health Disparity and Health Equity in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which has recently been elevated in the hierarchy of the division to ensure health equity is embedded in all programming and services of DHHS. Previously, Lefthand served as the director, manager, and specialist of the Title VI Indian education program with Omaha Public Schools, Veteran Affairs, and Indian Health Service, respectively. From his lived and work experience, his passion and dedication to promoting health and elevating quality of life for all under-represented minorities is unwavering. He is excited to be a part of this fellowship to learn more about innovative and practical measures to develop, implement, and impact health equity policies to



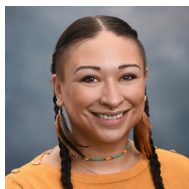
NATIONAL ACADEMY  
FOR STATE HEALTH POLICY

ensure higher quality of life for all.



### **Edward Robles Jr.**

Edward Robles Jr. is a San Diego transplant from Los Angeles and a health care advocate who is passionate about improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations. With a bachelor's degree in health care management, obtained in 2018, Robles has dedicated his career to addressing health disparities and improving access to care. He currently works as a community development analyst for Aetna Better Health of California, a CVS Health company, where he develops and implements programs aimed at improving the health of Medicaid recipients and ensures the compliance of health care quality and population health initiatives. In his previous role as an outreach representative with Molina Healthcare, Robles organized outreach interventions that addressed patient gaps in care. He also completed an internship at the University of California, Riverside, School of Medicine and was tasked with internal/external communications for the School of Medicine. He is committed to addressing the social determinants of health, improving health care access, and building a more equitable health care system.



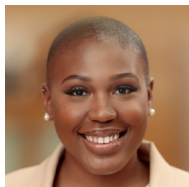
### **Jeniece Cordova**

Jeniece Cordova is from the Bay Area, California. Cordova currently resides in the Atlanta, Georgia area, working as a research associate for the Georgia Health Policy Center, which is housed within Georgia State University. Cordova's projects focus on policy, program implementation and evaluation, and technical assistance for school-based mental health, youth substance use treatment, and equity for LGBTQ+ youth in substance use treatment. Cordova is interested in social determinants of health, equitable access to health care, women and children's health, and behavioral health. Cordova earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from California State University Sacramento in 2018 and a master's degree in public health and master's degree in social work from the University of Georgia in 2021.



### **Hattie Xu**

Originally from San Gabriel, California, Hattie Xu is currently at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health pursuing a master of public health degree in health policy with a concentration in population mental health. After graduation, Xu hopes to continue delving into behavioral and mental health policy, especially with a health equity and affordability lens. She previously served as a program and communications manager for Patients For Affordable Drugs, an advocacy group for lower prescription drug prices. In her role, she supported communications efforts, helped train and engage patient advocates, and assisted with research projects related to drug price hikes and industry advertisement spending. Xu graduated from Brown University in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in cognitive neuroscience.

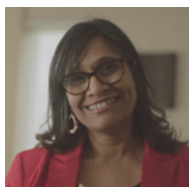


### **Orobosa Idehen**

Orobosa Idehen is a public health graduate student and researcher at the University of Chapel-Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health. Concentrating in health policy, her interests lie at the intersection of public health research and public policy with a focus on equitable access to social determinants such as affordable housing, quality and affordable health care, and strengthening the health care system to reduce the unsustainable burden on U.S. safety nets. With values rooted in social justice, she has always committed to working in spaces that center marginalized and under-resourced communities such as women, children, communities of color, justice-involved persons, and, more recently, rural residents. Her current National Institutes of Health-funded research focuses on the effectiveness of North Carolina's systems (including parole and the justice system, the health system, and safety net programs) in aiding in more successful reentry for justice-involved individuals back into society. During her advocacy internship with the North Carolina Rural Center, Idehen began exploring the vulnerability of rural constituents and their access to affordable housing and economic development and how to improve advocacy initiatives in rural grassroots organizations. She hopes to continue advocacy work with a housing-first model to protect vulnerable populations. In her transition from the urban context of Brooklyn, New York, where she was born and raised, to the suburbs of Georgia, and now Durham, North Carolina, Idehen's lived experiences have made her keen on analyzing neighborhoods and built environments and how they contribute to inequitable health and social outcomes. Idehen is the eldest first-generation daughter of Nigerian immigrant parents, with a younger sister and brother. She loves weight training, listening to podcasts, and walking long distances.

## Advisors

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### **Ana Novais (RI)**

Ana P. Novais is the acting secretary at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in Rhode Island. She holds a master's degree in clinical psychology from Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, and is a graduate from the Northeastern Public Health Leadership Institute, the University at Albany, State University of New York, and Leadership Rhode Island. Novais has worked in public health for over 30 years, including five years in Africa (Cape Verde), five years in Portugal and over 20 years in the United States. She has worked for the Rhode Island Department of Health since 1998, first as an education and outreach coordinator, and as the chief for the Office of Minority Health, ensuring the department addresses the health needs of the racial and ethnic minority communities of Rhode Island. Since March 2006, as the executive director of health for the Division of Community, Family Health, and Equity, Novais has led the department's efforts to achieve the goal of health equity by focusing in the areas of health disparities and access to care, chronic care and disease management, maternal and child health, environmental health, and health promotion and wellness. She also worked on the development and implementation of the "Rhode Island Health Equity Framework," a plan of action for achieving health equity at the state and local level through the "Health Equity Zones" initiative. On August 1, 2015, her role was expanded to become the executive director of health for the department, charged with implementing the department's strategic priorities across all divisions and ensuring that the department resources and operations are aligned with the strategic priorities. In 2020, after helping to lead the response to Rhode Island's COVID-19 crisis, Novais was promoted to assistant secretary at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.



### **Cheryl Roberts (VA)**

Cheryl J. Roberts, JD, is director of the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, where she currently chairs the agency's executive leadership team and provides leadership and direction for agency, staff, and major programs. In her prior position as deputy director, she was responsible for the program development and executive oversight of the Medicaid managed care delivery system. Previous responsibilities included oversight of service and provider operations, long-term care services, and behavioral health. Prior to working with the department, Roberts was the chief operations officer of a Virginia-based Medicaid health plan, and was the assistant vice president of operations for a large health insurance company in New York City. Roberts received her law degree from Rutgers Law School. She serves as an executive committee vice chair for NASHP and also works on various national health care projects, collaborative projects, and committees.



### **Debra C. Farrington (NC)**

Debra C. Farrington, MSW, LCSW, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services deputy secretary/chief health equity officer, is a native North Carolinian reared and educated in rural Columbus County. Through her humble beginnings in Chadbourne, Farrington learned the value of family, hard work, and perseverance. From her mother, who raised five children after being widowed at age 28, Farrington learned to work diligently, never give up on your dreams, and always strive for better. Farrington's values of fairness, equity, and concern for others, along with her deep faith, were shaped by her grandparents and mother, a factory worker who didn't finish high school but earned her GED diploma at the age of 45. With their love, support, and guidance, Farrington received a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master of social work degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a licensed clinical social worker with over 30 years of experience in community-based services for children and adults with behavioral health needs.

Farrington enjoys learning and teaching and has been privileged to teach children, youth, and adults in her local church. During the COVID-19 pandemic she and several community members began conducting community outreach and vaccination drives to reach Columbus County residents who were experiencing higher than average rates of COVID-19 infections and death due to poor health care access, poverty, and lack of information. Farrington led COVID-19 informational calls for Columbus County weekly and then monthly for the past two years.

Farrington joined the Medicaid program in October 2016 as a member of the program design team responsible for the design, development, and implementation of the 1115 Waiver and was later appointed chief of staff, providing support to the deputy secretary on overall program vision, leadership, and strategic direction to North Carolina Medicaid. Her primary duties included planning, implementing, coordinating, and evaluating operations and policies to promote health equity, effective program administration, and service delivery. One of Farrington's biggest priorities during her tenure as chief of staff was to support the staff who work within Medicaid, with special attention to equity in hiring, career advancement, and human resources policies for historically marginalized individuals.

As the newly appointed deputy secretary/chief health equity officer, Farrington will focus on addressing health disparities and the health needs of North Carolina's most vulnerable citizens.



### **Kevin Patterson (CO)**

Kevin Patterson has served as chief executive officer of Connect for Health Colorado since April 2015. He previously served as chief administrative officer and interim chief of staff to Gov. John Hickenlooper and has an extensive history of public service.

Patterson brings a strong understanding of local, state, and federal government and organization engagement to this role. For his time at Connect for Health Colorado, Patterson has been focused on improving customer experience so the organization can focus on health insurance with tax credit implications. He has held many senior leadership roles for the city and county of Denver. He was elected to the Denver Board of Education in 2001 and 2005. Patterson graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in teaching from Sam Houston State University, and holds both a master's in public administration and a master's in urban regional planning from the University of Colorado at Denver. He is known as a collaborative non-partisan problem-solver for Colorado issues.



### **Michelle Robinson (WI)**

Michelle Robinson, PhD, is the inaugural director of the Office of Health Equity at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). As director, Robinson is the principal policy and program officer for equity and inclusion, workforce planning, and health equity, serving on the executive management team and providing strategic leadership and advisory support in the identification and advancement of DHS goals. She also serves as the vice chair for the Governor's Health Equity Council, which was charged with creating a comprehensive plan that will achieve long-lasting and equitable health outcomes for all Wisconsinites by addressing health disparities. She previously served as the director of the Office of the Inspector General and the Equity and Systems Change Research and Policy Officer (ESCRPO) at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF), where she was a member of the secretary's cabinet and the agency's leadership team. As ESCRPO, Robinson provided strategic leadership and direction on internal and external equity and health equity initiatives. Prior to joining DCF, Robinson was a member of the award-winning Race to Equity Project at Kids Forward. She contributed her expertise on disparities and racial equity research, policy, practice, and community engagement. She holds a PhD and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has received the 2018 Madison Community Leader Award by Church Women United, the 2018 Collaborator of the Year award by the Progress Center for Black Women, and the 2017 Community Justice Award by the Urban League of Greater Madison and was named one of the University of Wisconsin's Outstanding Women of Color in Education in 2014.



### **Shabnam Salih (NJ)**

Shabnam Salih is the first director of the Office of Health Care Affordability and Transparency, launched in 2020, in the New Jersey Governor's Office. The office will guide the administration's work on health care affordability and price transparency. Salih previously served as the senior policy advisor on health and human services to Gov. Philip Murphy and helped advance key priorities in the area of health, human services, health insurance, and children and families since February 2018. During her time in the Governor's Office, Salih has worked extensively on a range of issues, including the opioid epidemic, the individual health insurance market, behavioral health, state health benefits, and homelessness. From 2013 to 2018, Salih was with the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and served as the associate director of policy and engagement. Salih was also a legislative aide in the New Jersey Senate and is a former Teach For America Corps Member. Salih has a master's in public administration from Baruch College and a bachelor of arts degree from the College of New Jersey.



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