

February 2024

2024 Emerging Leaders of Color Fellowship: Fellow and Advisor Biographies

Fellow Biographies

Aiyah Adam (VA)


Aiyah Adam, of Alexandria, Virginia, is an aspiring health policy professional passionate about leveraging the community's role in health care decision-making and making health care accessible to all. Adam is currently a research assistant for the Evidence-Informed State Health Policy Institute at AcademyHealth, where she supports bridging health services researchers with state health policy makers. She specifically works with the Medicaid Medical Directors Network. Adam graduated from the University of Richmond with a bachelor of arts in health studies in 2023. During her time in college, she was a Bonner Scholar and interned at CrossOver Healthcare Ministries, a clinic that serves underserved populations; CARITAS Women's Shelter; Upland Advocacy; and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. Volunteering at community organizations grew her interest in social determinants of health, and she was able to visually see how zip codes can determine health access and the role that government benefits play to reduce disparities. From her various experiences, Adam values health care access' role in building an equitable society. This year, she will start her master's in public health program and hopes to delve further into state health policy to contribute intentionally to the important field.

Jada Hoyle-Gardner (GA)

Jada Hoyle-Gardner is particularly passionate about addressing health disparities and promoting health equity. This commitment to inclusivity and cultural competence is reflected in her work, where she actively engages with diverse communities to develop tailored interventions that meet their unique needs. Hoyle-Gardner is a two-time graduate of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Spelman College and Florida A&M University. Her interdisciplinary background in public health allows her to be a strong advocate for people of color in the health care field. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University. At Emory, her general work focuses on the intersection of public health research and science communication to promote the well-being of all people regardless of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. A New Jersey native, Hoyle-Gardner is thankful for her community as they continue to support her throughout her professional journey.

Jennifer Pinder (PA)

Jennifer Pinder is from Philadelphia and works for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a program specialist in the policy and planning division for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Pinder has built a strong foundation in interpreting and implementing program policy in her career with the commonwealth. With her roots in eligibility work, it has always been important to her to connect vulnerable populations with access to use services available to them. Learning and administering several




programs (SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and Long-Term Living) has led Pinder to become a program specialist for those programs. Her path has led her to program policy for CHIP, and the world of policy development and program planning has ignited a passion based in her longstanding foundation in understanding and using policy to best administer programs. The importance of having voices that understand and represent the populations that policy affects on a daily basis has become clear to her. This is particularly true in the health care arena. As a mother of two young children, the daughter of aging parents, and a community member of so many with unique health care needs it is her honor to bring those voices to the table. It is Pinder's hope to learn and grow to be a strong voice in policy planning, program support, and leadership, so that health equity does not miss those who have not received the opportunity to be engaged in the rooms where these decisions are made.

Mariah Seater (AK)

With a commitment to advancing the welfare of Alaska's communities, Mariah Seater serves as a special assistant to the commissioner of the Alaska Department of Family and Community Services, based in Anchorage. In this role, Seater serves as a liaison to collaboratively engage with Tribal leaders on system level issues, as well as on the department policy team supporting the facilities critical to supporting the state's most vulnerable individuals. A proud lifelong Alaskan, Seater brings a deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing the state's diverse populations and communities. Prior to her current position, she served as a health equity advisor for the CDC Foundation, where she actively contributed to shaping policies and initiatives aimed at reducing health disparities in Alaska. Her commitment to advancing health equity also led her to work as a contractor for Partners for Advancing Health Equity. In addition to her policy and advisory work, Seater has a robust background as a researcher, with a particular emphasis on supporting public health programs within Indigenous communities. Through research initiatives she has been a part of, she has contributed valuable insights into the unique health challenges faced by minoritized populations, advocating for culturally sensitive and community-based participatory research approaches to public health interventions. Seater holds a bachelor of science degree in kinesiology and master of science degree in educational psychology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a master of public health degree in public health practice from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She is currently pursuing a DrPH in leadership, advocacy, and equity through Tulane University.

Vivian Tam (NY)

Vivian Tam is currently at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy pursuing a master of public health degree in health policy and management. She serves as a graduate student assistant for the school's government affairs team. Her interests include delivery system reform and state efforts to advance equity through addressing social drivers of health and health-related social needs. She is also the



Special Projects Fund intern at the New York Health Foundation, which seeks to improve the health of all New Yorkers, especially people of color and those who have been historically marginalized. In her role, she supports a funding portfolio that is responsive to innovative ideas and emergent challenges. Prior to joining NYHealth, Tam served as a policy intern for the Primary Care Development Corporation, where she researched key primary care issues and trends and developed materials for New York State advocacy efforts. Before graduate school, she managed activities for patient, regulatory, and scientific communications campaigns at GCI Health and held roles at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center and at community-based organizations in Boston. Tam received bachelor of arts degrees in community health and American studies from Tufts University.

Sandra Walle (CA)

Sandra Walle is a dedicated advocate for community health and equity. Originally from Merced, California, Walle is driven by a strong commitment to improving health outcomes, with a particular focus on Hispanic/Latinx and rural communities. In her current role as a community-based services specialist for Santa Clara Family Health Plan, Walle has actively contributed to the implementation of the Enhanced Care Management Medicaid benefit, a core initiative of CalAIM. Her previous position as a quality improvement coordinator involved proactive engagement in supporting the Health Homes Program, preventive care outreach campaigns, NCQA accreditation, and process improvement activities. Through these roles, Walle has contributed to enhancing health outcomes for Medicaid recipients and maintaining compliance with health care quality and population health initiatives. Previously, she gained valuable experience as a performance improvement consulting intern at Kaiser Permanente and as a health equity, policy, and planning intern at the Alameda County Public Health Department. She also volunteered as a health advocate, offering community resource navigation for patients of Alameda Health System. Driven by a commitment to address social determinants of health and improve health care access, Walle draws inspiration from her personal and professional experiences. These experiences have shaped her interest in health care safety nets, population health, and her fervor for designing programs that empower and build healthier communities. Walle holds a bachelor of arts degree in American studies with a concentration in health, economics, and policy in the U.S. from the University of California, Berkeley (Class of 2019).

Advisor Biographies

Reuben Hampton (NH)

Reuben Hampton is the director of the Office of Health Equity at the New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS). His work focuses on identifying and addressing health disparities for marginalized populations across the state and ensuring equitable access to effective quality DHHS programs and services for all clients.

Hampton previously worked as a program manager in the areas of data management and compliance, as well as a consultant focused on the education sector. At previous organizations he has taken on leadership roles on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, including policy, strategic plan development and implementation, and community engagement. He has been a board member of The Family Place, a family resource center in Vermont, since 2019 and serves as the board's treasurer and DEI committee chair. Hampton received his undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania and his master's degree from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, where he is a member of the school's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity in Action (IDEA) Committee.

René Mollow (CA)

René Mollow has been with the California Department of Health Care Services since 1995. In the Medi-Cal program, she serves as the deputy director for health care benefits and eligibility (HCBE). She provides leadership for benefit and eligibility policy planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of health care services and delivery systems under Medi-Cal and for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). HCBE is comprised of four divisions (Benefits, Eligibility, Pharmacy Benefits, and Dental) and two offices (the Office of Family Planning and Office of Tribal Affairs). Mollow works to ensure that policies, procedures, and related activities in HCBE conform to applicable state and federal policies, statutes, and regulations. She assists the directorate of administration and state legislatures in determining program direction consistent with legislative intent, and she consults with the director's office and state Medicaid director on issues of significant policy impact involving both Medi-Cal and CHIP. Mollow has played a major role in policy planning, development, and implementation on matters pertaining to health care coverage maintenance and expansions for children and adult populations, as well as benefit management for the Medi-Cal program.

Ana P. Novais (RI)

Ana P. Novais is the assistant secretary at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in Rhode Island. She holds a master's degree in clinical psychology from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium and is a graduate from the Northeastern Public Health Leadership Institute, University of Albany, New York, and Leadership RI.


Novais has worked in public health for 30 years, including five years in Africa (Cape Verde), five years in Portugal, and for the past 20 years in the U.S. She has worked for the Rhode Island Department of Health since 1998, first as an education and outreach coordinator and the chief for the Office of Minority Health, ensuring the department addresses the health needs of the racial and ethnic minority communities of the state. Since March 2006, she has been executive director of health for the Division of Community, Family Health, and Equity. She has led the department 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, health promotion and wellness and by developing and implementing the “Rhode Island Health Equity Framework,” a plan of action for achieving health equity at the state and at the local level through the Health Equity Zones initiative. In August 2015, Novais’ role was expanded, and she became the executive director of health for the department, charged with implementing the department strategic priorities across all divisions and assuring that the department resources and operations are aligned with strategic priorities. In 2020, after helping to lead Rhode Island’s COVID-19 crisis, she was promoted to assistant secretary at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

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 collaborator engagement to his role. For his time at Connect for Health Colorado, he has been focused on improving the customer experience so they 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 of public administration degree and a master of urban regional planning degree from the University of Colorado at Denver. Patterson is known as a collaborative non-partisan problem-solver for Colorado issues.

Cheryl J. Roberts (VA)

Cheryl J. Roberts is director at the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, where she 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, which covers 700,000 members; dental and pharmacy services; quality management; and program integrity operations for the agency. Previous responsibilities include oversight of service and provider operations, long-term care services, and behavioral health. Prior to working with the department, Roberts served as 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 juris doctorate from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Law School. She serves as an executive committee vice chair for NASHP and also works on various national health care projects, collaboratives, and committees.

Michelle Robinson (WI)

Michelle Robinson is the inaugural director of the Office of Health Equity (OHE) at the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). As Director, she serves as the principal program and policy officer for equity and inclusion and workforce planning programs. OHE and its director are charged with establishing clear vision and focus and complementing and amplifying the related diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and wellness work and health equity initiatives across all of DHS's internal and external operations. In her role, Robinson reports to and serves as an advisor to the DHS secretary, a member of the Office of the Secretary, and the agency's executive management leadership teams. Robinson served as the vice-chair of 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 was the primary author of its report "Building a Better Wisconsin: Investing in the Health and Well-being of Wisconsinites." Robinson 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, where she was a member of the secretary's cabinet and the agency's leadership team. At ESCRPO, Robinson provided strategic leadership and direction on internal and external equity and health equity initiatives. She holds a PhD and master's degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She received the 2018 Madison Community Leader Award by Church Women United, 2018 Collaborator of the Year award by the Progress Center for Black Women, and 2017 Community Justice Award by the Urban League of Greater Madison. She was also named one of the University of Wisconsin's Outstanding Women of Color in Education in 2014.