

FEBRUARY 8, 2024 WEBINAR: WE WILL VOTE!

BIOSKETCHES

Jeanne Ayers, R.N., M.P.H., serves as the executive director of Healthy Democracy Healthy People Initiative (previously known as VoteSAFE Public Health), a coalition of 10 national public health organizations focused on advancing health equity by assuring participation in the electoral process is available to everyone. Before joining the Initiative in 2020, Ayers held leadership roles in state governmental public health for more than 9 years. She served as the Wisconsin State Health Officer and Administrator of the Division of Public Health and as Assistant Commissioner and Chief Health Equity Strategist for the Minnesota Department of Health. Prior positions include director of nursing and preventive services and occupational health at the University of Minnesota, Boynton Health Service. She worked in professional continuing education for 15 years and founded and directed the Centers for Public Health Education and Outreach at the School of Public Health, University of Minnesota.

Ayers is a recognized leader in national efforts to assure health and racial equity and improve population health. She has worked extensively with government, academia, health care, community groups and broad-based community organizers to deepen the public understanding of the social determinants of health and their relationship to race, place, class and power. She was selected as the 2010 University of Minnesota Josie R. Johnson Human Rights and Social Justice Award winner and led development of the award-winning report “Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: A report to the State Legislature” by the Minnesota Department of Health. Ayers led the health equity work of the faith-based organizing group, ISAIAH, and launched and directed the Healthy Heartland Initiative, a partnership of community organizing groups and public health organizations in five Midwest states building collective capacity to impact public policy. Ayers describes her work as building power to assure the conditions necessary for health are available for all. She sees civic participation and a healthy inclusive democracy as a prerequisite to advancing health equity and creating healthy communities.

Georges C. Benjamin, M.D., is the executive director of APHA since 2002, he is leading the Association’s push to make America the healthiest nation. From his firsthand experience as a physician, he knows what happens when preventive care is not available and when the healthy choice is not the easy choice. He came to APHA from his position as secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Benjamin became secretary of health in Maryland in April 1999, following four years as its deputy secretary for public health services. As secretary, Benjamin oversaw the expansion and improvement of the state’s Medicaid program.

An established administrator, author and orator, Benjamin started his medical career as a military physician in 1978 when he trained in internal medicine at the Brooke Army Medical Center. In 1981, he was assigned to the Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Washington, where he managed a 72,000-patient visit ambulatory care service as chief of the Acute Illness Clinic and was faculty and an attending physician within the Department of Emergency Medicine. A few years later, he was reassigned to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in

Washington, D.C., where he served as chief of emergency medicine. After leaving the Army, he chaired the Department of Community Health and Ambulatory Care at the District of Columbia General Hospital. He was promoted to acting commissioner for public health for the District of Columbia and later directed one of the busiest ambulance services in the nation as interim director of the Emergency Ambulance Bureau of the District of Columbia Fire Department.

His academic career has consisted of a full range of endeavors from teaching and policy research to academic program development and management. Benjamin has combined his practice and academic experience as an emergency physician with public health to become one of the nation's experts in public health emergency preparedness. Benjamin, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, is a graduate of the Illinois Institute of Technology and the University of Illinois College of Medicine.

Aliya Bhatia, MPP, is the Executive Director at *Vot-ER* and Civic Health Month where she works to bring voter registration into health care settings, including emergency rooms, hospitals, and community health centers. Aliya was drawn to the connection between health and democracy through the combination of being raised by parents in the medical field and various defining experiences while studying, teaching, and working on housing and health initiatives. Aliya started her career as a high school educator and then as a strategy consultant at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). She prioritizes diversity and inclusion in all her endeavors. Aliya resides in Washington, DC where she works to realize *Vot-ER's* vision of healthy communities powered by an inclusive democracy. She is a Georgia native and has worked in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Missouri. She completed her Masters in Public Policy from Harvard Kennedy School as a Sheila C. Johnson Leadership Fellow and is a graduate of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

Lizette Escobedo currently serves as Associate Vice President of Civic Engagement and Advocacy at AltaMed Health Services, where she has led the successful scale up and implementation of civic engagement campaigns as well as the successful development and implementation of *¡Andale! ¿Que Esperas?!*, an eleven-million-dollar vaccine outreach and education effort, which led to over 130,000 vaccinations statewide. Most recently, Escobedo led the successful revamp of AltaMed's *My Vote. My Health.* campaign reaching over half a million Latino voters in Los Angeles and Orange Counties during the Midterm Election. Prior to her role at AltaMed, Lizette served as National Director of Civic Engagement at NALEO Educational Fund overseeing the Civic Engagement Department of over 30 staff and the organization's Latino civic engagement efforts nationally.

Throughout the course of her career Lizette has led and organized social justice, civic engagement, and issue campaigns -- playing a lead role in one of the largest nationally coordinated Immigration Reform alliances, the Alliance for Citizenship. During her role as Communications and Development Director at the *Mi Familia Vota* Education Fund, Lizette helped raise over \$1.4 million and helped launch civic engagement campaigns in key battleground states. In 2007 Lizette helped revamp the nationally recognized *ya es hora ¡Ciudadanía!* campaign at the NALEO Educational Fund where she helped the organization

substantially develop its strategic partnerships and national coalition work. Additionally, during her tenure there Lizette helped launch the New Americans Campaign and the first ever national DACA information and referral hotline. In 2014 Lizette served as Field Operations Director for U.S. House Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard where she led on issues of immigration, labor, homelessness and affordable housing. Lizette graduated from the University of California, San Diego where she earned a B.A. in Communications and a B.A. in Ethnic Studies and currently serves on the Board of Make the Road States.

Sheri Johnson, Ph.D., is Director of the Population Health Institute; Associate Professor (CHS), Department of Population Health Sciences, and Associate Director of Community Partnerships for the Prevention Research Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, School of Medicine and Public Health. Dr. Johnson has dedicated her 25+ year career to partnering with children, families, community organizations and systems to advance health and well-being. Awed by the resilience of individuals and communities, she is motivated to remove unfair obstacles and conditions that create and perpetuate health inequities.

Dr. Johnson completed undergraduate studies at Brown University; earned a M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Boston University and served as a Clinical Fellow in Psychology at Harvard Medical School. She was previously Director of Behavioral Health at Milwaukee Health Services, Inc., a federally qualified health center and served as the Administrator and State Health Officer for the Wisconsin Division of Public Health. Immediately prior to joining the Population Health Institute, she was Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the Medical College of Wisconsin Center for Advancement of Underserved Children where she collaborated with diverse stakeholders to address a broad range of real-world problems.

Stella A. Safo, M.D., M.P.H., created Just Equity for Health, a health care improvement company that uses advocacy, education and care model design (via her company Safo Consulting) to ensure equitable care delivery across all sectors of medicine in 2021. She is a Ghanaian-American, board-certified practicing HIV primary care physician and public health practitioner who has led teams dedicated to healthcare improvement in various settings. Dr. Safo has a deep passion for racial and gender equity and for health as a human right. Trained at Harvard for her BA, MD and MPH, she completed internal medicine training at Montefiore's Primary Care Social Medicine program with a fellowship in HIV care.

Dr. Safo served as Senior Medical Director of Clinical Transformation at Mount Sinai, where she oversaw the initiation of the redesign of Mount Sinai's 50+ ambulatory primary care centers towards providing proactive patient-centered care under new payment models. She then joined Premier Inc., a leading healthcare improvement company, as their Chief Clinical Transformation Officer and managed a large team of researchers focused on translating innovation from pharmaceutical and biomedical device companies into clinician workflows that positively impact patient care.

Dr. Safo remains committed to advocacy within medicine in various contexts. In 2018 she challenged her own academic health system to address issues of gender, race and age

discrimination (<https://www.equitynowatmountsinai.com/>). Her board positions include ExpandedED Schools and Just Human Productions. She is a co-founder of Civic Health Alliance, which aims to increase healthcare engagement around voter turnout, and the Coalition to Advance Antiracism in Medicine which is committed to using federal legislation to address racism in healthcare. Passionate about medical education and racial and gender equity, Dr. Safo serves as a lecturer and mentor for all levels of medical trainees across the US and in Ghana.