

Veronica Gillispie-Bell, MD is a nationally recognized obstetrician-gynecologist, women's health expert, and public health leader whose work focuses on improving health outcomes for women across the lifespan by transforming clinical care, health systems, and policy. She serves as System Medical Director of Health Outcomes and Medical Director of Quality for Women's Services across Ochsner Health, where she leads system-wide quality and safety initiatives in women's healthcare. A Professor at Xavier Ochsner College of Medicine, Dr. Gillispie-Bell also directs the Minimally Invasive Center for the Treatment of Uterine Fibroids and is nationally known for her clinical expertise in managing heavy menstrual bleeding and performing advanced laparoscopic and robotic-assisted surgeries. As Medical Director of the Louisiana Perinatal Quality Collaborative and Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review, she has led statewide initiatives across more than 40 hospitals that have improved care processes and reduced severe maternal morbidity. Her work has shaped state and national policy, including testimony before Congress and being an invited speaker at The White House Inaugural Maternal Health Day of Action. A trusted national voice on women's health, quality improvement, and health equity, Dr. Gillispie-Bell has been featured on CNN, Good Morning America, and CNBC, written opinion pieces for *The New York Times* and *USA Today* and been quoted in many other national media.

Sarah Heppner, MS serves as the Associate Director of the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) in the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In this role, Sarah provides programmatic, policy, and operational support for the Office. FORHP has an annual budget of \$417 million and administers a range of technical assistance, research, and capacity-building grant programs that serve rural communities. It is also charged with advising the HHS Secretary on rural health issues. Sarah has been with FORHP since 2012, serving as the Research Coordinator, the Deputy Director of the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, and the Director of the Policy Research Division. She has an undergraduate degree in chemistry from Wells College and a Master's in Clinical and Translational Sciences with a concentration in Research Management from the University of Vermont.

Janelle Palacios, PhD, CNM, is Salish and Kootenai, originally from the Flathead Indian Reservation in Northwestern Montana. She is a nationally recognized leader in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Maternal and Child Health, bringing over 18 years of experience as a nurse midwife alongside a distinguished career in research, policy and health equity advancement. She practices clinically in the San Francisco Bay Area, grounding her national work in real-world care and is an Associate Research Professor at the Mark & Robyn Jones College of Nursing at Montana State University. Dr. Palacios has earned national recognition for her expertise through publications, research and extensive consulting with Tribal, federal, state and national organizations. She previously served as a member of the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Advisory Committee on Infant and Maternal Mortality (ACIMM), where she was Co-Chair of the Health Equity Workgroup and was a key author of the committee's first report focused

specifically on AI/AN populations, “*Making Amends: Recommended Strategies & Actions to Improve the Health and Safety of American Indian and Alaska Native Mothers and Infants*,” a landmark document advancing equity-centered maternal health policy. Dr. Palacios is the founder of Encoded 4 Story, a consulting agency dedicated to advancing respectful healthcare, strengthening community partnerships, and leveraging the power of storytelling to transform maternal/infant health outcomes.

Melissa Simon, MD, MPH, is the George H. Gardner Professor of Clinical Gynecology, Vice Chair of Research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. She is also the Founder and Director of the Center for Health Equity Transformation and the Chicago Cancer Health Equity Collaborative and the Associate Director for Community Outreach and Engagement for the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center. She is an expert in implementation science, women’s health across the lifespan, minority health, community engagement and health equity. She has been recognized with numerous awards for her substantial contribution to excellence in health equity scholarship, women’s health and mentorship, including the Presidential Award in Excellence in Science Mathematics and Engineering Mentorship and a Presidential Leadership Scholar. She is a member of The National Academy of Medicine, a former member of the US Preventive Services Task Force and serves on the NIH Office of Research in Women’s Health Advisory Committee. She is also a member of the National Academy of Medicine’s Roundtable on the Promotion of Health Equity. She completed her bachelor’s degree at the University of Chicago, her medical degree at Rush Medical College, her residency at Yale University, and her fellowship in family planning at Northwestern University.

Catherine Y. Spong, MD, is a Tenured Professor and Chair in the [Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology](#) at UT Southwestern Medical Center. Prior to joining UT, she had a 23-year career at the National Institutes of Health, where she served as NICHD’s Acting Director, Deputy Director, and Chief of the Pregnancy and Perinatology Branch. She specializes in creating the evidence for obstetric practice, ensuring access to care, prematurity, fetal complications, improving outcomes for children, and inclusion of pregnant and lactating women. She is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and has received numerous awards including SMFM Lifetime Achievement Award, the UMKC Alumnus of the Year Award, the ACOG Distinguished Service Award. She was the Chair of the DHHS Federal Task Force on Research Specific to Pregnant Women and Lactating Women. She is an Editor of *William’s Obstetrics, Management of High-Risk Pregnancy, Protocols of High-Risk Pregnancy*, and *Stillbirth: Prediction, Prevention and Management*. She has published more than 500 peer-reviewed papers, has an h-index of 79.