



2023 CHEAC Annual Meeting Workshop Session Biographies

Maximizing the Opportunity of New Health Equity Infrastructure

Melissa Jones, Executive Director

Melissa Jones is the Executive Director of BARHII (the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative) and the Founder of National Racial Health Justice Center.

Melissa has dedicated her life to equity and justice. A globally-trained administrator and social entrepreneur, Melissa leverages equity innovation to create conditions for health. She believes that the resources of the government, matched with grassroots ingenuity, can guarantee a healthy and prosperous life for all.

In 2015, Melissa was named the executive director of BARHII, the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative. BARHII is a founder in the health equity movement, whose groundbreaking health equity framework is featured in public health textbooks and serves as a foundational document for United States public health accreditation, the founding of the California Department of Public Health's Office of Health Equity, and the American Medical Association's Health Equity strategy. BARHII's guidebooks and trainings are used by thousands of government and community leaders throughout the country.

Melissa is charged with leading BARHII into its next era of impact. Under her leadership, BARHII has been an essential "health voice" to help pass groundbreaking legislation that has saved tens of thousands of lives and improved the health of communities impacted by systemic inequities--including expanded paid sick leave, statewide rent-gouging rules, pandemic-related eviction prohibitions, and climate justice programs. In her first two years at BARHII, she trained over 1500 California officials on Adaptive Leadership for Racial Equity. During the pandemic, she launched an equity officer in emergency response model that has been scaled by the California Department of Health across California.

Melissa is determined to make the pandemic the inflection point that finally makes health equity and racial justice a reality. Over the next five years, she will launch the National Racial Health Equity Center at BARHII. This new Center will help equity innovators share successes faster, create the nationwide infrastructure we need to create health equity in our lifetime, and center a Black health agenda. The first initiative for the Center, a first-in-the-nation campaign to create communities designed for Black health has already been named a top budget priority by several California Legislative Caucuses.

Melissa is a sought-after speaker and commentator and she has been featured in media including NPR, the San Francisco Chronicle, and Cal Matters and has been keynote speaker and highlighted in publications from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the National Association of City and County Health Officers, the San Francisco Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation. A local leader who takes inspiration from her global training, she has served as an Atlantic Fellow for Racial Equity (a South African-US global leadership fellowship), a Fulcrum Fellow with the Center for Community Investment, and a doctoral candidate with the United Nations Executive Doctorate Program in Governance at Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

She brings more than 20 years of experience in city government, community development, and youth services to BARHII from roles at the Boston Local Initiative Support Corporation, the City of Oakland's Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, and the City of Alameda. Melissa also led youth power programs at an Oakland community center and managed school improvement efforts through AmeriCorps programs in the San Francisco Unified, San Jose Unified, and Oak Grove Unified school districts.

Alegría De La Cruz, Director of the Office of Equity

The Board of Supervisors appointed Alegría as the Director of the Office of Equity in August 2020. Prior to this appointment, Alegría served as a Chief Deputy in the County Counsel's Office.

Before joining the County of Sonoma, Alegría worked in public service and public interest for the State of California Agricultural Labor Relations Board; the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment; and at California Rural Legal Assistance. Alegría holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from Yale University, a law degree from the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, and has been a licensed attorney in California since 2003. Alegría is a current member of the Board of Directors of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, Santa Rosa City School Board Trustee, and the current Board President of the Sonoma County Secure Families Collaborative.

Alegría identifies as Chicana and recognizes, embraces, and celebrates her responsibility to contribute meaningfully to public service, social justice, and equity. Alegría lives in Santa Rosa with her husband and two children and their dogs. Alegría finds joy on early morning trail runs and at the beach with her family in Sonoma County's beautiful wild spaces.

Dr. Analilia García, Chief Equity & Inclusion Officer leading the Office of Diversity, Equity, & Belonging

Dr. Analilia García (she/her) is the Chief Equity & Inclusion Officer leading the Office of Diversity, Equity, & Belonging for the County of Santa Clara focused on building organizational capacity to address systemic inequities that contribute to poor outcomes for historically marginalized communities. Dr. García, who is trained in public health and has built a career championing social justice, supports all County departments to assess programs, services, and policies for explicit considerations of racial equity. These efforts will help to ensure that strategies and actions reduce rather than perpetuate inequities for all residents of Santa Clara County.

Dr. García has worked for more than two decades in academia, nonprofit organizations, and government where she has provided leadership and strategic direction for community-engaged research, program planning and evaluation to address racial and health equity, and social determinants of health.

Dr. García, who comes from an immigrant family, is bilingual and bicultural. She lives in Oakland with her husband and two sons. Dr. Garcia enjoys hiking, listening to her husband and boys play the piano and spending time with her family. Dr. Garcia holds a doctorate in Public Health from the University of California, Berkeley, a Master's degree in Public Health from San José State University, and a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Dr. Tamarra Jones, Health Policy and Planning Manager and Public Health Equity Officer

Dr. Tamarra Jones has nearly 25 years' experience in Public Health, including approximately 20 years working in local Departments of Public Health in Nevada and Southern California. Dr. Jones brings a wealth of public health leadership experience working in a diverse array of programs and services supporting underserved populations, prevention programming, and extensive community engagement and collaboration activities.

Dr. Jones is the Health Policy and Planning Manager and Public Health Equity Officer with San Mateo County Health. She is currently serving as the interim Director of Public Health, Policy & Planning. Dr. Jones has a Master of Public Health in Health Promotion and Education and a Doctor of Public Health in Preventive Care from Loma Linda University, and a bachelor's degree from University of California, Santa Cruz.

Dr. Jones recently returned to San Francisco where she was born and raised. The opportunity to contribute to work that can have a positive impact on the community she grew up in was a key factor in her returning to the Bay Area. She enjoys the opportunity and ability to collaborate with others to help advance health improvement priorities.