

Speaker's Biographies

Beyond Health Care Reform: Health & Equity in All Policies

Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen

Delegate from the United States Virgin Islands
House of Representatives

The Honorable Donna M. Christensen continues to distinguish herself as a leader in the United States Congress. As a Member serving her seventh term, she is the first female physician in the history of the U.S. Congress, the first woman to represent an offshore Territory, and the first woman Delegate from the United States Virgin Islands. She serves as an Assistant Majority Whip.

In the 111th Congress, Delegate Christensen serves on the following House Committees, Subcommittees and Caucuses: the House Energy and Commerce Committee where she is the first non-voting delegate to be named to the committee, the Committee on Natural Resources, and she is a former chair of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Insular Affairs. The Natural Resources Subcommittee on Insular Affairs oversees the affairs of the offshore territories including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Northern Marianas Islands, and the free associated states of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. She was named to the Energy and Commerce Subcommittees on Health, Telecommunications and the Internet, and Oversight and Investigations. She was named to the Natural Resources Subcommittees on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife and is also a member of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands.

Delegate Christensen has just been elected Second Vice-chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and chairs the Congressional Black Caucus' Health Braintrust, which oversees and advocates minority health issues nationally and internationally. She is a Member of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, member of the Steering Committee of the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus, Congressional Rural Caucus, Friends of the Caribbean Caucus Coastal Caucus, Congressional Fire Caucus and additionally, a Member of the Congressional National Guard and Reserve Caucus.

Delegate Christensen was born in 1945 to the late Judge Almeric Christian and Virginia Sterling Christian. She earned a Bachelor of Science in 1966 at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana and an M.D. (Doctor of Medicine) in 1970 from George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C. She interned at Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, California from 1970 to 1971 and did her residency in family medicine at Howard University Medical Center from 1973 to 1974. She became a board certified physician in 1977.

Christensen began her medical career in the Virgin Islands in 1975 as an emergency room physician. She served as staff physician at the Maternal & Child Health program, Medical Director of the Nesbitt Clinic in Frederiksted, Director of the Frederiksted Health Center, Director of Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning, then served as the Medical Director of the St. Croix Hospital and rounded out her medical career as the Territorial Assistant Commissioner of Health and as the Acting Commissioner of Health. She maintained a private practice in family medicine from 1975 until her election to Congress in 1996.

As a registered member of the Democratic Party of the Virgin Islands, she has served as Democratic National Committeewoman, member of the Democratic Territorial Committee, Delegate to Democratic Conventions from 1984 to present, Member, Platform Committee of the Democratic National Committee from 1988 to present. She was elected to the Virgin Islands Board of Education from 1984 to 1986 and was appointed as a member to the Virgin Islands Status Commission from 1988 to 1992.

Christensen is a member of the National Medical Association, the Virgin Islands Medical Society, the Caribbean Studies Association, the Caribbean Youth Organization and the Virgin Islands Medical Institute. Prior to her election to Congress, she served on a variety of church and civic associations.

Larry Cohen
Executive Director
Prevention Institute

Larry Cohen is founder and executive director of Prevention Institute, a non-profit national center dedicated to improving to improving health, safety, and equity for all. Prevention Institute moves beyond approaches that target individuals to create systematic, comprehensive strategies that alter the conditions that impact community health. Larry has led many successful public health efforts at the local, state, and federal level focused on health equity, injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, and healthy eating and activity-related chronic disease prevention. Larry has played a key role in promoting prevention and wellness as part of stimulus funding and health reform.

Larry's work focuses on strategies to improve health equity. He recently authored [*A Time of Opportunity: Local Solutions to Reduce Inequities in Health and Safety*](#), prepared for the Institute of Medicine Roundtable on Health Disparities, and [*Good Health Counts: A 21st Century Approach to Health and Community for California*](#). Larry facilitated the [*California Campaign to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health*](#), and developed [*THRIVE: Tool for Health and Resilience In Vulnerable Environments*](#), a web-based tool designed to help communities identify and foster factors in the community environment that will improve health outcomes and reduce disparities experienced by racial and ethnic minorities. Larry also helped to define violence as a preventable, public health issue and has trained and written nationally on primary prevention of gender violence. Larry currently heads [*UNITY \(Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth Through Violence Prevention\)*](#), a national initiative designed to strengthen and support cities in the U.S. to more effectively prevent community violence.

Prior to founding Prevention Institute, Larry formed the first U.S. coalition to change tobacco policy and created the nation's first multi-city smoking ban. He established the Food and Nutrition Policy Consortium and helped catalyze the nation's food labeling law. He continues to work extensively on policies to improve nutrition and physical activity environments to prevent chronic disease. He also helped shape strategy to secure passage of bicycle and motorcycle helmet laws and strengthen child and adult passenger restraint laws California.

Larry has authored or edited many publications related to primary prevention practice and comprehensive strategies to improve public health and health equity. [*Prevention is Primary: Strategies for Community Wellbeing*](#), an academic text, frames prevention as an essential component of health by identifying best practices and illustrating the application of prevention principles. [*Prevention for a Healthier California*](#), demonstrates the cost effectiveness of community-based prevention efforts. Larry is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Injury Control and Emergency Health Services Section Public Service Award from the American Public Health Association, the Secretary's Award for Health Promotion from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and recognition from the American Cancer Society and the Society for Public Health Educators.

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Brian D. Smedley, Ph.D.

Vice President & Director
Health Policy Institute
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

Brian D. Smedley is Vice President and Director of the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, DC. In this position, Dr. Smedley oversees all of the operations of the Institute, which was started in 2002 with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Institute has a dual focus: to explore disparities in health and to generate policy recommendations on longstanding health equity concerns.

Formerly, Smedley was Research Director and co-founder of a communications, research and policy organization, The Opportunity Agenda (www.opportunityagenda.org), where he led the organization's effort to center equity in state and national health reform discussions and to build the national will to expand opportunity for all. To that end, Smedley is a co-editor, along with Alan Jenkins, of a book, *All Things Being Equal: Instigating Opportunity in an Inequitable Time*.

Prior to helping launch The Opportunity Agenda, Smedley was a Senior Program Officer in the Division of Health Sciences Policy of the Institute of Medicine (IOM), where he served as Study Director for the IOM reports, *In the Nation's Compelling Interest: Ensuring Diversity in the Health Care Workforce* and *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*, among other reports on diversity in the health professions and minority health research policy. Smedley came to the IOM from the American Psychological Association, where he worked on a wide range of social, health, and education policy topics in his capacity as Director for Public Interest Policy.

Dr. Smedley served as a Congressional Science Fellow in the office of Rep. Robert C. Scott (D-VA), a position sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Among his awards and distinctions, in 2009 Smedley received the Congressional Black Caucus Congressional Leadership in Advocacy Award; in 2004 he was honored by the Rainbow/PUSH coalition as a "Health Trailblazer" award winner; in 2002 he was awarded the Congressional Black Caucus "Healthcare Hero" award; and in August, 2002, was awarded the Early Career Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest by the APA. Smedley holds an undergraduate degree from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in psychology from UCLA.

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Adolph P. Falcón, MPP

Senior Vice President

National Alliance for Hispanic Health

Adolph P. Falcón, MPP is Senior Vice President of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health (the Alliance). Founded in 1973, the Alliance is the premier science-based organization focusing on Hispanic health. The community-based organizations that comprise the Alliance annually provide quality services to over 15 million Hispanic health consumers throughout the U.S., making a daily difference in the lives of Hispanic communities. He oversees the science and policy portfolio of the Alliance.

Mr. Falcón He played a leading role in the landmark Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1990 and most recently has been active in protection of patient rights under Executive Order 13166 improving access for limited English proficient (LEP) persons, health information technology policy, regulatory oversight of the Medicare Modernization Act, and health access for the underserved.

Mr. Falcón has served as principal investigator for initiatives funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation among others. He currently serves as principal investigator for *Proyecto Ciencia* (project science), an NIH funded effort that is fostering new Hispanic research talent and bringing the best in science to Hispanic health consumers as well as the Alliance/Merck Ciencia Hispanic Scholars Program, a \$4 million scholarship and internship program to increase Hispanic participation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers; and the Kellogg Foundation supported Health and Environment Action Network (HEAN) that introduced innovative mobile pollution monitoring technology to the U.S. supporting communities in efforts to secure their right to clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

Mr. Falcón is a founding steering committed member of the Partnership to Improve Patient Care, Board of Advisors for the PBS television series, *Second Act* and an editor of the bilingual health magazine, NIH MedlinePlus *Salud*. He has served on the Board of the Children's Safety Network, Public Finance Project, U.S. Programs Committee of Save the Children, the Welfare Information Network, and was a Ziegler Fellow in Civil Rights and Human Liberties.

Prior to joining the Alliance, Mr. Falcón was editor-in-chief of the *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, a senior associate at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and a program director at the Hill Health Center. He received his Masters of Public Policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government and his Bachelor of Arts from Yale University.

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