

Empowering Leaders and Transforming Health Care:

25 YEARS OF IMPACT WITH HEALTHFORCE



Healthforce
Center at UCSF



For 25 years, Healthforce Center at UCSF has led the development and success of the next generation of California’s health leaders. Through its most long-standing initiative — the CHCF Health Care Leadership Program, funded by the California Health Care Foundation — Healthforce has designed a program defined by comprehensive skills training, executive coaching, mentorship opportunities, and access to an invaluable network of impressive alumni. To date, more than 700 clinicians from around the state have come away from it with the skills and relationships needed to thrive in their demanding roles, solve the field’s most persistent problems, and improve care delivery in California and nationwide.

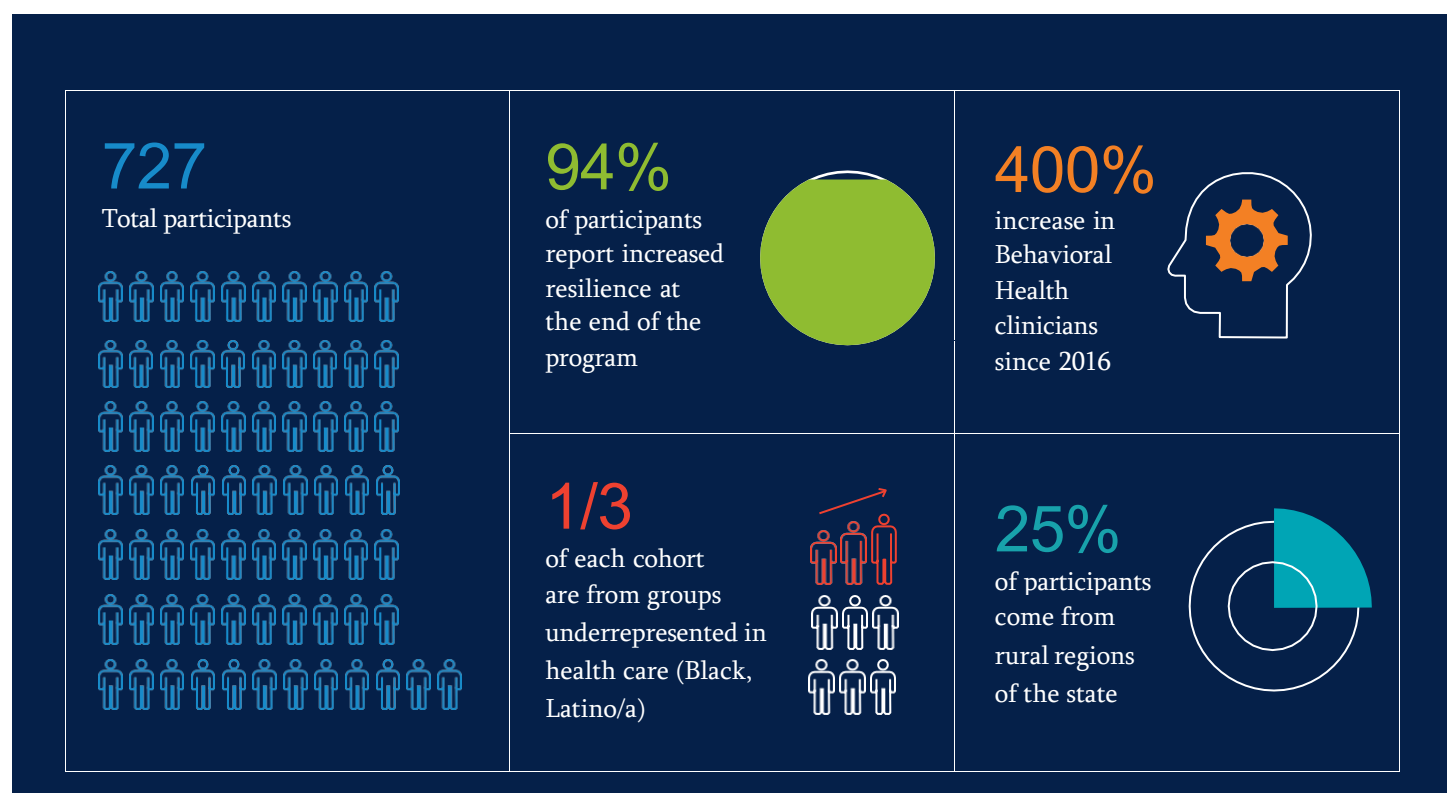
The leadership program represents just one piece of Healthforce’s workforce development strategy. Through its wide range of [leadership and capacity-building initiatives](#), Healthforce drives systems change by

strengthening individuals; catalyzing representation in health care leadership; bridging regional, cultural, and socio-economic divides; and fostering a workforce that is dynamic, adaptable, and quick to respond to changes in an ever-evolving field.

After more than two decades of steering the CHCF program, the team at Healthforce has come away with a deep understanding of what clinician leaders need to direct improvement and thrive in their roles. A core lesson, according to Sunita Mutha, MD, Healthforce Center’s director, is that transforming care begins with those at the helm: “Systems changes must be led by highly capable, trained people. California is benefiting from this network of hundreds of skilled leaders who are activated to drive change in health care. Our goal is to transform care, and this program is a core component of our field-changing strategy.”

Advancing Leadership in Underserved Areas

To advance health equity and quality of care in historically **underserved regions**, the leadership program has prioritized training leaders based in areas with high health care needs, including the Central Valley, the Inland Empire, and California’s rural north, with 25% of participants coming from rural parts of the state. The program also emphasizes fields like **behavioral health**, where demand for services surpasses workforce and resource capacities. Knowing the direct health benefits of fostering a representative and culturally concordant workforce, Healthforce deliberately elevates **Black and Latino/a** clinicians, who have historically been underrepresented in health care leadership positions and whose presence in leadership roles fosters trust with — and better health outcomes for — patients and communities of color. Today, clinicians from underrepresented groups make up one third of each cohort.



Continuous Improvement

Health care is a dynamic industry with policies and priorities that constantly shift. Knowing this, Healthforce has integrated **continuous improvement** into its programming and content to ensure that the leadership program responds to environmental changes and stays relevant. “We recognize what is needed, and we are always adapting,” said Mutha.

“ In rural areas, it can be hard for health care leaders to have camaraderie and academic rigor. It is also hard to recruit physicians to work in these parts of the state. But that speaks to how needed we are and how important it is for us to get leadership training and join state-wide networks.

I was able to take the skills and best practices I learned from the leadership program and bring them home.”

Kelvin Vu (Cohort 14)

DO, chief clinical officer at Open Door Community Health Centers, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties



Rosalba's Story

“We Know What Our Community Needs”

California's Central Valley is home to sizeable Spanish-speaking immigrant and farmworker populations. It also faces a dearth of behavioral health providers, especially those who can provide culturally concordant care.

Addressing issues of access and representation has always been important to Rosalba Serrano Rivera (Cohort 22), MSW, LCSW, director of Camarena Health's behavioral health program. For a long time, Rivera was unsure how to tackle these big challenges. But through the fellowship, she met like-minded leaders and honed her advocacy skills to better advance equity.

“The leadership program provided me with that confidence to be the leader who hires staff who look like the patients we serve, who come from our communities,” Rivera said. “Supporting leaders who are rooted here in the Central Valley and who know what the community needs is critical to advancing health equity, closing care gaps, and transforming the system in general.”

Promoting Resilience

As California’s health system faces workforce shortages and resource cuts, clinician leaders are at risk of fatigue, **burnout**, and even departure from their fields. By refueling people who are mission-driven and results-focused, the leadership program **improves leaders’ capacities** to do the work they love, with 94% of participants reporting increased resilience at the end of the program. It sharpens their management skills, thereby improving job performance; cultivates a network that provides emotional and professional support; and offers tools for resilience, sustainability, and problem solving.

“ I joined the leadership program at a breaking point. Between managing crises, plugging staffing gaps, and keeping the clinic afloat, I was burnt out and overwhelmed. The program became a lifeline, offering space to reconnect with my purpose. Support from my peers reminded me I wasn’t alone, and I emerged with tools to lead strategically and sustainably.”

Mychi Nguyen (Cohort 23)

MD, chief medical officer at Asian Health Services



Pouya’s Story

“Instant Credibility”

When Pouya Afshar (Cohort 22), MD, founded Presidium Health, a start-up that brings home-based care to the health care safety net, he thought that his cost-saving business model would sell itself. But as a physician entrepreneur with neither a business background nor an influential network, Afshar struggled to get traction in his local market. “I was spinning my wheels and starting to question if I’d ever be able to break through,” he said.

Joining the leadership program enabled Afshar to connect with “agents of change” from across the state. Thanks to a cohort referral, he soon found himself pitching Presidium to health plan executives. “You have instant credibility,” he said, adding that leadership program also helped hone his speaking and fundraising skills. “I’m now very optimistic about our future and our ability to help underserved populations in the Medicaid space.”

Bracing Organizations for Change

Clinicians' organizations benefit from the program, coming away more prepared to navigate uncharted waters and better positioned to seize opportunities. **Trust** among alumni across organizations fosters new creative partnerships and accelerates collaboration, meaning problems are solved faster and more effectively. Alumni leave behind **legacies** that promote equity, sustainability, and growth mindsets, which can have a high impact in safety-net settings that have not traditionally had resources to provide leadership training.

“As a Black woman, I used to enter a room full of White people and hear all these inner voices telling me to tone things down. But since participating in the leadership program, I speak up. I feel very confident going into places and sharing my ideas. The program lit a fire in me.”

Tricina Edwards (Cohort 21)

BSN, nurse manager at San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health

“Being part of a network of like-minded clinicians accelerated my growth as a leader — and my career.”

Alice Chen (Cohort 6)

MD, MPH, chief health officer at Centene



Monica's Story

“Real-Time Support”

Monica Soni (Cohort 15), MD, was the new head of a South Los Angeles primary and urgent care clinic when she joined the leadership program. While her medical training had prepared her for the role's clinical aspects, other parts of the job — like balancing budgets and managing staff members — were unfamiliar. “I was out in front of my skills in terms of the skills that I needed to be successful,” she said.

After completing the fellowship, Soni's clinic became a top performer, serving large volumes of patients and attracting skilled physicians and staff. Now chief medical officer at Covered California, Soni says that the skills Healthforce emphasized made all the difference: “We became the shining star of ambulatory clinics — and that is directly connected to me having real-time support from the leadership program.”

Transferable Lessons

While the leadership program is rooted in California, its reach goes beyond the Golden State's borders. As alumni transition to roles at national organizations, they bring knowledge, relationships, and lessons learned from the program with them, reshaping how care is managed and delivered across the country.

Empowering Bold Ideas

Health care leaders are drawn to the program out of a desire to move the needle when it comes to addressing the field's most pressing challenges. After two years of mentorship, training, and network development from Healthforce and its partners, participants are more **confident** taking risks when it comes to **solving meaningful problems**. By exposing clinician leaders to new approaches, tools, and strategies, the program empowers them to speak their minds, change lanes, and act on bold ideas. Alumni come out of the program with a more **holistic understanding** of the health care ecosystem, having been exposed to a wide **range of vantage points** from colleagues with diverse professional and personal backgrounds, including nurses, behavioral health professionals, and rural health leaders.



Award-Winning Innovation

Participants' **California Health Improvement Projects (CHIPs)** explore solutions to real-world problems. In 2024, Marco Angulo (Cohort 20), MD, medical director of AltaMed's Institute for Health Equity, was recognized for his insights into how to train physicians leaders to address health disparities.

An Investment in Health Care's Future

For more than two decades, Healthforce Center at UCSF has shepherded California's next generation of decisionmakers through periods of change, like the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, and uncertainty, as with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the CHCF Health Care Leadership Program, it has developed a robust network of impressive and diverse alumni who are bold, forward-thinking, and resilient; who have front-row seats at the country's most impactful organizations; and who are doing the work of transforming health care to be more equitable, accessible, and sustainable.

Looking forward, Healthforce will continue to evolve alongside the health care system by preparing clinician leaders to respond effectively to whatever comes their way. From funding cuts to workforce shortages to new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), today's health care leaders face a daunting health care landscape. By investing in this program — and in the leaders who will shape health care's future — Healthforce is proactively laying the groundwork to address the changes and challenges we see on the horizon.