Meet the Nation’s New Health Leaders

A roll call from team Biden-Harris

February 15, 2021 By Trent Straube

After enduring nonstop efforts by Republican leaders to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, allow discrimination in health care and ignore basic science, many Americans—especially those living with chronic illnesses—are relieved to have a new Democratic administration at the helm. Here’s a look at key health officials working with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

Xavier BecerraCourtesy of State of California Department of Justice

Xavier Becerra

Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services

Serving as California’s attorney general when nominated, Becerra has “a long track record of fighting for the Affordable Care Act and for health equity,” notes AIDS United, “but some Senate Republicans are concerned [about his] lack of public health policy expertise.”

Anthony Fauci, MDCourtesy of Anthony Fauci, MD

Anthony Fauci, MD

Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and Chief Medical Adviser on COVID-19 to the President

This physician-scientist has led the NIAID and advised presidents since 1984, including during the early HIV epidemic, when he butted heads with AIDS activists before collaborating with them.

Marcia FudgeCourtesy of the U.S. House of Representatives

Marcia Fudge

Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development

Why include Representative Fudge (D–Ohio) in this roundup? As HIV and homelessness advocacy group Housing Works is fond of claiming, “Housing is health care!” Plus, in her HUD role, she’ll oversee the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS program.

Vivek Murthy, MD, MBACourtesy of HHS

Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA

Surgeon General

Murthy returns as “America’s Doctor,” a post he held from 2014 to 2017 under the Obama administration, when he helped the nation tackle the Ebola and Zika viruses and the opioid crisis. He also cofounded the global HIV education group VISIONS and was an attending physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital at Harvard Medical School.

Marcella Nunez-Smith, MD, MHSCourtesy of Yale School of Medicine

Marcella Nunez-Smith, MD, MHS

COVID-19 Equity Task Force Chair

An associate professor of medicine and epidemiology at the Yale School of Medicine, she’s a leading expert on inequities, discrimination and racial disparities in health care—as such, she’ll offer vital insight, because COVID-19, like HIV, disproportionately affects Black and brown communities.

Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPHCourtesy of Massachusetts General Hospital

Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH

Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

An HIV doctor, infectious disease specialist and professor of medicine at Harvard, Walensky will head the nation’s public health institute. Renowned AIDS activist Gregg Gonsalves says she’s “the perfect person to lead us out of the darkness of this [COVID-19] pandemic.”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.