



Health Services Researcher Valdez to Lead AHRQ

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Robert “Bob” Otto Valdez, Ph.D., a health services researcher with previous experience at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has been named director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Before joining AHRQ, Valdez served as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Professor Emeritus of Family & Community Medicine and Economics at the University of New Mexico. He was the founding executive director of the RWJF Center for Health Policy at the university. He previously served as founding dean at the Drexel University School of Public Health in Philadelphia. From 1985 through 1999, he was Professor of Health Services at the UCLA School of Public Health and directed the health services doctoral studies program, the MBA/MPH program in collaboration with the UCLA Anderson School of Business and served as associate director of the Chicano Studies Research Center.

From 1993 through 1997, Dr. Valdez served at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health (Public Health Service) and simultaneously as Director of Interagency Health Policy (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services). Prior to joining DHHS in 1993, he served as a Special Senior Advisor to the White House on healthcare reform. In 1998, he served as Special Senior Advisor to the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

A blog post by AcademyHealth notes that “Valdez comes to AHRQ during a time of great tumult in our country as the pandemic has brought the healthcare system to the breaking point, health practitioners are fighting burnout, exhaustion, misinformation and distrust, pervasive disparities continue to impact communities of color, and policymakers are looking for answers to questions that have long plagued our health systems. We have seen how far short we have fallen as a country of our goals in

providing access to high quality health care for all and study after study reveal the many facets of deep racial, ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic health disparities. There are far too little evidence-based evaluations and understanding of the policies that were enacted in response to the pandemic, or to the health care system and supply chains that were far less resilient to shocks that led to ad hoc interventions. The challenges that AHRQ and our country face are great and urgent, and strong proactive leadership is key. Dr. Valdez will provide this.”

AcademyHealth also noted that AHRQ is the only agency that has the statutory authorizations to generate research on the healthcare system. “While AHRQ undertakes and funds critical research that transcends a single disease or hospital system, it also plays a key role in translating research findings across the biomedical and public health systems in a way that improves individual and community care. Health services and primary care research through AHRQ are critical pieces of the puzzle as we identify what goes wrong, what needs to go right, and bridge the divide between the development of new cures and providing high-value care to all.”

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