

**Name:** Sheila Young-Mercado, MD

**Professional Title, Organization:** Founding Board Member, Compton Health Equity Collaborative

**CHIP Title:** Yes, Your Voice Matters

**Project Description (include objectives, results, solutions):**

The City of Compton, California and community of North Long Beach, California continue to experience extraordinary barriers to lifesaving medical care. With the highest rates of maternal mortality, infant mortality, and homicide in Los Angeles County, these areas lack essential lifesaving medical services including, a high-risk hospital-based birthing center, a neonatal intensive care unit, and a level-one trauma center. Furthermore, individuals in these communities suffer higher rates of blindness, amputation, kidney failure, heart attack and stroke, the negative sequelae of chronic medical conditions such as uncontrolled diabetes mellitus and uncontrolled hypertension. It is no wonder, therefore, that the life expectancy in Compton and North Long Beach are 77.1 years and 78.9 years respectively, compared 87.5 years among the “best performing city or community” in Los Angeles County.

Through CHIP interviews, I was connected with a group of individuals who are passionate about improving the access to health care in Compton, California. In the fall of 2022, we created the Compton Health Equity Collaborative. Overall, we believe that with California boasting one of the highest GDP per capita in the US and having the fifth largest economy in the world, there is no reason why we cannot work together to provide Compton and North Long Beach with culturally and linguistically appropriate life-sustaining medical care.

Our overarching goal is to empower community members to be the architects of the way health care is delivered in their communities and to build capacity among community members to provide basic and advance health care services. This is a long-term project where we envision a comprehensive health care center and a corresponding hospital run and staffed by individuals from the community with the lived experiences to meet their friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors' needs.

**Key Findings and Lessons Learned:**

- Through individual interviews and focus groups, community members described continued barriers to accessing medical and mental health care and particularly the absence of certain health care services in the area such as trauma care, advanced cardiac care, dental care and maternity care.
- Community members expressed that their voice does not matter; that they do not matter. They have had discussions of what they need, yet there are no long-term substantive solutions that have been provided. They are tired of talking about the problems. They want to see action.
- Community members often feel used when an organization starts a project then leaves once their research is complete.
- Community members did not believe that they would see health justice in their lifetime.
- We must plan for the long-term if we want to build and maintain trust with community members.
- Local and state leaders are aware of the issues, but unsure of how to approach bringing more services to their communities.

- We are working directly with community members in ways that demonstrate that their recommendations and suggestions are valued and realized.

**Next Steps:**

Continued advocacy for health care infrastructure and workforce development.

- **Short-term:** Increasing health insurance coverage so more individuals can access care at MLK Community Hospital. Increasing access to telemedicine (telephonic and video), concurrently increasing access to high-speed internet at home.
- **Intermediate term:** Provide a comprehensive health care facility open after hours and weekends.
- **Long-term:** Provide a tertiary care medical facility that augments the services provided by local medical facilities to include trauma, stroke, and cardiac care facilities, MICU, SICU, NICU, Maternity Ward staffed with Maternal Fetal Medicine specialists to care for high-risk pregnant patients.