



New Fellow Spotlight: Vikki Wachino

Chief Executive Officer

Community Oriented Correctional Health Facilities

Vikki Wachino is CEO of Community Oriented Correctional Health Services, a nonprofit dedicated to building a system of health care for people who experience the criminal justice system. Vikki has worked for more than 25 years to advance stronger health care policy for low income people in the United States. She is the former Deputy Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, where she oversaw all policy and operations for the Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Programs, which serve more than 70 million Americans. She has also worked as a consultant, advising organizations on making policy, strategy and operational changes to advance the health of people with complex social needs, including people involved in the criminal justice system. Earlier in her career, Vikki worked at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and NORC at the University of Chicago. Vikki is the author of many publications on Medicaid coverage and financing and speaks frequently on these topics, including in testimony before the United States Congress.

What are you most looking forward to as a NAPA Fellow?

In the course of my career, there has never been a more clear or compelling need to demonstrate the value of public leadership than there is right now. I hope to work with the NAPA fellows across the varied fields in which we each work to help strengthen public confidence in leadership and expertise.

What inspires you during these challenging times?

My colleagues – in my own organization and in others that I work with -- have unfailingly continued to advance their missions, steering through the difficult financial, political, and practical barriers that COVID and other factors have precipitated. Their commitment to mission and to helping a growing number of people in need inspires me.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do?

Most of my career has focused on ensuring that people have health insurance through Medicaid when they need it. I've enjoyed knowing that the work I am doing has an impact on people's lives, and in particular on the lives of people who face difficult life circumstances – people who may have lost their jobs, or are experiencing a serious health condition or disability, or are just trying to make ends meet.

Who or what inspired you to work in public service?

Primarily, my parents. My mom taught school and ultimately ran our local board of education. My dad worked in the defense industry, which is of course highly influenced by federal policy decisions. Our dinner table conversation was frequently a mix of policy and politics. It apparently hard wired me for public service.

Which of the Academy's Grand Challenges resonate most with you?

All of the Grand Challenges resonate, but Fostering Social Equity aligns squarely with my priorities right now. My current work focuses on building a stronger public health system that promotes health equity and justice for people who are involved in the criminal legal system. We need to strengthen systems to promote greater equity, and racial equity in particular.

What advice can you give to folks beginning careers in public service?

The first thing I would say to someone entering public service is: “Congratulations! Great choice!” The opportunity to serve the public is a gift. And that leads to the advice: Make the most of the opportunity. What is it that you want to accomplish? How are you going to deliver value for the people and communities you serve? Challenge yourself to answer those questions each day. And have fun!

What is the first concert you attended?

When I was in sixth grade friends gave me tickets to an Andy Gibb concert for my birthday. The music was fine, but the real pleasure was in simply attending: because it was a gift, my parents could not say no.