Ninez Ponce, Ph.D., MPP

Chair, Department of Health Policy and Management
UCLA Fielding School of Public Health

Director
UCLA Center for Health Policy Research

Ninez Ponce, PhD, MPP, is the chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and the director of its UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. She leads the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the nation's largest state health survey, recognized as a national model for data collection on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and immigrant health. CHIS is the only large-scale population survey that includes Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, Cantonese and Mandarin, in addition to Spanish and English in administering the survey to a representative sample of California's adults, adolescents, and young children. It is considered a gold standard for other state-level efforts on meaningful inclusion of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders through oversampling or special samples, and by developing culturally and linguistically appropriate instruments. This approach has resulted in one of the richest datasets with sufficient subsample of the SOGI population, mixed immigrant status (citizen children with noncitizen parents) families, and several major Asian ethnic groups. CHIS is one of the few population datasets that collects information on American Indian/Alaska Native tribal enrollment and whether the tribe is state or federally recognized. Ponce recently served on the Board of Scientific Counselors, National Center for Health Statistics. She has served on committees for the National Academy of Sciences and the National Quality Forum (NQF), where her expertise has focused on setting guidance for health systems in the measurement and use of race/ethnicity and other social determinants of health as tools to monitor health equity. In 2019, Ponce and her team received the AcademyHealth Impact award for their contributions to population health measurement to inform public policies. In recognition of her career-long commitment to community-engaged research and data advocacy, Ponce was the 2019-20 recipient of the Don T. Nakanishi Award for Outstanding Engaged Scholarship at UCLA and the 2020 inaugural Data Equity award from the Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership (APPEAL).

As the chair of AcademyHealth 2020 meeting, Ponce advocated for plenary discussions of algorithmic fairness, especially in making inferences on health, health behaviors, and health risks of people of color. In many ways, the excellence of the health policy field is conditioned on the diversity, equity, and inclusion of the data. Ponce champions better data, especially on social determinants of health, better inferences on communities of color, better population representation of data, especially for those that are typically invisible in administrative and surveillance data, and better care for overlooked groups.

Ponce earned her bachelor's degree in science at UC Berkeley, her master's degree in public policy at Harvard University, and her Ph.D. in health services at UCLA.