



Adrianna Nava

Finding the voice within

Nurses as community leaders influence health policy.

By Adrianna Nava, PhD, MPA, MSN, RN

FOR MILLENNIAL NURSES, involvement in community leadership through professional associations such as the National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN) can be integral to developing leadership competencies and skills. For RNs who graduated after the 2007–2009 recession, it was difficult to find a nursing job, let alone one that might result in a management position where they could acquire leadership skills. Transitioning from staff nurse to management or senior leadership without “paying your dues,” or from a clinical to an administrative role without years of experience, can be challenging.



To develop my leadership skills, I volunteered and was elected to serve in 2011 as the president of the Illinois Hispanic Nurses Association, now known as the NAHN Illinois Chapter (NAHN-IL). We focused on the professional development of Hispanic nurses to improve Hispanic health outcomes. Within 2 years, I grew our chapter to the fifth largest in the country. As a local chapter president, not only did I have to speak up for myself, I also had to speak up on behalf of others and learn how to negotiate and build consensus among external stakeholders (valuable leadership skills in any healthcare setting). This experience ignited my desire to get involved in health policy, with a focus on improving health equity and access to care for underserved communities in the United States.

To keep growing, I continued volunteering

with NAHN and participated in advanced nursing education. Subsequently, I was elected to serve on the 2014–2016 National NAHN Board of Directors and as 2021–2024 NAHN president. I focus on increasing the pipeline of Hispanic nurse leaders in the United States and developing partnerships to improve the health of Latino communities. Serving in these roles keeps me visible to nursing and healthcare leaders and current with emerging nursing practice and policy topics.

In addition to completing my doctoral dissertation (which focused on assessing the impact of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act on reducing racial/ethnic disparities in healthcare access), in the summer of 2020, I volunteered on the Health Policy Committee for the Biden for President Campaign, where I concentrated on healthcare quality and immigrant health. I combined my leadership and advocacy experience within NAHN and my academic knowledge of health policy to contribute to national policy recommendations.

Looking back, although each academic and clinical practice moment played a role in who I am now, my experiences as a volunteer community leader shaped me most. Many leaders have directed my career trajectory, including my current leadership position. Other volunteers also have influenced me. When you represent a group of people with shared values and goals and advocate for a common purpose, the experiences can be magical. Over the years, as I've helped other Latino nurses find their voices, my own voice has grown stronger, and I've become a better advocate for improving Latino health throughout the United States. I encourage any nurse who wants to find their voice (or passion) to lend a hand on an issue you care deeply about. You'll soon find your way.

AN

Adrianna Nava is president of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses and co-chair of the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing. She also is the chief of quality at a Chicago-based hospital.