

# Promoting Health Equity

Issue 11 • April 2021

## Quote of the Month

The Public Health Institute applauds the formation of a White House Gender Policy Council, established through executive order on International Women's Day, March 8, 2021.

*"We applaud the council's focus to address the needs of women from underserved communities, and the gendered impacts of COVID-19. As we have seen in our own work, the pandemic is worsening gender violence and inequalities, from domestic violence, homelessness, job loss and more—with an increased burden on women from vulnerable communities."*

Source: Public Health Institute

[phi.org/press/phi-statement-on-the-gender-policy-council](https://phi.org/press/phi-statement-on-the-gender-policy-council)



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**#VaccineReady** | **April 2021**

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## National Minority Health Month 2021

April is National Minority Health Month, and this year, the HHS Office of Minority Health (OMH) is focusing on the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on racial and ethnic minority and American Indian and Alaska Native communities and underscore the need for these vulnerable

communities to get vaccinated as more vaccines become available.

This year's theme for National Minority Health Month is #VaccineReady. The focus will be to empower communities to get the facts about COVID-19 vaccines, share accurate vaccine information, participate in clinical trials, get vaccinated when the time comes and practice COVID-19 safety measures.

**Learn More:**

Office of Minority Health

[National Minority Health Month](#)

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## Driver of Change: Interview with Arcenio J. López, Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)

### Finding My Voice



*Every issue we feature stories of individuals and agencies that are making a difference in their communities during this time of COVID-19. Today we are talking with Arcenio J. López, Executive Director, Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP).*



*MICOP's Executive Director, Arcenio J. López, is a visionary and passionate indigenous leader working to elevate the voices of the indigenous people in California. Arcenio emigrated to the United States at the age of 21, with the goal similar to many of his fellow Oaxacans - to make enough money to support his new*

*family in Mexico. Arcenio was chosen to be MICOP's first indigenous Executive Director in 2014. Under Arcenio's leadership, MICOP has grown into the preeminent indigenous immigrant organization in Southern California. Arcenio has united indigenous immigrants in transforming power relationships and advancing farmworker rights.*

### **How did you get interested in MICOP?**

**Arcenio:** In 2003 while working in the strawberry fields I noticed that people from Oaxaca were treated differently by people from other states of Mexico. I noticed indigenous farmworkers were mistreated and bullied simply because they were speaking their native language. Being from Oaxaca myself I felt that this was unfair and started to wonder what I can do to help my community. So, I went to introduce myself to El Concilio and I was offered the position as their volunteer Spanish Language Tutor, but not having transportation of my own prevented me from taking that offer. I also started attending ESL classes at Oxnard Adult School and met Josefina who was one of MICOP's board members. In 2004, Josefina introduced me to MICOP's founder, Sandy Young, who invited me to attend their monthly community meeting where I felt connected immediately and decided to volunteer. Later MICOP hired me as their first indigenous community organizer in 2006. In 2008, I applied for the Executive Director position but instead I became the Associate Director. In 2010, I was promoted to be the Executive Director of MICOP. I've now been with MICOP for more than 15 years.

### **What is your passion for working in the community?**

**Arcenio:** I never imagined that community work was a passion of mine. I always knew that helping others was in my DNA and I'd say that this is my calling. As an indigenous person myself I have found my voice and I see this as my responsibility to speak about us. We have to reclaim our rights to continue to be the authors of our own narratives, but this won't be possible without initiatives similar to what MICOP has created. I'd like to continue contributing toward creating safe spaces to support our indigenous people to feel confident to raise up their voices and use their power to create changes they want to see for themselves and their families.

There are personal motivators that shaped me to do this work. I grew up listening to my grandmother's story about being discriminated against for not being able to speak Spanish. My grandparents and parents were seasonal workers for the cotton, sugar cane, and tomato industries in Mexico. Later my parents also were agricultural workers for the grape, vegetable, and strawberry industries in California. When I hear them tell their stories and experiences, I don't recall a single one being positive; rather, they are about how they have been taking advantage of, discriminated against, underpaid, the health issues that the physical work had caused in their bodies, etc. These types of stories I see in every single person I have the opportunity to talk to through my work. So, more than passion, this being an

obligation to contribute to do something to change these conditions.

**How are you specifically addressing issues of Health Equity in your work and your community? How are you making a difference?**

**Arcenio:** For the past 15 years my work has been focused toward leadership development of the indigenous migrant community in Ventura County. We are creating leaders who are community outreach workers that are multilingual to lead outreach and education efforts in the indigenous migrant community. I have contributed to initiatives that promote higher access to resources of the indigenous community. Some of these initiatives include: Voz de la Mujer Indígena, with the goal of indigenous women's leadership development. In 2009, we started a youth group called Tequio, uniting and building the leadership of indigenous high school and college students, encouraging their activism for immigrant and indigenous rights, and promoting cultural pride. Tequio Youth launched an influential anti-discrimination campaign called No Me Llamas Oaxaquita, confronting the anti-indigenous racism that is often prevalent in the Mexican community. In 2019, MICOP launched the Indigenous Interpreter Services, formalizing the indigenous health interpreters 40-hr training curriculum and contracting with over 75 area agencies to provide Mixteco and Zapoteco interpretation.

In 2017, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with talented and strong indigenous community leaders to be able to launch the first indigenous radio station in Ventura County - Radio Indígena 94.1FM. More recent contributions have been to bring MICOP's work internationally. In the spring and summer of 2019, I participated in the plenary panel at the Global Labor Migration conference in Amsterdam and traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to be part of the International Des-Conferencia of Indigenous Interpreters and Translators organized by CEPIADET.

Currently, MICOP's team of 90 employees has expanded to the northern region of Santa Barbara County in the city of Santa Maria and created new programs including the MICOP's Immigration Legal Assistance (MILA) to provide immigration legal support to the indigenous community of the California Central Coast.

During the COVID19 pandemic, we continue to advocate with and for the indigenous community. We are building bridges with key stakeholders such as public health departments and other government agencies to support them on how they can better address the health needs of our communities. We are developing outreach strategies that include videos and PSAs in indigenous languages, hiring a team of community health outreach workers to conduct COVID19 education outreach and building stronger trust with the community and access to COVID19 vaccines. We are engaging in decision making conversations with local officials to create long lasting system changes and public policies for better inclusion and equity for hard-to-reach and underserved

populations and communities including indigenous people.

**What are the areas that you hope to make changes in?**

**Arcenio:** I hope to see that borders no longer exist. I want humans to live as humans, to respect one another. A place where we are not afraid to speak our languages, that our voices are heard and that all have access to those services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. I want farm workers labor to be recognized by providing them with better wages and benefits such as retirement, wage replacement, and health insurance.

**Tell us one thing about you that helps us get to know you better?**

**Arcenio:** I came to this country when I was 21 years old. I worked in the strawberry fields and three years in a green vegetable packing company. I was a cook at a local Mexican restaurant. So, I know how to cook (laughing). I am a proud dad of two girls, Maritza and Emily. Maritza is currently enrolled at UCLA and Emily is deciding where to go, maybe UC Davis or UCSB. I am proud of my six brothers and my parents. We all came almost at the same time and learned English and graduated from college. I have brothers who hold degrees in computer engineering, business and refrigeration, one with a PhD. In 2019, finally, I graduated with a B.S in Accounting from Cal Lutheran University. Now, I am looking for the next phase of my educational life. I hope I can continue with my Master's degree, but not until my two daughters graduate from university. I love listening to chilenas (Mixteco music). I am a plant lover. I have hundreds of different little plantitas.

**If you could give a closing remark for or words of inspiration for the community during this time, what would it be?**

**Arcenio:** The pandemic uncovered what we already knew, the hundreds of years of injustice and exclusion we have suffered. We must continue to build on our strengths of unity, and create a circle of support and healing so that we will get through this as we have done in past crises. We must continue doing what we know best, organizing the community for social change because we have the power to transform systems of structural racism and inequalities built without including our voices in the conversation and it is time to change that. We the indigenous people have power and we can be the authors of our destiny.

**Thank you Arcenio for sharing your experience with us. You are an inspiring Driver of Change!**

*Thank you to Alma Ixta for her excellence in editorial writing for this interview.*

**Learn more:**

Mixteco/Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP)  
[mixteco.org](http://mixteco.org)

*"To support, organize and empower the indigenous migrant community in California's Central Coast"*





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## Featured Resource: Isabella Jimenez: Launching a Food App to Inspire Healthy Eating

### Promoting Healthy Communities

*From Salud America!*

*Here is a story about inspiring healthy eating and lifestyles.*



Isabella Jimenez is only 16 years old, but she's already an entrepreneur and app creator. Jimenez began creating her app called MyFunFood in 2018. The app is meant to be a digital cookbook where young people can learn to cook easy, healthy recipes, while also playing trivia games and learning health tips.

*"The goal now that it's out is just to try to get it to not only kids, but adults and families as well, and not just the San Antonio area, but hopefully even the across the country," Jimenez said.*

MyFunFood started as a service project for Jimenez. She wanted to help her classmates eat healthier. In Latino neighborhoods here and across the nation, families are exposed to little healthy food and abundant availability of junk food. "After thinking about it for a while, I was like, 'You know what, I think I'm going to do a cookbook,'" Jimenez said. But she quickly discovered her peers would be more interested in a cooking app than a physical cookbook. Read about her inspiration.

**Learn more:**  
*Salud America!*  
[Salud Heroes](#)

*Salud America! is a national Latino-focused organization that creates culturally relevant and research-based stories and tools to inspire people to drive healthy changes to policies, systems, and environments for Latino children and families.*

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# In the News: Biden Establishes A Gender Policy Council Within the White House

## Promoting Gender Equity

*From NPR*

President Biden marked International Women's Day by signing two executive orders geared toward promoting gender equity, both in the United States and around the world.

In a statement, Biden said: "In our nation, as in all nations, women have fought for justice, shattered barriers, built and sustained economies, carried communities through times of crisis, and served with dignity and resolve. Too often, they have done so while being denied the freedom, full participation, and equal opportunity all women are due."

**Learn more:**

[Biden Establishes A Gender Policy Council Within The White House](#), NPR, March 8, 2021

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## Featured New Resources

We continually add new resources to the Social Determinants of Health website. Here a few newest ones here.

### **National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM)**

The National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM) is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the International Organization for Migration to support state and local health departments working with refugee, immigrant, and migrant (RIM) communities that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

[nrcrim.org](https://nrcrim.org)

### **House Farm Workers!**

House Farm Workers! has established committees that cover the unincorporated county, Santa Paula, Fillmore, Ventura, Oxnard, Camarillo and Moorpark. These volunteer-driven committees are the heart of the organization and have played a critical role in advocating on behalf of the farm worker community since 2004. The city groups mobilize public support, engage public officials, and collaborate with other grassroots organizations to ensure affordable housing for farm workers.

[housefarmworkers.org](https://housefarmworkers.org)

### **Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community**

The Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign is a

statewide collaboration between tobacco and alcohol use prevention, sexually transmitted disease prevention, and nutrition partners to examine what's in our community stores and how that impacts public health. The aim of the Healthy Stores for Healthy Communities program is to improve the health of Californians through changes in community stores. They work to educate people on how in-store product availability and marketing influences what we eat, drink and use.

[healthystoreshealthycommunity.com](http://healthystoreshealthycommunity.com)

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## Upcoming Events

We will keep you posted on upcoming events in each newsletter. If your agency is planning any online meetings, please send us the information so we can post it.

**Health Disparities Roundtable: Disparities in COVID-19 – Social Justice, Policy, and Ethical Considerations in Vaccinating the U.S. Population**

4/16/2021, 7:00 - 8:30 AM CDT

The Health Equity Work Group at the UMN School of Public Health

[Register](#)

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## Nominate a Driver of Change

### Share your Stories

You may nominate a community member or colleague for recognition for exemplary work in the community to help build healthier communities and address health equity. Go to the website and nominate someone or yourself!



We would love to hear your stories of community change, what inspired you, and how you are making a difference.

**Learn more:**

Social Determinants of Health, Drivers of Change

[www.healthequityvc.org/drivers-of-change](http://www.healthequityvc.org/drivers-of-change)

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## Stay Connected

If you are looking for resources in the community, check out our websites. We continually add news, tips, latest research, blogs, publications and more.



Social Determinants of Health  
[www.healthequityvc.org](http://www.healthequityvc.org)

Ventura County Behavioral Health  
[vcbh.org](http://vcbh.org)

Wellness Every Day  
[www.wellnesseveryday.org/news](http://www.wellnesseveryday.org/news)

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STAY CONNECTED

