

Biographical Sketch

Kara Odom Walker, MD, MPH, MSHS

Secretary, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services



As Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Dr. Walker runs one of the largest agencies in state government, DHSS has 11 divisions, employs more than 4,000 people and in one way or another affects almost every citizen in Delaware. DHSS provides services in the areas of public health, social services, substance abuse and mental health, child support, developmental disabilities, long-term care, visual impairment, aging and adults with physical disabilities, state service centers, management services, financial coaching, and Medicaid and medical assistance. The Department includes three long-term care facilities and the state's only public psychiatric hospital, the Delaware Psychiatric Center.

Prior to joining DHSS, she served as the former Deputy Chief Science Officer at the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) from August 2012 to January 2017. As part of the leadership team, Walker had responsibility for overseeing PCORI's long-term research investments, working on operational efficiencies for the Science department, managing external relationships with stakeholders and Board members, and managing the front office of the Chief Science Officer.

A family physician with health services and community-based participatory research training, Walker previously was assistant clinical professor in family and community medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, where she created measurement instruments to better understand integrated care in health systems for diverse populations.

An honors graduate of University of Delaware with a BS in chemical engineering, Walker received her MD from Jefferson Medical College and her MPH from Johns Hopkins University. She completed postgraduate training at University of California, San Francisco, and served as a Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she conducted research on the impact of hospital closure on underserved, minority populations.

As an advocate for health equity and minority and underserved populations, Walker has been recognized for leadership by the Harvard Business School's program for leadership development, the American Medical Association, and the National Medical Association. She is a past national president of the Student National Medical Association and past postgraduate physician trustee of the National Medical Association. She continues to see primary care patients in a local clinic for the uninsured.