Findings from CHCF's Regional Market Report on San Diego and Imperial Counties

Tuesday, November 10, 2026

Speaker Biographies

Kara Carter, MBA, MSc, is senior vice president of strategy and programs at the California Health Care Foundation, where she develops strategies, provides overall guidance, and leads the program teams in the development, execution, and assessment of CHCF's work. In this role, Carter provides thought leadership and support to CHCF's grantmaking programs and priorities, as well as CHCF's program-related investments and its learning and impact functions.

Before joining CHCF, Carter was a partner at McKinsey & Company's San Francisco and London offices. She was a leader in McKinsey's Medicaid practice in the US, and supported public and private sector health systems in the US, UK, and Europe to improve quality, access, and affordability. Before joining McKinsey, Carter worked for UK-based philanthropic institutions on a broad range of topics related to poverty and community action. She received a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, a master's in social anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a master's in business administration from the London Business School. Carter currently serves on the UC Davis Health National Advisory Board.

Douglas Cates, PhD, has served as chief strategy officer at UC San Diego Health for the past nine years. He recently became the chief strategy officer for the Palomar – UC San Diego Health joint power authority, a new entity serving patients of North County San Diego. Cates is responsible for guiding clinical services growth and network development for both enterprises and helping to ensure programs meet community needs across the region. He has more than 30 years of experience in market analysis and business development & strategy across healthcare delivery, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods. Cates holds a PhD in physical chemistry from Duke University, along with a BS in chemistry and computer science from Baylor University.

Caroline Davis, MPP, is president of Davis Health Strategies LLC, which provides strategic and analytical services to health systems, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and government agencies focused on health care and health policy. Davis is a recognized health policy expert

with over 20 years of experience in health care financing, policy development, and implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. She has extensive experience with California's health programs for low-income populations, especially the state's Medicaid program (Medi-Cal). From 2014-18, Davis was the senior policy director for the Local Health Plans of California (LHPC). In this role, she provided leadership and strategic direction to identify policy and advocacy positions for California's 16 locally based health plans as well as analysis of the operational impacts of Medi-Cal legislative and regulatory proposals.

Prior to joining LHPC, Davis was a senior consultant at Health Management Associates (HMA), a national Medicaid consulting firm. Prior to joining HMA, she founded and served as the senior operations manager for the California-based Center to Promote HealthCare Access — now known as Alluma — and as a program officer with the California Health Care Foundation. Davis also has served on the senior staff of California's Medi-Cal program, where she worked on a variety of policy, financing, reimbursement, and operational issues. She started her career in Washington, DC, as the lead Medicare analyst at the White House Office of Management and Budget. Davis earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Carleton College and her master's degree in public policy from Duke University.

Gene Ma, MD, is president & CEO of Tri-City Healthcare District. He joined Tri-City Emergency Medical Group in July of 2000, subsequently becoming their executive director and managing partner, overseeing their medical practice along with the business and revenue cycle operations. Ma served as chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine and later was elected by his peers as chief of staff at Tri-City Hospital. After serving as chief medical officer for the hospital, Ma was honored to serve as the president and CEO of Tri-City Medical Center. During his tenure as CEO at Tri-City, after leading an operational, clinical, and financial turnaround, Ma guided the District through a national search for a long-term partner, resulting in the successful lease of the hospital to Sharp HealthCare.

Ma founded and served as CEO of WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists (OHS) in 2012, expanding it into the region's pre-eminent occupational medicine practice. His experience also includes executive management and board roles for private equity firms, along with tech startups. Ma attended medical school at the University of California, San Francisco. He then completed his internship at Stanford, followed by a residency in emergency medicine at UC San Diego. Ma has been honored as San Diego's "Top Doctor in Emergency Medicine" 10 times.

Melissa Major is CEO of Sharp Rees-Stealy Medical Centers, where she leads a team of 3,000 employees dedicated to supporting over 700 primary and specialty care physicians and

advanced practice providers. For over 100 years, Sharp Rees-Stealy has provided compassionate service and care to generations of San Diegans. Sharp Rees-Stealy serves more than 400,000 patients at 15 medical office sites, six urgent care centers, and eight retail pharmacies throughout San Diego County.

Major joined Sharp HealthCare in 1999, serving as a contracts consultant before becoming an accounts receivables manager. She moved over to Sharp Rees-Stealy in 2005 and was named vice president of Facilities & Ancillary Services. Major was promoted to chief administrative officer in 2023, having responsibility for more than 850 staff and 1 million square feet of medical office space. Her 27-year career at Sharp has been spent supporting Sharp Rees-Stealy's mission to offer quality services that set community standards and exceed expectations in a caring, convenient, affordable, and accessible manner.

Amanda Simmons, MSHCT, is chief development officer for Health Center Partners (HCP) of Southern California, and she also serves as executive vice president for HCP's clinically integrated network (Integrated Health Partners) and accountable care organization (My Choice Quality Care Network). In these roles, Simmons helps community health centers navigate complex payer environments and improve patient access and outcomes.

Simmons has more than 20 years of experience serving Medicaid, low-income, and uninsured populations, and developing strategies to help rural and safety-net organizations manage complex healthcare challenges. Before joining Integrated Health Partners in 2021, Simmons was a principal at Premier, Inc., where she led consulting work focused on value-based transformation, Medicaid, and managed Medicaid. Previously, she served as administrative director of the DSRIP Region 3 Southeast Texas Regional Healthcare Partnership for the Texas Medicaid Transformation 1115 Waiver, and as executive director of business development for Baylor College of Medicine. Simmons is a graduate of LeTourneau University and holds a master of science in healthcare transformation degree from The University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School Value Institute.

Kristof Stremikis, MPP, MPH, is director of the California Health Care Foundation's Market Analysis and Insight team, which promotes greater transparency and accountability in California's health care system. He oversees the foundation's work to provide research and analysis to policymakers and other health leaders across the state to give a market-wide view of the complex health care ecosystem and to support informed decisions about California's health care landscape.

Stremikis previously served as associate director for policy at the Pacific Business Group on Health, where he also oversaw the Purchaser Value Network. Earlier, he spent six years at the Commonwealth Fund as senior researcher to the president. He received a bachelor's degree in economics, political science, and history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison; a master's degree in public policy from UC Berkeley; and a master's degree in health policy and management from Columbia University.