

David Satcher Doctor of Science

Esteemed physician and untiring public health advocate, you served as U.S. Surgeon General from 1998 to 2002 and for much of that time you simultaneously held the position of Assistant Secretary of Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. During your tenure as Surgeon General, you continued the important battle against smoking and tackled vital but controversial issues that had never before been addressed at the national level, including mental health, sexual health, obesity, and the disparities that exist in health care access and quality for minorities. Your leadership on these issues was hailed by the American Academy of Family Physicians as well as policy makers, health professionals, community leaders, and individuals across the country.

Prior to your appointment as Surgeon General, your distinguished career in the service of public health included stints as Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Throughout your career in public service, you emphasized preventive care, promoted healthy lifestyles, and worked to improve public health policy for all Americans.

Champion of health care for the underserved, born in 1941, you grew up in rural Alabama before the Civil Rights era. When you contracted whooping cough at age 2, the local hospital was off-limits to you because of your race. The only local black doctor walked miles to your home to care for you, and your family credited him with saving your life. You decided to follow in the footsteps of that physician. Throughout your career, you have remained committed to the mission of drawing attention to health disparities and working to find solutions.

Leader in the field of medical education, through your work as a scholar, teacher, and administrator, you have sought to make medical education more inclusive of minorities and doctors more responsive to the needs of patients. You have taught at Morehouse School of Medicine and the UCLA School of Medicine and Public Health; developed and chaired the King-Drew Department of Family Medicine at King-Drew Medical Center in Los Angeles; and served as president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, and interim president at Morehouse School of Medicine. In 2002 you assumed the post of Director of the National Center for Primary Care at Morehouse School of Medicine. Three years ago, you established the Satcher Health Leadership Institute, whose mission is to develop a diverse group of public health leaders, to foster and support leadership strategies, and to influence policies toward the reduction and ultimate elimination of disparities in health.

You have received many honors in recognition of your contributions to public health, including top awards from the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians, and the American Academy of Family Physicians. You received the Breslow Award in Public Health, the New York Academy of Medicine Lifetime Achievement Award, the Bennie Mays Trailblazer Award, the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Award for Humanitarian Contributions to the Health of Humankind from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, and the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Award for Sustained National Leadership.

Over the years, you had often expressed your desire to be known as “the Surgeon General who listened to the American people and who responded with effective programs.” Today we affirm that you have achieved that goal.