



Department of Veterans Affairs

Senior Executive Biography

Dr. Shereef Elnahal

Under Secretary for Health

Dr. Shereef Elnahal is Under Secretary for Health at the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, nominated by President Joseph R. Biden and confirmed by the United States Senate in 2022. He is a physician leader who previously served as President and Chief Executive Officer of University Hospital in Newark, NJ from 2019 through 2022. University Hospital is a Level I trauma center, the principal academic medical center for Rutgers NJ Medical School, the state's only public hospital, and New Jersey's largest urban safety net hospital.



Dr. Elnahal led University Hospital through the COVID-19 public health emergency. The hospital has served as a model for urban hospital and regional response efforts. In addition, Governor Phil Murphy tasked the hospital with coordinating regional pandemic response efforts across dozens of hospitals in northern NJ, as well as with activating a military field hospital alongside the National Guard. Dr. Elnahal also set up one of the first COVID-19 vaccination sites in NJ, vaccinating the state's first health care worker on December 15th, 2020.

In addition to his leadership during the pandemic, Dr. Elnahal oversaw substantial improvements in care quality and patient safety at University Hospital, leading to improvements against national benchmarks. He also oversaw a financial turnaround of the hospital, moving from significant operating losses to a healthy operating surplus. He brought his public health background to bear in community-based programming, including a partnership with a developer and the NJ Housing and Mortgage Financing Authority to provide supportive housing to homeless patients; a hospital-based violence intervention program that has served as a national model; and a program that deploys trusted chaplains as community health workers.

Prior to his time at University Hospital, Elnahal served as New Jersey's 21st Health Commissioner, appointed to the Cabinet post by Governor Phil Murphy and confirmed unanimously by the New Jersey Senate. During his nearly two years as Commissioner, Elnahal left a lasting impact on the State's healthcare system. He expanded the New Jersey Health Information Network, an interoperability platform that allows for electronic exchange of patient health information among healthcare providers. He worked closely with New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy on her Nurture NJ campaign to help improve infant and maternal health outcomes and reduce health disparities—a mission he continued at University Hospital, with its top tier maternal health services. He also made strides in curbing the opioid epidemic, granting funding to institutions to facilitate data sharing and public health reporting, and marked NJ as the first state in the nation to allow EMS responders to use buprenorphine in the field to prevent withdrawal after naloxone.

Dr. Elnahal also served as Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Quality, Safety, and Value at the US Department of Veterans Affairs from 2016 through 2018, overseeing national policies around quality of care for the Veterans Health Administration, and as a White House Fellow in the VA from 2015-16. During that time, he co-founded the VHA Innovation Ecosystem, a program that continues to foster the spread of innovation and best practices that improve Veteran care across the nation. Dr. Elnahal also served on the Biden-Harris Transition Team for the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dr. Elnahal holds an MD from Harvard Medical School and an MBA with Distinction from Harvard Business School. His perspective on the American health care system's COVID-19 response, including on matters of health equity, has been featured on national media outlets including MSNBC, CNN, Fox Business Network, and the New York Times.