



MARISSA BROWN

ACS CAN Senior Vice President, State and Local Advocacy

Marissa Brown is the senior vice president, state & local advocacy for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). In this role, she leads a vibrant national team that implements intentional advocacy strategies to improve the lives of cancer patients. She and her team oversee ACS CAN's advocacy field operations. In addition, her portfolio includes, state and local campaigns, organizational strategy and impact analytics, advocacy business operations and advocacy health equity strategy. Marissa has over 30 years of experience in nonprofit management,

Sadvocacy and social change. She served as executive director of the Democracy Initiative and held senior roles at Alliance for Justice, The League of Conservation Voters Education Fund and the National Democratic Institute. Marissa earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Arts in International Relations/Latin American Studies from Johns Hopkins School of International Studies (SAIS). She lives in Silver Spring, MD where she can be found gardening, hiking and enjoying her adult children.



CELENA DONAHUE

California ACT Lead, Congressional District 2

Celena Donahue is Pueblo Indian, and her family is Hupa, Yurok. She was raised on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation in rural northeastern Humboldt County. She graduated from California State University of Sacramento in 2008. She currently is a Cancer & Health Disparities Eliminator, Public Health Equity Advocate, and Talking Circle Facilitator. Celena works on multiple cross-functional initiatives addressing clinical quality and service improvement programs where she developed programs targeted to improve STAR Ratings, HEDIS, Health Outcome Survey, and other identified performance measures for Commercial/Marketplace, Medicare, and the

Medi-Cal population. She also has 17 years in Clinical Pathology and has been working in Public Health for over a decade which she has successfully collaborated with numerous tribes, Indian Health Services (IHS), community clinics, and different stakeholders in the healthcare community over the past several years. As a result of her collaborative efforts there has been a significant increase in health and cancer screenings. She has a vested interest in tribal communities and minimizing the healthcare disparities in these communities. Celena has also

served as the internal subject matter expert on Tribal Public Health Issues, working on culturally appropriate materials, training, and guides. She has strong ties through a plethora of tribal communities where she has served as a community member and healthcare professional. Celena currently volunteers and serves as a Chair and Board member for several tribal coalitions, boards, and committees.





JAMIE ESCOTO

California State Lead Ambassador

Jamie Escoto is a technology leader with a strong commitment to social impact. Currently a Technology Strategy & Operations Consultant at Apple, she has a proven track record leading technical teams at major media companies like Disney, 21st Century FOX, Sony Pictures, and NBC Universal. As a Filipina-American, Jamie has championed Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives, fostering more inclusive workplaces throughout her career.

Her dedication to positive change extends beyond the corporate world. Jamie serves on the Advisory Board for A Window Between Worlds, an organization that uses art to empower individuals and communities impacted by trauma. For almost a decade, Jamie has volunteered her time and expertise with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN). Currently serving as California's State Lead Ambassador and on the leadership team for ACS CAN's Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Volunteer Caucus, Jamie plays a vital role in advancing public policy to fight cancer and amplifying the voices of the AAPI community to advance representation and reduce health disparities. Above all else, Jamie prioritizes her family and is a proud mom to two boys, Lorenzo & Moisés.



LORENZO ESCOTO

California Junior Ambassador

Lorenzo celebrated his tenth birthday last week. He is in fourth grade at El Marino Elementary School, where he is enrolled in a Spanish immersion program. He plays piano, practices wu shu martial arts, and also loves playing soccer, building legos and creating paper airplanes. He became interested in ACS CAN when his mom first shared about the cancer journey of her dad: Papa Jimmy, the grandpa he never met but lives on in his heart. He doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up yet but is thinking cancer research scientist may be an option.





CESAR GONZALEZ

PhD Candidate, City of Hope

Cesar is a 5th year PhD Candidate in the Biomedical Sciences program at City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center. He is currently conducting research on the molecular and genetic mechanisms that regulate early brain development and understanding how these processes play a role in brain cancers. His work is supported by a grant from the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine. He has worked on several biomedical research projects in the past ranging from studying rare pediatric diseases to different types of cancers such as prostate, breast, ovarian and liver cancers. Cesar's inspiration to pursue a career in research was driven by his grandfather who passed away from stage IV Lymphoma. Cesar currently resides in the 31st congressional district and has been volunteering with ACS CAN since 2021. His plans are to continue working in research after completing his PhD in the field of science policy, communication, or as a medical science liaison.



NICK GRAHAM, PHD

Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science and Gerontology, University of Southern California

Nick Graham is an Assistant Professor of Chemical Engineering at the University of Southern California. Dr. Graham received a BS in Chemical Engineering and French from Washington University in St. Louis in 2001. He received a PhD in Chemical Engineering from the California Institute of Technology in 2007 for research into the crosstalk between intercellular and intracellular signaling pathways under the guidance of Anand Asthagiri. He then did postdoctoral training at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the laboratory of Thomas Graeber, where he investigated the interactions between kinase signaling and tumor metabolism.





MARIE KENNEDY

California ACT Lead, Congressional District 6

Marie C. Kennedy (she/her) is a stage IV ovarian cancer survivor in her second year of survivorship. It took a full year from the time her symptoms appeared until her metastatic cancer diagnosis. It was a difficult journey, full of angst and obstacles. But she knew that she would use this experience to turn lemons into lemonade her ongoing mantra. She is honored to be the ACT Lead for ACS Cancer Action Network in congressional district 6 living in Sacramento. Sharing the news of health care breakthroughs, advocating on behalf of patients and delving into the science of saving lives have been the cornerstones of Marie's career. Medicine has been her livelihood in her career as a health care communications strategist. The cancer patients whose stories she told over the years were her inspiration for her survivorship. Being a part of this work brings a voice to those facing this terrible disease who might not have the resources and experience to navigate a cancer diagnosis and even prevent a devastating diagnosis.



JIM KNOX

Recently Retired ACS CAN Managing Director California, Guam, & Hawai'i

Jim Knox has served as the Managing Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), which is the advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, since 2004. In that capacity he is responsible for directing the organization's federal, state and local advocacy efforts in California and Hawaii. He has more than 40 years of experience in non-profit public interest advocacy in California. Previously he served eight years as the Executive Director of the political reform group, California Common Cause. Prior to that he worked for the Planning and Conservation League, a statewide environmental lobbying group. Knox has been a registered lobbyist at the state capitol for 30 years and has directed numerous statewide ballot measure campaigns. He has an undergraduate degree from Stanford University, is a graduate of the Coro Fellows Program in Public Affairs, and has a Masters Degree in Public Policy from the Claremont Graduate School. A New Jersey native, Jim has a grown daughter and son and resides in Sacramento.





MICHAEL REINHART

California Junior Ambassador

Michael is 10 years old and in 5th grade. He attended his first Relay For Life event when he was 1 month old. He has been an Ambassador for 5 years. He plays baseball and wants to start playing basketball. He also likes playing with his friends, reading, and hanging out with his younger brother and sister. His goal is to help find a cure for cancer. He wants to be President of the United States when he grows up.



DR. REENA THOMAS

Clinical Associate Professor at Stanford University

Dr. Reena Thomas, MD, PhD, is a Clinical Associate Professor in Neuro Oncology at Stanford Medicine leading a translational research team in immune-based therapy for brain cancer. Holding dual degrees in medicine and molecular immunology, Dr. Thomas has worked for more than two decades to integrate clinical expertise with a deep understanding of cellular immunotherapy mechanisms and burgeoning technologies such as CAR-T (Chimeric Antigen Receptor T lymphocyte) cell therapy. Beyond research, Dr. Thomas is nationally recognized for her excellence in medical education in

her tenure as Fellowship Program Director of Neuro Oncology, subsequently as Associate Dean of Diversity in Medical Education, and newly as Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education at the Stanford School of Medicine. Her commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion in medicine is evident through her advocacy for health equity, striving to dismantle systemic barriers in medical education, and ensure equitable access to care for all patients.

