

Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, MD, PhD, MS, for Global Leadership in Health Equity and Mental Health Innovation

Distinguished UC Davis Professor and Founder of the Center for Reducing Health Disparities Advances National and International Models for Community-Driven, Evidence-Based Healthcare Transformation



Sacramento, California Jun 18, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - The University of California, Davis, School of Medicine has officially announced the promotion of Dr. Sergio A. Aguilar-Gaxiola, MD, PhD, MS, to the rank of Distinguished Professor of Clinical Internal Medicine. This prestigious elevation recognizes Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola as a distinguished public health leader, researcher, and advocate for health equity whose work has transformed the understanding and reduction of health disparities among underserved populations. Concurrently, he assumes a critical new institutional role as the Faculty Lead for the Community and Collaborator Engagement Program within the UC Davis Clinical and Translational Research Center (CTSC), further embedding his structural expertise into the university's overarching research framework.

Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola's localized leadership is anchored by his ongoing tenure as the Founding Director of the UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities (CRHD), a position he has held since October 2005. In this role, he has led pioneering efforts to advance equitable access to health and mental health care through community-engaged research, policy development, and culturally responsive interventions. Under his leadership, the CRHD has become a nationally recognized model for addressing health inequities and improving outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, serving as a vital academic and operational hub for designing culturally competent healthcare delivery models.

By taking on the new Faculty Lead role within the CTSC alongside his directorial duties, Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between rigorous scientific clinical research and the real-world, localized needs of multi-ethnic populations. Over the past two decades, he has spearheaded innovative initiatives that bridge research, practice, and policy to improve population health at the local, national, and global levels. His work has systematically strengthened crucial partnerships among communities, health systems, and government agencies, while advancing evidence-based solutions that promote health equity, workforce development, and community well-being.

Widely recognized for his commitment to social justice and public service, Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola continues to champion collaborative approaches that create lasting change and expand opportunities for healthier communities. This lifelong commitment was recently celebrated on April 22, 2026, when UC Davis Health hosted a formal ceremony to unveil Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola's portrait on the "Legacy and Progress" Wall, located on the third floor of the Medical Education Building. This permanent installation follows his selection earlier in the year as a Distinguished Honoree for the School of Medicine Portrait Wall, where university leadership noted that his likeness stands as an enduring symbol of integrity, respect, diversity, and community trust.

A central pillar of Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola's current research portfolio is his administration of significant state and federal grants focused on public health transformation. He is actively spearheading a \$1.28 million contract from the California Department of Health Care Services for the *Together for Wellness/Juntos por Nuestro Bienestar* initiative, running through December 2026. This comprehensive program is designed to enhance community engagement, digital infrastructure, and rigorous outcomes evaluation to support diverse, rural, and urban Latino children and young adults up to age 25. The initiative is currently undergoing a strategic transition into California's broader Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI).

Simultaneously, Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola serves as the Principal Investigator on a \$1.68 million grant from the Office of Health Equity within the California Department of Public Health, driving Phase II of the California Reducing Disparities Project. This extension focuses on providing specialized technical assistance and infrastructure support to multiple Latino Capacity Building and Implementation Pilot Projects across the state. Furthermore, his collaborative efforts extend to federal partnerships, serving as a Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) on a \$222,702 Westat-NIH-funded project aimed at fortifying

alliances between academic researchers and grassroots community-based organizations to address ongoing social and medical needs in disproportionately impacted areas.

Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola's research acumen is anchored by a diverse and rigorous academic foundation spanning multiple decades and international borders. He earned his medical degree (MD) from the Autonomous University of Guadalajara School of Medicine in 1977, followed by an internship at Santa Maria Chapalita Hospital in Jalisco, Mexico. He later expanded his expertise into behavioral sciences, earning both a Master of Science and a PhD in Psychology from the George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. He capped his formal clinical training with a prestigious postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), operating within the Departments of Psychiatry at the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute and San Francisco General Hospital.

Before establishing his definitive footprint at UC Davis, Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola cultivated a rich history of academic and instructional excellence across several major institutions. From 1994 to 2005, he served as a full Professor in the Department of Psychology at California State University, Fresno, where his work earned him the Provost's Excellence in Teaching Award for Distinguished Achievement in Research. His early career also featured foundational professorships in Mexico, including tenures at the Western Technological Institute of Higher Studies (ITESO) and the Academic Research Division in Graduate Programs in Guadalajara, establishing his lifelong professional bridge between U.S. and Latin American medical methodologies.

Beyond his university and regional obligations, Dr. Aguilar-Gaxiola maintains a highly influential profile within national and global healthcare policy sectors. He continues to serve as a vital Executive Committee member and the regional coordinator for Latin American and Caribbean participating countries within the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Mental Health Survey Consortium. His expertise in diagnostic metrics is internationally recognized through his long-standing seat on the Editorial Committee for the WHO's Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI). Nationally, he contributes his strategic vision to the National Academy of Medicine (NAM), co-chairing the Organizing Committee on Assessing Meaningful Community Engagement in Health & Health Care Policies & Programs.

His lifetime of service has yielded an extensive array of high-profile honors from domestic and international entities. Notably, the Government of Mexico bestowed upon him the Ohtli Award via the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, representing the highest honor given to individuals who have successfully carved out socio-economic and professional pathways for Mexican citizens living abroad. Additionally, his regional impact was solidified when he was named one of the top 20 "Latino Change Makers" by the *Sacramento Bee* and received the Lifetime Award for the Advancement of Latino Behavioral Health from the National Latino Behavioral Health Association. Under his continued guidance, the UC Davis School of Medicine reinforces its commitment to setting national standards for equity, translational science, and systemic health equity.

Learn more about Dr. Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola:

Through his America's Best in Medicine profile, <https://americasbestinmedicine.com/providers/sergio-aguilar-gaxiolamdphdms> or through his profile on UC Davis Health, <https://health.ucdavis.edu/crhd/our-team/sergio-aguilar-gaxiola>

America's Best in Medicine

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