

# ASU's efforts to improve health outcomes for Arizonans lauded by US congresswoman

## Future of health care focus of event with Rep. Yassamin Ansari

By Scott Bordow, ASU News  
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As the Arizona State University Congressional Dialogue Series with U.S. Rep. Yassamin Ansari began Wednesday morning, David Schwartz used three words to describe the health care system:

Chaotic. Complex. Confusing.

But then [Schwartz](#), vice president of strategy and business development for ASU Health, explained in one sentence how those three Cs could turn into As, so to speak.

[“ASU Health,”](#) he said, “can be the hub for transforming health care.”

Wednesday's event in the ongoing Congressional Dialogue Series, hosted by the [Office of Government and Community Engagement](#) at ASU, was held at the Thunderbird School of Global Management and focused on the future of health care in Arizona, access to care for Arizonans, how to strengthen the health care workforce and support healthier communities across the state.

“I am here,” Ansari said, “to show my support for doctors, nurses and researchers who are working hard every single day to keep us healthy, and finding new breakthrough treatments and diagnosis techniques that will keep us even healthier tomorrow.”

Improving health care for Arizonans is not just a political urgency for Ansari; it's borne out of personal experience. She told a story of collapsing in a New York bodega her first year working at the United Nations, drenched in sweat and experiencing severe pain.

Ansari said paramedics repeatedly asked her if she was pregnant, “as though pregnancy is the only form of pain that could cause a woman to just randomly pass out on a Sunday morning.”

The truth, Ansari said, is that she collapsed because of debilitating period pain and even now has days where she feels like “barbed wire is tightening inside of me.”

"I often end up on the bathroom floor in the fetal position, crying, moaning and vomiting," she said.

Ansari said her experience compelled her to introduce the Health Equity and Rights, or HER, legislative package designed to address gaps and inequities in women's health care.

"All of us have a health care story," she said. "Whether it's our own experience or the experiences of somebody that we love."

Ansari said she's particularly appreciative of ASU's efforts to combat health care disparities in Arizona. Schwartz pulled up a 2025 Arizona health system scoreboard slide that showed the state ranks 50th in adult and youth mental health, 49th for prevention and 43rd for women's health.

"We lag most of the country in nearly every health metric," he said.

Ansari cited several examples of how ASU is trying to improve health care for Arizonans, including leading new efforts in cancer research, utilizing artificial intelligence for targeted treatment and, during the pandemic, developing some of the earliest saliva-based COVID tests.

"Even more impressive, ASU researchers have programmed nanobots to specifically target cancer cells and starve them of their blood supply," she said. "I could go on and on, and this is all before ASU Health is even officially open."

Cynthia Lietz, dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions at ASU, was part of a panel discussion at the July 8 event. She said ASU is well positioned to be an educational leader in health care because of its transdisciplinary approach with ASU Health.

"I think that strength can help us as we lead in this space," she said. "It takes a village. It takes all of these different sectors to come together to figure out how to do this well."

This fall, ASU Health will welcome its first class into the [John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering](#), which will train students to blend multiple disciplines — medicine, engineering, technology and humanities — in order to create health care leaders with a strong sense of innovation and problem-solving.

"It is a fundamentally different approach to advancing health," Schwartz said. "Our north star, simply put, is improving health outcomes for the state of Arizona. Full stop."

After her speech, Ansari moderated a panel discussion with Lietz, Michael Yudell, dean of the College of Health Solutions, Judy Karshmer, dean of the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, and Todd LaPorte, CEO of HonorHealth, which will be the [primary clinical affiliate](#) for the Shufeldt School.

LaPorte said the number one issue for HonorHealth is the workforce and the possibility of a severe workforce shortage in the near future. He said 14% of jobs in the United States are health care related and by 2032, there will be an estimated shortage of about 4,700 nurses and 4,100 physicians.

"There's really inadequate funding for the training and education of the workforce that we need," LaPorte said.

Karshmer said one way Edson College is helping to address that shortage is with its [Learn Where You Live initiative](#), which aims to make nursing degrees more accessible to students throughout the state of Arizona.

Students in rural areas will be able to take nursing classes through [ASU Sync](#) — technology-enhanced, fully interactive remote learning — and work with a hometown nurse who will be trained by ASU to be a clinical instructor to complete their simulation hours inside the mobile unit at their local facility.

“We are recruiting folks who live in those communities and who are going to stay in those communities,” Karshmer said. “So a student from Parker will be able to get their education in Parker, graduate in Parker and work in Parker.”

Ansari asked the panelists how technology like artificial intelligence will change the model of health care and what educational institutions can do to embrace and propel that transformation.

Yudell cited the Biomedical Informatics program in the College of Health Solutions, which trains students how to acquire and manage data, as well as how to use those capabilities to solve health problems.

“We’re in the middle of sort of rethinking all of our bioinformatics work at ASU,” he said.

ASU also has created the [School of Technology for Public Health](#), which offers a [one-year Master of Science in public health technology](#) and a [two-year Master of Public Health](#), and focuses on training students who will leverage technology and data as central to transforming public health.

“I think ASU is doing a really yeoman’s job of trying to embrace where we are going with AI,” LaPorte said. “We want our students and graduates to help drive where this is going, not have to be subject to it.”

As she wrapped up the discussion, Ansari said the future of health care depends on innovation and empathy.

“And ASU Health,” she said, “is leading on both fronts. So I can’t wait to see what is to come.”

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



U.S. Rep. Yassamin Ansari discusses Arizona's health care future during ASU's Congressional Dialogue Series on July 8 at Thunderbird School of Global Management headquarters in downtown Phoenix. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

**Text image(s)**



David Schwartz, ASU Health's vice president of strategy and business development, speaks at ASU's Congressional Dialogue Series on July 8. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News





From left: Congresswoman Yassamin Ansari discusses Arizona's health care future with Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation Dean Judy Karshmer, HonorHealth CEO Todd LaPorte, Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions Dean Cynthia Lietz and College of Health Solutions Dean Michael Yudell. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation Dean Judy Karshmer speaks at ASU's Congressional Dialogue Series on July 8. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News