

A recipient of the “Champion of Change” award from the White House in 2014, Nahla Kayali is described as an advocate and a leader who inspires, elevates, and empowers underserved individuals and families to ensure they have access to health and human services. Arriving to the United States as a Palestinian refugee from Syria at the age of 16, and married, and only having finished the 9th grade, Nahla founded Access California Services (AccessCal) in 1998, a culturally and linguistically competent health and human services non-profit organization in Anaheim dedicated to empowering under-served populations, with a focus on Arab- American & Muslim- American communities. Under Nahla’s executive leadership, AccessCal has grown from a budget of \$2,000 to \$1.9 million serving 11,000 unduplicated clients and providing over 65,000 services, annually. AccessCal’s programs include: case management and advocacy, healthcare access services, employment and tax services, counseling and support services, financial assistance services, education services, citizenship and immigration services, community services and civic engagement and refugee services. Nahla’s work continues to make an impact at the local and national level and has awarded her multiple recognitions from public officials, foundations, corporations and service providers. Nahla serves on multiple boards, including the advisory board for the National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC) and the board of directors for Arab American Institute (AAI). Nahla serves as the Chairperson of the Orange County Refugee Forum and holds the State Refugee Forum Seat for the State Advisory Council on Refugee Services and with the State Office of Health Equity. Most recently in 2019, Nahla’s work was featured in the book “Leadership with Impact: Preparing Health and Human Service Practitioners in the Age of Innovation and Diversity,” written by Juan Carlos Araque, PhD, a Clinical Associate Professor and Eugenia L. Weiss, PsyD, LCSW, a Clinical Associate Professor who both work at the Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work at the University of Southern California