

Virginia | Karen Shelton, MD

State Health Commissioner

Virginia Department of Health

Dr. Shelton was named state health commissioner effective May 1, 2023, by Governor Glenn Youngkin. Dr. Shelton brings to the position a wealth of experience in public health operations and policy, health care management, and in caring for patients in the public health and private health care sectors.

Dr. Shelton, a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist, treated patients in Bristol for nearly 20 years before turning her focus to public health. Dr. Shelton first joined the Virginia Department of Health in 2016 to lead the Mount Rogers Health District, which encompasses six county health departments and two city health departments in Southwestern Virginia. As health district director, she led the health district during the opioid overdose crisis and through the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the health district led community testing and vaccination efforts, working closely with community leaders and healthcare providers. Dr. Shelton also served as acting director for the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau health districts from January to August of 2021. Dr. Shelton accepted a position with Ballad Health in 2021 as vice president and chief medical officer for Bristol Regional Medical Center and Smyth County Community Hospital.



Dr. Shelton's honors include being recognized as 2021 Bristolian of the Year by the Bristol Herald Courier newspaper for her work in managing the response to the pandemic. The United Way of Southwest Virginia also noted her work on the pandemic in awarding her its Woman of Distinction Award in 2022.

She is excited to rejoin the Virginia Department of Health and looks forward to working with agency staff and the Youngkin administration in improving the health of all Virginians, enhancing maternal and children's health, and addressing the dual crises of behavioral health and fentanyl poisoning that affects communities across Virginia.

Dr. Shelton received her undergraduate education at Wake Forest University, and her Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Virginia School of Medicine. She completed her obstetrics and gynecology residency at Eastern Virginia Medical School. Dr. Shelton is married and has two adult children and enjoys hiking.