

NOVELLO, ANTONIA COELLO (1944–)

“I realized that for these people, for women, I have to be good as a doctor, I have to be good as a surgeon general, I have to be everything.” U.S. Department of State website.

The first female and first Latina to be appointed surgeon general of the United States, Novello was born and raised in Puerto Rico, a sickly child who spent lots of time in hospitals. Not surprisingly, Novello decided to become a doctor. After university, Novello completed her medical training and moved to Michigan. There she completed residency in pediatric nephrology, a rare specialty, and moved to Washington D.C. where she completed a fellowship at Georgetown University. She later became a faculty member at Georgetown. In the nation's capitol she served as deputy director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and as a congressional fellow advising lawmakers on health issues. She became Surgeon General in 1989 appointed by President Bush. In that position Novello headed the U.S. Public Health Service and held the rank of Vice Admiral in the Navy. Advocating against childhood AIDS, Novello worked with UNICEF and ultimately became Commissioner of Health for the state of New York. She has received numerous honors for her work and is a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, the national honorary medical society.