An internationally recognized pediatrician, Dr. Helen Rodríguez-Trías is credited with improving maternal and family health care and public health services for marginalized patients.

After her birth in New York City, Rodríguez-Trías spent her first 10 years in Puerto Rico, until her family returned to New York City in 1939. She earned her medical degree in 1960 from the University of Puerto Rico. While serving her residency at the university hospital, Rodríguez-Trías established the island’s first center for neonatal care.

Returning to New York in 1970, Rodríguez-Trías headed the Department of Pediatrics at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx, where she worked to sensitize her staff to the cultural issues and needs of the Puerto Rican community. She advocated against forced sterilizations of poor women, testified before Congress, and helped draft federal guidelines in 1979 that require a patient’s consent for sterilization.

In 1988, while serving as medical director of the New York State Department of Health’s AIDS Institute, Rodríguez-Trías helped develop critical programs for families affected by HIV.

In 1993, Rodríguez-Trías became the first Hispanic-American woman to serve as President of the American Public Health Association. In 2001, she was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Clinton for her work on behalf of children, women, people living with AIDS, and the poor.