

Building an Organizational Response to Health Disparities



Disparities in the quality of care that minority populations receive, even when they have the same insurance, socioeconomic status, and comorbidities as their non-minority counterparts are well documented. Evidence based interventions are an effective tool for reducing health disparities and lowering cost. Therefore, focused quality improvement efforts should be targeted to populations at risk for disparities.

Learn how to identify, prioritize, and take action on health disparities by championing the Disparities Action Statement in your organization. Participants receive personalized technical assistance focused on strengthening your quality improvement program through a series of consultations from subject matter experts. To learn more, contact HealthEquityTA@cms.hhs.gov.



DATA COLLECTION

A strong commitment to the collection of race, ethnicity, and language (REAL) data is essential to identifying and addressing disparities in quality of care. The better the data is, the greater the ability to accurately assess and respond to disparities.

Following are tips for improving data collection.

- **Prioritize** the collection of REAL data.
- **Align** direct patient tools to collect self-identified REAL data. Keep in mind that race differs from ethnicity.
- **Train** staff to understand that REAL data is collected to reduce health disparities.



FEATURED RESOURCE

THE DISPARITIES TOOLKIT: A TOOLKIT FOR COLLECTING RACE, ETHNICITY AND PRIMARY LANGUAGE INFORMATION FROM PATIENTS was developed by the Health Research and Educational Trust to help health professionals understand the importance of collecting demographic data.

DATA ANALYSIS



Health plans and their providers benefit from a systematic, thorough, and objective look at their data. Effective data analysis can provide insights into factors that contribute to health disparities and how to respond.

- **Stratify** available health and prescription drug plan data by race, ethnicity, and language.
- **Collaborate** with providers to analyze and address health disparities.
- **Enhance** dashboards and reports with REAL data.
- **Share** data on identified health disparities with leaders, providers, and other partners.

FEATURED RESOURCE

The American Hospital Association's **IMPROVING HEALTH EQUITY THROUGH DATA COLLECTION AND USE: A GUIDE FOR HOSPITAL LEADERS** describes how hospitals are analyzing and using REAL data to develop targeted interventions for improving access to care for underserved populations.

CULTURE OF EQUITY



Leaders and staff can improve their capacity to address disparities by establishing a strong organizational commitment to equity. [Here are ways to build a culture of equity.](#)

- **Elevate** health equity into the organizational mission statement.
- **Designate** a leader and provider to champion disparities reduction.
- **Measure** the significant cost of health disparities.
- **Empower** employees with resources to implement focused interventions.
- **Provide** training in cultural competence to all employees, providers, and their staff.

FEATURED RESOURCE

The National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by establishing a blueprint for health and health care organizations. See the **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES IN HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE: A BLUEPRINT FOR ADVANCING AND SUSTAINING CLAS POLICY AND PRACTICE.**

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Health disparities are evidence that high quality care has not been delivered equally to all members and patients. The Institute of Medicine's (IOM) 2002 report, *Unequal Treatment*, concluded that variations in quality and poor outcomes associated with health disparities are evidence of low-value health care. Quality improvement (QI) provides a framework for disparities remediation.

- **Define** measurable goals and evaluate success of QI programs in reducing health disparities.
- **Adopt** the four-stage QI process, Plan, Do, Study, Act, using the stratified data to align your QI programs.
- **Diagnose** the root cause(s) of health disparities.
- **Establish** a value proposition for your QI initiative by looking at cost savings.
- **Recruit** a diverse QI and provider workforce that reflects the characteristics of the plan's membership.

FEATURED RESOURCE

MULTICULTURAL HEALTH CARE: A QUALITY IMPROVEMENT GUIDE, developed by the NCQA in collaboration with Eli Lilly, was created to provide a QI framework for health care organizations seeking to promote culturally appropriate care, provide equitable access for individuals with limited English proficiency and reduce health disparities.

INTERVENTIONS

Effective interventions should address the root causes of health disparities in your plan. Once implemented, health plans and providers reengage in the cycle of assessment, analysis, and planning through ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

- **Identify** evidence-based interventions that are measurable and adaptable and evaluate health equity through sources such as the success stories reported by the Disparities National Coordinating Center.
- **Partner with** plans to learn from their experiences.
- **Invite** vulnerable members to provide feedback on planned interventions before and after piloting implementation.
- **Invest** in real-time stratified dashboards to accelerate the response to health disparities.



FEATURED RESOURCE

FINDING ANSWERS: DISPARITIES RESEARCH FOR CHANGE, A ROADMAP TO REDUCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN HEALTH CARE by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provides a comprehensive resource on designing and implementing interventions to address disparities.

RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING EQUITY AND RESPONDING TO DISPARITIES

This table of comprehensive resources and guides covers topics such as data collection and analysis, leadership, cultural competence, and quality improvement within a health equity framework. The documents also highlight interventions designed to reduce disparities that providers and health plans are implementing.

DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	CULTURE OF EQUITY	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT	INTERVENTIONS	
RESOURCE		CATEGORY OF IMPACT			
Mapping Medicare Disparities Tool Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Office of Minority Health		DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS		
Equity of Care: A Toolkit for Eliminating Health Care Disparities Source: American Hospital Association		DATA COLLECTION		CULTURE OF EQUITY	
Improving Health Equity through Data Collection and Use: A Guide for Hospital Leaders Source: American Hospital Association		DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	CULTURE OF EQUITY	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
Diversity in Health Care: Examples from the Field Source: Hospitals in Pursuit of Excellence				CULTURE OF EQUITY	INTERVENTIONS
Disparities Toolkit: A Toolkit for Collecting Race, Ethnicity and Primary Language Information from Patients Source: Health Research and Educational Trust		DATA COLLECTION			
Improving Quality and Achieving Equity: A Guide for Hospital Leaders Source: Massachusetts General Hospital				CULTURE OF EQUITY	INTERVENTIONS
Multicultural Health Care: A Quality Improvement Guide Source: National Committee for Quality Assurance				CULTURE OF EQUITY	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT
Implementing Multicultural Health Care Standards: Ideas and Examples Source: National Committee for Quality Assurance		DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS		QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INTERVENTIONS
Finding Answers: Disparities Research for Change, a Roadmap to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation			DATA ANALYSIS	CULTURE OF EQUITY	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INTERVENTIONS
Guide to Preventing Readmissions Among Racially and Ethnically Diverse Medicare Beneficiaries Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Office of Minority Health					QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INTERVENTIONS
National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care: A Blueprint for Advancing and Sustaining CLAS Policy and Practice Source: Department of Health & Human Services				CULTURE OF EQUITY	QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

To sign up for email updates from CMS Office of Minority Health, visit: go.cms.gov/cms-omh, or for further information about how to use the data to improve the quality of care provided by your plan, including for a particular racial or ethnic group, please email StratifiedDataQI@norc.org.