

Section I
*Reducing Health Care
Disparities*

Reducing Health Care Disparities

A. About this Section

To meet the needs of their diverse populations, hospitals and health systems will need to bridge the gap between collecting meaningful patient data and reviewing the data to identify inequities in health care provision and utilization, and to implement effective interventions to improve care for patients. This section provides a brief overview of the importance of addressing disparities in health care and the importance of analyzing quality-of-care and health outcomes data using patient demographics to specifically identify disparities and implement actions to reduce such disparities.

B. Tools in this Section

- Resources

Introduction: Linking Disparities and Quality

The Institute of Medicine report *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare* (2002) called attention to poorer access to health care and worse health outcomes among certain racial and ethnic groups. Evidence from the last 20 years shows that racial and ethnic disparities continue in health care. Achieving health care equity and eliminating healthcare disparities are priority goals of hospitals and health systems. Health care equity has gained importance nationally as policymakers aim to improve quality of care while lowering costs through a variety of strategies, including changing existing incentives. Data measurement and outcomes have become increasingly important for demonstrating the effectiveness of health care.

Eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care is a central issue in overall efforts to improve quality of care. Information on racial and ethnic characteristics of the New York State (NYS) population is needed to target quality improvement efforts, identify the nature and extent of health disparities, and monitor progress. Measurement, reporting, and benchmarking are critical to improving care. In addition, federal and certain state statutes and laws require reporting data by race and ethnicity to monitor discriminatory practices. Enforcement of laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, and disability rely on data collection to monitor compliance. Ultimately, hospitals and other facilities need to be responsive to the communities they serve. A first step towards accomplishing this goal is understanding who the community is and working collaboratively to address problems and concerns.

The health system serves three critical functions (Eliminating Health Disparities: Measurement and Data Needs, National Research Council, 2004):

1. **Ensuring the health of the population.** This is the ability to provide consistent and reliable epidemiological data on the incidence and prevalence of various health conditions and related risk factors among different racial and ethnic populations.
2. **Ensuring equitable access to care.** Access to care is a prerequisite for entering and staying in the health care system. Available racial and ethnic data have been used to document important differences in access between racial and ethnic groups. More accurate data can also be used to document differences in access within racial groups (e.g., Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, etc.).

- 3. Ensuring quality of care.** Language and cultural barriers can have a negative impact on quality of care. For example, African Americans were nearly twice as likely as whites to report being treated with disrespect during recent health care visits; Hispanics, regardless of language skills, were more likely than other patients to report having difficulty communicating with and understanding their doctors (Collins, Tenney, and Hughes, The Commonwealth Fund, 2002; Doty and Ives, The Commonwealth Fund, 2002). These findings underscore the importance of ensuring culturally competent care to patients by health care providers.

There are a number of disparity monitoring initiatives conducted by the federal government. Eliminating health care disparities is one of the primary goals of [Healthy People 2020](#), a long-term national agenda aimed at improving health in the United States. Beginning in 1999, Congress also required the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to develop an annual [National Healthcare Disparities Report \(PDF\)](#) to track the extent of disparities in health care and monitor whether progress has been made toward eliminating them.

It is important to maintain both a national and state focus on this issue to present national and state data to assess our progress in eliminating disparities in care. However hospitals and other health care facilities need to also monitor the care they deliver within their own "backyards." Many experts have called for health care organizations to stratify their quality reports by race and ethnicity to identify disparities and to undertake targeted interventions. Hospitals and other health care organizations should be able to stratify race and ethnicity data by service quality indicators (patient satisfaction, wait times, etc.) as well as by technical quality indicators (clinical measures).

For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation national initiative to reduce disparities in cardiac care, [Expecting Success: Excellence in Cardiac Care](#), focuses on improving cardiac care to minority populations in a hospital learning collaborative. A major emphasis of this initiative focuses on reporting cardiac care quality measures by race, ethnicity, and primary language.

In addition, [Finding Answers: Disparities Research for Change](#), a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, suggest promising strategies for reducing racial and ethnic disparities in care for depression, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Source: Hasnain-Wynia, R., Pierce, D., Haque, A., Hedges Greising, C., Prince, V., Reiter, J. (2007) *Health Research and Educational Trust Disparities Toolkit*. hretdisparities.org accessed on 11/22/13

Section I: Resources

Resources

Hospitals in Pursuit of Excellence (<http://www.hpoe.org/resources/hpoehretaha-guides/1431>)

A growing collection of resources—in the form of guide and research studies and other content regarding equity in care from hospitals in pursuit of excellence.

Institute of Medicine 2009 Report Brief

(<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/RaceEthnicityData.aspx>)

Resources Produced by the Disparities Solutions Center at Massachusetts General Hospital made possible by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Disparities Solutions Center has released several publications that highlight practical solutions to identify and address disparities within hospitals and other health care organizations. It also features other resources related to health care disparities elimination.

- [Healthcare Disparities Measurement](#)
- [Improving Quality and Achieving Equity: A Guide for Hospital Leaders](#)
- [Assuring HealthCare Quality: A Healthcare Equity Blueprint](#)
- [Creating Equity Reports: A Guide for Hospitals](#)

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality AHRQ

AHRQ's mission is to produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and to work with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used.

- [Improving Patient Safety Systems for Patients with Limited English Proficiency: A Guide for Hospitals](#)

Other Disparities Resources

- HHS Advisory Committee on Minority Health: A Statement of Principles and Recommendations
[\(http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/Assets/pdf/Checked/1/ACMHHealthDisparitiesReport.pdf\)](http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/Assets/pdf/Checked/1/ACMHHealthDisparitiesReport.pdf)
- Center for Prevention and Health Services Issue Brief
[\(http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/Assets/pdf/checked/1/Eliminating_Racial_Ethnic_Health_Disparities_A_Business_Case_Update_for_Employers.pdf\)](http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/Assets/pdf/checked/1/Eliminating_Racial_Ethnic_Health_Disparities_A_Business_Case_Update_for_Employers.pdf)