

COVID-19: 5 Actions to Promote Health Equity During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Reports indicate how diverse and vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 infections and deaths. Hospitals and health systems are working to address the health equity challenges highlighted by this crisis in different ways. Below are five areas in which hospitals are making a difference in communities across the nation.

1. Educating in Ways that Resonate with Every Patient

Hospitals and health systems continue to educate their patients and communities on prevention, social distancing and deterring the spread of COVID-19. Some hospitals, such as the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the University of Chicago, have created **public service announcements** educating on COVID-19 symptoms, guiding the public to test sites and informing them about care options, should symptoms progress. Some are reaching Black and Latino communities by using **trusted sources of information**, including faith community leaders. Above all, hospitals are reassuring the public that they are open and available 24/7 to provide medical expertise and treatment for all persons in need of care.

2. Leveraging Community Partnerships

SoHum Health in Garberville, Calif., Henry Ford Health System in Detroit and **Loyola University Medical Center in Chicago** are using their existing community partnerships to strengthen prevention efforts. Hospitals and health systems are relying on partnerships to get messages out in various ways to communities that may lack local newspapers or that previously depended on public gatherings in houses of worship and businesses to spread the latest community news. For example, many faith leaders are offering services via videoconferencing and reinforcing the importance of staying home. Food pantries also are amplifying critical health and prevention information, and community health workers are distributing educational materials as well as medicine, food and other essentials to people in need.

3. Bolstering Efforts to Collect and Use Patient Data

Data on **Race, Ethnicity and Language (REaL)**, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) and Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) helps clinical care teams to make better-informed decisions, and to connect patients with resources to address social needs and improve equity. During the pandemic, hospitals are reinforcing efforts to collect these data to help capture the impact of COVID-19 in the diverse communities they serve, and to use the data to help target their efforts to improve health equity. For additional information and action items addressing social needs and mitigating health inequities, see **AHA's resource**.

4. Advocating on Efforts to Address COVID-19 Disparities

The AHA, the American Medical Association and the American Nurses Association on April 16, 2020, **urged** the Department of Health and Human Services to mobilize its agencies to identify and address disparities in the federal response to COVID-19. In a joint letter, the associations called for increasing the availability of testing, ensuring access to equitable treatment and disseminating timely, relevant, culturally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive public health information. America's hospitals and health systems continue to urge federal policymakers to identify areas where disparities exist and help us immediately address these gaps.

5. Sharing What We Learn

Hospitals and health systems continue to advance equity by sharing lessons learned with their peers serving communities of all sizes, demographics and locations. AHA encourages health care providers to share their front-line experiences in an online hub where we are compiling these bright spots, best practices and **stories of resilience**. Together, we can amplify great ideas for the greater good.