

A photograph of three healthcare professionals in a hospital setting. In the center is a Black woman with a large, curly afro, wearing a white lab coat, smiling with her arms crossed. To her left is a white male doctor with glasses and a beard, also in a white lab coat, smiling. To her right is a young woman with long brown hair, wearing blue scrubs, smiling. The background is a blurred hospital hallway with green walls and recessed lighting.

Health Equity: Bridging the Gap for a Healthier Future

A Whitepaper



The Need for Health Equity

Unequal health outcomes are widespread throughout the United States, disproportionately impacting people of colour, immigrants, individuals with lower socioeconomic status, and LGBTIQ+ communities. Systemic racism, social determinants of health (SDOH), interpersonal biases, and other factors contribute to significant disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. This gap not only affects those impacted but also drives up costs across the broader healthcare system.

To set the context for health equity, it's essential to acknowledge the broad and persistent disparities in health outcomes across different populations in the U.S. These disparities create significant challenges, particularly for underserved communities, affecting access to care, quality of care, and overall health outcomes. Addressing health equity requires an understanding of these root causes and a commitment to structural change across healthcare systems, public policy, and community support.

In this setting, organizations like EY outline strategies for cross-sector collaborations, innovative care models, and data-driven approaches as essential components of advancing health equity. The goal is not only to provide care but to remove barriers and enable better health outcomes for all, making health equity a shared responsibility across society.

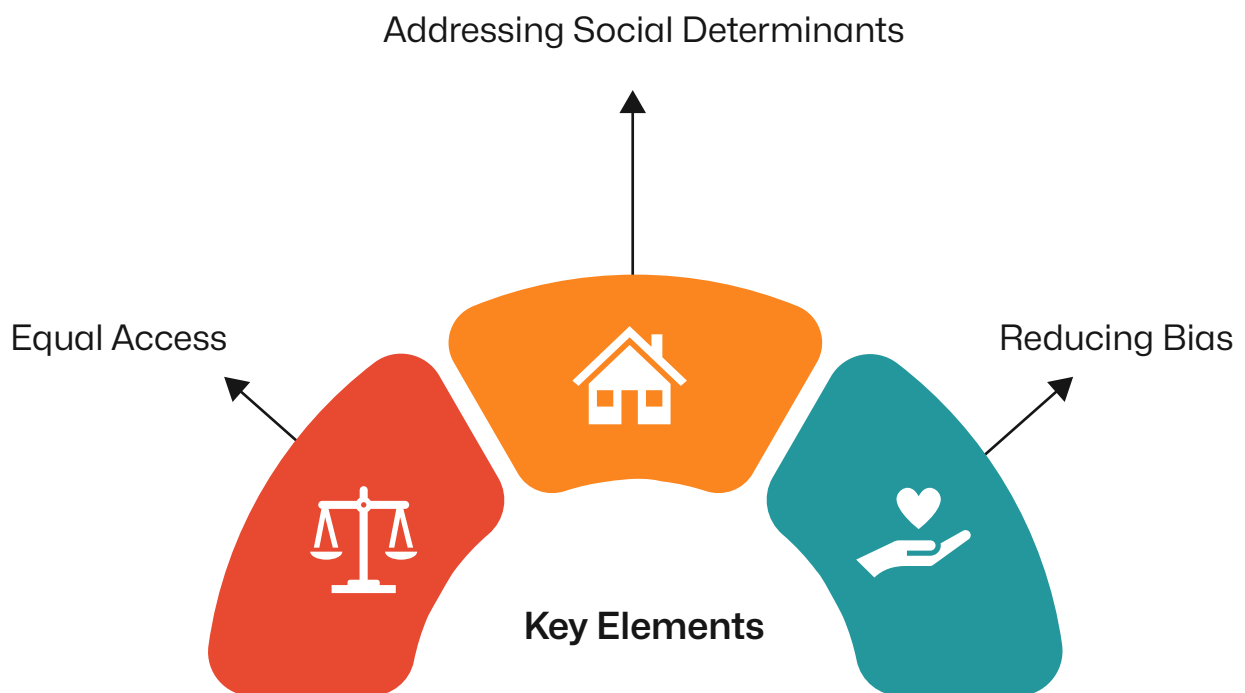
Deloitte's insights on the economic impact of health equity reveal that improving health equity in the United States could add approximately \$2.8 trillion to the U.S. gross domestic product by 2040. This underscores the significant economic benefits of addressing health disparities.



What is Health Equity?

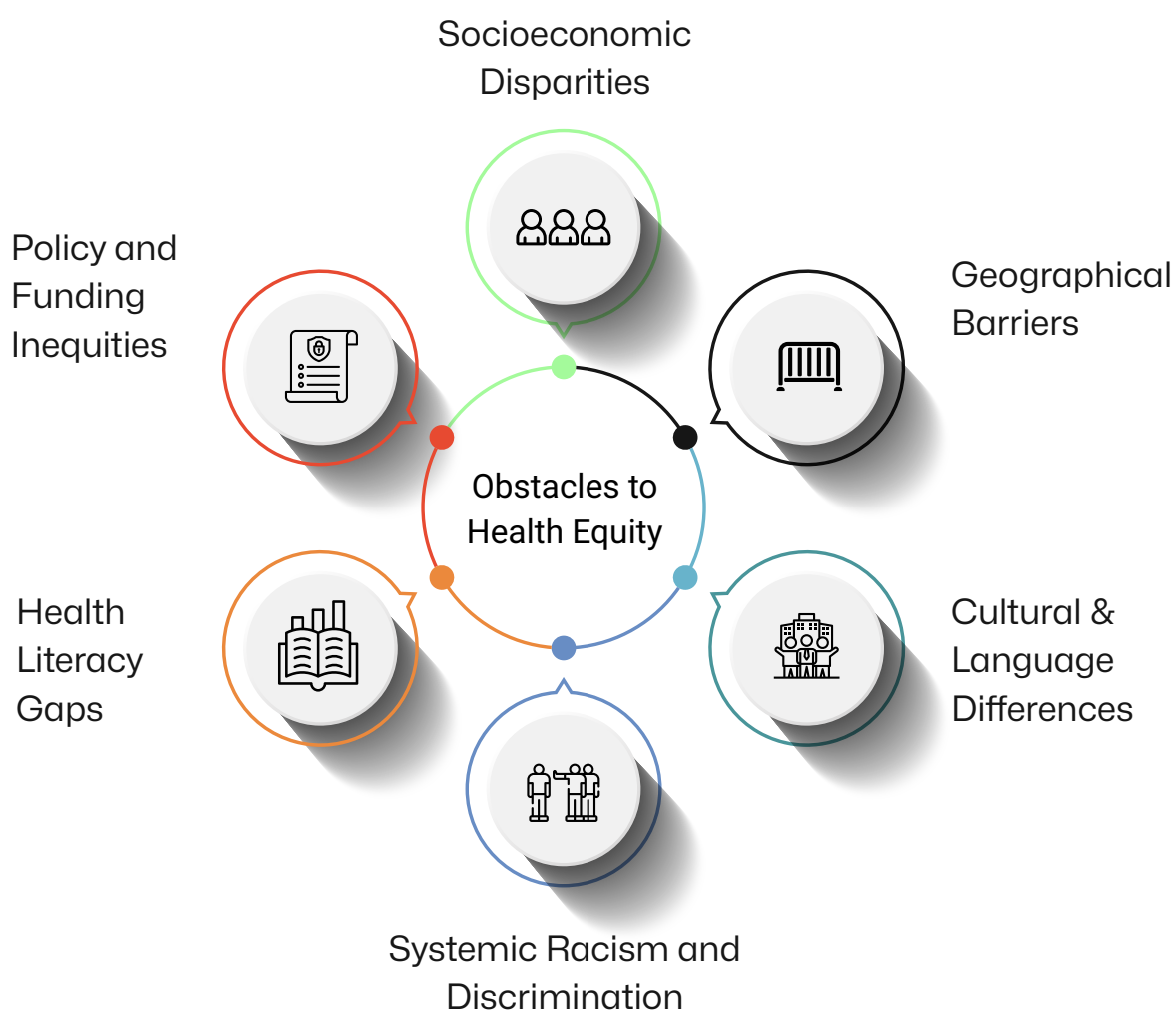
“ Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and healthcare. ”

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Report





Understanding the Obstacles to Health Equity





Understanding the Barrier

Impact in Practice



Socio-economic Disparities

Socioeconomic disparities are differences in income, education, and job opportunities that affect people's access to essential resources for health, such as quality healthcare, safe housing, and nutritious food.

Low-income individuals often live in areas with limited healthcare facilities, facing longer travel and wait times. Lack of insurance or inability to afford copayments also limits access to preventive care, leading to higher rates of chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension.



Geographical Barriers

Geographical barriers refer to challenges in accessing healthcare due to physical location, particularly in rural areas with limited medical providers and specialized care.

Rural populations in the U.S. face more hospital closures and often need to travel long distances for specialist care, leading to delays in diagnosis and treatment. This limited access results in poorer health outcomes compared to urban areas, especially for serious conditions like cancer and heart disease.



Cultural & Language Differences

Cultural and language differences can create communication barriers, leading to misunderstandings between patients and providers and affecting care quality and satisfaction.

Hispanic patients with limited English proficiency may struggle with treatment instructions, increasing risks of medication errors. Additionally, some Native American patients may face cultural insensitivity, discouraging them from seeking care.



Understanding the Barrier

Impact in Practice



Systemic Racism and Discrimination

Systemic racism in healthcare involves biases based on race or background, leading to poorer care and mistrust among marginalized groups.

Afro-American orientation/origin people patients are less likely to receive pain management than white patients, due to stereotypes about pain tolerance. Indigenous communities also report higher discrimination, deterring timely care.



Health Literacy Gaps

Health literacy gaps arise when individuals lack the skills to understand healthcare information, affecting their ability to make informed decisions.

Low health literacy, common among older adults and non-native English speakers, leads to missed follow-up appointments and worsens chronic conditions, increasing hospitalization.

Policy & Funding Inequities

Policy and funding inequities involve the unequal distribution of resources, often leaving marginalized communities with less access to necessary care.

Rural areas receive less healthcare funding than urban areas, reducing facility access. Policies may also underfund programs addressing social factors like housing, increasing health disparities.



Current State and Investment Priorities

Various research analysis on health equity in the US has revealed that:

The maternal mortality rate for Afro-American orientation/origin people women is four times greater than that for non-Hispanic White women.

Hispanic women are 20 times more likely to die from cervical cancer than non-Hispanic white women.

Infant mortality disparities result in an additional 3,400 Afro-American orientation/origin people infant deaths annually.

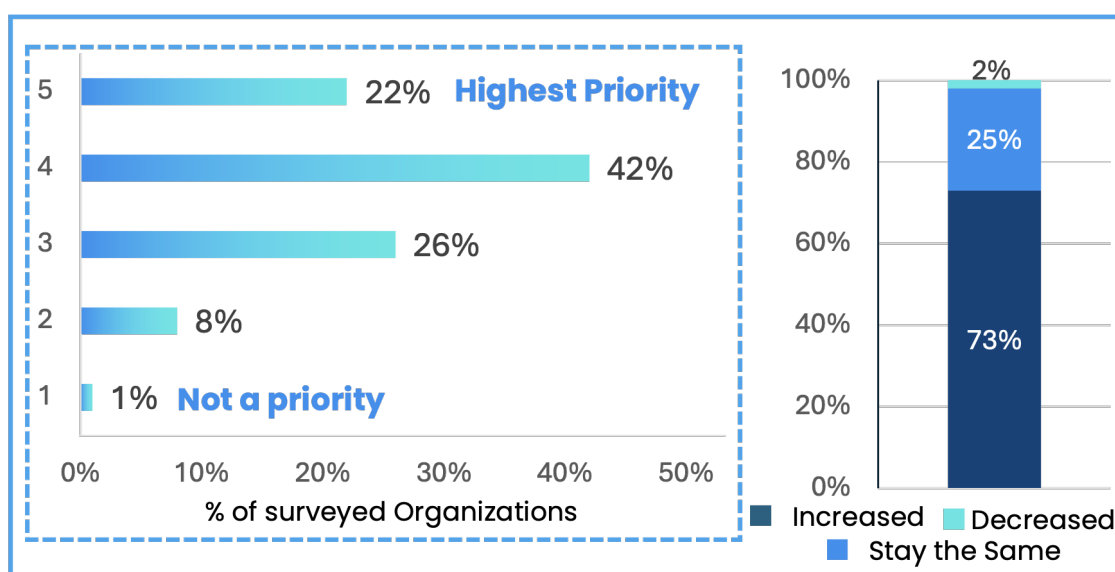
Asian Americans are eight times more likely to die from hepatitis B than non-Hispanic Whites.

Cancer mortality disparities result in an additional 9,200 Afro-American orientation/origin people cancer deaths annually.

Funding per person for the rarer Cystic Fibrosis (CF), primarily affecting white individuals, is significantly higher—\$2,807 vs. \$812 federally and \$7,690 vs. \$102 in foundational support—leading to critical care gaps for SCD patients.



Health equity is gaining momentum as a critical priority for organizations across the healthcare landscape. As the focus intensifies, organizations are not only recognizing the need to bridge health disparities but are also increasingly leveraging technology, data, and strategic initiatives to drive impactful change. The following insights illustrate current and future perspectives on health equity prioritization, highlighting key areas of focus and shifts within the industry.



Health equity as an organizational priority, current and future perspectives

22% of organizations view health equity as one of their top priorities, and 42% consider it highly important. 73% of organizations expect to increase their focus on health equity in the future whereas Only a small percentage (2%) expect their focus to decrease, while 25% will likely keep it the same.

Economic Impact



Addressing health inequities could add up to \$2.8 trillion to U.S. GDP by 2040 by increasing workforce productivity and economic participation.



Healthier, more productive employees could boost corporate profits by \$763 billion by 2040, especially in labor-intensive sectors.



Reducing health disparities can help save on healthcare costs, currently adding \$320 billion annually and projected to exceed \$1 trillion by 2040 if unaddressed.



Healthier populations with fewer medical expenses have more disposable income, which stimulates consumer spending and economic growth.



Investments in health equity strengthen communities, attracting businesses, raising property values, and supporting local economic growth.



Strategies To Promote Health Equity



Community Partnership

Collaborate with local organizations to address specific needs, like food security and healthcare access, through mobile clinics and community health programs.



Inclusive Workplace Policies

Implement flexible work options, mental health support, and tailored benefits to reduce health disparities among employees and improve productivity.



Data driven insights

Use data to identify health disparities and target interventions, focusing resources on high-risk groups based on demographic analytics.



Culturally Competent Care

Provide training, language support, and culturally sensitive materials to ensure equitable, respectful care for diverse patient populations.



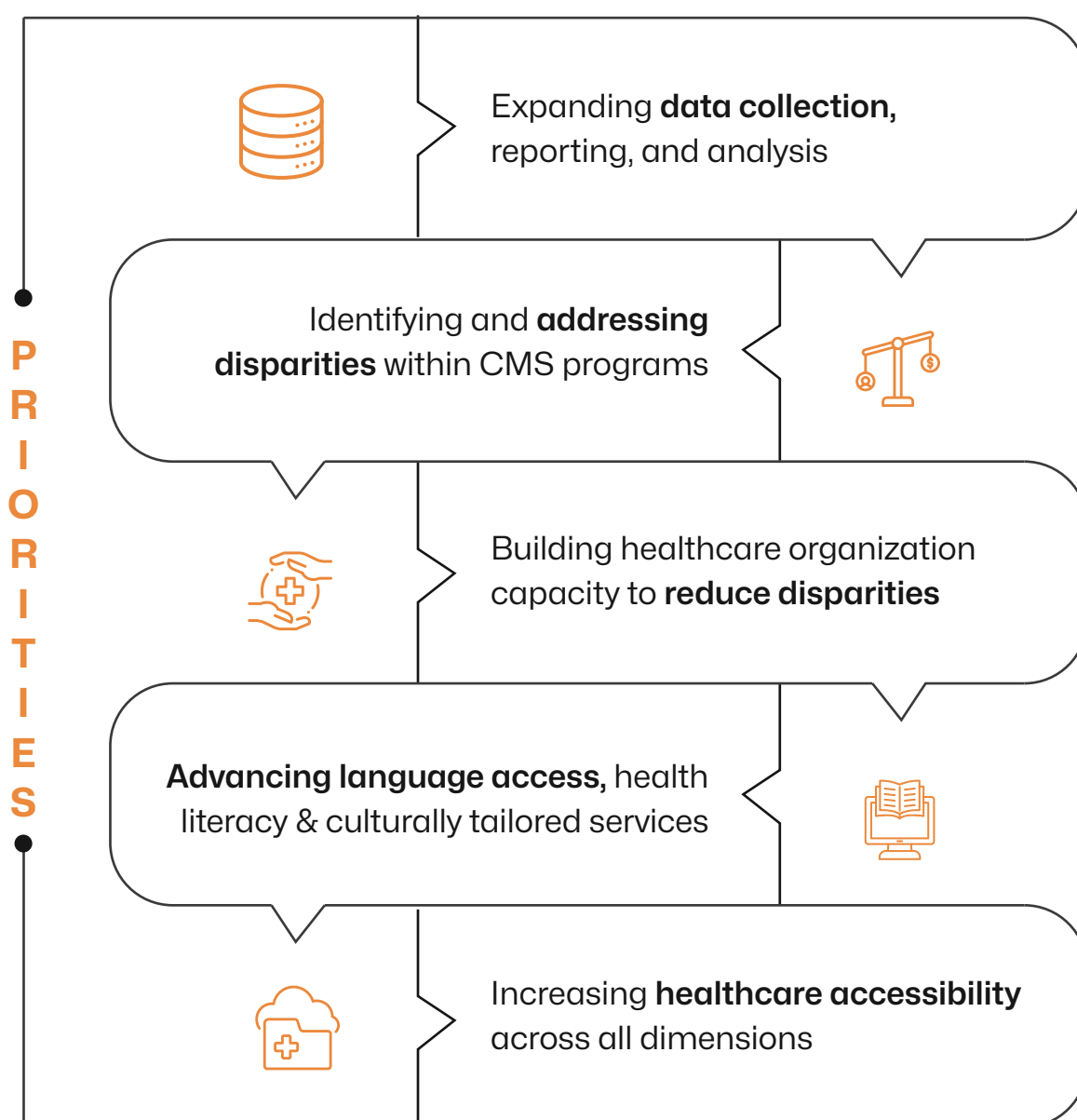
Digital Health Solution

Leverage telemedicine, mobile health, and AI tools to increase healthcare access, especially in underserved areas, and enable proactive care.



CMS Health Equity Index: Priorities & Action Item

The CMS Health Equity Index (HEI) is an initiative developed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) aimed at promoting health equity within the Medicare and Medicaid programs. It serves as a standardized framework for measuring and incentivizing improvements in health equity among healthcare providers and organizations.





Data Management Requirements

Payers to invest in data systems that track disparities, including race, ethnicity, and SDOH to enable accurate Medicare risk adjustments and better revenue management



Benefit Design for Social Risks

Payers to adjust benefits (e.g., copays, provider networks) to address social risk factors like transportation and housing, reducing costs and improving outcomes for high-risk populations



Cultural Competency & SDOH

Promotes culturally appropriate services and SDOH tracking in EHRs. Initiatives like the HL7 Gravity Project work to standardize SDOH data, focusing on areas such as food security and housing



Shift to Value-Based Care

Advocates for value-based care, rewarding providers for achieving better outcomes in underserved populations, aligning with the goal of improved health equity



Key Highlights

Starting in 2027, the HEI will be factored into CMS's Star Ratings for Medicare Advantage and Part D plans. This change incentivizes healthcare payers to prioritize health equity by rewarding those who make measurable improvements in reducing health disparities.

Other organizations, like the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) and The Joint Commission, have introduced health equity accreditations and measures. These align with CMS's goals and encourage payers to adopt similar standards, such as stratifying data by race and focusing on social needs screening.

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If we are looking for improving health [and] decreasing disparities, we're going to have to make sure that we are collecting high-quality data on human behaviors, as well as the social and physical environment.

”

Michelle Williams, ScD

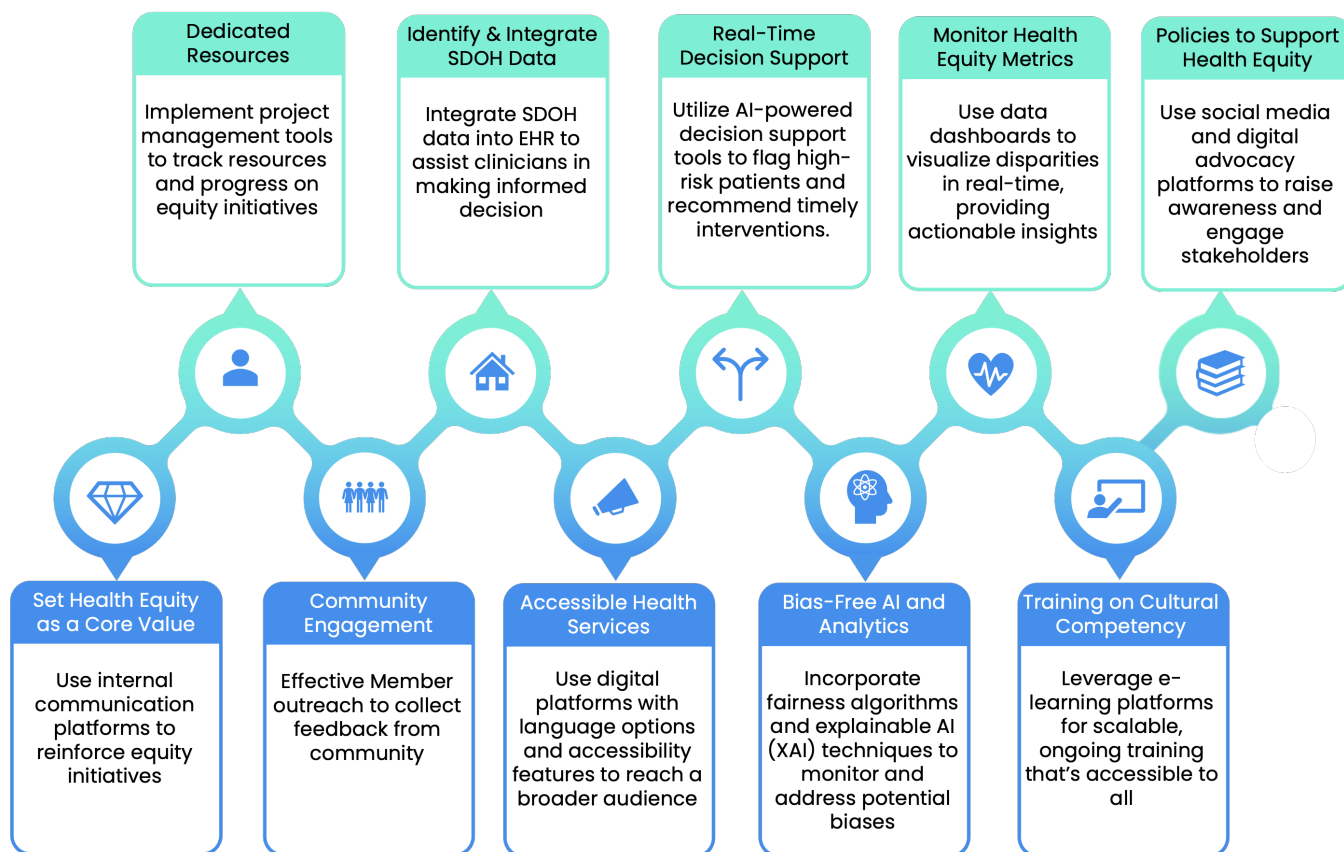
Professor of epidemiology at Harvard University, visiting professor of epidemiology and population health at Stanford Medicine





Building Health Equity: A Strategic Roadmap

Improving health equity requires a step-by-step approach that builds a strong foundation before implementing targeted, technology-driven solutions. By starting with core values, community engagement, and resource allocation, organizations can then leverage data, AI, and policy advocacy to create lasting, equitable healthcare outcomes.





Collaborative Action to Advance Health Equity Adoption

Achieving health equity requires coordinated efforts across payers, providers, and other stakeholders. By focusing on inclusive data practices, culturally competent care, bias-free technology, and supportive policies, healthcare organizations can create a fair and accessible system for all.

	Payers	Providers	Other Stakeholders
Collect and Integrate Data on Health Disparities	Gather data on SDOH, race, and utilization patterns to identify disparities.	Integrate SDOH data into EHRs to personalize care.	Build interoperable platforms to support equity-focused data sharing.
Bias-Resistant AI and Predictive Analytics	Use AI with fairness algorithms to identify and support at-risk populations	Deploy AI tools to flag high-risk patients for timely care.	Ensure AI tools undergo bias testing to prevent disparities.
Enhance Community Engagement	Develop culturally relevant outreach strategies informed by community feedback.	Train staff in cultural competency to build trust with diverse patients.	Partner with community groups for tailored health education.
Continuous Monitor Health Equity Metrics	Track disparities in utilization, outcomes, and satisfaction to refine programs.	Use dashboards to monitor outcomes across demographics.	Provide analytics tools for transparency and accountability.
Policy Changes Supporting Health Equity	Gather data on SDOH, race, and utilization patterns to identify disparities.	Integrate SDOH data into EHRs to personalize care.	Build interoperable platforms to support equity-focused data sharing.



Transforming Health Equity Through Digital Innovation





Putting AI and Data into Action: The Indium Approach

To implement data and AI solutions for health equity, Indium can help adopt a structured framework with a specific focus on reducing disparities and enhancing equitable care delivered through technology. Here's a potential framework tailored to leverage Indium's offerings:

	Purpose	Approach	Impact
SDOH-Driven Insights	Leverage SDOH data to enhance health equity through personalized care.	Use Indium's SDOH ML Engine to extract key non-clinical factors from physician note and predict risks, improving outcomes with targeted interventions.	Helps identify at-risk patients and suggests preventive interventions tailored to specific community needs.
Data Integration	Drive seamless data interoperability for comprehensive insights into health equity.	Integrate FHIR data into healthcare systems using WSO2 through Indium's strategic partnership. This ensures efficient data exchange across EHR, claims systems, and other health data platforms.	Supports real-time data sharing, improving care coordination and closing gaps.
Digital Health Platform GTM	Roll out targeted digital health solutions for chronic conditions.	Develop a Digital Health Platform for Oncology, Neurodegenerative diseases, and chronic conditions with <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patient Outreach for engagement• Care Management tools for personalized treatment plans• Leverage Indium's Digital Health intervention suite GTM partner solution	Enables proactive, personalized care and improved health outcomes.
AI/ML for Value-Based Care	Use AI/ML-driven solutions to address critical healthcare challenges under value-based care models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Predict hospital readmissions for timely interventions• Identify and close care gaps with predictive analytics• Leverage Indium's custom Analytical model solution for Value based care	Improves outcomes while reducing costs for high-risk patients.

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Artificial intelligence and machine learning hold promise for identifying and addressing health disparities. However, it's crucial that these technologies are developed and implemented with a focus on equity, ensuring they benefit all populations equally.

”

Dr. John Halamka
President of the Mayo Clinic Platform



Conclusion

Achieving health equity requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the complex challenges faced by under-served communities, recognizes the economic impact of inequities, and aligns investment priorities with meaningful outcomes. As highlighted in this whitepaper, health equity is not just an ethical imperative but also a strategic priority that demands coordinated efforts across payers, providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

In today's landscape, with evolving regulations like CMS Health Equity Index (HEI), there is a pressing need for innovative, data-driven solutions that not only identify disparities but actively work to close them. Digital technology plays a transformative role here, enabling real-time insights, predictive analytics, and targeted interventions that can break down traditional barriers to care. Leaders are already prioritizing investment in AI, machine learning, and advanced analytics to build an equitable healthcare ecosystem.

Indium's approach aligns closely with these goals, offering AI-powered tools, SDOH integration, and tailored analytics to support a comprehensive, data-driven strategy. Through our solutions, we empower healthcare organizations to monitor disparities, optimize resources, and deliver personalized care, helping to drive health equity at scale. Our strategic roadmap provides actionable steps that payers, providers, and stakeholders can adopt to create lasting change, leveraging technology to bridge gaps in access, quality, and outcomes.

Together, by combining strategic vision, digital innovation, and cross-industry collaboration, we can make significant strides toward a fair and inclusive healthcare system. Health equity is within reach, and with sustained effort, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of background, has access to quality care and improved health outcomes.



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About Indium

Indium is an AI-driven digital engineering company that helps enterprises build, scale, and innovate with cutting-edge technology. We specialize in custom solutions, ensuring every engagement is tailored to business needs with a relentless customer-first approach. Our expertise spans Generative AI, Product Engineering, Intelligent Automation, Data & AI, Quality Engineering, and Gaming, delivering high-impact solutions that drive real business impact.

With 5,000+ associates globally, we partner with Fortune 500, Global 2000, and leading technology firms across Financial Services, Healthcare, Manufacturing, Retail, and Technology—driving impact in North America, India, the UK, Singapore, Australia, and Japan to keep businesses ahead in an AI-first world.

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