



Improving Health Equity through Research and Action

AHRQ's mission is to produce evidence to improve healthcare quality so that it is safer, more accessible, equitable, and affordable and to work with consumers, healthcare leaders and clinicians, HHS divisions, and other partners to ensure the evidence is understood and used.

AHRQ develops and disseminates actionable knowledge, tools, and data to help consumers, their families, healthcare professionals, and policymakers make informed healthcare decisions. AHRQ is the home for health services research and is the Nation's lead Federal agency for primary care and [patient safety research](#) across all settings of care.

AHRQ is acutely aware of inequities and implicit bias embedded in today's healthcare delivery systems and has been committed to expanding its efforts to fund and disseminate strategies to vanquish care inequities and bias and advance all Americans' well-being.

To achieve these goals, AHRQ has thoroughly examined equity and its connections to Agency activities in alignment with its mission. AHRQ's efforts have also been informed by the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to advancing equity and support for underserved communities, as described in President Biden's Executive Orders (Executive Orders [13985](#) and [14091](#)) and [HHS' Health Equity Plan](#).

AHRQ fulfills its mission and improves healthcare quality by leveraging three core competencies:

- **Health services and systems research (HSR):** AHRQ invests in research that generates scientific evidence and actionable knowledge by funding HSR to understand how care is delivered and how healthcare services can be delivered more safely and effectively for everyone.
- **Practice improvement:** AHRQ moves actionable knowledge derived from the body of scientific evidence into practice by developing tools, training, resources, and nonregulatory, nonpunitive assistance, leading to strategies to help health systems and clinicians improve care.
- **Data and analytics:** AHRQ data and analyses help healthcare decision makers understand health system performance and where opportunities for improvement lie for Federal, state, and local policymaking.

AHRQ's goal is to "hard wire" health equity into the Agency's core competencies to ensure that equity is a priority in everything that the Agency does to improve patient care.





Health Services and Systems Research

- AHRQ launched the [Learning Health System Embedded Scientist Training and Research Centers](#) initiative, a 5-year, \$80 million effort to train researchers and scientists to conduct system-focused research to advance health equity and enhance workforce diversity.

Impact: Supports training of a cadre of diverse health equity researchers and scientists.

- AHRQ commissioned a [systematic review](#) to summarize current research defining and measuring respectful maternity care (RMC) and evaluate the effectiveness of RMC and implementation strategies to improve health outcomes, particularly for populations at risk for healthcare disparities.

Impact: Provides evidence for integrating RMC into labor and delivery unit safety culture toolkits to improve the experiences and outcomes of births, including Black and Native American births, communities with the highest morbidity and mortality rates in the United States.

- AHRQ conducted a [rapid review](#) to evaluate the effectiveness and unintended effects of healthcare worker implicit bias training and education interventions on patient safety and healthcare outcomes.

Impact: Summarizes the state of the evidence and identifies research priorities for developing evidence-based implicit bias training.

- AHRQ published a notice of funding opportunity titled [Dissemination and Implementation of Equity-Focused Evidence-Based Interventions in Healthcare Delivery Systems \(R18\)](#) and awarded seven research grants in the fall of 2023 totaling \$15 million.

Impact: Generates evidence on implementing evidence-based interventions to advance health equity.

Practice Improvement

- AHRQ sponsored a public [workshop series](#) as part of an ongoing consensus study examining the current state of racial and ethnic healthcare disparities in the United States, building on the 2003 Institute of Medicine consensus report, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*.

Impact: Identified major drivers of healthcare disparities, successful and unsuccessful interventions, gaps in the evidence base and proposed strategies to close those gaps, and considered ways to scale and spread effective interventions to reduce inequities in healthcare.

- AHRQ sponsored the publication of a *Health Services Research* special issue, [Achieving Healthcare Equity in the United States](#). Papers commissioned for this issue summarize the state of evidence and results from an inclusive, participatory process to identify opportunities in five areas to drive more equitable care: [healthcare delivery systems and structure](#); [payment](#); [social determinants of health and social needs](#); [implementation science](#); and [access to care](#).

Impact: Identified strategies to advance health equity within healthcare systems.

- AHRQ launched the [AHRQ ECHO National Nursing Home COVID-19 Action Network](#), which provided free training and mentorship to nursing homes across the country to increase implementation of evidence-based infection prevention and safety practices to protect residents and staff who were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact: Provided training to 9,058 nursing homes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The online resources have been curated and continue to be updated and freely available for use by U.S. nursing homes.



- AHRQ published the [Digital Healthcare Equity Framework](#) and a guide for its use to help creators and users of healthcare solutions that involve digital technologies ensure that their solutions are equitable.

Impact: Promotes equitable development of digital healthcare tools.

Data and Analytics

- AHRQ has examined the use of race and ethnicity in [healthcare algorithms](#), their impact on racial and ethnic disparities in care, and approaches to identify and mitigate existing biases.

Impact: Provides information to inform the development of guiding principles and actionable solutions for the use of race and ethnicity within healthcare algorithms.

- AHRQ is expanding the [Social Determinants of Health \(SDOH\) Database](#) to make community-level SDOH data readily available to use in research to inform interventions to improve health equity. The SDOH Database currently includes data files at the county, zip code, and census tract levels from 2009 to 2020.

Impact: Enables use of easily linkable SDOH data in patient-centered outcomes research to understand how community-level factors impact health and inform approaches to improve health outcomes.

- AHRQ is hosting a [challenge](#) to accelerate the identification and elimination of inequities in the receipt of preventive services through the creation of data visualization tools to identify disparities in the receipt of clinical preventive services and use these visualizations to create or adapt interventions to address these disparities.

Impact: Fosters innovation to reduce inequities in receipt of clinical preventive services, particularly among racial and ethnic minorities and low socioeconomic status populations.

AHRQ's Focus on the Future

- AHRQ continues to signal the importance of health equity–focused HSR through its [Special Emphasis Notice to Advance Health Equity and Special Emphasis Notice to Improve Healthcare for Persons Living with Disabilities](#).
- AHRQ's Patient-Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR) [Trust Fund Strategic Plan](#) makes health equity a central tenant for PCOR Trust Fund investments and highlights the importance of prioritizing patient-centered and participatory methods that center equity and ensure the voices of stakeholder and community members from underserved and priority populations are reflected in all stages of the research process.
- AHRQ will continue to fund [research supplements](#) to further its commitment to diversifying the HSR workforce by providing a pathway to recruit, train, and develop the next generation of HSR leaders who reflect the communities they serve.



AHRQ Pub. No. 24-0037
Updated March 2024

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