

# Addressing Health Equity Benefits All of Us

From Capital Blue Cross

Inequities in the availability and quality of healthcare can take a toll on the wellness of individuals and our communities, and affect overall healthcare costs. Addressing health equity is becoming more important than ever as the country's population grows more diverse.

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“Health equity” is a term you are likely to hear often in discussions around fostering healthier communities.

But what does health equity mean? And why does it matter?

In the simplest terms, health equity means ensuring everyone can attain his or her fullest health potential regardless of factors such as income, race, gender, where they live, or other social determinants. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), existing health inequities can lead to differences in:

- **Quality and length of life** – For example, Americans age 65 and older and members of minority racial and ethnic groups have been disproportionately represented among COVID-19–associated deaths, according to a CDC study.
- **Rates of disease, disability, and death** – African Americans adults are 50 percent more likely to have a stroke compared to their white counterparts, according to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Severity of disease** - Black and Hispanic children are hospitalized with complications of asthma much more often than are white children, according to the HHS.
- **Access to treatment** - In 2017, African American mothers were 2.3 times more likely than white mothers to receive late prenatal care or no prenatal care at all, the HHS found.

Disparities such as these can impact all segments of our society, according to Dr. Jennifer Chambers, chief medical officer at Capital Blue Cross.

“Inequities in the availability and quality of healthcare not only negatively affect individuals, but they can take a toll on our workforces and our communities as well, creating social and economic costs that we all bear,” Dr. Chambers said. “When we work to address these inequities, by ensuring that all members of our community have access to high-quality healthcare, the entire community benefits with better quality of life.”

Addressing inequities in healthcare is becoming more important than ever as the country's population grows more diverse.

To address disparities in care, insurers like Capital Blue Cross often turn to data to find out where gaps exist so they can act. For instance, when public health data showed minorities were lagging in receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, Capital Blue Cross worked to establish pop-up clinics in minority and underserved neighborhoods to increase access to the vaccine. Those clinics – including ones hosted at the Hamilton Health Center and Heinz-Menaker Senior Center in Harrisburg and the Spanish American Civic Association in Lancaster – provided vaccines to thousands across Central Pennsylvania.

In the long-term, addressing health equity will take changes in public policy and shifts in healthcare resources. But as those changes take place, the result will be improved healthcare access for all segments of our population.