HEALTH EQUITY AND HEALTH DISPARITIES:
## *WHAT GOVERNING BOARDS CAN DO*

Improving quality and the delivery of health care is a steadfast goal for many hospitals and health systems. A key component of quality improvement and creating healthy communities is working to eliminate **health disparities** and advance **health equity**. This is especially important in Texas, where over the last decade, there have been substantial changes in our state's population and demographics. Use this guide to address factors that contribute to health disparities in your community and understand what barriers your community may face in achieving health equity.

Health Disparities reflect differences in health status between populations, for example, a higher burden of illness or mortality experienced by one group relative to another. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to good health based on their race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, age, mental health, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion[1]. For example, studies have shown that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to experience medical errors, longer lengths of stay and avoidable readmissions.

As hospitals work to achieve health equity eliminating health disparities is an important strategy in achieving that goal. Health disparities can arise from:

- Differences in quality of care received in the health care system.
- Differences in access to health care, including preventative and curative services.
- Differences in life opportunities, exposures and stresses that result in varying underlying health statuses.

Health Equity has been defined as the attainment of the highest level of health for all people. It is also the circumstances in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible[2]. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities[3].

EQUALITY   **EQUITY**

Texas
Healthcare
Trustees
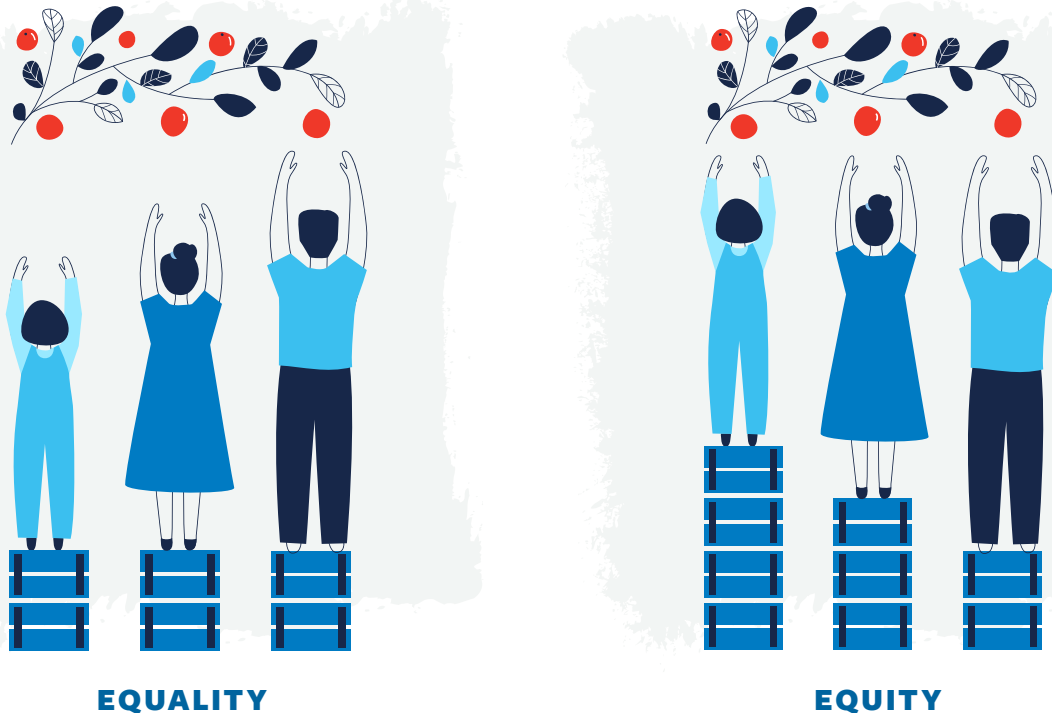
ACTION ITEMS:

Know Your Patients and Community:

Conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment to better understand your population's social determinants of health.

Request and review data that highlights health differences between population groups, above and beyond your own community.

Collaborate with stakeholders in education, transportation, housing, planning, public health and faith-based organizations on health equity programming.

Stay Current on Education in this Important Area through Webinars, Publications, Podcasts and Articles:

Texas Healthcare Trustees

AHA's Institute for Diversity and Health Equity

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion: Healthy People 2020

Enable Health Equity, Health Disparity and Diversity Conversations in the Board Room:

Form a Health Equity Committee or have these conversations as part of the Quality and Patient Safety Committee

Ensure diversity and health equity initiatives are part of your strategic plan

Review your organization's diversity policy, or pursue one if not in place

Engage in meaningful dialogues with health equity and diversity experts

Hold community-based focus groups

Reflect on Your Board's Own Diversity and Representation:

Conduct a Board Self-Assessment

Utilize a Board Compositional Matrix to identify where the Board can improve in this area.

Form a Diversity and Inclusion Committee to evaluate and monitor the organization's initiatives and provide strategic recommendations.

FURTHER READING & LISTENING

THT Bulletin: How to Start Addressing Health Equity in the Board Room
THT Trustee Research: Who's Who at the Table? (PDF)
THT Webinar: Governing for Population Health
THT Webinar: Addressing Health Disparities Through Governance
AHA: Addressing Health Care Disparities through Race, Ethnicity and Language (REaL) Data
AHA: The Partnership for Public Health
AHA: Equity of Care: A Toolkit for Eliminating Health Care Disparities
Institute for Diversity and Health Equity: Certificate in Diversity Management in Health Care
Institute for Diversity and Health Equity: Inclusion & Diversity Resources
ODHP: Healthy People 2020

[1] Kaiser Family Foundation Issue Brief: Disparities in Health and Health Care: Five Key Questions and Answers.
Accessed at: https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-five-key-questions-and-answers/
[2] Healthy People 2020: Disparities. Accessed at: https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/foundation-health-measures/Disparities.
[3] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities. The National Plan for Action Draft as of February 17, 2010 [Internet].
Chapter 1: Introduction. Accessed at: http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/templates/browse.aspx?&lvl=2&lvlid=34.

Texas Healthcare Trustees