



Advancing Health Equity

September 23, 2021

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association’s vision for Illinois healthcare is that all individuals and communities have access to high-quality healthcare at the right time, in the right setting, in order to support each person’s quest for optimum health.

Confronting and eliminating racism are essential to achieving that vision. The cumulative effects of racism and discrimination result in generational trauma and poverty, higher rates of illness, poorer health and lower life expectancy for people of color. Unquestionably, racism is a serious public health crisis.¹

As community anchors, Illinois hospitals and health systems are taking action to examine and revise our institutional policies through an equity lens, strengthen our partnerships with local community-based organizations, and build a culture that values and respects all individuals.

In the summer of 2020, IHA established a permanent standing Committee on Health Disparities to recommend strategies to reduce health disparities and advance health equity. With the leadership of the Committee, the IHA Board of Trustees, and all Illinois hospitals, we have pursued strategies to enact public policy and support the hospital community so that individually and collectively we advance health equity.

Below are examples of key IHA-supported advocacy outcomes and hospital equity improvement strategies that demonstrate tangible progress and ongoing efforts to advance health equity and realize IHA’s vision for Illinois healthcare.

Public Policy Advocacy

Healthcare Transformation Collaboratives: The *Healthcare Transformation Collaboratives* program was authorized in the spring of 2021 following a multiyear advocacy effort. This program invests \$150 million per year in Medicaid funds in State fiscal years 2021 through 2027 to facilitate collaboratives among healthcare providers and other community organizations that are designed to reduce health disparities, advance health equity, and improve the health and healthcare of vulnerable communities. [P.A. 101-655](#)

¹ American Hospital Association, [Statement on Racism as Public Health Issue](#) (July 2021).
American Medical Association, [Racism is a Threat to Public Health](#) (November 2020), [Strategic Plan to Embed Racial Justice and Advance Health Equity](#) (2021).
American Public Health Association, [Structural Racism is a Public Health Crisis](#) (October 2020).



Telehealth Coverage Expansion: Legislation to continue the expanded coverage of telehealth service by commercial health insurers was enacted. Expanded coverage under Medicaid will continue under the current regulations. [P.A. 102-104](#)

Health Coverage Expansion: By May 30, 2022, coverage under the Medical Assistance Program will be available to noncitizens aged 55-64 who would otherwise be eligible for the Program but for their non-citizenship status. [P.A. 102-16](#)

Health Care and Human Service Reform Act: The Legislative Black Caucus' comprehensive initiative to improve health equity includes provisions on unconscious bias training for health professionals, funding for community health workers, and Medicaid coverage for home visits to pregnant women and doula services. [P.A. 102-004](#)

Improving Health Care for Pregnant and Postpartum Individuals Act: This maternal health legislation increases insurance coverage for certain types of prenatal and postpartum care, unbundles certain hospital delivery services, includes greater mental health and substance use coverage for pregnant and postpartum women, and expands various state programs for high-risk pregnant and postpartum women and children.

Hospital Financial Assistance and Community Benefits: This legislation aims to advance health equity by increasing access to hospital services for uninsured individuals, increasing transparency with respect to financial assistance, and enhancing reporting of hospital activities to advance health equity.

Hospital Equity Improvement Strategies

Racial Equity in Healthcare Progress Report: In June 2021, IHA launched statewide the [Racial Equity in Healthcare Progress Report](#) ("Progress Report"), which is a long-term accountability tool for hospitals and other healthcare providers to document progress toward achieving racial health equity. The Progress Report provides for a baseline self-assessment and then an opportunity to measure progress, assess implementation of key strategies, understand provider and community assets in racial equity work, and identify areas of improvement.

IHA Health Equity Action Day: On the first official observance of Juneteenth—now a state and federal holiday—over 1,400 hospital leaders and staff across the state participated in [IHA's Health Equity Action Day](#), which included an inspiring virtual program in the morning and practical resources, tools and information for hospitals to use on their own in the afternoon.