

Advancing Health Equity and Reducing Disparities Requires Long-term, Systemic Solutions

The Issue

Health inequity is the result of historic and systemic inequalities that persist today, and it has risen to the level of a public health crisis in California. According to the California Health Care Foundation:

- Black Californians have the highest rates of new prostate, colorectal, and lung cancer cases, and the highest death rates for breast, colorectal, lung, and prostate cancer.
- About one in five Latinx Californians report not having a usual source of care and difficulty finding a specialist.
- Californians who are Native American and Alaska Native, as well as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, are less likely to report having a checkup within the past year than other racial/ethnic groups.

California's hospitals are on the front lines of mitigating health inequities. Within their communities, hospitals examine and address the social determinants of health — things like housing instability, access to healthy foods, and community violence — that significantly affect health risks and outcomes. And they continually work to improve the experience and outcomes for everyone in their care through a variety of initiatives, including a statewide maternal health quality collaborative; data collection and analysis on race, ethnicity, language preference, and other sociodemographic data; cultural competency training; increasing diversity in leadership and governance; and improving and strengthening community partnerships. But hospitals alone cannot eliminate health disparities.

What's Needed

Ensuring every Californian receives equitable, high-quality care requires long-term, systemic solutions, including:

- Correcting the structural imbalance created by Medi-Cal underfunding, which disproportionately affects people of color
- Action derived from partnerships among health care providers and lawmakers, civic leaders, insurance companies, and others
- Meaningful measurement of the problems, starting with data that are collected and analyzed at the community level
- Expanding innovative modes of care delivery — such as telehealth and hospital-at-home programs — for their capacity to increase access to care



87 years

Life expectancy at birth in California.

75.1 years

Life expectancy at birth for Black Californians.

<https://www.chcf.org/publication/2021-edition-health-disparities-race-ethnicity-california/>