

Addressing Health Equity in Nursing Homes

Like other healthcare institutions, health disparities exist in nursing homes. These disparities can have a significant impact on health outcomes such as infection rates, hospitalizations, readmission rates, and mortality. Given the increasing diversity of the aging population in the United States, it is important that there is equity in the quality of care being provided in nursing homes, and an understanding of the diverse needs of the older adults that are being served.

A focus on health equity has the potential to build resident and family trust, strengthen provider-resident communication, provide better resident experience, improve the quality of care, and decrease healthcare costs. Nursing homes can be positioned to address health equity in the following ways, among others:

- **Understand your resident population by collecting race, ethnicity, and preferred language (REaL) data.** These data can help your organization identify disparities in quality, outcomes, or resident experience. This helps organizations begin to plan and implement appropriate interventions and programs that can be used to address the identified disparities.
- **Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS).** This type of care ensures that the services your organization provides are respectful and responsive to each resident's culture and communication needs. This helps incorporate person-specific interventions e.g., activities, food, or other appropriate services that are part of a resident's care plan.
- **Address the social determinants of health (SDOH).** This information can help your organization understand residents' non-medical social needs, such as social, environmental, and economic factors that can influence their health outcomes. This provides organizations the ability to better connect residents with appropriate community-based resources upon discharge.

Underpinning all the strategies outlined above is having organizational support to ensure that health equity is part of the organization's policies and practices, as well as ensuring that staff have the appropriate training and resources to follow through successfully.

To learn more about what your organization can do to improve health equity, please contact Tammy Geltmaker (tgeltmaker@qsource.org) for resources and assistance on moving forward. Resources on health equity can also be found on our website at qio.qsource.org.



Health equity, as defined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, is the “attainment of the highest level of health for all people, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, preferred language, or other factors that affect access to care and health outcomes.”