

**Social Justice and Health Disparities Working Group
DRAFT Recommendations**

Although the problems are complex and require comprehensive approaches to stop racism in health care, DC Health Link health plans and DCHBX can be part of the solution.

Focus Area 1: Expand access to providers and health systems for communities of color in the District

The vast majority—over 96%—of District residents have health coverage, which ranks Washington, DC among the best in the country for coverage. However, there is a shortage of hospitals, urgent care facilities and other providers in areas of DC, leading to difficulties with obtaining medical care for many residents of color. Access to diverse providers is limited as well.

Potential Recommendations:

Carriers:

- **Provide incentives for both primary care and specialist physicians to practice in underserved areas in DC**
- **Support access to diverse medical professionals**
 - Provide scholarships for STEM students and medical school students of color in health professional schools in the District.
 - Review provider networks to determine the race, ethnicity and primary language of their providers to establish a baseline, and develop 5-year goals to improve the diversity of the networks.

Focus Area 2: Eliminate health outcome disparities for communities of color in the District

Blacks and Latinos are hospitalized at over 3 times the rate of their white counterparts. About 40 percent of non-Hispanic blacks compared to 28 percent of non-Hispanic whites have high blood pressure, and the rate of diagnosed diabetes is 77 percent higher among non-Hispanic blacks than non-Hispanic whites. African American men have the highest cancer death rate of any racial and ethnic group in the U.S.

Potential Recommendations:

Carriers:

- **Collect and use comprehensive, member-level racial, ethnic and primary language data to support and collaborate with network providers to reduce racial and ethnic inequities**

- No later than Plan Year 2023, obtain race, ethnicity, and language data directly from members via mail, email, telephone and electronic portals, and other mechanisms. Share with DCHBX and DISB baseline metrics for data collection, annual goals and, beginning in Plan Year 2024, progress in meeting such goals.
- Provide aggregate data by race, ethnicity and primary language to DCHBX and DISB for select diseases and health conditions, in consultation with DCHBX and DISB.

DCHBX:

- **Modify insurance design for DC Health Link standard plans to eliminate cost-sharing, including deductibles, co-insurance and co-payment, for medical care, prescription drugs, supplies and related services that prevent and manage diseases and health conditions that disproportionately affect patients of color in the District.**
 - Develop a Value-Based Insurance Design to support adherence for patients with chronic conditions. The Social Justice and Health Disparities Working Group recommends the following prioritization of conditions to be assessed for AV and premium impact by the HBX Standard Plans Working Group: (1) for the adult population-- diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease, mental health and HIV, as well as cancer of the breast, prostate, colorectal and lung/bronchus; and (2) for pediatric population-- mental and behavioral health services.
 - Waiver of cost-sharing is only for the underlying condition and does not include co-morbidities. For example, for an enrollee with diabetes, heart disease treatment would continue to have cost-sharing.
 - Health plans are encouraged to evaluate impact of design changes on enrolled population and provide periodic updates on trends to DCHBX and DISB. Furthermore, health plans are encouraged to expand their current health equity support and pilot programs to include patients for whom there will be no cost-sharing for treatment of certain specific conditions. Because product design changes will require provider education, DCHBX shall include in their budget funding for provider education in consultation with the health plans.
 - New insurance design should apply to standard plans in the individual marketplace.
 - DCHBX must also develop new standard plan design, which must include this new insurance design, for the small group marketplace to be offered for plan year 2023.

Carriers:

- **Identify disparities in care by stratifying quality measures by race, ethnicity and primary language**

- Conduct “Equity Audits” based on race, ethnicity and primary language data with focus on HEDIS measure performance, patient experience and provider payment. Such audits should align with NCQA requirements as feasible.
- Update existing contracts with medical management vendors to require assessment of vendor performance with caring for diverse populations, and development of goals and timeline for improvement.

Focus Area 3: Ensure equitable treatment for patients of color in health care settings and in the delivery of health care services in the District

Myriad studies have found that persons of color are less likely to receive equitable treatment across a range of health conditions, leading to significant disparities in health and health outcomes. Implicit bias from providers and biased clinical algorithms contribute to inequitable treatment.

Implicit bias, along with false beliefs about biological differences, can lead to disparities in recommended treatment and poor provider communication during medical visits, which in turn contributes to experiences of perceived discrimination and poor quality of care. Blacks in particular are more likely to report being treated unfairly and with disrespect by providers because of their race.

Potential Recommendations:

Carriers:

- **Require network providers to complete cultural competency training, which should reflect widely available, recommended resources and tools to mitigate implicit bias**
 - Provide and require cultural competency training to support the delivery of culturally and linguistically competent services, in adherence to the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health’s [A Physician’s Practical Guide to Culturally Competent Care](#) and other resources listed by [CDC’s National Prevention Information Network](#).
 - Require cultural competency training annually for all providers in network. Incentives should be offered to encourage non-network providers to complete training as well.
 - Require cultural competency training in provider contracts, which should be tailored to both primary care physicians and medical specialists.
 - DCHBX will reach out to DC Health to learn how it has encouraged cultural competency training for providers, including whether provider licensure requirements could be leveraged for this purpose.

- **Obtain the National Committee for Quality Assurance's (NCQA's) Multicultural Health Care distinction**
 - Seek this distinction, awarded for organizations that meet or exceed standards in providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

- **Review clinical algorithms and diagnostic tools for biases and inaccuracies and update appropriately**
 - Each carrier will conduct and report to DCHBX and DISB on efforts to assess clinical management algorithms for bias. Within [six months vs. one year], carriers will report the outcomes of such assessments to DCHBX and DISB, as well as plans and timeline for correction, as necessary.
 - Such reports will be used for informational purposes regarding the types and prevalence of algorithms that are found to potentially bias care for diverse populations. These reports will be considered proprietary and confidential.
 - DCHBX and DISB may report aggregate outcomes from these reports.
 - Within [six months vs one year], prohibit use of race in estimating glomerular filtration rate (GFR) by hospitals, laboratories and other providers in network.