

# Promoting Health Equity

This job aid provides information and guidance Navigators, Certified Application Counselors (CACs), and Enrollment Assistance Personnel (EAPs) (collectively, assisters) need to know in order to advance health equity when working with consumers and their communities.

## Table of Contents

- Overview.....2
- Health Equity Initiatives .....3
- Programs and Resources .....3
- Additional Resources.....6

Version 1.0. April 2024. This information is intended only for the use of entities and individuals certified to serve as Navigators, certified application counselors, or non-Navigator assistance personnel in a Federally-facilitated Marketplace. The terms “Federally-facilitated Marketplace” and “FFM,” as used in this document, include FFM where the state performs plan management functions. Some information in this manual may also be of interest to individuals helping consumers in State-based Marketplaces and State-based Marketplaces using the Federal Platform. This material was produced and disseminated at U.S. tax filer expense.

## Overview

As the nation's largest health insurer, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has a critical role to play in driving the next decade of health equity for people who are underserved. Assistants can help in this effort to eliminate avoidable differences in health outcomes experienced by people who are disadvantaged or underserved, and provide the care and support that consumers and their families need to thrive.

The following definitions will help in the discussion of CMS' ongoing commitment to health equity:

- **Equity** means the consistent and systematic, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including:
  - Individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color;
  - Members of religious minorities;
  - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons;
  - Persons with disabilities;
  - Persons who live in rural areas; and
  - Persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.<sup>i</sup>
- **Health Equity** is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Health Disparities** are differences in health outcomes closely linked with social, economic, and environmental disadvantage.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Minority Groups** include non-dominant groups within a society with certain racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population.<sup>iv</sup>
- **Underserved Communities** refer to populations sharing a particular characteristic, including geographic communities that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified in the definition of equity.<sup>v</sup> This includes CMS Office of Minority Health's (OMH) focus populations.<sup>vi</sup>

## Health Equity Initiatives

CMS has a robust infrastructure in health equity via the Office of Minority Health (CMS OMH). The mission of the CMS OMH is to ensure that the voices and needs of the populations they represent are present as the agency is developing, implementing, and evaluating its programs and policies. The vision is that all CMS beneficiaries achieve their highest level of health and to eliminate disparities in health care quality and access. For more information visit [Health Equity Programs and Healthcare Resources](#).

The CMS OMH recently published the CMS Framework for Health Equity 2022-2032. This initiative provides information and tools to ensure there is a health equity foundation across all of CMS' work, in every program, across every community. CMS is committed to taking an integrated, action-oriented approach to advance health equity among members of communities, providers, plans, and other organizations serving such communities, who are underserved or disadvantaged.

The Framework for Health Equity is consistent with and builds upon the CMS Administrator's Strategic Vision and with Executive Order (EO) 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," signed by President Biden on January 20, 2021. Refer to: [CMS Framework for Health Equity](#).

## Programs and Resources

Assisters are encouraged to explore available resources to support their work while promoting health equity.

### Health Equity Technical Assistance (TA) Program

The CMS Office of Minority Health offers Health Equity TA resources to support quality improvement partners, providers, and other CMS stakeholders, including assisters, by offering:

- Personalized coaching and resources
- Guidance on data collection and analysis
- Assistance to develop a language access plan and disparities impact statement
- Resources on culturally and linguistically tailored care and communication
- Training and resources to help embed health equity in stakeholder's strategic planning:
  - Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan
  - Guide to Implementing the National CLAS Standards

For more information about CMS's Health Equity Technical Assistance Program, refer to [Health Equity Technical Assistance](#).

## Language Access Planning

In 2023, HHS published an updated Language Access Plan to identify and address barriers to equal opportunity faced by underserved communities.

A language access plan spells out how to provide services to individuals who are non-English speaking or have Limited English Proficiency. They should be tailored to individual organizations but may include sections such as needs assessment, services offered, and training for staff. For more information, refer to [The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Language Access Plan](#).

## Communication Access

Assisters can help provide high quality service to consumers who may be blind or have low vision by having a plan to provide effective communication to consumers. For some ideas on how to create an effective plan you can review the Improving Communication Access for Individuals who are Blind or Have Low Vision brochure and the Improving Communication Access for Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing brochure.

The Improving Communication Access for Individuals who are Blind or Have Low Vision brochure can be found at [Improving Communication Access for Individuals Who are Blind or Have Low Vision](#). The Improving Communication Access for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing brochure can be found at [Improving Communication Access for Individuals Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#).

## Assister Roles and Responsibilities

Assisters are the link between the high-level policy and the on-the-ground change and should take active steps to:

- **Build a Culture of Equity.** Leaders and staff can improve their capacity to address disparities by establishing a strong organizational commitment to equity.
- **Practice Health Promotion.** Health promotion refers to activities designed to help people improve their health or prevent illness through changes in environments, lifestyle, and behavior.

To promote health equity, assisters can:

- Elevate health equity into the organizational mission statement.
- Participate in broad coalitions that work to address the root causes of health and educational disparities.
  - Get to know your elected representatives and tell them how important your work is and what you need from them to do it successfully.

- Implement National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Standards (CLAS).
  - Provide training to all employees, providers, and their staff.
  - Develop a Language Access Plan.
  - Certain assisters are required to implement CLAS standards pursuant to federal regulation at 45 CFR 155.215(c).<sup>vii</sup>
- Volunteer in the community.
  - Work with community leaders and cultural brokers to create opportunities for such interactions.
- Create visual guides mapping the community and its health-based resources.
- Use non-traditional media (radio, local free newspapers).

## Outreach

Exhibit 1 provides a list of potential organizations or individuals to work with in promoting health equity. For more information about working with outside organizations, refer to [Tips for Assisters on Working with Outside Organizations](#).

**Exhibit 1 – Health Equity Collaboration**

Individuals and Groups for Health Equity Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local hospitals to develop a referral system for uninsured patients visiting the emergency room.</li> <li>▪ Local housing authorities and food banks to let them know about Open Enrollment services at the health center.</li> <li>▪ Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites for tax-related questions and assistance.</li> <li>▪ Groups selling other types of insurance (e.g., life, auto, home).</li> <li>▪ Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).</li> <li>▪ Faith-based organizations.</li> <li>▪ Local elected officials and well-respected community leaders.</li> <li>▪ Colleges and universities to provide education and awareness to students.</li> </ul>

Assisters should explore what messages work best in their communities such as:

- Offering Health Insurance Literacy 101 sessions when Open Enrollment is closed.
- Emphasizing that improved health is a community and family opportunity and responsibility.

- Reflecting your community in your imagery: Have affirmative, positive images in materials in the various languages your community speaks. Tailor and customize the conversation to fit your community.
- Considering ways to engage with people who don't have internet:
  - Billboards, display posters, postcards, mailers
  - Have "word of mouth" captains
  - Television, radio, and newspapers

Thinking creatively about where to offer assistance to under-resourced community members can result in successful outreach. For instance, going to where consumers work with populations that have future eligibility for coverage (e.g. ex-felons, individuals recently released from jail, or children/young adults in juvenile detention centers). Assisters can conduct mini outreach events in different locations throughout the week instead of having one large-scale outreach event for the month or provide assistance at work sites – many daily outdoor laborers need assistance post-enrollment too.

Assisters can learn from and expand their work with all communities:

- Ask for and be open to feedback and change.
- Be responsive to your community.
- Get to know who your community members trust, such as faith-based figures, school administrators, medical professionals.
- Be accessible outside of Open Enrollment by being a year-long resource.
- Be transparent and honest about what you can and cannot help with. Your consumers should have realistic expectations.

## Additional Resources

Note: There are some references and links to non-governmental third-party websites in this section. CMS offers these links for informational purposes only, and inclusion of these websites should not be construed as an endorsement of any third-party organization's programs or activities.

### Technical Assistance Resources:

- Marketplace Assister Microlearning: [CMS.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/marketplace-assister-microlearning](https://www.cms.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/marketplace-assister-microlearning)
- Providing Effective Communication and Language Assistance: [CMS.gov/marketplace/assister-webinars/communication-language-assistance.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/marketplace/assister-webinars/communication-language-assistance.pdf)

- Resources for the Uninsured: [CMS.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/connecting-uninsured-to-health-care-resources.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/connecting-uninsured-to-health-care-resources.pdf)
- Serving Consumers with Disabilities: [CMS.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/consumers-with-disabilities.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/consumers-with-disabilities.pdf)
- Serving Special Populations: Consumers with Limited English Proficiency: [CMS.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/limited-english-proficiency-job-aid.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/marketplace/technical-assistance-resources/limited-english-proficiency-job-aid.pdf)

#### Other Resources:

- CDC Guide to Promoting Health Equity: [CDC.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/SDO\\_H-workbook.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/SDO_H-workbook.pdf)
- CMS Health Disparities Guide: [CMS.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/Downloads/Health-Disparities-Guide.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/Downloads/Health-Disparities-Guide.pdf)
- Coverage to Care Initiative: [CMS.gov/priorities/health-equity/c2c](https://www.cms.gov/priorities/health-equity/c2c)
- Executive order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities: [Whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/)
- HHS OMH Blueprint for Implementing CLAS: [Thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdfs/EnhancedCLASStandardsBlueprint.pdf](https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdfs/EnhancedCLASStandardsBlueprint.pdf)
- Out2Enroll: [Out2enroll.org](https://www.out2enroll.org)

---

<sup>i</sup> Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government: [Whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-orderadvancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-orderadvancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/)

<sup>ii</sup> [Health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers](https://www.health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers)

<sup>iii</sup> [Health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers](https://www.health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers)

<sup>iv</sup> [OHCHR.org/en/ohchr\\_homepage](https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage)

<sup>vv</sup> Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government: [Whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-orderadvancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-orderadvancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/)

<sup>vi</sup> [Health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers](https://www.health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/questions-answers)

<sup>vii</sup> [45 CFR 155.215\(c\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45--chapter-155--section-215-(c))

