STATES ADDRESS STRUCTURAL RACISM

In 2020, the nation awakened to the pervasive systemic and structural racism that essential hospitals have long fought. The injustices resulting from structural racism create health inequities along racial and ethnic lines that disproportionately affect the marginalized communities served by members of America’s Essential Hospitals.

The COVID-19 pandemic redoubled this national spotlight on racial inequities in health and health care. Black, Latino, and Native people are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with higher rates of infection, hospitalizations, and mortality.¹

In the wake of 2020, cities, counties, and localities across 27 states joined in declaring racism a public health crisis. Eight states officially declared racism a public health crisis, while 21 governors included strategies to dismantle systemic racism and attain health equity as part of their 2021 state addresses.² Several other states have legislation pending to declare racism a public health threat. States are pursuing a variety of policies and initiatives to address structural racism and health equity, focused on education, workforce development, and new cabinet positions.

Implicit Bias and Health Equity Education
Implicit bias and discrimination contribute to improper care for marginalized communities and increased levels of distrust between providers and patients, ultimately adversely impacting health outcomes. While many states have implemented implicit bias training for law enforcement, some have implemented this training for other professions. Vermont has required implicit bias training annually for legislators and staff, and several states now require implicit bias training for health care providers.

• Washington passed legislation that require state medical schools by January 2023 to develop curriculum on health equity.³

• In 2020, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) required all health care staff to do implicit bias training as part of the knowledge and skills necessary for licensure, registration, and renewal of licenses and registrations of health professionals in the state.⁴

• Maryland has passed legislation to require implicit bias training for health care workers when they renew their licenses.⁵
Health Care Workforce Diversity

Research has shown that building and maintaining trust in the health care system can improve health outcomes. Further, trust varies and is associated with race, as racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to trust the health care workforce. Several states are working to ensure the health care workforce is representative of the communities they serve to improve patient trust.

- **Illinois** passed legislation to create a Diversity in Health Care Professions Task Force to diversify the health care workforce, including promoting entry of racial and ethnic minority students into medical school.

- **Oregon** introduced legislation to create the Indian Health Scholarship Program, which would cover tuition and fees for qualifying Indian health profession students in exchange for student commitment to work at tribal service site after graduation.

- The **Virginia** legislature passed a bill that would require the state to develop strategies to improve health care workforce diversity.

New Equity Cabinet Positions

Several states have taken the step to create positions within their governments to address and prioritize equity.

- **Delaware** Gov. John Carney (D) created a position, director of statewide equity initiatives, that will work across all executive branch agencies and advise the governor on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion.

- In response to protests over racial inequity and police brutality, **Indiana** Gov. Eric Holcomb (R) created a cabinet-level chief equity, inclusion, and opportunity officer position to build diversity and inclusion within the state government and through the services it provides.

- The Council of the **District of Columbia** created the Office of Racial Equity through a resolution to coordinate Washington, D.C.’s efforts in achieving racial equity and to serve as a liaison to the public.

- **Oregon’s** legislature established a Capitol Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee to provide ongoing dialogue, discussion, and growth opportunities for all legislative employees and elected officials to increase understanding of the benefits of a diverse and inclusive state capital.

Notes


7. Ibid.


