

What is health equity?

Health equity is the absence of disparities in the health of all Pennsylvanians.

Health disparities are when one population or group of people experience worse health outcomes or a lesser quality of health care when compared to other populations. These differences are often caused by societal, economic, or environmental factors, such as poor housing, poverty, or discrimination.

Who suffers from health disparities?

It depends. Populations often affected are racial/ethnic minorities (such as Latinos/Hispanics and Blacks/African-Americans), immigrants and refugees, those with physical or mental disabilities, sexual minorities (gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender individuals), the elderly, and those who live in rural areas.

What is cultural competency?

Our definition of cultural competency is having the skills needed to understand, communicate and work well with people from different backgrounds, cultures and language abilities. Cultural competence helps public health practitioners and health care professionals provide beneficial and high quality care to patients from diverse backgrounds.



Dr. Hector R. Ortiz
Director, Office of Health Equity
hectoortiz@pa.gov

Andrea Lowe, MPH
Public Health Program Administrator
anlowe@pa.gov

Cliff Deardorff
Refugee Health Program Administrator
cldeardorf@pa.gov

Lisa Waldschmitt, MPhil
lwaldschmi@pa.gov

Pennsylvania Department of Health Office of Health Equity

**Health & Welfare Building
625 Forster St. • Room 628
Harrisburg, PA 17120**

Phone : 717-787-4366

<http://www.health.state.pa.us/healthequity>



Office of Health Equity



Office of Health Equity Programs and Initiatives

Health Equity Programs

Funded through the Federal Office of Minority Health State Partnership Grant, the Office of Health Equity (OHE) provides leadership to increase public awareness of health inequities and disparities in the commonwealth. It advocates for the development of programs and policies within the Department of Health and collaborates with community-based organizations and other stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to directly address health inequality.



The OHE recommends actions which are data-driven, evidence-based and culturally and linguistically appropriate in order to increase public awareness of the existence of health inequities and mobilize statewide agencies, communities, and individual action to reduce and/or eliminate health disparities. In addition, the OHE works with policy makers, health care providers and communities to implement policies and programs that result in measurable and sustained improvements in the health status of underserved and disparate populations.

Cultural Competency Taskforce

The Office of Health Equity has spearheaded the creation of a Pennsylvania Department of Health Cultural Competency Taskforce. This taskforce is made up of individuals from across the Department who are dedicated to addressing health inequalities and providing high-quality health care to all Pennsylvanians.

The Taskforce is responsible for providing training and raising awareness of cultural competency, Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards, and health disparities to Department of Health staff and partner organizations. Cultural competency trainings will involve fostering a health care system that values diversity and is conscious of the adaptations needed in diverse cultures to provide equitable access to health care.

A thorough knowledge of health disparities (including social determinants of health, such as poverty and education) experienced by populations that a health care system serves is also essential to understanding many of the potentially unseen problems that patients are experiencing. Ultimately, the goal is to make this program available to all health care professionals in Pennsylvania.

The OHE works with health care providers, government agencies and community organizations to develop their capacity to serve diverse populations through building cultural competency skills and the ability to meet CLAS Standards. The OHE also serves as a resource to people interested in learning about health disparities in Pennsylvania.

Refugee Health Program

The Refugee Health Program is a partnership between the Office of Health Equity, Bureau of Epidemiology, the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. The goal of this program is to ensure that all newly arriving refugees receive a comprehensive health screening as soon as possible after entering into the United States. These screenings protect the public's health against communicable diseases, identify health problems that have been overlooked or developed subsequent to the overseas medical exam, and provide a level of care necessary for a supportive and successful resettlement.

The Refugee Health Program works with commonwealth-selected medical providers to ensure that all of the necessary refugee health assessments are completed.

The primary components of the health assessments include:

- medical history and physical examinations;
- tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and hepatitis and intestinal parasite screenings;
- immunizations; and
- referral to appropriate related services

The Refugee Health Program also provides medical interpretation, a vital component in reducing disparities in those who have limited English language skills. The PA DOH Refugee Health Program encourages medical providers across the commonwealth to join the network of participating providers. Please contact Cliff Deardorff at 717-787-4366 or cldeardorf@pa.gov for more information.

