



National Health Disparities Month



What are health disparities?

Health disparities are the persistent gaps between the health status of minorities and non-minorities in the United States.

Despite continued advances in health care and technology, racial and ethnic minorities continue to have more disease, disability, and premature death than non-minorities.

African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, have higher rates of infant mortality, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV infection/AIDS, cancer, and lower rates of immunizations and cancer screening.

The causes are complex, but two major factors are:

- **Inadequate Access to Care** Barriers to care can result from economic, geographic, linguistic, cultural, and health care financing issues. Even when minorities have similar levels of access to care, health insurance and education, the quality and intensity of health care they receive are often poor.
- **Substandard Quality of Care** Lower quality care has many causes, including patient-provider miscommunication, provider discrimination, stereotyping, or prejudice. Quality of care is usually rated on four measures: effectiveness, patient safety, timeliness, and patient centeredness.

The Business Case

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that 41.5% of the workforce will be members of racial and ethnic minority groups within the decade.

Even after controlling for economic and health insurance status, differences still appear in diagnosis and treatment of specific health conditions, utilization of preventive services, and health outcomes.

This makes health disparities a business issue. Employers have begun to recognize that the quality of health care for their workers receive is important to employee health, productivity, performance and business outcomes.

However, many employers may be unaware of inequities in the health care system and how they can negatively influence health status. Awareness of these issues and of what other businesses have done to tackle the problem successfully, is essential to employers who purchase or plan health care services.

As a result, the HHS Office of Minority Health asked the National Business Group on Health to develop Why Companies Are Making Health Disparities Their Business: The Business Case and Practical Strategies. It describes the impact that racial and ethnic health disparities have on large employers.

OMH and the National Business Group on Health have launched a new two-year effort to strengthen ongoing partnerships and build new business-community coalitions to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities and improve the quality of health care for minority populations. This includes the development of a portfolio of practical strategies that large employers could implement as major purchasers of health care.



Source: www.omhrc.gov/npa/