

MAY 2023

Advocate for and Invest in Maternal Health Equity

Operational Guidance for Health Plans

The Opportunity

This guidance document outlines recommendations health plans can use to raise the bar for maternal health equity and excellence as **advocates and investors**.

Health plans can harness their economic resources to invest in health equity and ensure that organizational culture promotes equity in all aspects of business. As dominant political and economic stakeholders, health plans have the power and resources to shape and advance public policies that profoundly impact maternal health equity. This includes new approaches to payment and models of care that address maternal health inequities.

Roadmap of this Section:

1. Recommendation: **Incorporate maternal health equity in spending decisions.**
2. Recommendation: **Set maternal health equity goals at all levels of the organization, and ensure accountability and resources necessary to meet them.**
3. Recommendation: **Advocate for policies that increase maternal health equity across the spectrum of public policy.**

Recommendation: Incorporate maternal health equity in spending decisions.

The first step in investing in maternal health equity is to assess your organization's spending practices. This includes spending for clinical services and spending that is unrelated to direct service provision. A comprehensive view of how resources are spent will highlight opportunities to leverage financial spending to transform maternal care.

■ **Align payment for maternity care services with improved maternal health outcomes**

- Consider bundled prospective payment models that cover doula support, similar services and social needs, which are hard to reimburse under other payment models.
- Tie at least a portion of payment to performance on maternal health outcomes and equity.
- Design a payment episode for [maternity care home](#) features.

■ **Administrative Spending:**

- Employ a diverse workforce. Partner with organizations that employ a diverse workforce.
- Contract with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)-owned businesses for products or services associated with running your organization (e.g., HVAC, furniture procurement, training).

■ **Philanthropic Spending:**

- Invest foundation resources and community benefit funds in ways that positively impact maternal health equity social drivers (e.g., nutrition, housing, transportation, employment).
- Ensure philanthropic resources are awarded to organizations operated by and for communities experiencing maternal health inequities.
- Invest foundation resources to fund scholarships for doula, midwifery and lactation specialist training and credentials (especially BIPOC doulas, midwives and lactation specialists).

■ **Contracts and Partnerships (clinical and nonclinical):**

- Contract with BIPOC-led community-based organizations, such as organizations that provide doula and midwifery services and train new practitioners.
- Forge relationships with partners that address social drivers. For example, collaborate with Food Banks to identify high need areas and then invest funds to address gaps.

■ **Innovative Projects that Reduce Poverty and Increase Wellbeing**

- Invest in workforce training efforts. Employment and economic security are critical for health and wellbeing.
- Support pipeline programs for maternal health professional development and cross-training, for instance from doula to midwife.

Recommendation: Set maternal health equity goals at all levels of the organization, and ensure accountability and resources necessary to meet them.

Maternal health inequities are multi-faceted, with longstanding racism and inequitable approaches built into care delivery and payment. Intention, accountability and dedicated activities to remediate past inequities are key to achieving maternal health equity.

- Set organizational metrics for improving maternal health equity. Track performance against these metrics at the board level.
- Assess your health plan's services, offerings, etc., for pregnant individuals, including speaking with them to understand whether those services and offerings are contributing to, or mitigating, maternal health inequities.
- Work with maternal health voices and community stakeholders to craft, build and sustain a holistic maternal health program that addresses cultural, operational and structural barriers to equitable maternal health.
- Provide all staff access to programs and learning opportunities aimed at addressing maternal health biases, including unconscious bias and cultural competency training for everyone in the maternal care continuum.
- Create an Equity Cabinet within your health plan that is focused on eliminating disparities of all kinds and on addressing social drivers of health. Establish a strategic plan for the Cabinet to ensure that your health plan's policies and practices are aligned with these goals. Establish a complementary strategic plan for the Cabinet that is focused on ways your health plan can influence local and national policies.
- Promote values of equity, inclusion and anti-racism through both internal and external communications (see sidebar).

Communicating Equity, Inclusion and Anti-racism Values

Minnesota-based Health Partners includes the following statement on their website:

Everyone welcome, included and valued.

Being welcome, included and valued is a basic human need and essential to health and well-being. It's why eliminating inequities is key to building healthy communities.

HealthPartners has a long history of addressing health equity – from a focus on reducing health care disparities and increasing diversity and inclusion in our workplaces, to engaging with communities to address social factors that affect health such as education, housing and access to food. Despite these efforts, staggering health inequities in our community persist.

Recommendation: Advocate for policies that increase maternal health equity across the spectrum of public policy.

Eliminating maternal health inequities will require public policies that build equity and address structural racism and social drivers of health across all segments of society. As key stakeholders in the health care industry, health plans have a role to play in influencing public policies to improve maternal health equity. Below are examples of where your influence as a health plan could evolve policy.

■ Health Ecosystem Changes

- Medicaid expansion in remaining states
- Requirement for all states to provide 12 months of continuous postpartum coverage through Medicaid and CHIP
- Reimbursement for doula support
- Pregnancy as a qualifying life event (for currently uninsured individuals) for special enrollment in the health insurance marketplace created by the Affordable Care Act

■ Social and Economic Advances

- Minimum wage standards that provide a living wage
- Universal Paid Leave
- Universal, affordable broadband

Health plans are also in a powerful position to advance maternal health equity by supporting and advocating for a robust public health infrastructure, affordable housing, equitable economic development, educational equity and other needs of the community and your members that affect their health and wellbeing.

The Alliance of Community Health Plans (ACHP) represents the nation's top-performing nonprofit health companies, serving tens of millions of Americans in 37 states and D.C. ACHP is the voice of a unique payer-provider partnership model advancing proven solutions that deliver better value for patients, employers and taxpayers, and their participation focused on reimbursement structures in provider-aligned health systems.

Find detailed recommendations and more resources at nationalpartnership.org/raisingthebar

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