

# Policy Brief: How Focusing on Diversity Can Help Health Care Organizations Achieve the Triple Aim

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As the focus of the U.S. health care system shifts rapidly toward achieving the Triple Aim – improving the individual experience of care, improving the health of populations and reducing the per capita cost – health care organizations must develop new core strengths, deploy new resources, and discover new ways of connecting with patients, families and communities. By helping health care organizations better understand the unique needs of the diverse communities they serve, well-crafted diversity initiatives hold the potential to accelerate the Triple Aim across the U.S.

A new [toolkit](#) from the Institute for Diversity in Health Management and AHA’s Equity of Care initiative provides a framework and resources to help hospital leaders accelerate the elimination of health care disparities and ensure their leadership teams and board members reflect the communities they serve. In addition, the following are some areas in which diversity initiatives can support efforts to achieve the Triple Aim, as well as resources to help organizations do so.

## **POPULATION HEALTH**

- **Data Collection and Use:** A diversity initiative helps focus health care organizations on the collection and use of race, ethnicity and language (REAL), and other data for all patients. By allowing patients to share the language and cultural groups with which they identify, health care providers will be better positioned to provide health information to patients in a manner that is linguistically and culturally appropriate.
  - **Resource:** [Health Research and Educational Trust Disparities Toolkit](#)
  - **Resource:** [Diversity and Disparities: A Benchmark Study of U.S. Hospitals in 2013](#)
- **Data Analysis:** By stratifying and analyzing patient outcomes data across REAL data categories, health care organizations can better understand and address the unique needs and health challenges of various sub-populations of patients within an organization’s overall patient population.
  - **Resource:** [A Framework for Stratifying Race, Ethnicity and Language Data](#)
- **Emerging Markets:** As more individuals obtain health insurance as a result of the Affordable Care Act, health care organizations that have aligned their marketing strategies and service offerings to meet the needs of diverse communities will experience a competitive advantage.
  - **Resource:** [Rising Above the Noise: Making the Case for Equity in Care](#)

## EXPERIENCE OF CARE

- **Language Access:** As the U.S. moves toward a majority-minority population, the context by which care will be measured also will change. Language services will be integral in ensuring quality health care outcomes for limited English proficient patient populations. These services will support quality measures as communication is critical to all relationships, including relationships between patients and clinicians and relationships between health care organizations and communities. Meeting the diverse linguistic needs of patients and families will enhance shared decision-making and clinical outcomes. Hospitals and health systems will need to provide these services and make them readily available to ensure current and future compliance regulations are being met.
  - **Resource:** [Implementing CLAS Standards and Improving Cultural Competency and Language Access: A Practical Toolkit](#)
- **Staff Education:** Providing culturally competent care is fundamental to meeting the needs of patients. Diversity initiatives can help health care organizations launch educational programs designed to address current and future trends of emerging patient populations and include understanding the global community. By developing educational programs that enrich the cross-cultural skills of the health care workforce, providers will be better positioned to gain insights into culture, traditions and values that can enhance the quality of care plans.
  - **Resource:** [Building a Culturally Competent Organization: The Quest for Equity in Health Care](#)
  - **Resource:** [Diversity and Disparities: A Benchmark Study of U.S. Hospitals in 2013](#)
- **Community Outreach:** Diversity initiatives inspire hospitals and health systems to look beyond the walls of their facilities and focus on the communities where patients live, work and play. A comprehensive plan to engage diverse constituencies within a health care organization's service area will help that organization design delivery systems that are more attuned to the community's needs. In addition, reaching out to and partnering with diverse communities will allow the health care organization to better influence social determinants of health that place vulnerable communities at risk for health disparities.

## PER CAPITA COST

- **Reducing Unnecessary Utilization:** Through focused partnering with vulnerable communities and communication that is culturally and linguistically tailored to specific patient populations, health care organizations can expect better health system navigation and utilization. An AHA white paper identifies some of the drivers of health care utilization and its contributing factors. More importantly, the paper recommends a way to move forward that will place hospitals at the forefront of innovative change for reducing non-beneficial services while improving health care overall.
  - **Resource:** [Appropriate Use of Medical Resources](#)

- **Eliminating Disparities in Care:** Once health care organizations become more adept at analyzing and responding to patterns in care along REAL lines, they can more effectively and accurately address the root causes of health care disparities, which have been shown to create excess costs and use of health system resources.
  - **Resource:** [Improving Quality and Achieving Equity: A Guide for Hospital Leaders](#)
- **Enhanced Patient Compliance with Care:** Research has shown that enhanced patient trust of health care providers leads to better compliance with care. As diversity initiatives improve communication with patients and build trust with communities, patients will be more likely to adhere to care plans and experience better health outcomes.

### **About the American Leadership Council for Diversity in Healthcare**

In 2006, the Institute for Diversity in Health Management created the [American Leadership Council for Diversity in Healthcare](#) to foster collaboration among professional diversity practitioners committed to developing and implementing change initiatives through research, education, and advocacy to improve the quality, safety, and elimination of disparities among the nation's health care systems. The Council, consisting of diversity practitioners from Institute member hospitals across the country, functions as an advisory council that provides insight and perspective to the Institute and to the field of health care diversity management through enhancing national efforts aimed at fostering inclusion, changing mindsets, and increasing cultural competence.