

AUGUST 2021

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY

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The Alliance of Community Health Plans (ACHP) is committed to improving health equity by removing obstacles in our nation's health care system. ACHP believes that in our approach to public policy, we can take important steps to advance more equitable access, treatment and health outcomes for everyone.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO TELEHEALTH BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the demand for access to high-quality care from the safety, privacy and convenience of our homes. The recent expansion of telehealth has benefited patients in rural, underserved and disadvantaged communities who otherwise may have had financial, physical or other challenges in visiting a medical office. Telehealth is a critical tool to increasing access to affordable coverage and care, and its continued use can help improve health inequities that exist among certain populations.

How It Improves Health Equity: By committing to and expanding telehealth, those most likely to experience inequities gain greater access to quality coverage and care.

ACHP's Position: Congress should extend the flexibilities granted under the COVID-19 public health emergency. This includes expanding the types of providers and clinicians who can furnish telehealth to reach a wider and more diverse population. HHS should also incorporate expanded virtual care delivery opportunities in value-based delivery models and demonstrations.

IMPROVING MEDICAID HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Medicaid provides health coverage to more than 80 million children and adults—more than half of whom identify as minorities. The program, with its mix of both federal and state oversight, provides a unique opportunity to pilot new initiatives to improve access and coverage to this demographically diverse population. Through Medicaid, patients who are frail or sicker than others can receive special care at home or at health centers through the home and community-based services (HCBS) program. This may include skilled nursing care, occupational and physical therapies, transportation and assistance with everyday tasks, such as getting dressed. Outside of Medicaid, these services are expensive and difficult to arrange. The HCBS program provides an opportunity to alleviate costs while providing care and treatment to vulnerable populations in the comfort of their home.

How It Improves Health Equity: The HCBS program improves access, care and affordability for minority populations, seniors and the chronically ill.

ACHP's Position: Legislation passed during the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily increased spending for the HCBS program. ACHP supports permanently extending the additional funding for HCBS and believes that the program should be tailored to meeting the health needs of minority populations. Federal incentives to expand Medicaid will improve access to quality coverage and care and improve health outcomes for millions of minority individuals. The program's focus on HCBS allows older Americans, including those with disabilities and the chronically ill, to live independently with the help of specially trained, outside organizations. Without the HCBS program, many of these services would come at a cost that is simply too expensive.

STRENGTHENING MATERNAL HEALTH CARE

For decades, the U.S. has struggled with persistently high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, more common among women of color. Strengthening maternal health services and expanding access to affordable coverage and care can significantly improve health outcomes.

How It Improves Health Equity: By addressing disparities in maternal health care, women of color and their babies will receive better care, improving health outcomes for both mother and child.



ACHP's Position: Through a multi-stakeholder project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ACHP has partnered with the National Partnership for Women & Families (NPWF) to study and provide best practices on how to better meet comprehensive maternal care needs and improve health outcomes. ACHP also supports legislation, including the [Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act](#) to reduce and eliminate disparities in maternal health care and impact the lives of millions of women and babies in the U.S.

TARGETED MEDICARE ADVANTAGE SUPPLEMENTAL BENEFITS

Medicare Advantage (MA) serves an increasingly diverse population, enrolling a higher percentage of people of color than traditional Medicare, and more than half of its enrollees have annual incomes of less than \$30,000. MA plans provide a range of supplemental benefits that include meal delivery, transportation, health and wellness education and more. These types of benefits often aid lower-income and older Americans.

How It Improves Health Equity: Giving MA health plans the incentive and flexibility to target supplemental benefits to high-risk communities improves access and care for minority populations.

ACHP's Position: MA's Special Supplemental Benefits for the Chronically Ill program, or SSBCI, allows health plans to provide a wider range of services that are often targeted to minority populations. Ensuring the program's viability, in part, hinges on federal regulatory changes that allow MA plans to receive their full quality bonus. This would allow health plans to deliver additional benefits and services in ways that target minority populations. MA plans would also benefit from leeway to design supplemental benefits to target chronic conditions that are more prevalent among certain populations. More broadly, a national, coordinated stakeholder learning action network of plans and providers can foster shared learning and improve a coordinated approach to addressing health inequities.

CONNECTING SOCIAL NEEDS AND HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

Social determinants of health, including food and nutrition, transportation, and access to stable housing directly impact a person's health. A collaborative approach between government, health plans, health systems, employers and community organizations can improve progress in identifying and addressing social needs upstream and improve health outcomes for the most at-risk populations.

How It Improves Health Equity: Social determinants disproportionately impact the same populations who frequently experience disparities in health care. Community partnerships and improved federal grant requirements can combine for a more holistic approach to care.

ACHP's Position: ACHP supports federal and state policies that support health plans in leveraging community relationships to partner with outside organizations, such as schools, churches and local businesses. Ensuring that federal grant programs include social needs as a criterion during the application process can improve focus on addressing social needs that impact health outcomes. In addition, federal grants should also extend to nonmedical needs, such as housing and education. Finally, eliminating health disparities should be included as a quality metric in reporting programs.

ABOUT ACHP

The Alliance of Community Health Plans (ACHP) represents the nation's top-performing nonprofit health plans to improve affordability and outcomes in the health care system. ACHP member companies are provider-aligned health organizations that

provide high-quality coverage and care to tens of millions of Americans. They are leading the industry in practical, proven reforms around primary care delivery, value-based payment and data-driven systems improvement.

i Want to know more?

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