

Attachment J: Iowa HHS Health Equity Framework

STATE OF IOWA DEPARTMENT OF Health AND Human SERVICES

Iowa HHS Health Equity Framework

HHS Health Equity Vision

Building Health Equity for All Communities

HHS Health Equity Mission

HHS will protect and improve the health of all people in Iowa where they live, work, learn and play by uniquely tailoring efforts that advance optimal and equitable health outcomes.

Executive Summary

Iowa Health and Human Services has developed initial policies and plans for embedding health equity across internal and external work through accreditation, workforce development, data management, and planning efforts. There are a number of divisions and bureaus that have excelled at developing comprehensive strategies to address health inequities and develop internal strategies to support health equity infrastructure. In 2022 and beyond, Iowa HHS is in a position to significantly expand efforts to ensure that all people across the state have the ability to attain their highest level of health. We can accomplish this by explicitly tying a justice-centered approach to identifying and addressing pressing health inequities in historically excluded populations with a specific focus on people of color/indigenous people, people with disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQ+, people who are poor, and people with other demographic characteristics that have been historically excluded from access to opportunities and services to support optimal health.

Iowa HHS' definition of health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care. For the purposes of measurement, health equity means reducing and ultimately eliminating disparities in health and its determinants that adversely affect excluded or marginalized groups.

A health equity framework is required to identify the internal opportunities to fully integrate health equity perspectives and capacities and to understand and embrace the unique social and community context within Iowa. We can also identify core public health roles, a root cause analysis to health

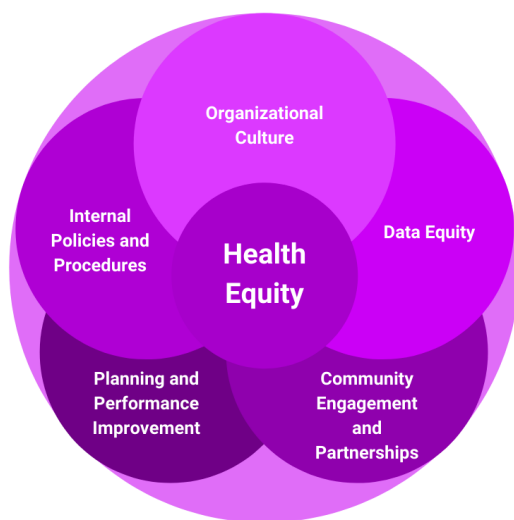
inequities, and opportunities to shift roles and resources to meet our obligations to residents to support upstream public health strategies while addressing critical health and environmental issues.

A primary objective in the next five years (2022-2026) is to ensure that Iowa HHS has thoroughly assessed and addressed opportunities to significantly shift efforts and resources towards addressing institutional and structural inequities that lead to disproportionately negative outcomes for some populations. Foundational work includes adoption of this health equity framework and focus areas, and a health equity implementation plan.

The Iowa HHS Health Equity framework is focused on departmental efforts that we can control as well as opportunities to influence other institutional partners to develop a health in all policies approach.

The following focus areas have been adopted as the primary areas for expanding integration of department-wide health equity efforts:

1. Organizational Culture
2. Internal Policies and procedures
3. Data Equity Framework
4. Planning and Performance Improvement
5. Partnerships and Community Engagement



Organizational Culture

Iowa HHS's organizational culture is one of the most important predictors of whether or not health equity efforts will be successful. There are many ways to measure organizational effectiveness including existing surveys and utilization of quality improvement and performance management measures that are already in place. There is a clear need to develop an internal health equity communications strategy starting with regular monthly communication to all staff, and ensuring that equity messaging is embedded in leadership communication. Health equity needs to be visible across all department functions/programs and staff need to find ways in which their work clearly intersects and enhances strategy. The Division of Strategic Operations, which includes the Office of Health Equity, has a primary role in messaging as well as ensuring that department wide efforts have a health equity focus. External communication can also ensure that Iowa HHS embraces its power as a public health authority and uphold health equity while balancing a nuanced communications approach for the public.

- Strategic health equity framework
- Communications strategy-internal and external
- Sharepoint site for Office of Health Equity
- HEAL Collaborative-Health Equity workgroup
- Partnership with Human Resources on equity-centered workforce supports

Internal Policies and Procedures

Internal policies and procedures support organizational culture and make clear the value of health equity integration into how we develop standards for the work. The health equity policy is an example of a good policy with unclear practice and no current capacity to evaluate the standards included. A revision may be needed to ensure that we are finding practical ways to implement health equity standards. Iowa HHS data standards also need to be updated with guidance and development of best practices. There is currently no role/FTE that is responsible for evaluating data standards. Then there is also a clear need to evaluate external documents and materials for accessibility. Language translation resources are critical and there should be established procedures for how people can access language translation and use data to make a determination on what languages need to be translated. Workforce development strategies should also be a primary focus to support diversification of staff and build the capacity of current staff to meet the needs of Iowa's populations. Efforts include evaluating hiring and promotion practices, developing alternate pathways to employment, and increasing retention of staff.

- Health Equity Policy
- CLAS standards for external communications/publications
- Policy and Advocacy
- Contracting guidelines
- Workforce equity strategy

Data Equity Framework

Data collection, analysis, evaluation, and dissemination methodologies are critical to understanding population health from root cause to appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. Iowa HHS should deepen the capacity of our epidemiological, evaluation, and planning teams to support integration of health equity considerations. Data governance includes not just reducing liability and protection of individual data, but also ensuring data sovereignty, quality, security, and accessibility. Iowa HHS can also examine how impacted populations are engaged in each step of the data lifecycle and find ways to thoughtfully integrate their perspectives and priorities into the work done at this department.

- Data equity framework development
- HHS data standards and data modernization efforts

- Social Determinants of Health data to practice
- Public Data

Planning and Performance Improvement

There is significant overlap between expectations for data management, community engagement, and planning and performance improvement. Quantitative/qualitative data should drive decision making and planning efforts to ensure that Iowa HHS and the community are developing and implementing appropriate programs and services to address needs and issues. There are also internal plans that drive our work that can more fully integrate health equity as not just a value, but an expectation and goal with measurable impacts.

- Iowa HHS strategic plan
- Public Health Accreditation
- Healthy Iowans State Health Improvement Plan
- Performance Improvement
- Division and Bureau planning efforts

Partnerships and Community Engagement

Iowa HHS strategic plan does not currently have overarching standards to ensure quality partnership and there is an opportunity to develop a department-wide community engagement strategy. There is incredible work being done at the program, bureau, and division level, and Iowa HHS can learn from these programs about what is working and develop approaches that can be elevated throughout the department.

- Community engagement framework development
- Resourcing partnerships and individual labor in planning and evaluation
- Strengthening intergovernmental partnerships
- Fact sheets/asset maps for partners