American Heart Association

SUMMARY REPORT: AN EMPLOYER RESOURCE GUIDE

AN EMPLOYER RESOURCE GUIDE • HEALTH EQUITY

Health Equity in the Workforce

The Health Equity in the Workforce Initiative is part of the American Heart Association's Well-being Works Better™.

The American Heart Association's Health Equity in the Workforce initiative, in collaboration with the Deloitte Health Equity Institute, and the SHRM Foundation, is convening employers and industry leaders to build a comprehensive roadmap that creates tools, resources, and knowledge products to improve the health and well-being of our nation's workforce.

For access to the full Employer Resource Guide, please click here.

Deloitte. **SHRM Foundation**

*Actionable strategies to help your
company accelerate health equity in the workforce*
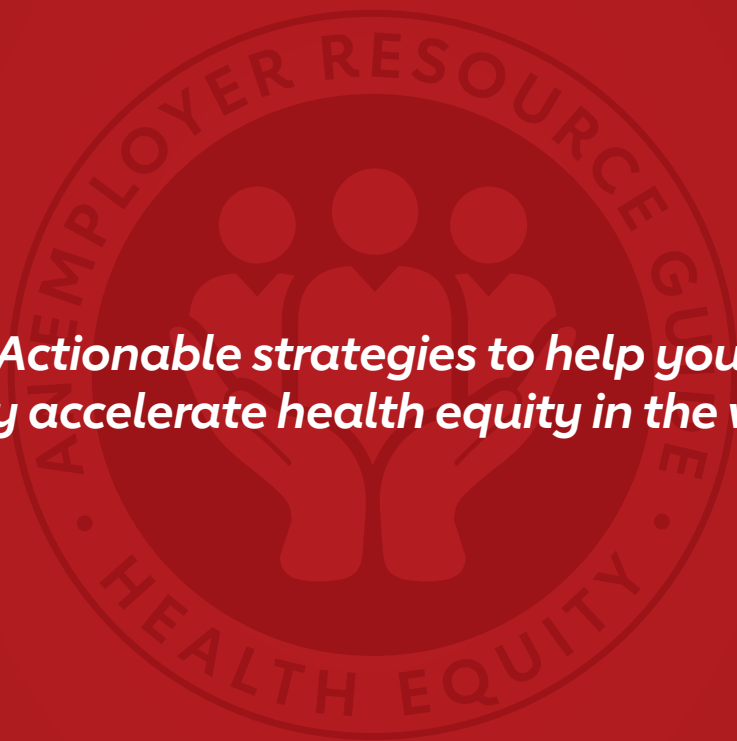
Top Takeaways

1

HEALTH EQUITY IS WHEN EVERYONE in society has an optimal and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. This means addressing the root causes of inequities.

2

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTED and exacerbated stark health inequities in American communities and increased the number of business leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders who wished to reduce these health inequities.
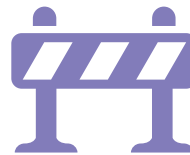
3

ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY AT WORK involves creating systems that give all employees optimal and just opportunities and resources so that they can achieve their highest level of health and well-being.

4

SYSTEMIC BIASES OR DISCRIMINATION in the workplace can be a major barrier to health equity that negatively impacts employee health, productivity, morale and retention.

5

GROWING COSTS TO HEALTH INEQUITIES are projected to cost the U.S. economy $1 trillion annually by 2040, according to research from Deloitte[1].

6

ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY in the workforce involves eliminating gaps in health and well-being outcomes across different employee sub-populations (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.).

[1] Please see www.deloitte.com/about for a detailed description of our legal structure.

Top Takeaways

7
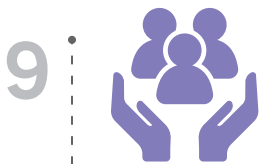
INCREASED UNDERSTANDING
of health equity is needed, as 60% of Human Resources professionals report not understanding the term.[2]
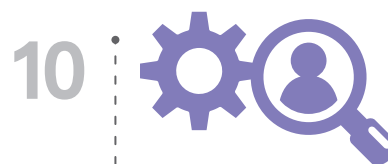
8

SOCIAL FACTORS IN THE BROADER
community have a significant impact on an employee's ability to be healthy, especially income. Addressing these social drivers of health is everyone's business.

9

EMPLOYERS CAN PROMOTE
health equity as a business and operational strategy that leads to better employee health outcomes.

10

A KEY STRATEGIC APPROACH
is to design, implement and evaluate comprehensive health and well-being policies and programs, including holistic benefits, through an equity lens.

11

ORGANIZATIONS CAN MEASURE
their progress and success through consistent data collection, critical evaluation and ongoing monitoring.

⟫ Executive Summary

In the United States, health inequities appear, and persist, in all aspects of life, including at work. Even though many workers in the U.S. have access to employer-sponsored health insurance[3], recent studies[4,5], including an analysis of the disparate mortality rates from COVID-19[6], underscore the challenging reality of health inequities. Given that workers spend almost half of their waking hours at work[7], promoting workplace *health equity* has become a cross-cutting priority for leaders, employers and communities to help ensure that everyone has an optimal and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health[8].

> **Everyone deserves an optimal and just opportunity to be healthy, giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health and no one is disadvantaged from achieving their potential because of social position or any other socially defined circumstance[8].**
>
> **– American Heart Association**

Health equity in the workplace is when all employees have the opportunity to achieve their highest level of health and well-being. There are approximately 167 million adults in the U.S. workforce[9], and given that poor health leads to higher health care costs and lost productivity[10], business leaders have a vested interest in promoting a culture of health equity and well-being that addresses inequity, discrimination and bias.

HEALTH INEQUITIES =
$320 BILLION
in annual U.S. health care spending

IF LEFT UNADDRESSED,
health inequities are estimated to cost the U.S.
$1 TRILLION ANNUALLY BY 2040

The cost of inaction is high. According to a recent analysis from Deloitte, health inequities account for roughly $320 billion in annual U.S. health care spending and if left unaddressed, could cost the U.S. $1 trillion annually by 2040[1]. Research also shows that workplaces that mitigate bias and discrimination can experience higher morale, productivity, loyalty and lower turnover, all of which save employers money[11]. However, nearly 60%, or 3 out of 5 HR professionals, report not understanding the term "healthy equity."[2] Nearly 2 in 5 HR professionals report that their organization started addressing health equity within the last two years, and roughly 1 in 6 HR professionals report that their organization is not addressing health equity at all.[12]

There are both *moral and business arguments for promoting health equity* at work. From a moral perspective, mitigating health inequities could decrease human suffering by positively impacting quality of life and life expectancy[13]. Organizations should strive to improve the quality of human life if they (not we) are able to do so. From a business perspective, addressing health inequities could lead to a reduction in all types of direct and indirect costs ranging from reduced spending on health care to increased productivity and improved business performance.[10]

The role of the employer is to create the conditions for health equity at work through the implementation of strategies, policies and practices that promote equity and, as stewards and influencers in their communities, to help drive health equity outside of work through strategic partnerships with community-based organizations and stakeholders. Achieving *health equity in the workforce* — zero gaps in health status and health outcomes across employee populations — involves collaborating with other community partners to address the social drivers of health that affect a person's ability to live a long, healthy life. These factors include aspects such as household income, education, food insecurity and access to affordable comprehensive health care benefits.

While employers are not solely responsible for these social factors, there is growing recognition that work itself is a social driver of health and that work directly shapes the condition of a person's well-being[14]. In a recent study, researchers found that people who experienced high levels of workplace discrimination were 54% more likely to develop first-time high blood pressure compared to employees who experienced low levels of discrimination at work[15].

This employer resource guide is designed to provide leaders with a compilation of organizational strategies to help promote health equity and change inequitable workplace policies and practices that are rooted in bias and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation age, ability, veteran status, or other factors.

Advancing health equity is not only the right thing to do for the health of the nation, it's also a sound business decision for employers looking to support their workforce, bolster business outcomes and build trust in their communities.

Actionable Strategies: summary*

For a more detailed discussion of these 19 strategies, see the Actionable Strategies section on next page.

Commit

Align organizational priorities and resources with health equity.

- Prioritize health equity as a strategic business imperative by embedding it into the mindset, strategy, operations, resources allocations, and talent.
- Design and implement comprehensive health and well-being policies and programs through an equity lens.
- Train managers in health equity and equip them with resources to implement and sustain health equity strategies.

Attract

Enhance diversity and inclusion by recruiting and retaining professionals from diverse backgrounds.

- Take steps to minimize bias and discrimination in hiring and retention practices.
- Advocate for culturally and linguistically effective training for all employees.
- Offer paid family, medical and sick leave.

Belong

Create an inclusive and supportive environment where employees of all backgrounds are treated with respect and have equal opportunities for success.

- Offer comprehensive and affordable health care coverage for all employees without regard to racial or ethnic backgrounds.
- Offer diversity, equity and inclusion training for all employees. **Note:** Given the shifting policy environment at the state level, we recommend that these activities are carefully reviewed in consultation with legal and HR advisors prior to implementation to assess risk as well as compliance with any applicable laws.
- Support employee financial well-being through financial education, benefits and other resources.
- Adopt anti-discrimination principles and implement anti-discrimination policies (e.g., race, gender, religion etc.).
- Promote employee health literacy and employee benefits literacy.
- Review communications for cultural appropriateness, diverse representation and accessibility.
- Offer and promote the use of employee assistance programs (EAPs).

Foster

Implement policies and practices that support the fair and equal advancement of all employees to ensure inclusion and equitable growth.

- Include equity metrics and indicators in performance processes and evaluations.
- Ensure employees have a voice in organizational decision-making, where appropriate.
- Ensure pay equity and promote a living wage.

Influence

Drive equity by actively incorporating principles of fairness and justice into an organization's products, services and relationships within the communities it operates.

- Look for opportunities to expand diversity of supplier pool and engage businesses owned by underrepresented owners (e.g. women-owned, Black-owned, LGBTQIA+ owned businesses).
- Strive to assemble a leadership team that is composed of people from diverse backgrounds and representatives of the workforce and community.
- Advocate for science-backed public health policies in communities through collaborations and alliances.

This information does not constitute legal advice; these activities should be carefully reviewed in consultation with legal and HR advisors prior to implementation to assess risk as well as compliance with any applicable laws.

Working towards health equity can make sense for all organizations. All organizations can be "health care" organizations in a sense if they provide health and well-being benefits to employees. Equitable policies and practices can benefit employee health and productivity, reduce health care costs for employees and employers[10], and companies with ethnic and racial diversity outperform companies without ethnic and racial diversity by 30% in profitability, according to Deloitte[16].

This guide is meant to provide a business case and actionable strategies to business leaders so that they can integrate health equity into business strategy and operations to address systemic sources of bias and discrimination in the workplace and attract and retain a vibrant and diverse talent pool. The health of the entire nation can improve if employers commit to take actions that eliminate inequities in the workplace.

Actionable Strategies

Employers have the greatest influence over their internal business strategy and operations (programs, policies and environments) and are therefore in a strong position to create a culture of health and well-being that is built on the foundation of equity to help ensure equitable health outcomes for all employees. At the heart of this effort is putting systems in place that seek to eliminate any bias and discrimination in the employment system throughout an employee's journey.

At the same time, employers can also play a vital civic role in their communities and help to strengthen the social factors that shape health through collaborations with community-based organizations and strategic investments that are aligned with corporate social responsibility.

This section provides an initial, curated list of evidence-informed internal and external strategies for employers to consider as they seek to advance health equity.[17, 18, 19]

Note: *This information does not constitute legal advice; these activities should be carefully reviewed in consultation with legal and HR advisors prior to implementation to assess risk as well as compliance with any applicable laws.*

COMMIT:
Align organizational priorities and resources with health equity.

1 *Prioritize health equity as a strategic business imperative by embedding it into the mindset, strategy, operations, resource allocations, and talent.*

STRATEGY

Knowledge and awareness of health equity in the workplace is currently low.[2] Low awareness of health equity is a cited obstacle to advancing health equity in the workplace.[17, 20, 21, 22] Organizations can help advance health equity by formally prioritizing health equity as a strategic goal and a measured outcome.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Develop a health equity plan and integrate it into your organization's overall health and well-being plan.

• Dedicate paid staff time for health equity activities. For example, appoint a Chief Equity Officer role or assign responsibility for achieving health equity goals to an existing staff role (e.g., Chief Human Resources Officer). Where health equity "sits" in the organization may depend on the size and industry sector.

• Hire health equity managers to implement and sustain health equity strategies.

• Provide dedicated funding to support health equity implementation. For example, dedicate a protected budget to a health equity portfolio.

• Define and measure health equity outcomes annually.

• Report health equity progress to the organization's leadership and Board (where applicable).

2   *Design and implement comprehensive and affordable health and well-being programs through an equity lens.*

STRATEGY

Comprehensive health and well-being policies and programs address a range of risk factors and the social drivers of health. These types of programs have been associated with positive employee and organizational outcomes;[23] however, a 2017 U.S. national survey showed that only 1 in 5 employers implemented comprehensive policies and programs.[24]

Comprehensive policies and programs address a full range of risk factors, including social drivers of health. A comprehensive approach to promoting mental health, for example, should ideally include the following elements.

- **Leadership support and culture:** Leaders discuss mental health and model positive mental health behaviors (including supporting paid time off and no-technology use after hours, for example).

- **Written policies:** Employers document their organization's approach to mental health support in a written document that is included in the Employee Handbook.

- **Comprehensive benefits:** Employers provide mental health benefits and ensure mental health parity.

- **Mental health services:** Employers provide and promote the use of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in addition to health insurance-related mental health services.

- **Mental health prevention and disease management programs:** Employers provide access to mental health prevention (e.g., digital apps for stress management) and treatment programs (e.g., telehealth access for behavioral health issues).

- **Communications:** HR leaders communicate regularly to raise awareness of mental health benefits.

- **Engagement:** Employers make benefits available to family members.

- **Measurement and reporting outcomes:** Employers receive a variety of employee mental health data from vendors and other sources to track and improve service utilization, including health equity considerations.

- **Burnout prevention:** For example, include an assessment of an employee's workload into the quarterly or annual performance review process to prevent overwork.

According to the CDC 2017 national survey, 15% of employers provided mental health disease management programs, ranging from 11% (small employers; 10-24 employees) to 67% (large employers, 500 or more employees).[24]

IMPLEMENTATION

- Design policies and programs that science and expert consensus show are effective at improving employee health and well-being.

- Use validated health and well-being scorecards or evaluation tools to measure your culture of health and well-being and identify areas for improvement.

- Use scorecards that include health equity as a domain to evaluate progress in advancing health equity in the workplace.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We value our employees' mental health and psychological safety."
— University of California, Irvine

We value our employees' mental health and psychological safety at UCI and UCI Health. To support this, we have implemented the Life Resources Program (LRP), which offers our employees and their families a wide range of resources to help navigate life's unexpected challenges at work and at home. We have also introduced REACH, a comprehensive mental health resources program centralized for easy access. To raise awareness and normalize mental health conversations, we offer multiple training options, including certification in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). So far, we have trained more than 1,000 employees in MHFA.

— University of California, Irvine

| **3** | *Train managers in health equity and equip them with resources to implement and sustain health equity strategies.* |

STRATEGY

Current diversity, equity and inclusion training generally does not focus on health equity as a cross-cutting organizational activity, although some government health departments and health care systems do offer specific training in health equity.[25, 26]

IMPLEMENTATION

• Train all employees in health equity at least once per year.

• Make health equity training voluntary and support with positive framing.

• Work with a credible vendor to make training available online through the organization's learning management system.

• Supplement online training with learning and educational resources, e.g., a primer on social drivers of health and how an employer is working to address these factors.

ATTRACT:

Enhance diversity and inclusion by recruiting and retaining professionals from diverse backgrounds.

| **4** | *Take steps to minimize bias and discrimination in hiring and retention practices.* |

STRATEGY

Deliberate, equitable hiring practices can contribute to a diverse and inclusive staff that reflect their communities and clients. Inclusivity can be achieved through intentional sourcing via broad community networks and outreach to ensure that historically excluded groups are represented in the recruitment process. Creating a diverse and inclusive workforce can help attract and retain talent.[27]

IMPLEMENTATION

• Establish goals for hiring to help ensure that your workforce is representative of the community.

• Adapt recruitment and hiring processes to help mitigate bias, e.g., blind resumes, using different recruitment networks, etc.

• Collaborate with local community organizations to source talent.

• Craft job descriptions that emphasize skills and competencies and life experiences, not just formal education requirements.

• Train hiring personnel to mitigate unconscious bias in recruiting.

• Benchmark against external hiring standards.

• Leverage employee resource groups to improve the hiring process and employee experience.

• Recruit in universities that serve students from historically underrepresented race and ethnicity groups.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We promote fairness in our hiring and retention procedures and strive to foster a culture of inclusivity and belonging to achieve this goal."

— Premier Health

At Premier Health, we promote fairness in our hiring and retention procedures. We strive to foster a culture of inclusivity and belonging to achieve this goal. Our latest innovation is an AI-based talent platform that eliminates implicit bias and focuses on qualifications and expertise. This platform has proven particularly effective in recruiting diverse candidates. We also encourage employee resource groups, where volunteers can support events and community campaigns with individuals with similar identities and interests. These groups are designed to have two executive sponsors and members from various departments and roles to represent the Premier Health population adequately. They serve as consultants for companywide initiatives, such as addressing social determinants of health from an employer's perspective, to improve the employee experience.

— Premier Health

5   *Advocate for culturally and linguistically effective training for all employees, providers and vendors.*

STRATEGY

Health care providers are increasingly aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the general population. It is increasingly common to encounter educational programs aimed at promoting cultural competence as a means of decreasing health disparities and improving overall quality of care.[28] While culturally and linguistically effective training in health care systems is the most salient example, employers in all industries can implement versions of this training to promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide education to employees on cultural effectiveness and humility, including an assessment of one's own values and biases.
- Create resources in different languages that meet the needs of your employees and promote respect for and acceptance of various cultural beliefs.
- Use interpreters.

6   *Offer paid family, medical, and sick leave.*

STRATEGY

The U.S. is 1 of the 35 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that does not offer paid leave to new mothers, and 1 of the 8 OECD countries that do not provide paid leave to fathers. In the U.S., there is currently no federal requirement to offer paid sick leave. Robust leave policies provide employees with adequate time off to meet their need for rest and manage personal priorities and can help create a competitive advantage to attract and retain the best talent, as well as advance health equity. For example, access to paid family leave can have positive impacts on health outcomes such as reductions in low-birth weight, early-term babies and infant mortality; reductions in parental stress; and improvements in the longer-term emotional health of children.[29] Studies also indicate that paid sick leave is associated with improved job satisfaction, and lower turnover.[30]

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide adequate paid time off to cover personal time, vacations, and sickness for themselves and family members.
- Provide access to robust paid family leave for men and women.
- Do not base the amount of provided leave on work tenure. Consider providing the same amount of leave (days or hours) across all levels of your organization.
- Ensure adherence to relevant regulations that require employers to provide job-protected, paid caregiver leave.

BELONG:
Create an inclusive and supportive environment where employees of all backgrounds are treated with respect and have equal opportunities for success.

7   *Offer comprehensive, understandable, and affordable health care coverage for all employees including mental health.*

STRATEGY

Health insurance benefits cover a range of important offerings that can influence employees' and their family members ability to live long, healthy lives, including access to treatment, disease management, mental health services and well-being programs. Health care costs have generally shifted over time from employers to employees through rising premiums, deductibles and cost-sharing.[31] A Commonwealth Fund study found that in the first half of 2020, a quarter of adults mostly lower income in employer-sponsored plans were underinsured, largely due to increasingly inadequate employer coverage.[31] Data show that Hispanic (30%) and Black (15%) people are significantly more likely to be underinsured than White (11%) people in the U.S.[32]

IMPLEMENTATION

- Endeavor to make all aspects of health care coverage reasonably affordable to all employees, especially lower income employees. For example, consider the feasibility of varying premiums, deductibles, co-payments and out-of-pocket maximums on a sliding scale based on income.

- Assess adequate provider networks with carriers and Third Party Administrators (TPAs) to help ensure equitable access (beyond the limited definition of adequacy typically set by states and employers).[33]

- Ensure that employees have access to a network of providers representative of the employee population and their needs (e.g., LGBTQIA+ providers).

- Ensure parity between coverage for physical and mental health as required by the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

- Regularly evaluate coverage to help ensure it is meeting the needs of employees regarding affordability and benefits.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We have placed on-site health centers in or near high-need areas, which has led to an increase in preventive care, closing gaps in care for those with chronic diseases and a successful anti-obesity campaign."

— Metro Nashville Public Schools

Metro Nashville Public Schools now understand how home and work environments affect individuals' health through the integration of HR data into its data warehouse. We know that half of our teachers live in areas of high need, with underrepresented racial and ethnic groups having a 30% higher chance of residing in these areas. This has resulted in higher health care costs for our Black employees due to high rates of obesity and related health issues. However, MNPS has addressed this issue by placing on-site health centers in or near these high-need areas. This has led to an increase in preventive care, closing gaps in care for those with chronic diseases, and a successful anti-obesity campaign to reduce the impact of obesity.

— Metro Nashville Public Schools

"Employee well-being is prioritized through a comprehensive program where accomplishments and milestones are celebrated, and resources are provided for employees."

— Southeast Service Cooperative

At Southeast Service Cooperative, employee well-being is prioritized through a comprehensive program that includes challenges, group activities, healthy meals and volunteer opportunities. Accomplishments and milestones are celebrated, and resources are provided for employees to maintain their well-being. A wellness center and healthy snacks are available on site for staff members.

— Southeast Service Cooperative

8   *Offer diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training to all employees.*

STRATEGY

Effective DEI training seeks to help employees understand the value of lifting up the voices and perspectives of people with diverse backgrounds, as well as fostering organizational values such as respect, equity, tolerance, acceptance, sensitivity and belonging. Research by Harvard Business Review suggests that diversity training is more successful when it is voluntary and positively framed rather than mandatory and remedially framed.[34]

IMPLEMENTATION

- Offer DEI training as voluntary and frame the content in a positive manner by emphasizing the economic and social benefits of increased diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.[34, 35]
- Ensure that DEI training is supported by the necessary policies, programs, practices and resources to promote employee learning.
- Deliver allyship training to employees and leaders to help them advocate for others.
- Offer skills development and training opportunities for all employee groups.
- Complement diversity training with mentoring and sponsorship programs to support and help accelerate employee development for the current and next generation of diverse talent.
- Be thoughtful when helping employees understand the true value of DEI.

9   *Support employee financial well-being through education, benefits and other resources.*

STRATEGY

Wealth is unevenly distributed in the U.S. The Federal Reserve found that White families have eight times the wealth of Black families, and five times the wealth of Hispanic families.[36] This is in part due to the legacy of racist practices such as redlining, a New Deal-era government backed policy that resulted in residential segregation by making it difficult for people who were not White to buy homes. Redlining was outlawed in 1968, but the financial inequities and residential segregation it caused remain to this day.[37] The U.S. has among the largest income-based health disparities in the world: Poor adults are five times as likely as those with incomes above 400 percent of the federal poverty level to report being in poor or fair health.[38] Apart from the generational racial wealth gaps, generally, few people in the U.S. have access to emergency savings even when the job market is strong.[39] Poor financial well-being can affect an employee's ability to pay for health insurance, out of pocket expenses, deductibles, and limit the ability to engage in health enhancing behaviors such as leisure-time physical activity or buying healthy foods. Poor financial health is associated with poor psychological well-being.[40] By providing supportive programs and benefits, employers can help ensure equitable opportunity for employees to manage their finances, save money and build wealth to ensure financial stability.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Evaluate pay/salary bands for equity.
- Assess disparities that may exist in the ability of employees access financial well-being programs.
- Survey employees to understand the state of financial well-being of the workforce (for example, their ability to cover an emergency expense).
- Offer financial coaching and training support.
- Implement emergency funding programs.
- Consider partnering with local credit unions to provide employees with access to low-interest loans.
- Consider retirement plans with an opt-out design and scaled employer matching based on income.
- Provide upfront tuition assistance, rather than tuition reimbursement.
- Analyze employee utilization data by different population groups and segments to understand who is using financial benefits and who is not to develop incentive strategies to increase the use of this benefit among low-income employees.

"We prioritize our employees' financial well-being by offering a range of benefits and services."

— *Packard Culligan Water*

Packard Culligan Water prioritizes its employees' financial well-being by offering a range of benefits and services. The company provides a well-being portal for economic habit-building challenges and free financial coaching through a partnership with the Christensen Group. Additionally, the company offers annual tuition scholarships for employees' children and strives to make its benefit package accessible and affordable to all.

— *Packard Culligan Water*

"Supporting employee financial well-being through financial education, benefits, and other resources."

— *LVE Partners (LVE franchises more than 200 Taco Bell and KFC restaurants in five states.)*

In 2023, we reviewed the demographics of our retirement plan participation and spotted a cohort of employees that were under savers — our store managers. As leaders in their stores, they serve as role models and mentors to a diverse population of team members. We implemented a targeted and personalized strategy to educate store managers about the benefits of long-term saving. Though employees save and accumulate assets differently, we felt that if we could focus on specific concepts such as compound growth, company match and the ease of enrollment with one-on-one support, we could help them take advantage of the opportunities offered by our plan. By viewing our plan data differently and matching our communication to the audience, we increased participation in our 401(k) by more than 30%.

— *LVE Partners (LVE franchises more than 200 Taco Bell and KFC restaurants in five states.)*

10 *Adopt anti-discrimination principles and implement anti-discrimination policies.*

STRATEGY

Across the country, racially and ethnically diverse populations experience higher rates of poor health and disease in a range of health conditions, including diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma and heart disease, when compared to their White counterparts.[41] A growing body of research shows the link between racism (and discrimination) and poor health outcomes.[42] Business leaders can support health equity by combating discrimination and promoting equity, including racial equity, at work.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Provide a transparent, confidential feedback/reporting system that helps to ensure non-retaliation.

• Proactively conduct a workplace culture or climate survey that includes equity questions to understand employee attitudes and experiences and address concerns.

• Implement non-discrimination and harassment training to help foster a culture of diversity, inclusion and respect for others.

• Create and support employee resource groups.

• Establish mentorship, sponsorship and leadership development programs.

• Externally, invest in local community development in historically marginalized neighborhoods.

11 | *Promote employee health literacy and employee benefits literacy.*

STRATEGY

Health literacy is the degree to which a person can obtain, process, understand and communicate health information to make appropriate health decisions.[43] According to UnitedHealthcare's Consumer Sentiment Survey, only 9% of the U.S. population understand four basic health insurance terms — health plan premium, co-payment, out-of-pocket maximum and deductible.[44] Low health literacy is also consistently associated with more hospitalization.[45]

IMPLEMENTATION

• Provide health literacy education programs.

• Provide health insurance literacy programs.

• Communicate about benefits year-round, not just during open enrollment periods.

• Provide access to benefits experts (such as health advocates) who can answer health-related questions as well as questions that might be uncomfortable for employees to ask your organization's HR representative.

• Provide information about financial well-being and health insurance benefits at appropriate literacy and health literacy levels.

12 | *Review organizational communications for cultural and linguistic appropriateness, diverse representation and accessibility.*

STRATEGY

The U.S. population is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse.[46] Consequently, there is a unique opportunity for business leaders to help ensure that corporate communications are representative of and respectful to employees, families, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Communications are not only about what is said. It is also about what people see, hear and how they are represented in the stories people tell. Inclusive, diverse and appropriate communications can also foster a greater sense of belonging among employees. Finally, clear and inclusive communications can help build trust and advance health equity.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Use an inclusive lens when developing communications. Make sure the visuals represent your entire workforce and community.

• Avoid pictures and videos that reinforce stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, veteran status, and other factors.

• Design simple and concise communications to increase the likelihood that people will read and understand your message.

• Where possible, engage employee resource groups to help develop strategy, content and oversight.

• Consider communications in languages other than English to better some employees and their families.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We aim to create an inclusive community that promotes personal and professional growth."

— Kaiser Permanente

At Kaiser Permanente, we take pride in the incredible work of our Business Resource Groups (BRG's). The BRG's of Kaiser Permanente are an essential part of our organization, promoting our mission and values. One example is the Women Empowered @ Kaiser Permanente BRG (WE@KP), whose focus is to promote the personal health, wellness, education, and development of women/cis women. WE@ KP aims to create an inclusive and welcoming community where personal and professional growth can thrive. The WE@KP BRG contributes positively to the organization by sharing opportunities for career advancement, personal growth, and self-health promotion. WE@KP is focused on elevating the lives of women/cis women to make a lasting impact for the betterment of our communities at large.

— Kaiser Permanente

13 *Offer and promote the use of employee assistance programs (EAPs).*

STRATEGY

An effective Employee Assistance Program can help address unique and often traumatic experiences endured because of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, veteran status, and other factors. An effective EAP can help triage mental health concerns in the workplace and should be available to all employees (regardless of whether they are enrolled in the company's health insurance plan).

IMPLEMENTATION

- Simplify access to services.
- Ideally, segment your employee population and use targeted messaging based on key sub-population categories such as gender, race-ethnicity and LGBTQIA+ identities.
- Continuous quality improvement: leverage insights from employee engagement surveys to improve EAP offerings to meet the stated needs of employees.
- Assess the diversity of your EAP's providers or other mental health providers.
- Offer services in languages other than English.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We provide eight free visits to the Employee Assistance Program for all employees annually as well as for their household members."

— Safran Landing Systems Kentucky

Safran Landing Systems Kentucky provides eight free visits to the Employee Assistance Program for all employees annually. Additionally, an employee's household members are entitled to the same benefit. Safran Group conducts an annual EVREST survey among employees to gather feedback on the psychosocial status of their workforce, demonstrating their concern for their employees' well-being.

— Safran Landing Systems Kentucky

FOSTER:

Implement policies and practices that support equal opportunities and the fair and equal advancement of all employees to help support inclusion and equitable growth with respect and have equal opportunities for success.

14 *Include equity metrics and indicators in performance processes and evaluations.*

STRATEGY

All employees should be evaluated fairly and equitably using a standardized approach to minimize bias and discrimination. Equitable evaluation can lead to equitable compensation, which is a key element in advancing health equity.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Conduct regular employee financial well-being audits based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, accent and other categories to understand what inequities may exist.
- Use mentoring to support the professional and personal development of individuals from underrepresented groups to help foster advancement.

"We prioritize professional development and value equity and inclusion."
— *Southeast Service Cooperative*

At Southeast Service Cooperative, we prioritize professional development. We offer training and conferences upon request, and our team members meet twice a year with leadership to discuss their career paths and aspirations. We also value equity and inclusion, offering learning sessions and book studies, and support our staff further through financial well-being support and a 3% match to 403b accounts.

— *Southeast Service Cooperative*

"We help our leaders increase their potential, recognize hard work and innovation, and assist employees in areas needing improvement."
— *Safran Landing Systems Kentucky*

Safran Landing Systems Kentucky provides an internship program that supports job and education development. Additionally, the leadership team at SLS-KY participates in an annual career management program to evaluate employees in leadership positions. It helps these leaders increase their potential, recognize hard work and innovation, and assist employees in areas needing improvement.

— *Safran Landing Systems Kentucky*

15 *Ensure employees have a voice in organizational decision-making where appropriate.*

Employee participation in decision-making where appropriate can be a contributor to organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Active and meaningful employee engagement can help organizations achieve their mission, execute strategies and generate business results. It is important that management intentionally listens, considers and responds to feedback.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Develop mechanisms that help enable employee input in decision-making.

• Recognize and reward inclusion and participation.

• Involve employee resource groups in relevant organizational decision-making processes.

• Contract with an external party that can confidentially and competently evaluate employee feedback.

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We strongly encourage regular check-ins between employees and managers to promote effective communication and flexibility."

— American Heart Association

*At the American Heart Association, we strongly encourage regular check-ins between employees and managers to promote effective communication and flexibility. They allow space for feedback on what is working well and what needs improvement as well as encourage innovative approaches to completing tasks. These check-ins enable managers to track goals, offer coaching and support employee growth. The AHA also conducts a confidential employee engagement survey through a third-party vendor, allowing employees to provide honest and open feedback about their experiences with the organization. Based on the results, the AHA creates an action plan to address areas for improvement identified by employees. Each business unit and department also **establishes its own improvement plans, engaging with employees to identify actionable items** and implementing them as appropriate.*

— American Heart Association

"Based on employee requests and feedback, we introduced an annual on-site 5K and formed an employee engagement committee."

— Safran Landing Systems Kentucky

*After acquiring a new division of employees, SLS-KY extended the Gym Membership Reimbursement program to include its Kentucky workforce. Additionally, in response to employee requests, SLS-KY introduced an annual on-site 5K walk and run in 2022. The newly formed Walton Engagement committee, led by employees, **organizes monthly events at SLS-KY based on employee feedback**.*

— Safran Landing Systems Kentucky

16	*Ensure pay equity and provide a living wage.*

STRATEGY

Pay equity is equitable compensation for similar work based on job duties and not extraneous factors (earnings history, negotiation skills, etc.).[47] Pay inequities have been well-documented for women compared to men.[48] While pay inequities may affect all ranks and positions, a living wage pertains primarily to those who are the least paid in an organization. It refers to sufficient income for basic living expenses, including housing, food, transportation and discretionary spending.[49] In contrast to the federal minimum wage, which has been unchanged at $7.25 an hour since 2009,[50] a living wage is variable and considers the local cost of living. To review living wages across counties in the U.S., visit the MIT Living Wage Calculator (mit.edu).[51]

IMPLEMENTATION

• Adopt formal written policies that commit the organization to ensuring pay equity and providing a living wage.

• Proactively conduct regular pay equity audits to help ensure that sources of inequity are identified early and promptly corrected.

• Regularly evaluate and adjust wages as necessary to ensure all employees are paid at least a living wage.

"Our commitment to pay equity and transparency shows our dedication to employee well-being."

— Southeast Service Cooperative

*In Minnesota, public employers must check for gender inequality in employee pay every three years. In 2020, Southeast Service Cooperative hired Gallagher to evaluate job compensation using the Decision Band Method and ensure internal equity. The leadership team approved updated ratings, a new salary structure and special adjustments for staff at a lower pay range. SSC also **has third-party reviews for fair classification and provides staff training on compensation**. This commitment to pay equity and transparency shows SSC's dedication to employee well-being.*

— Southeast Service Cooperative

INFLUENCE:

Drive equity by actively incorporating principles of fairness and justice into an organization's products, services, and relationships within the communities it operates.

17 | *Review contracts to maximize hiring of underrepresented businesses and groups and help ensure supplier commitment to equity and equitable practices.*

STRATEGY

Diversifying a company's supplier base and improving supply chain access to historically underrepresented businesses can quickly support more equitable economic development in your local community.[52] Investment provides revenue opportunities for businesses owned by people from underrepresented groups, (e.g., women-owned, Black-owned, LGBTQIA+ owned businesses), which in turn can bring benefits back to their respective communities in the form of job and wealth creation.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Review procurement process overall including supplier diversity to ensure equal opportunity and spending are aligned with industry best practices.

• Set clear goals to improve access for suppliers from historically underrepresented communities.

• Evaluate diverse suppliers for their alignment with DEI principles and values in addition to the standard criteria such as pricing, quality, legal, and other considerations.

18 | *Strive to assemble a leadership team that is composed of people from diverse backgrounds and representative of the workforce and community.*

STRATEGY

According to the Stanford Corporate Governance Research Initiative, 84% of Fortune 100 CEOs in 2020 were White persons, and 93% were Men.[53] The rates of overrepresentation by this group are similar in other executive and senior leadership positions, such as Chief Financial Officer and Chief Human Resource Officer. Having leadership that is equitably composed of people from diverse backgrounds and representative of the workforce and community can be important to meeting an organization's equity goals. Diverse leadership can allow the voice of all employees including those from populations that have been historically underrepresented to be heard, respected, and reflected in decision making.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Assess your leadership for gaps in representation.

• Set goals for the representation of leadership by population group.

• Build a pipeline of diverse candidates.

• Remove bias from talent acquisition processes that focus on eliminating opportunities for bias.

• Create a CEO Diversity Taskforce to track leadership diversity and create organizational accountability.

• Recruit from inside and outside to increase diversity.

19   *Advocate for evidence-based public health policies in communities through partnerships and alliances.*

STRATEGY

Employers may have important standing and influence in their communities. To effectively address the upstream drivers of health, businesses may choose to advocate for evidence-based public health policies and other public policies through partnerships and strategic alliances to bolster the health equity components of public policy.

IMPLEMENTATION

• Examples of evidence-based public health policies include:

     o Comprehensive health insurance coverage for all[54]

     o Affordable housing[55]

     o Early quality care and education for children[56]

     o Culturally and linguistically appropriate services in the health system[57]

     o Increased support for public health infrastructure[58]

     o Living wage policies for all employees, especially part-time and contract workers[59]

BRIEF EXAMPLE

"We and our partners are committed to positively impacting our community."

— LCMC Health

*The creation of public health policies is influenced by various social, cultural and economic factors in our communities. LCMC Health believes in working collectively to bring about systemic changes. We collaborate with partners, maintain advocacy and forge strategic alliances based on evidence-based public health policies to achieve this. This approach **enables LCMC Health to improve the quality of services provided to the community, which will help reduce health disparities and promote health equity.** LCMC Health and its partners are committed to positively impacting our community. LCMC Health's partnership with other organizations aligns with the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care and the Joint Commission Hospital Accreditation Standards.*

— LCMC Health

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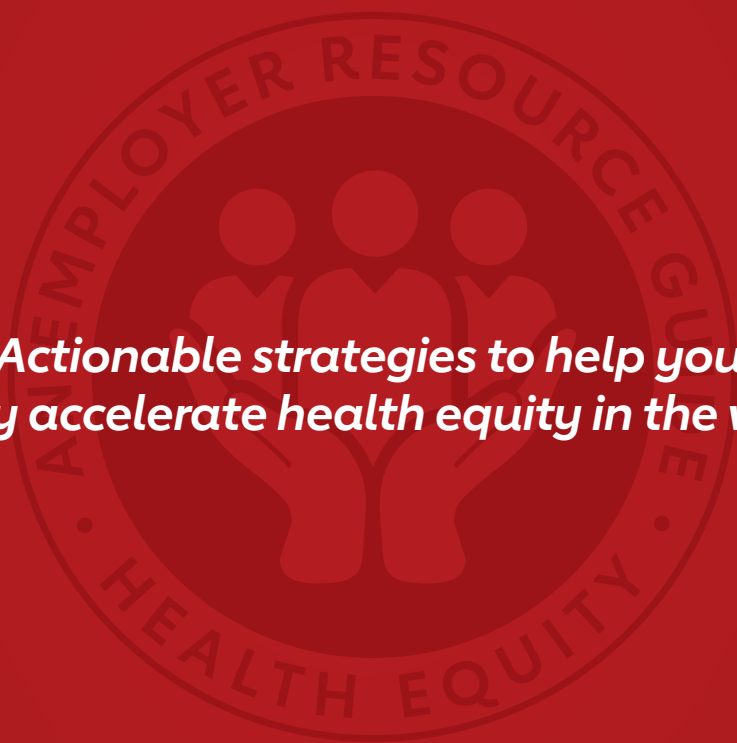
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www.heart.org

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