

# Understanding & Eliminating Disparities

## THE PROBLEM

Disparities have been found across a wide range of health care settings, disease areas, and clinical services, even when controlling for socioeconomic & insurance status.



**HEALTH DISPARITIES** are differences in the *prevalence, incidence, & outcomes of health conditions & diseases* that are systematically related to social inequality & disadvantage.



**HEALTH CARE DISPARITIES** are differences in the *availability, accessibility, & quality of health services* aimed at preventing, treating, & managing diseases.

## THE PEOPLE

Many sources at different levels of the system contribute to disparities for minority populations, including patient-provider communication, stereotyping & unconscious bias, patient mistrust, & difficulty navigating the health care system.



### Racial & Ethnic Minorities

Robert Phillips, a 29-year-old black man, has been waiting three years for a kidney transplant. He is frustrated with the medical bureaucracy and feels that black patients may not be referred for a new kidney because physicians think "they're just going to ruin it anyway."\*



### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer (LGBTQ) People

Laura Nez, an aging transgender woman, fears mistreatment from providers and staff due to negative experiences in the past. She presents to the ED with signs of having suffered a mild stroke but refuses to be admitted to the hospital.



### People with Limited English Proficiency

Mohammad Kochi, an Afghani man with stomach cancer, refuses chemotherapy in part because of poor communication between his doctors and his daughters, who act as his interpreters. He is never informed that medical interpreters are available free of charge.\*



### People with Disabilities

Vanessa Gutiérrez, an adolescent with impaired vision, is diagnosed with Type II diabetes. Her doctor explains her treatment plan, but the office is unable to provide her with self-care instructions in an accessible format, such as large print or audio recording.

## THE SOLUTION

**THE DISPARITIES SOLUTIONS CENTER** at Massachusetts General Hospital is dedicated to implementing strategies that advance policy & practice to improve quality, eliminate disparities, & achieve equity in a time of rapid healthcare transformation.

### STEP 1: COLLECTING DEMOGRAPHIC DATA



Understand the population your organization serves by collecting data on:

- Race & ethnicity
- Primary/preferred language
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Disability

### STEP 2: IDENTIFYING & REPORTING DISPARITIES



Stratify key quality measures by race, ethnicity, language, & other characteristics based on available data and report on any disparities in care that are identified.

### STEP 3: IMPLEMENTING SOLUTIONS



Implement interventions tailored to address the disparities identified. Focus on barriers that affect minority patients while also addressing general barriers to improve quality of care for all patients.

### STEP 4: EVALUATING INTERVENTIONS



Develop & implement evaluation strategies to understand which interventions are most useful, as well as opportunities to improve the effectiveness of interventions as they are underway.

For more information, please visit [www.mghdisparitiessolutions.org](http://www.mghdisparitiessolutions.org).

\*Case examples from Worlds Apart: A Film Series on Cross-Cultural Health Care by Maren Grainger-Monsen & Julia Haslett