

Multicultural Principles for a Healthy California:

A Systemic Approach to Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities

The California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN) works to ensure that all Californians have access to health care and can live healthy lives. Formed in 1992 by the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, the California Black Health Network, the California Rural Indian Health Board, and the Latino Coalition for a Healthy California, CPEHN is an established leader in multicultural health. We advocate for public policies and sufficient resources to meet the needs of communities of color.

The health of people of color in California continues to lag behind that of the overall population. Racial and ethnic health disparities exist because of many institutional and societal factors, including but not limited to inequities in education, employment, environment, and economic opportunity. CPEHN has made it a priority to advocate for solutions to eliminate these disparities in California.

In 2004, CPEHN held convenings in Los Angeles and Oakland to discuss strategies for eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. At the meetings, participants suggested that CPEHN develop a set of principles to guide efforts to address the systemic injustices and inequities that impact the health communities of color. This document stems from those discussions.

1. Systemic social, economic, and environmental inequities must be addressed to eliminate health disparities.

Effective solutions to eliminate health disparities require a multicultural approach that addresses systemic inequities such as differences in access to education, housing, nutrition, physical activity, safe neighborhoods, healthy food, health care, and other services that are factors in determining the health of a community. There are also differences in exposure to health risks within communities such as unequal treatment based on race and ethnicity, occupational hazards, environmental toxins, industrial pollution, and proximity to liquor outlets. Strategies to eliminate health disparities must improve conditions that impact health in neighborhoods, communities, and workplaces.

2. All institutions and sectors are responsible for eliminating health disparities.

California's effort to reduce disparities must include the commitment and participation of all institutions – public and private, government and community, individuals and groups – to ensure that there are comprehensive, effective solutions. Efforts must include specific plans and actions, measurable achievement markers, and strong evaluation and enforcement mechanisms.

3. Communities of color must be integral players in efforts to eliminate health disparities.

Involvement of communities of color is essential to the development of solutions to eliminate health disparities. Additionally, community partners representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders should be included, such as faith institutions, professional associations, institutions of higher learning serving racial and ethnic communities, neighborhood associations, clinics, and other organizations directly linked to communities of color.

4. Universal access to affordable quality health care is essential for eliminating health disparities.

Any strategies to reform the health care system in California must provide universal access to affordable health care and ensure a single standard of care, regardless of race, residency, citizenship, employment status, lack of an established residence.

5. All services must be culturally and linguistically accessible in order to eliminate health disparities.

Public, private, and government health institutions must provide staff, environments, materials, and services accessible, understandable, and available to everyone, regardless of culture or primary language. These institutions must make it a priority to employ staff that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities they serve. California must ensure that legal standards and best practice models are established, fully funded, and supported to guarantee that services are delivered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

6. Data and research are critical to the elimination of health disparities.

Reliable data and research are necessary to identify health disparities, to determine the root causes of the disparities so as to appropriately target resources and interventions, and to track the progress of programs designed to address the disparities. This requires the systematic and centralized collection and reporting of information on race, ethnicity, and primary language. Reports must be made accessible and meaningful to the public, particularly to communities of color.

7. Eliminating health disparities must be a priority for California.

Racial and ethnic health disparities are a persistent and growing threat to the state's health and prosperity. With people of color now the majority in California, these disparities have far-reaching social and economic consequences. Ending racial and ethnic health disparities requires dedicated funding and resources. If California is to achieve healthy financial recovery, the private, public, and government sectors need to promote policies and programs that seek to reduce health disparities. *Given the state's ability to influence national policy priorities, California is a natural leader in the effort to achieve health equality for all.*