

2020 Health Equity Report

Moving Health Equity Forward

Executive Summary

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) 2020 Health Equity Report, “Moving Health Equity Forward,” serves as the annual report on the department’s efforts to address racial and ethnic health disparities as required by Public Act 653. This legislation was passed by Michigan’s 93rd Legislature in 2006 and became effective in January 2007. It amends the Michigan Public Health Code (1978 PA 368; MCL Section 333.2227). (See Attachment A.)

Public Act (PA) 653 focuses on five racial, ethnic and tribal populations in Michigan: African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Arab/Chaldean American. In accordance with this law, MDHHS has the responsibility to establish a departmental structure to address racial and ethnic minority health disparities, monitor minority health, promote workforce diversity, and develop policy and actions to advance health equity as specified in the provisions of the act.

The year 2020 had many unique and unprecedented challenges due to the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This pandemic not only posed threats to Michigan’s population as a whole, but particularly to marginalized communities, including people of color. Since the beginning of the pandemic, racial and ethnic minority populations have experienced a disproportionate impact, both in terms of morbidity and mortality as well as economic harm. While these disparities raised the alarm for many, for the public health and human services field the pandemic brought to the spotlight inequities that have long existed.

The 2020 Health Equity Report focuses on these inequities. [An infographic with report highlights](#) is available. Changes in health disparities across various health and social indicators from 2010-2019 are presented in a data brief (Attachment B), as are data on COVID-19 cases and deaths for racial and ethnic populations (Attachment C). Other morbidity, mortality and social determinants of health indicators are highlighted in the report. The report also discusses actions MDHHS has taken to respond to the pandemic and its disparate impact on communities of color, as well as lessons learned for addressing racial and ethnic disparities beyond the pandemic.

Information for the report was obtained through a department-wide survey along with key informant interviews with MDHHS top executive leadership. Overarching accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned include the following.

Accomplishments – Michigan was one of the first states to identify and report disparities in COVID-19 cases and deaths among communities of color, prompting MDHHS to take action early on. Successful efforts included:

- Expanding COVID-19 testing to include testing at neighborhood sites and via mobile health units in marginalized communities.
- Providing increased resources, support, wraparound services and public assistance to address needs.
- Effectively communicating with diverse audiences, partners and stakeholders, including implementing tailored communication campaigns for communities of color.
- Leveraging funds to address increased needs due to COVID-19.
- Using data, surveillance and case monitoring to inform and target the state’s response.
- Building, strengthening and mobilizing partnerships to advance efforts.

Challenges – Despite the many accomplishments of MDHHS’s COVID-19 response, it also encountered several challenges. These included:

- Lack of access to services, technology and information in marginalized communities.
- Spread of misinformation about COVID-19 and mistrust of the government and health care providers among communities of color.
- Limitations with MDHHS’s outdated data and surveillance systems.
- Insufficient sustainable funding and gaps in the department’s infrastructure.

Lessons Learned – These accomplishments and challenges have brought to light a number of lessons learned for advancing equity in the pandemic and beyond. These include:

- The importance of partnerships and communication.
- The need to implement innovative, locally based approaches and actively engage communities in planning and implementing efforts.
- The necessity of addressing social determinants of health.
- The need to improve and update data and surveillance systems.
- The importance of placing equity at the forefront of all efforts.
- The need for on-going, sustainable funding and investment in the public health/human services infrastructure and workforce.

The department’s response to COVID-19 demonstrates how MDHHS worked to improve and expand its health and social equity efforts during the pandemic. MDHHS seeks to continue this work as it carries out the provisions of PA 653 and move equity forward in Michigan.