

This document was prepared by the data subcommittee members of the Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Advisory Board. It is intended to serve as a starting point for employers considering analyzing data by race and ethnicity to determine if and where disparities may exist; and as a supplement to the two issue briefs published previously by this board: Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities; A Business Case Update for Employers, and Addressing Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities: Employer Initiatives.

This document features two key components for employers: 1) an introductory section on collecting racial and ethnic data, and 2) information specific to the creation of a privacy statement for employees.

1. Consider the business case for addressing disparities

- As the workforce continues to diversify, issues of disparities will increasingly demand more time, attention and resources if they are not addressed.
- When disparities exist, employers have not yet realized the maximum value of their health and productivity programming
- When disparities are eliminated, human capital is healthier (higher-quality health care is available to employees) and employers have a more productive workforce.

2. Assess the potential for disparities in your organization

A. Consider the definitions of disparities and whether they apply to your employee population:

Disparities in Health – differences in health outcomes and status

Disparities in Health Care – differences in preventive, diagnostic and treatment services offered to people with similar health conditions.

B. Data – essential and secondary elements to collect:

Essential Data Elements to collect:

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- Age
- Salary/Job Category
- Primary Language/Language Preference (at home, at work, in discussing health care, literacy, health literacy)

Secondary Data Elements (to collect if possible):

- Employee Status (full time/part time)
- Education level
- Home zip/geography (consider this for multinational employers also)
- Employee preferences/perceptions (including any preferences for culture of health care providers, experiences and expectations from the health care system, etc.)

C. Analyze race/ethnicity data and utilization/cost data to identify possible disparities by condition, use of services, adherence to medication protocols, adherence to clinical guidelines, etc.

- To establish a benchmark for your employee population, consider using CDC data on chronic illnesses by race, age, etc. and narrowing these down by county of residence or by which regions use the most health care

3. Identify steps you can take after looking at the data

A. Work with employees

- A communication strategy is necessary to adequately inform a diverse employee pool about disease risk factors and available programs/services
- Consider conducting focus groups to gain employee perspectives on their experiences with health care and health and productivity programs.

B. Work with health plans/vendors/consultants to address identified disparities

- Consider talking with other employers who have the same health plan administrator; with increased employer interest, plans may make health disparities a priority.

Examples of key questions for employers to consider asking health plans/vendor partners:

- Are health plans/vendor partners currently capturing any racial/ethnic data or information on disparities? What information on disparities could be gathered if the employer provided racial/ethnic data?
- What provisions are in place in their health and productivity contracts that address disparities?
- Have disability plan vendors been evaluated to see how they are addressing health care disparities (e.g., Are staff required to have cultural competency training)?
- Are wellness programs – e.g., programs designed to increase physical activity or promote weight maintenance – linguistically and culturally appropriate? Is communication with various ethnic/racial groups adequate?
- Is current programming being tailored to appeal to specific groups?

Data collection at three varying levels of employer engagement: things to consider

If you are an employer who is:

1. Just getting started in data collection

- Decide where you will get your data
 - Employment application (EEO data)
 - Health plans
 - Independent survey
 - Employer or health plan website
- Create a privacy statement or standards – how will you communicate efforts to employees? (See ‘Privacy Statement Overview’ below)
- Work with your legal department on issues related to privacy and security
- Determine how data will be protected and stored
- Consider putting a business associate agreement in place with the plan or data vendor
- Work with a data warehouse to discuss what is available at what cost and how the new information will be linked to the existing databases
- Working with relevant program and administration management, determine the intended goals and level of investment in human capital, budget, and expected return on investment
- Determine how long data will be collected and what metrics will be analyzed
- Work with health plans to ensure they understand how to use the data
- Invest in obtaining senior executive approval and buy-in on these efforts

2. Currently engaged in data collection

- Determine what programs will be developed as a result of data findings
- Consider geomapping to determine whether culturally appropriate provider groups are available and language needs are being met
- Create an evaluation strategy for programs that are being developed as a result of findings
- Acknowledge that health plans may not be ready to accept and integrate racial and ethnic data into their own systems, and be prepared to be innovative and persistent in working with them

3. Employers who have fully developed strategies/programs in place as a result of data collection

- Consider benchmarking the data against that of other employers
- Consider matching racial and ethnic data with health and productivity outcomes (short- and long-term disability, workers compensation, etc.) and with retention data

Privacy Statement Overview

While employers may have an existing privacy statement for employees who are providing racial and ethnic data for U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requirements, this statement may specify only how the company is using the information for government reporting.

The following information is designed to assist employers with key elements and sample language that can be used in the creation of a privacy statement for employees when race/ethnicity data is being collected and used for reasons other than EEOC reporting.

This document also includes a template with key elements and language that specifies how the race/ethnicity data will be used to help improve health and health care for employees and their families. The template can be adapted and personalized as needed; it should be reviewed by the internal legal department to ensure that the standards are appropriate for the company. Employers are encouraged to be as specific as possible in tailoring the language of the privacy statement to reflect the elements applicable to their particular company.

Important elements to consider when collecting data on race and ethnicity

Why your company is requesting this data and how it will benefit the employee

- Explain that racial and ethnic health disparities exist and that the company is committed to eliminating these differences; this may motivate employees to be more willing to provide their personal information.
- Provide statistics illustrating the differences in health status of different races and ethnicities nationally and suggest that this might also be true among company employees; this can help employees understand why the initiative is necessary.
- Describe the services that the company would be able to provide once it has gathered language and racial/ethnic information (e.g., interpreter services, programs that address the needs of different ethnicities, culturally-sensitive communication)
- Asking employees for their “support in this effort to eliminate health disparities for all” may boost participation.

Sample language:

Please inform us of your racial/ethnic background so that we can work with our health plans to ensure that everyone receives the highest-quality care.

These data can help ensure that our vendors provide sufficient language assistance services, develop appropriate patient education materials, and track quality indicators and health outcomes to monitor improvements in the quality of care for all segments of our population.

An explanation of how the data will and will not be used

- Inform employees that the data will be used to tailor or strengthen health services for them and their dependents.
- Inform employees that data will NOT be used to determine insurance coverage or payment of claims and will not be used to discriminate in any way. The information will have no impact on the employee’s employment status.

- Explain how data will be used both internally and externally. For example, internally the company may assess which health services are contributing most to medical claims, determine whether additional health care or wellness programs are needed, etc. Externally, the data may help provide employees with better care management.

Information about how the data is protected and stored

- Reiterate that providing the information is strictly voluntary.
- Reiterate the company's policy on confidentiality.
- Give specifics about the technology and systems in place for protecting data.
- Explain that the employer will only see information in aggregate form,* meaning that data will be combined in a non-identifiable format with data submitted by other employees. Aggregate data does not contain any information that could be used to contact or identify an individual.
- Explain how employees can access the aggregate information that is collected (if applicable).
- Mention the role of a data warehouse in handling data if applicable; reiterate that the data is protected and what standards are in place to do so.

* **Comment:** It is important to clearly explain that the *health plan* will look at individual data to improve its outreach to employees, but the *employer* will only see aggregate data and will not have access to individual data.

Sample language:

*"We value our employees' privacy. Our company is committed to protecting employee data and handling it with respect and integrity. Also, what you tell us won't affect your insurance coverage, how much you pay or how we pay your claims."*¹

*"The only people who will see this information are xxxx, xxxx, and xxxx. The confidentiality of what you say is protected by law."*¹

*"We will only use aggregate, or group, information derived from this survey to improve our services to you. We are committed to protecting the security of your personal information. To prevent unauthorized access, maintain data accuracy, and ensure the correct use of information, we strive to maintain physical, electronic, and administrative safeguards."*²

- Employers may also want to provide the contact name and information of someone employees can contact if they have further questions or concerns.
- Employers may want to consider providing the privacy statement in Spanish or other appropriate languages in addition to English.

Sample Privacy Statement for Employees

Why Are We Asking For This Information?

As your employer, (*insert company name*) cares about your health and your family's health. With that in mind, we are now working with (*insert health plan or vendor name*) to provide you with care that is more specific to your needs and is equitable for all. The information you provide here is completely voluntary and confidential.

Health Disparities Exist. Did You Know That:

- Hispanics are less likely to receive or use medications for asthma, cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, mental illness or pain.³
- African-American women are more likely to die from breast cancer than white women, partly because African Americans have lower screening rates and are diagnosed at later stages of the disease.⁴
- Asians are more likely than whites to report poor communication with health providers.⁵

We want you and your dependents to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Unfortunately, some racial and ethnic groups do not experience the same quality of health care as others, despite having similar access to care and insurance coverage. A study by a nationally recognized non-profit found that certain racial and ethnic groups have higher incidences of diseases and worse health outcomes.⁶ At (*insert company name*), we want to make sure all of our employees get the best care and that health care is equitable. You can help us achieve this goal by providing us with your race, ethnicity and language preference. Our health and productivity programs will then be able to send you additional information that is useful because it is more specific to your needs. They can also educate doctors and hospitals providing services to our employees on how to ensure all of their patients receive the same quality of care.

How do I know my information will be kept confidential?

We value our employees' confidential information and have in place physical, electronic, and administrative safeguards to ensure the information you supply is kept safe. Only a select number of people from our health plans will be authorized to view this information, and they will only use it to understand patterns of care and plan population and specific health care outreach. The data you provide will not affect your insurance coverage, how much you pay, how we pay your claims nor your employment status.

We need your help!

Attached are a few questions about your race, ethnic background, preferred language and (*insert any other data elements you are collecting*). Thank you for taking the time to help us help you!

If you would like more information about this initiative, please contact (*insert contact*).

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