

## What is health equity?

Health equity is the absence of disparities in the health of all Pennsylvanians.

Health disparities occur when one population or group of people experiences worse health outcomes or a lesser quality of health care compared to other populations. These differences are often caused by societal, economic or environmental factors, such as poor housing, poverty or discrimination.

## Who suffers from health disparities?

It depends. Populations often affected are racial/ethnic minorities (such as Latinos/Hispanics and blacks/African-Americans), immigrants and refugees, those with physical or mental disabilities, sexual minorities (gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender individuals), the elderly, and those who live in rural areas.

## What is cultural competency?

Our definition of cultural competency is having the skills needed to understand, communicate and work well with people from different backgrounds, cultures and language abilities. Cultural competence helps public health practitioners and health care professionals provide beneficial and high quality care to patients from diverse backgrounds.



## Office of Health Equity (OHE)

The mission of the OHE is to create awareness of health inequities, advocate for the development of programs and collaborate with community-based organizations to address health inequities.

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## Pennsylvania Department of Health OHE



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# OHE Programs and Initiatives

## Health Equity Programs

The Pennsylvania OHE provides leadership to increase public awareness of health inequities and disparities in the commonwealth. It advocates for the development of programs and policies within the Department of Health and collaborates with community-based organizations and other stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to directly address health inequality.



The OHE recommends actions which are data-driven, evidence-based and culturally and linguistically appropriate; the intention is to increase public awareness of the existence of health inequities and mobilize statewide agencies, communities, and individual action to reduce and/or eliminate health disparities. In addition, the OHE works with policy makers, health care providers and communities to implement policies and programs that result in measurable and sustained improvements in the health status of underserved and disparate populations.

## Cultural Competency Taskforce

The OHE has spearheaded the creation of a Pennsylvania Department of Health Cultural Competency Taskforce. This taskforce is made up of individuals from across the department. The taskforce is responsible for providing training and raising awareness of cultural competency, Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards, and health disparities within the Pennsylvania Department of Health and partner organizations.

## OHE Advisory Committee

The OHE Advisory Committee's function includes, but is not limited to:

- Advising the secretary of health and the OHE on matters concerning health inequities and recommending data driven, evidence-based and culturally aware actions to increase awareness on the existence of health disparities in Pennsylvania;
- Assisting in the identification of public and private funding and resources to support programs that address health inequities;
- Advising the OHE in the development of plans and strategies to address health inequities;
- Creating, reviewing and/or updating a multiyear strategic work plan that promotes health equity through the reduction or elimination of health

The OHE works with public health officials, health care providers, government agencies and community organizations to develop their capacity to serve diverse populations through building cultural competency skills and the ability to meet CLAS Standards. The OHE is a resource to people interested in learning about health disparities in Pennsylvania.

inequities; and

- Recommending methods to improve the health status of all commonwealth residents, regardless of location, socioeconomic status, disability, age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, immigrant or refugee status, sexual orientation, or any other differences.

## Refugee Health Program (RHP)

The RHP is a partnership between the OHE, Bureau of Epidemiology, the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

The goal of this program is to ensure that all newly arriving refugees receive a comprehensive health screening as soon as possible after entering into the United States. These screenings protect the public's health against communicable diseases, identify health problems that have been overlooked or developed subsequent to the overseas medical exam, and provide a level of care necessary for a supportive and successful resettlement.

The RHP works with commonwealth-selected medical providers to ensure that all of the necessary refugee health assessments are completed.

The primary components of the health assessments include: medical history and physical examinations; tuberculosis; sexually transmitted infections; HIV and hepatitis, and intestinal parasite screenings; immunizations; mental/behavioral health screening; and referral to appropriate related services.

