

Building Consumer Partnerships to Advance Racial Equity

Recommendations for State Associations

As leaders in shaping state policy and care delivery, state primary care associations and behavioral health associations play a critical role in advancing racial equity through their work. State associations are increasingly seeking to engage people with lived experience to advance racially equitable health policy and practice. This content draws from a Delta Center for a Thriving Safety Net event with Deborah Riddick, Director of Government Relations with the Oregon Nurses Association. For more of Deborah's insights, see "[Building Consumer Partnerships to Advance Racial Equity: Q&A with Deborah Riddick](#)."

What is Racial Equity?

Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. ([Race Forward, 2021](#))

Advancing racial equity requires work to **address root causes of inequities**, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them. ([CAPD, 2021](#))



START INTERNALLY

- ♦ **Clean your own house first.** Examine your own organization's policies, practices, and procedures to identify opportunities for improvement in such areas as hiring, training, and organizational culture. Advancing racial equity with intention requires a commitment from everybody and on all organizational levels.
- ♦ **Don't rush the process.** Developing strong, authentic relationships with community members requires a long-term commitment from your organization. You want a strong foundation to build on year-in and year-out.
- ♦ **Consciously learn and unlearn.** This happens on a personal and organizational level. Intentionally study how current thinking or practices can and should be changed to align with your organizational goals to advance racial equity. Be prepared to make mistakes to then revisit, unpack, and debrief on how you could do things differently.





CENTER LIVED EXPERIENCE IN YOUR WORK

- ♦ **Actively reduce harms.** Understand the ways in which your organization may have harmed or failed to help patients, particularly those from under resourced communities. Acknowledge and take accountability for past missteps. Commit to shaping a different future that respects their lived experience.
- ♦ **Engage diverse consumers.** Representation needs to be as diverse as lived experiences. This includes but is not limited to race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, geography. Engaging different groups will yield different perspectives, ideas, sensitivities, and values that will enrich your understanding and work.
- ♦ **Elevate voices that have not been heard.** Rather than defaulting to previous point persons for community engagement, be brave enough to seek new voices, especially individuals who offer a challenge to the status quo. If your organization has a consumer advisory group, consider setting term limits for leadership positions.

MEET COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY'RE AT



- ♦ **Construct a timeline that works for the community.** Consider how all individuals move through the world at different paces based on their lived experiences. This might mean allocating more time to build trust before diving into policy discussions.
- ♦ **Reject unhelpful hierarchical expectations.** We have been socialized to recognize and respect markers of privilege, such as certain types of appearance and educational degrees. Support more open discussion by fostering an environment that respects individuals with and without privilege - for example, by using introductions with names and pronouns, but no titles.
- ♦ **Make space.** Creating a candid and safe environment can look like embracing discomfort through establishing shared community agreements for meetings, co-designing agendas, and hosting informal meetings to elicit questions community members may have prior to formal meetings.
- ♦ **Follow up.** Touch base with consumers after meetings for their perspective on how things went and what could be done better. Show the results of your engagement consistently and with integrity so that the community feels heard and understood. Be transparent about what actions have been taken based on ideas elevated by the community.



PUSH FROM BEHIND

- ♦ **Teach folks to fish.** Consumer advocacy groups and other community-based organizations can be valuable partners in advancing racial equity. You can help improve their capacity by teaching skills (e.g., policy analysis) so that with or without you, they can continue to move the work, ideas, and policies forward independent of you.
- ♦ **Leverage your influence and connections.** Share your power. When you have a meeting with a policymaker, invite a Medicaid enrollee to join you. If a community group wants to present a policy proposal, you could help set up the meeting. By building bridges between the community and influential stakeholders within your network, the community can strengthen their foundation for taking the lead on future initiatives.

The Delta Center for a Thriving Safety Net is a national initiative launched in May of 2018 that brings together primary care associations (PCAs) and behavioral health state associations (BHSAs) to advance policy and practice change. The ultimate goal of the Delta Center is to cultivate health policy and a care system that is more equitable and better meets the needs of individuals and families.

The Delta Center is led by JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. (JSI) with the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (National Council) as strategic partners, and support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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