Suggested Policy Levers to Address the Role of Structural Racism Through Public Policy

American Heart Association.

Structural racism is a fundamental driver of health disparities and a cause of poor health and premature death from heart disease and stroke. The American Heart Association (AHA) offers the following policy levers across several social drivers of health as examples of public policy solutions that can be adapted and pursued by a multidisciplinary coalition of stakeholders to address the far-reaching repercussions of structural racism on health equity. **To learn more, please see the AHA's full policy statement on Addressing Structural Racism Through Public Policy Advocacy.**

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Access to Quality Healthcare	Pursue efforts to enhance access to and adequacy and affordability of health coverage for every person living in the United States.	✓ Enhance the consumer protections of the Affordable Care Act including premium and cost-sharing assistance. ✓ Advance Medicaid expansion. ✓ Maintain telehealth flexibilities implemented during the COVID-19 public health emergency.
	Enhance the ability of the health system to advance primary care and prevention, assess and address social needs, and build trust with communities of color.	✓ Reduce/eliminate cost-sharing for preventive, primary, and mental health care. ✓ Implement health insurance benefit designs that support robust, diverse health care provider networks. ✓ Expand appropriations for the support of FQHCs and other health care facilities that that serve remote, historically excluded, or underresourced communities.
	Support the ability of medical institutions to examine and address the role of structural racism on patient care and outcomes.	✓ Define metrics that institutions should assess to improve quality of care. ✓ Pursue medical-legal partnerships that embed legal professionals on the care team to resolve social and environmental concerns at the appropriate policy level.
	Support robust and diverse clinical trials through the elimination of barriers that disproportionately impede the participation of individuals living in rural areas, communities with lower socio-economic status, and underrepresented racial and ethnic population.	✓ Provide financial compensation and reimbursement for expenses associated with participation in clinical trials (transportation, lodging, childcare, etc.). ✓ Improve flexibility of clinical trial study designs to make participation less burdensome for participants (ex; reducing frequency of study visits, utilization of electronic communication tools, etc.). ✓ Codesign new therapies, treatments, and interventions with members of the community they are aimed to serve and prioritize their access once treatments are developed and approved.
	Work to eliminate institutional barriers to academia to widen the pathway for more diverse practitioners and scientists to enter the medical workforce and serve as investigators for research affecting historically excluded populations.	✓ Facilitate STEM scholarship programs for students from historically excluded communities. ✓ Support the development of community-driven health equity plans to help communities identify and address disparities experienced by at-risk populations.

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Healthy Food Access and Nutrition Security	Support and eligibility for food assistance programs and other federal income support benefits should be expanded.	Maintain and expand programs such as SNAP, SNAP-ED, WIC, FDPIR, CACFP, and school meal programs.
	Prioritize policies that incentivize and support the ability of health systems and insurers to address food insecurity.	Support food as medicine initiatives. Develop and implement a national measure of nutrition security, expanding the USDA food security screening tool. Support the efforts of CMS and other health care organizations efforts to pilot programs addressing food insecurity.
	Develop partnerships with local governments and community boards to advocate for healthy and culturally relevant foods in restaurants, schools, and other public-facing institutions.	Implement universal school meal program with robust nutrition standards aligned with most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
	Pursue policies that address and mitigate the impact of the disproportionate marketing of unhealthy food products to children from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups who reside in underresourced communities.	Develop and implement federal standards for unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children. Implement tax policies on sugary drinks or other unhealthy products, directing tax revenue to under-resourced communities that have been targeted by marketing.

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Access to Capital and Economic Stability	Support policies that address poverty and target financial relief to families and children.	Maintain and expand the EITC and CTC.
	Address the impact of racism in the pipeline to and within the workforce.	Explore opportunities to equitably raise the floor for workers in low-wage jobs. Increase federal and state appropriations for equitable workforce development and job training programs targeted to historically excluded communities. Support companies' ability to track and report race-aggregated hiring and wage data to identify and address disparities.
	Develop policies and institutions that support wealth building through capital investment, sustainable community partnerships, and equitable institutional policies and incentives that address the racial and ethnic wealth gap.	Incentivize the creation of Medical-Financial Partnerships which are novel cross-sector collaborations between health care systems and financial service organizations to reduce patient financial stress. Support policies that reduce the racial and ethnic wealth gap including paid family and medical leave, child educational savings funds, and baby bonds. Promote inclusion of financial literacy courses in schools.
	Address systematic racial disparities in debt and debt collection practices.	Expand access to health care through expanded access to quality, affordable medical coverage. Support financial assistance and payment plan options for medical patients who are low-income or from underresourced communities.
	Preserve local financial institutions, including minority-owned banks, in an effort to support longitudinal investments in the economic development of individuals and groups who live and work in the communities they serve.	Develop Community Development Financial Institutions to address differential credit by race and ethnicity

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Access to Equitable Housing	Expand access to affordable housing and eliminate racial discrimination connected to the acquisition of home loans and leasing.	Increase supply and improve physical and financial viability of affordable rental housing. Reduce bias in the Federal Housing Administration program and other traditional channels to support first-time, lower-income home buyers. Increase mortgage lending on tribal trust lands.
	Build partnerships with financial institutions and foster the finance industry's responsibility and accountability to the communities in which they live and serve.	Enhance appropriations for acquisition funding that enable developers who are creating affordable housing to acquire the buildings. Eliminate bias in credit scoring systems, to increase eligibility for historically disenfranchised racial and ethnic groups and social programs. Facilitate access to capital for diverse developers.
	Pursue multidisciplinary private-public stakeholder models to ensure that all communities are safe, are socially supportive, and have equitable access to health-sustaining resources.	Encourage funders of CBDOs, including government, philanthropic, or corporate investors, to equitably invest in and expand donations to support the sustainability and financial health of CBDOs.
	Provide access for individuals who are experiencing housing instability or homelessness, particularly those with disabilities or health conditions, to housing opportunities that also support their specific functional, psychosocial, and medical needs.	Develop partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies to mitigate pathways from foster care and criminal justice systems to homelessness. Screen for homelessness and housing insecurity during health care visits. Build capacity and procedures for healthcare professionals to connect patients with housing services.

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Access to Education	Pursue policies that ensure equity in funding and resources across early childcare and educational systems.	Equitably address per-pupil allotments to public schools to narrow funding inequities and performance gaps. Support smaller class sizes and the hiring and retention of qualified teachers. Support wage enhancements for educators who service historically under-resourced communities.
	Support expanded access to Early Childhood Education.	Support and expand federal appropriations for Head Start, Early Head Start. Expand access to quality, affordable childcare programs.
	Support efforts that assist students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds optimize their educational attainment and employment opportunities.	Integrate a holistic approach to higher education admissions processes that considers lived experience along with the impact of differential access to resources. Improve affordability of higher education through expanded support for Pell grants and free and low-cost community college. Advocate for expanded financial support of HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions.
	Work to mitigate implicit and explicit bias among school staff and to examine disciplinary policies and the role of law enforcement in schools.	Reduce inappropriate referrals of students to the criminal justice system. Reduce the use and eliminate disparities in discipline practices by establishing clear and consistent policies that promote fairness and equity. Expand access to social support and mental health services for at-risk students.

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Environmental Health	Pursue policies that support advantageous community infrastructure and partnerships related to environmental problem solving.	Mitigate environmental "sacrifice zones." Create inclusive, community-driven planning, policy development, and budgeting processes to address environmental issues. Assess community impact in all transportation and industrial infrastructure projects to ensure environmental justice and health equity.
	Ensure that advocacy organizations leverage networks of science and community stakeholders with government agencies to help advance environmental population- and individual health-linked agendas.	Strengthen air quality standards. Provide government investment and facilitate private-public partnerships to shift to the use of renewable energy.
	Advance policies that promote corporate responsibility for business operations and their environmental and health impacts in the communities in which they operate.	Corporations should commit to, and government could incentivize through tax policy robust, measurable, Environment, Social and Governance Goals (ESG).
	Work to expand research that helps to identify and address environmental health disparities and risks, as well as the long-term adverse health impacts associated with exposure to environmental hazards.	Governments should make investments in research to address environmental health disparities and support data collection to assess improvement over time.

Read the full policy statement here.

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Public Policy Levers
Public Health and Data Infrastructure	Ensure that federal, state, and local governments make investments in public health infrastructure and workforce.	Pursue partnerships among public health entities, trusted professional and community organizations, and other public figures to deliver tactical information to diverse audiences.
	Modernize and link local, state, and federal data systems to provide effective and prescriptive results.	Develop a comprehensive, standardized nationwide data infrastructure. Improve capture of social determinants of health data, including disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, sex, and gender identity at the patient and population level.
	Maintain and expand existing national databases that assess disparities health outcomes and social determinants of health.	Enhance national health surveys to capture patient experiences of discrimination. Maintain place-based tools that measure social factors and cumulative community risk and, when appropriate, integrate them into clinical practice (eg, CDC Social Vulnerability Index, HHS Environmental Justice Index).

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Specific Public Policy Levers
Health Information Technology	Advance "health techquity" through efforts that address the digital divide and the systematic neglect or exclusion of underresourced and geographically isolated populations from available technology.	Increase access to smart devices, computers. Support policy efforts to make broadband more affordable and enforce the provision of equitable internet service (eg, FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit).

Issue	Solutions	Examples of Specific Public Policy Levers
Civic Engagement	Support policies that cultivate an active and engaged electorate, with a focus on ensuring equitable voting opportunities in local, state, and federal elections for communities of color who have been historically disenfranchised.	Facilitate voter registration. Invest in "get out the vote" efforts to ensure individuals are registered to vote, educated about candidates and issues, and know how and where to vote.
	Oppose efforts to preempt the authority of communities to address their issues locally.	Oppose preemption efforts that limit the ability of communities to regulate, tax or otherwise enact legislation stronger than the state law.
	Advance policies that support the preservation of trust in and the integrity of our electoral process.	Provide resources for robust technology and poll worker safety.

Read the full policy statement here.