U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

Office of Health Equity

VHA Health Equity Operational Plan, Fiscal Year 2024

VHA Office of Health Equity (12HE)
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Mission and Vision Statements

Mission: The VHA Office of Health Equity (OHE) advances health equity and ensures social needs are met for all Veterans through leadership, data analysis, education, tool development, and quality improvement initiatives.

Vision: All Veterans will attain equitable health through high-quality health care and support for their social needs.

Background

The Fiscal Year 2024 VHA Health Equity Operational Plan outlines strategic priorities, objectives, and activities to promote equitable healthcare access and outcomes for Veterans. This plan reflects the OHE's commitment to providing leadership to advance health equity, creating comprehensive education and effective partnerships, funding quality improvement and operational work, addressing social risk factors and unmet needs, and monitoring health inequities and opportunities for improvement. This operational plan builds on the aims and activities of the VHA Health Equity Action Plan (HEAP). The HEAP is a living strategic document to achieve health equity for Veterans. Throughout the fiscal year, OHE's Education and Partnership, Health Care Outcomes, Social Needs, and Analytic teams will create and update strategic plans that build off this plan. The individual strategic plans provide more details, including relevant resources for the activities laid out in this document.

Leadership

Overall Goal: Lead and coordinate efforts to achieve health equity for Veterans.

Achieving health equity means creating an inclusive work environment, addressing healthcare disparities, and reducing unmet social needs. OHE leads in tackling disparities and social needs and supports efforts to build diversity. OHE leadership initiates and coordinates work to achieve health equity across office teams, VHA program offices, other parts of VA, and external partners.

Strategic Priority #1: Lead and coordinate work within VA to achieve health equity for Veterans.

Objective #1: Advise VA leadership about equity.

Activities

- Inform VA leadership about fiscal benefits, challenges and actions for equity.
- Lead the Health Equity Coalition in advancing equity actions.
- Respond to inquiries from VA leadership promptly.

Objective #2: Support VA plans to advance equity.

Activities

- Lead efforts in VA-wide Equity Action Plans and VHA Priorities.
- Develop and execute OHE strategic and operational plans.
- Coordinate equity work with Program Offices and VAMCs.
- Support VA Chief Diversity Officer and Diversity and Inclusion Program to build a diverse work environment.

Objective #3: Steward resources to advance equity in VA.

Activities

- Secure funds and organize personnel for equity work.
- Coordinate and deploy OHE equity teams efficiently.
- Secure funds to improve equity in health outcomes for Veterans.

Strategic Priority #2: Share and coordinate VA work to advance equity with external partners.

Objective #1: Share VA work to advance equity with external organizations.

Activities

- Articulate VA strategy to external organizations.
- Raise awareness of VA's equity efforts.
- Respond to inquiries about health equity.
- Support data linkages with external organizations.

Objective #2: Represent VA and coordinate with external organizations working to advance equity.

Activities

- Represent VA on equity advisory groups.
- Integrate best equity practices from external organizations.
- Coordinate VA equity work with external partners.

Education and Cultural Competency and Diversity

Overall Goal: Use education to improve health outcomes and improve workforce cultural competency and diversity.

Education is crucial to raising awareness and reducing existing health disparities. OHE aims to promote equitable care through diverse educational and partnership efforts. The Education and Partnerships team creates learning opportunities for Veterans, staff, and stakeholders to increase health equity knowledge and create a more competent and diverse workforce.

Strategic Priority #1: Educate on health disparities and actions for improvement.

Objective #1: Develop educational materials and increase awareness.

Activities

- Collaborate on information briefs and podcasts.
- Highlight relevant publications and trainings.

Objective #2: Pursue strategic partnerships for the HEAP.

Activities

- Distribute monthly newsletters.
- Host cyberseminars and publish briefs.
- Support a Health Equity podcast series.

Objective #3: Develop a comprehensive education plan.

Activities

- Draft FY24 Education Plan.
- Incorporate feedback for the final plan.

Strategic Priority #2: Provide educational opportunities for cultural competency.

Objective #1: Support training in health equity and cultural competency.

Activities

- Distribute resources via newsletters and other resources.
- Manage the health equity learning communities.

Objective #2: Partner for cultural competency in education.

Activities

- Establish partnerships for health equity resources.
- Translate OHE materials into different languages.

Objective #3: Promote best practices for diversifying the clinical workforce.

Activities

- Explore diversity data tracking.
- Support diversity efforts through resources and training.

Health Care Outcomes

Overall Goal: Improve health, health care outcomes, and eliminate health inequities among Veterans.

Healthcare aims to enhance quality of life, reduce morbidity, and support well-being. Upstream factors like social drivers impact health. The Health Care Outcomes team promotes equitable outcomes through quality improvement and operational work.

Strategic Priority #1: Advance health equity through regulatory and organizational priorities.

Objective #1: Support [VA Undersecretary of Health's Priority to Action (P2A) goals](#).

Activities

- Propose and assist with Fiscal Year 2024 P2A outcome measures.
- Provide assistance as needed.

Objective #2: Support implementation of [National Patient Safety Goal (NPSG) 16.01.01](#).

Activities

- Provide presentations and support for NPSG 16.01.01, a requirement of healthcare systems to improve health equity.

Objective #3: Support [VA-wide Equity Action Plan](#).

Activities

- Provide input to VA-wide Equity Action Plan.
- Connect OHE activities to the plan.

Strategic Priority #2: Advance equitable healthcare outcomes through equity-guided quality improvement.

Objective #1: Expand education tools for equity-guided quality improvement (QI).

Activities

- Complete equity-guided QI curriculum.
- Coordinate educational activities with Education and Partnerships team.

Objective #2: Increase awareness and practice of equity-guided quality improvement activities.

Activities

- Distribute equity-guided QI pilot project awards.
- Convene learning collaboratives with awardees.
- Present to diverse audiences on health equity.

Objective #3: Augment Primary Care Equity Dashboard.

Activities

- Collaborate with Analytics team on analysis of medical and social conditions.

Strategic Priority #3: Advance use of equitable clinical decision support tools and medical devices.

Objective #1: Identify tools with algorithmic bias.

Activities

- Identify tools at risk of bias and potential partners to address bias.

Objective #2: Consult on approaches to mitigate racial bias.

Activities

- Continue consultation for specific programs.
- Support stakeholders in addressing bias.

Social Needs

Overall Goal: Identify and address social risk factors and social needs, improve health, and promote health equity among all Veterans.

VHA aims to improve Veteran's quality of life through medical and social care. The Assessing Circumstances and Offering Resources for Needs (ACORN) initiative aims to identify and address unmet social needs among all Veterans to improve health and advance health equity. The Social Needs team supports broader VA and VHA priorities related to social determinants/drivers of health (SDOH), social risk factors, and social needs.

Strategic Priority #1: Advance efforts to identify and address social risk factors and social needs.

Objective #1: Support VA Undersecretary of Health's P2A goals.

Activities

- Propose and support Fiscal Year 2024 P2A outcome measures.
- Screen Veterans for social needs using ACORN.

Objective #2: Support implementation of NPSG 16.01.01.

Activities

- Incorporate NPSG into presentations.
- Align ACORN initiative with NPSG.

Objective #3: Support VA-wide Equity Action Plan and Related Interagency Efforts.

Activities

- Provide feedback and updates to VA colleagues.
- Monitor and report on OHE SDOH activities.

Strategic Priority #2: Collaborate with VA and VHA partners to increase awareness of SDOH.

Objective #1: Sustain ACORN Partner Engagement Group.

Activities

- Organize quarterly meetings.
- Develop partnerships for ACORN projects.

Objective #2: Develop relationships and support existing collaborators.

Activities

- Assist VA medical centers in data analysis and evaluation efforts.
- Maintain collaboration with other VA program offices.
- Present to diverse audiences on SDOH, social risk factors, and social needs.

Strategic Priority #3: Advance use of ACORN to identify and address Veterans' unmet social needs.

Objective #1: Incorporate ACORN template in the national VA electronic health record repository.

Activities

- Complete pilot testing of ACORN template.
- Release ACORN national electronic health record template.

Objective #2: Develop educational tools and processes for ACORN.

Activities

- Develop ACORN Implementation Toolkit.
- Expand ACORN content OHE's internal SharePoint site and external webpage.

Objective #3: Provide technical assistance to VA medical centers.

Activities

- Maintain ACORN learning collaboratives for VA medical centers.
- Offer monthly ACORN introductory calls and office hours.

Objective #4: Increase access to ACORN data.

Activities

- Enhance ACORN Dashboard.
- Assess opportunities to develop an additional dashboard with patient-level health information.

Objective #5: Continue evaluation efforts to understand successes and challenges associated with ACORN implementation.

Activities

- Release ACORN Annual Report.
- Conduct interviews with VA medical centers that have implemented ACORN.
- Gather VA medical center feedback and input through the ACORN learning collaborative.

Data and Analytics

Overall Goal: Improve data availability, coordination, utilization, and diffusion of research and evaluation outcomes.

Accurate and reliable data are essential for reducing disparities. Both quantitative and qualitative data are crucial for designing targeted interventions. The Analytics team focuses on identifying disparities and systemic barriers to ensure equitable healthcare for all Veterans.

Strategic Priority #1: Identify VA and non-VA data sources for health equity.

Objective #1: Evaluate existing data sources.

Activities

- Assess accuracy and reliability of Veteran data.
- Examine the use of National Center for Health Statistics data.

Objective #2: Foster collaboration for additional datasets.

Activities

- Collaborate with VHA VISN, Medical Centers, and Program Offices.
- Develop relationships for additional datasets.

Strategic Priority #2: Conduct data analyses and maintain inventory of data.

Objective #1: Develop data analyses framework.

Activities

- Draft analysis frameworks for projects.
- Review and update Health Equity Data Strategy.

Objective #2: Implement an efficient inventory management system.

Activities

- Refine and expand health equity data inventory.
- Update inventory with new activities monthly.

Objective #3: Develop a strategy for disseminating critical findings.

Activities

- Develop tools based on quality improvement practices.
- Transform critical findings into briefs, cyberseminars, podcasts, and more.

Strategic Priority #3: Identify strategies for capturing data for vulnerable populations.

Objective #1: Explore advanced technologies for data collection.

Activities

- Examine natural language processing and tools.
- Increase use of geographic information system mapping.

Objective #2: Develop validation strategies for data accuracy.

Activities

- Continue work on self-identified race/ethnicity.
- Explore Cerner Millennium race and ethnicity analyses.

Objective #3: Collaborate for integrated Veteran and SDOH data.

Activities

- Support data analysis for social needs.
- Form partnerships for emerging health disparity topics.

Strategic Priority #4: Develop a strategy for prioritizing, monitoring, and tracking disparities.

Objective #1: Establish a strategy for prioritizing disparities.

Activities

- Develop action plans for priority topics.
- Support analyses for specific Veteran groups.

Objective #2: Implement a real-time monitoring system.

Activities

- Develop a disparities object model.
- Create a monitoring tool for swift responses.

Objective #3: Create feedback loops for continuous assessment.

Activities

- Track OHE website metrics.
- Collaborate with stakeholders for feedback on equity issues.