

# Health Equity:

How Your Practice Can Make a Difference



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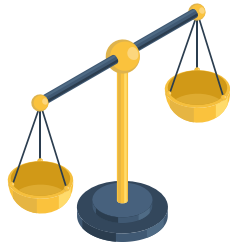
## Introduction

**T**here has been a lot of talk in our country lately on the importance of equity and its absence in many situations. Healthcare is one area where inequity is a big problem with the potential for devastating consequences. And while this is unlikely to be solved overnight, health equity is achievable, and each individual practice can do their own part to make positive changes.

**I**n this eBook, we'll discuss health equity and why it's so important, including looking at the social determinants of health, how inequity affects outcomes, how health equity can be improved, and some solutions and programs you can implement at the practice level to overcome health disparities.

**Let's get started.**

# What is health equity and why does it matter?



**H**ealth equity, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.” This is often determined to an extent by the circumstances in which a person lives, with factors such as socioeconomic status, race, and environment influencing an individual’s health and well-being.

**W**hen health equity is not present, it affects everyone, but those facing health disparities are affected most of all. These individuals often see greater instances of illness, shorter life expectancies, and a diminished quality of life. Additionally, health inequity causes increase in healthcare costs across the board, leading to avoidable excess spending.

# What are the social determinants of health?

**S**ocial determinants of health (SDOH) are defined as the circumstances into which an individual is born and lives their life, and how those circumstances can affect their health and wellbeing. Typically, SDOH are grouped into five categories:



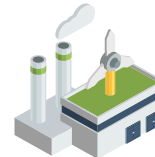
**Economic Stability**, referring to the effect that an individual’s financial resources has on their health



**Education Access and Quality**, referring to the effect that an individual’s education level has on their health



**Healthcare Access and Quality**, referring to the effect an individual’s access to quality healthcare and their understanding of their health has on their wellbeing



**Neighborhood and Built Environment**, referring to the effect that the environment in which a person lives has on their health



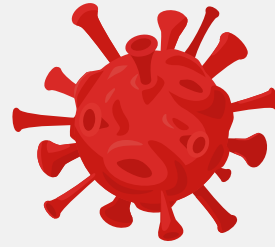
**Social and Community Context**, referring to the effect an individual’s community connections can have on their health

**S**ome examples of SDOH include if an individual has safe housing and adequate transportation; if an individual experiences discrimination such as racism, or if they experience violence; an individual’s education, employment, and income; whether an individual can easily access healthy food and exercise; the quality of the air and water in an individual’s community; and an individual’s literacy skills and understanding of the language spoken in their community. Any one of these social determinants of health can contribute to health inequity, and often where one is present there are others as well.

## How does health inequity affect outcomes?



**W**hen health inequities are present, they are evident in a difference in lifespan and quality of life, a higher rate and severity of disease, reduced access to treatment, and increased occurrence of disability and death. In addition to these impacts felt by those directly impacted by health disparities, health inequity affects everyone in a society to some degree.



**I**n a society without health equity, it's more difficult to treat and control the spread of infectious diseases. Crime rates and violence tend to be higher, as does alcohol and substance abuse. The economy can suffer due to individuals being unable to work because of unmanaged health crises. The number of individuals living in poverty grows, as does the number of people unable to get necessary care. And because of all of this, the cost of healthcare goes up for everyone in society. It is important to note, though, that those who suffer the most from health inequity are those directly impacted by it, as the effects are often felt not just by the current generation, but also by their children and grandchildren in a continuing cycle.

## How can health equity be improved?



**W**hile there is a lot of bad news that comes with the topic of health inequity, the good news is that it is avoidable and health equity is achievable. It does, however, require determination and focused investment. One of the first places that societies will do well to invest is in their public health infrastructure. A nation's public health system is integral to the wellbeing of its population. This system will seek to prevent disease and promote health through agencies at every level of society, monitoring for potential health threats, navigating communities through times of greater infectious disease, and providing education on how to achieve better health and wellbeing.



**A**nother way to improve health equity is to bolster access to quality health care. There are more than two million people in the Medicaid coverage gap in the United States. In other words, these individuals have no affordable options for healthcare coverage as their income is too low to allow for marketplace subsidies, but too high to allow for Medicaid coverage. Without insurance, many individuals forego preventative care and even put off care for health concerns. This leads to patients waiting to see physicians until they are in worse condition, which increases costs for not only that particular patient, but the healthcare industry overall.

## On the practice level, there are many things that can be done to help improve health equity:



First, acknowledge that health inequity is a problem and set the intention to prioritize equity whenever possible.



Next, practices can utilize screening tools – paper questionnaires, interviews, digital questionnaires for increased privacy – to discover inequities within their own patient population.



From there, practices can earmark resources for the purpose of improving equity and create processes and procedures designed to improve health equity.



Analyzing what may be most helpful in a specific patient population is a great way to know how you can best serve and make a difference for your particular patients. Some communities may need transportation help or house calls while others may benefit more from translation services.



Identifying where discrimination has typically existed within an organization and working to make changes to eliminate that discrimination is another important step.



Finally, practices can partner with organizations in their community to better serve the individuals in their surrounding area.

## Four Practice Level Technologies and Solutions to Improve Health Equity

**W**hile it can feel overwhelming at the practice level to think of making a dent in health inequity, there are tech solutions and programs that can be implemented to offset disparities in your community. First is telehealth. This technology enables practices to extend their care reach beyond the individuals who can easily make it to a face-to-face appointment. Whether a patient has transportation issues or lives in an underserved area outside of driving distance, utilizing a robust telemedicine platform fills in care gaps where it's needed most.

**T**ranslation services are another important solution that practices can implement. Patients who don't speak English, or only speak it as a second language, are at a disadvantage compared to native English-speaking patients. There are, however, distance translation services that your practice can sign up for, enabling you to ensure that all patients will have clear communication and understanding with their provider in your practice, eliminating that disparity and improving outcomes.

**F**inally, given the financial concerns that cause inequity among many patients, anything you can do to make care more affordable is a great help. Pharmacy discount cards and prescription samples are two ways to offset the cost of treatment for patients and improve the odds of medication adherence and, as a result, see better health outcomes.

# Conclusion

**H**ealth equity is necessary in any society for all individuals to be at their best. Where disparities exist, everyone will be impacted in one way or another. And while this is a big problem that will likely require sweeping change on a national level to solve, each practice can make a

difference by doing what it can to help its own little corner of the country. MicroMD knows how important this work is and that's why we offer solutions that enable practices to make a difference. Check out our Solutions Central page or call 1-800-624-8832 to learn more and get started.

## About Henry Schein MicroMD

Henry Schein MicroMD, a subsidiary of Henry Schein, Inc., provides simple yet powerful e-Prescribing, EMR and Practice Management solutions that facilitate the delivery of superior patient care, automate incentive and quality reporting activities, and streamline operations for today's busy providers. Full-featured, time-tested, and budget-friendly, MicroMD EMR is 2015 Edition CEHRT certified software that helps small practices, large medical groups, community health centers, and billing services accelerate progress toward a paperless environment and health information exchange with minimal disruption and stress. Learn more at [www.micromd.com](http://www.micromd.com).

