



Community Health Briefs **Health Equity Initiatives —** **Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin**



Innovation Strategy

Madison, Wisconsin (Dane County) often ranks as one of the best places in America to live. However [Race to Equity](#), a project of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, released a [baseline report](#) in 2013 detailing the state of racial disparities in Dane County. [Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin \(GHC-SCW\)](#) was compelled to explore how people are unintentionally affected by race in health care. This led GHC-SCW to identify health equity, when all people have the opportunity to attain their full health potential, as an organizational priority. GHC-SCW's health equity work emerged out of the reality that the causes of health inequity are systemic and persistent. As a Cooperative that values excellence, high quality patient-centered care, and the lived experiences of their members, GHC-SCW is responsive and strategic in challenging these inequities.

GHC-SCW's Health Equity Committee garnered momentum with several accomplishments, one being a successful collaboration with Second Harvest Foodbank to embed universal food insecurity screenings into routine well child visits. Patients and their families who screen positive for food insecurity can be connected with internal Community Service Coordinators to ensure that their needs are met through external community resources, such as food banks. To expand upon their work and formalize a structure for examining their own individual and institutional biases, GHC-SCW needed to partner with a resident expert who had the tools, knowledgebase, and skill set to help them go deeper into their equity and inclusion work – that resident expert being the [YWCA-Madison](#), an organization dedicated to eliminating racism and empowering women. Their [Creating Equitable Organizations](#) training provided a foundational pathway for GHC-SCW to create long-term, sustainable change. GHC-SCW was recently recognized as an 'Organization of Distinction' at the YWCA-Madison's Circle of Women event; check out this [4-minute video](#) to learn more about their partnership and experience with the Creating Equitable Organizations training.

Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Health Literacy
- Education
- Employment
- Stable Income
- Livable Communities
- Health Equity

Program Description

As a health care delivery system and an insurer, GHC-SCW is uniquely positioned to positively address and reduce health inequities and disparities for the communities they serve. GHC-SCW's Health Equity Committee has been active for several years, but recently experienced a resurgence due to the organization's renewed commitment to addressing health equity in Dane County. Truly in service of the community, all levels of leadership at GHC-SCW have committed to a three-year strategic plan to address health equity issues and biases within the organization that may translate to the community population.

GHC-SCW and the YWCA-Madison formalized a three-year partnership, where the YWCA-Madison is providing technical assistance and support, internal capacity building, training opportunities and professional development. GHC-SCW has found that health disparities will not present themselves unless you look for them, something the organization knows is difficult to acknowledge but important to address. The Roadmap for Health Equity (GHC-SCW's 3-year strategic plan) will be brought to life through its focus on formalizing an equity capacity structure, improving cultural competency, applying equity principles to employee engagement (hiring and work culture), service recipient engagement (care delivery and identifying disparities) and transgender care.

Outlook

GHC-SCW's overarching goal is to support health care that is equitable and affirming, responsive to the social determinants of health, and is both targeted and universal. This work is about humility and vulnerability, staying present and taking responsibility, engaging in continuous learning and having the courage to critically examine relationships to systems of power and privilege. It's about making the invisible visible. The great work around health equity has already begun at GHC-SCW, but in the second quarter of 2017 the plan will launch its new formalized structure focused on addressing the issue.

The Health Equity Change Team will serve as a multiracial, intercultural leadership council that will govern the Health Equity Committee and smaller, project-based workgroups. It will consist of a core group of employees committed to driving the health equity agenda forward and represent a variety of roles, leadership levels, and backgrounds. GHC-SCW's existing Health Equity Committee will meet on a quarterly basis and serve as a space for professional development, focused conversation and networking, and health equity updates, employee feedback, and calls for action. This new formalized structure is designed to ensure the movement to address health equity is sustainable overtime. GHC-SCW's reputation in the community reflects its willingness to taking risks and share shortcomings and learning opportunities with others. Inequities and disparities exist in Dane County, and GHC-SCW wants to be a leader in implementing solutions for eliminating those inequities and disparities in health care.

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