

Principles into Practice

Employer Role

Supported by the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, *Raising the Bar* provides an actionable framework for the entire healthcare sector to embed equity and excellence throughout its work. In this first part of the project the **National Alliance to impact the Social Determinants of Health** (NASDOH) convened extensive discussions with providers, hospitals, payers, and community leaders to develop foundational principles, essential roles, and concrete actions for the sector to help achieve optimal health for all. A second part, led by the National Partnership for Women & Families, is exploring more detailed guidance for maternal health.

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Principles into Practice:

Employer Role

Raising the Bar's five principles provide the foundation for transformational action by healthcare payers, providers, and other organizations. *Raising the Bar* describes four essential roles played by healthcare, providing a framework for how the principles can be put into practice.

This section focuses on healthcare's role as an EMPLOYER, including the essential role payers and other organizations play in facilitating the provision of healthcare, and outlines concrete actions, each with a commitment that healthcare can make to advance equity and excellence, and a set of tactical strategies.

Following the Roles and Actions, there are a set of vignettes which highlight examples of organizations already advancing efforts in line with those actions outlined in the EMPLOYER role. There is also a set of resources for healthcare stakeholders looking for a place to begin or to amplify ongoing work in this role area. An aggregated set of the *Raising the Bar* [Resources](#) is available.

EMPLOYER ROLE

Employ and Support a Diverse Health Workforce

The delivery of care and health outcomes are improved when the workforce and leadership reflect the diversity of the communities served. As employers, healthcare organizations should model practices that allow their workers to thrive.

Healthcare's Actions

Action 4 Invest in and grow leaders who advance and embed equity, quality, and value across the organization.

Healthcare's Commitment

Develop healthcare leaders who work to offer high-quality care while dismantling existing structures of inequity within the healthcare system. Leaders ensure their own organization's strategies, policies, and practices focus on allowing all individuals, families, and communities a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

Why this action is included

Progress towards health equity requires leaders with expertise, skills, and a personal commitment to advancing equity at all levels of their organizations, including the equitable delivery of care, organizational policies and programs, community engagement, advocacy, and investment.

Putting this action into practice

- Establish a culture and practice whereby organizational leaders participate in ongoing training to strengthen their understanding of the ways in which health is impacted by and healthcare perpetuates inequities.
- Enhance the ability of organizational leaders to identify and seize opportunities for transformation. This includes but is not limited to implicit bias training, quality improvement training, and how payment strategies can be used to advance equity.
- Challenge leaders to commit to being agents of change and to develop strategic plans to create equity within the organization, improve equity and excellence of healthcare covered or provided, and improve health equity for individuals, their families, and communities.
- Identify opportunities for employees at all levels of the organization to embody their leadership potential. Create inclusive and equitable pathways for growth and development that can help to bring people who are deeply committed to equity into the highest levels of leadership.
- Equip all healthcare workers with a range of tools, resources, and opportunities to continually develop their skills and expertise in addressing equity and quality, particularly as it impacts the delivery of care and patients' experience with healthcare.

Action 5 Employ and cultivate a representative workforce at all levels.

Healthcare's Commitment

Employ care teams and a workforce—including leadership, health professionals, institutional support staff, and personnel at all levels—who reflect the diversity of the places and populations served. Foster opportunities for training in equity, diversity, inclusion, and antiracism, and develop workforce pathways from, or that include, diverse communities.

Why this action is included

A diverse, representative workforce is better able to meet the needs of the many individuals who need services from healthcare organizations and institutions. Positive and more equitable health outcomes are more likely to be realized by communities served by diverse and representative clinical and non-clinical healthcare workers.

The current workforce has less racial, ethnic, and gender diversity at the executive-level, while entry-level or less skilled positions overwhelmingly contribute to diversity metrics. Employers should seek to ensure that diversity is consistent across the career lattice in addition to fostering diverse organizational leaders and executives.

Putting this action into practice

- Develop and deploy comprehensive strategies to improve recruitment, hiring, growth, retention, and promotion of workers traditionally underrepresented in the workforce (including people of color, women, and workers with disabilities).
- Ensure that increasing and sustaining a diverse workforce is a key organizational priority and that processes, including inclusive mentorship programs, foster equity and reduce potential bias.
- Invest in local education systems, including middle and high schools, thereby directly investing in pathways for the future workforce and providing mentorship and other resources to develop a talent pool for healthcare.

- Partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU), the Asian Pacific Islander American Association of Colleges and Universities (APIACU), the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), and community colleges and community-based organizations to advance recruitment, retention, and promotion of a diverse workforce.
- Appropriately train the workforce so that they can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate, respectful, and equitable care. This includes but is not limited to racial equity training, or training on providing trauma-informed or culturally congruent care.
- Evaluate and update medical and health profession curricula to focus on the role of health professionals in advancing the *Raising the Bar* Principles and Actions.

Action 6 Create and sustain workplaces and jobs where employees can be healthy, thrive, and help guide effective and equitable care while feeling safe.

Healthcare's Commitment

Provide employees with fair pay, a living wage, and a supportive and comprehensive benefits package. Create and support career development and pathways to ensure diversity at all levels. Ensure the voices of employees are respected and integral to the management of the institution.

Why this action is included

Healthcare organizations cannot fully realize their potential in building equity and addressing adverse social determinants of health if they leave their workforce behind. Healthcare organizations of all types need to look internally and ensure the health and well-being of employees and use their standing in the community to serve as a model employer.

Further, this has tangible benefits to the institution and its services—employees that are healthy and economically secure are best positioned to deliver effective care and contribute to the health and well-being of those they serve. They are more likely to remain in their roles enabling healthcare organizations and institutions to retain talent, promote continuity of operations, and reduce burnout and worker exploitation. Institutions also benefit from bringing the firsthand experience of their workforce into decision-making processes.

Putting this action into practice

- Provide fair pay to all employees at all levels of the organization by ending wage discrimination by race, gender, or other factors.
- Offer a living wage with a comprehensive benefits package, which at a minimum should include paid sick and comprehensive family leave, support for childcare and elder care, accommodations for pregnancy and breastfeeding, and mental health and wellness services.
- Protect healthcare employees from infection and emergencies through security, training, access to vaccines and personal protective equipment, and communications in languages appropriate to the employees. Create a safe working environment that is free of violence and harassment.
- Create professional advancement opportunities and resources to help staff (particularly those traditionally underrepresented) expand their expertise and credentials or evolve their roles and networks within the organization.

- Engage employees at all levels of the organization to ensure that these insights are central to decision-making. This can positively impact care delivery as the healthcare workforce has firsthand knowledge and brings valuable insights and perspectives on the policies and practices that affect individuals, families, and communities.

Action 7 **Leverage procurement to ensure the diversity and well-being of contract workers.**

Healthcare's Commitment

Use contracting and purchasing power to ensure that all those working in healthcare organizations and institutions have the same security and opportunity as those who are direct employees and that contracted organizations prioritize diversity and equity.

Why this action is included

The healthcare workforce includes many people who are not direct employees of the institution itself. Increasingly, contractual arrangements are used for services that range from facilities and support services to physician groups or carve-out medical or mental health services. These workers are equally important to the diversity of the overall workforce and are essential to the functioning of healthcare institutions. Healthcare organizations have the same responsibility to these workers as to their own employees and the same opportunity to serve as a model employer for other businesses.

Putting this action into practice

- Encourage transparency in the bidding process by requiring contractors and vendors to disclose compensation and demographic data of their workforce by role in proposals.
- Include provisions requiring nondiscrimination and fair treatment of employees in contracting requirements to ensure that contracted workers are treated fairly and justly.
- Ask contractors to provide information about workforce diversity, and about pay and benefits offered to employees by role, and ensure these align with the organization's own policies and offerings.

Employer Role: Vignettes

Partnership Health Center

Set on the traditional homelands of the Séliš, Qíispé, and Ktunaxa-Ksanka nations, in an area that is still home to many indigenous people, Partnership Health Center (PHC) is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) serving more than 15,000 patients from Missoula and surrounding rural counties in Montana.

PHC is a lifeline in an area where economic challenges and provider shortage areas make it difficult for many to access healthcare. Many area residents can't afford health insurance, or work for small companies that do not offer it. Twenty-two percent of Missoula's residents have no health insurance and seven percent experience homelessness.

PHC was formed 30 years ago to fill the void of affordable primary care. The aim has always been to provide care to promote optimal health and well-being for all through comprehensive, patient-focused, accessible, and equitable care.

PHC's approach to health equity and justice starts with its staff. PHC created "5 Domains & Goals" as an explicit commitment to diversity, retention, engagement, and development of its workforce. One of the five goals, "Joy at Work," seeks to achieve high levels of engagement through recruiting, developing, connecting, and compensating talented staff to provide safe and culturally affirming care to its patients. PHC uses Baldrige Gap surveys, a type of organizational performance self-assessment, to gauge staff engagement annually.

To support staff, PHC builds strong teams where all members can thrive. This includes maximizing the inclusion of staff at the table, providing a living wage for all, and investing in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and anti-racism training and growth strategies. It also means staff enrichment and self-care opportunities. Recent efforts include making childcare and a childcare navigator available to staff, establishing a medical assistant ladder program to grow internal skill sets, and setting aside time at the start of both large and small meetings, so that staff have space to discuss equity, racism, and gratitude regularly.

PHC's commitment to health justice goes beyond its physical walls. PHC encourages staff at all levels to engage in both the self-work and institutional work necessary to identify and address racism in their health center and community at large. To facilitate this, PHC created a DEI & Antiracism Committee, which includes staff from PHC with representation across departments, and the Family Medicine Residency of Western Montana, as well as members of the health center's consumer board and representatives from the county.

This committee is working to drive culture change, with antiracist policies and practices throughout all domains of work, including hiring and human resources policies and practices, staff training, community partnerships, provision of healthcare services, and PHC's policy and advocacy work. Its work is changing the dynamics of the organization and has led to the invitation of experts on antiracism, privilege, and power in healthcare to present at strategic planning meetings to help inform PHC's work moving forward.

Rush University Medical Center

Rush University Medical Center (Rush) is the flagship hospital for the Rush University System for Health, a leading academic health system located in the West Side of Chicago. The local community is racially diverse and predominantly working class. A long history of systemic racism led to policies and practices that resulted in a lack of investment in the surrounding community and its residents.

Historically, West Side community residents have had limited access to local educational opportunities and jobs that pay a living wage. High rates of poverty have greatly impacted health. Rush's 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment identified that the average life expectancy of West Side residents was 16 years shorter than residents of the wealthier downtown Loop District, just five miles away.

As the largest nongovernmental employer in the area, leaders at Rush felt a responsibility to leverage the institution's economic power to improve the overall health of their surrounding communities. Rush implemented an Anchor Mission strategy, which includes four initiatives (hire local, buy local, invest local, and Rush local) that aim to improve the economic well-being of West Side communities. Understanding local barriers to employment and the importance of community involvement, Rush has worked with multiple community-based workforce organizations to recruit, train, and retain local employees, growing a diverse health workforce. Since the formal implementation of its Anchor Mission strategy in 2017, Rush has hired 1,200 employees from the West Side.

Rush also invests in developing and mentoring future healthcare leaders from the surrounding community. Since the introduction of its Anchor Mission work, Rush created West Side Anchor Committee, a six-institution collaborative (spearheaded alongside Lurie Children's Hospital, AMITA Health, Cook County Health, UI Health, and Sinai) that seeks to improve economic well-being on the West Side of Chicago by leveraging the resources of large local employers. Collectively, the six healthcare organizations hire nearly 6,000 new employees and purchase close to \$3 billion towards goods and services every year. West Side United has instituted a myriad of education, training, and funding initiatives that help increase local residents' access to jobs, contracts, and economic growth opportunities—and in turn, increase its own access to community talent.

To learn more, visit [West Side United](#) and see [Rush's Anchor Mission Playbook](#).

Employer Role: Resources

[A CEO Blueprint for Racial Equity - Inside the Organization, Within the Community, and Broader Society](#)

FSG, PolicyLink, JUST Capital (2020)

- This blueprint provides corporate leaders actions to support racial equity by redesigning their “business-as-usual” practices and policies. The actions are organized in three key domains: 1) inside the company, 2) within the communities where the companies are headquartered and conduct business, and 3) at the broader societal level.

[A Design Thinking, Systems Approach to Well-Being Within Education and Practice: Proceedings of a Workshop](#)

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018)

- This resource details the proceedings of a workshop to explore systems-level causes and downstream effects of job-related stress affecting all health professions working in learning environments, both in clinical and classroom settings. The workshop identified examples that demonstrate how different professions cope with the stresses of educating health professionals under current health and educational structures, and how adjustments in policies and incentives might move organizations to adopt a more welcoming environment for testing and implementing individual stress-reduction and resilience-building strategies.

[Advancing Workforce Equity](#)

National Equity Atlas (2021)

- The Advancing Workforce Equity project is a multi-year collaboration between the National Equity Atlas, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and Burning Glass Technologies, which includes two national reports and ten local reports with disaggregated data on racial inequities in the workforce.

[Amplifying Black Voices: What Healthcare Organizations Can do to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workforce](#)

Deloitte (2021)

- This resource summarizes Deloitte's recent research showing that improving DEI in the workforce can support quality of care and financial performance goals. The research found that addressing racism and other biases can give organizations a competitive advantage, helping them attract the best talent and elevate their brand and reputation.

[Creating a More Human Workplace Where Employees and Business Thrive](#)

Society for Human Resources Management Foundation (2016)

- This resource discusses how employers can achieve valuable outcomes by focusing on creating a more human, caring workplace that promotes people's strengths, capabilities, and functioning, leading to elevated levels of engagement, productivity, satisfaction, and retention.

[Creating a Safe Space: Psychological Safety of Healthcare Workers](#)

Healthcare Excellence Canada (2020)

- This resource is intended to assist healthcare organizations in supporting healthcare workers by creating peer-to-peer support programs (PSPs) or other models of support to improve the emotional well-being of healthcare workers and allow them to provide the best and safest care to their patients.

Diversity and Inclusiveness in Healthcare Leadership: Three Key Steps

New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst Innovations in Care Delivery (2021)

- This resource offers three recommendations for healthcare leaders and their boards to improve diversity in their workforce and hospital leadership.

Employer Toolkit: Work Design for Health

The Work and Well-Being Initiative (n.d.)

- This toolkit is designed to help employers create workplace conditions which foster the health and well-being of all workers in an inclusive manner. It is composed of a number of modules that explore the Work Design for Health approach to worker well-being.

Health Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Measures for Hospitals and Health System Dashboards

American Hospital Association (2020)

- This document serves as a tool for hospitals and healthcare systems to develop health equity, diversity, and inclusion dashboards to measure opportunities and improvements as they address inequities and reduce disparities in their communities.

Inclusive Local Hiring: Building the Pipeline to a Healthy Community

Healthcare Anchor Network (2019)

- This toolkit offers a guide for how healthcare systems can leverage hiring practices to advance inclusive, local job creation and career development for communities experiencing the greatest health and wealth disparities.

Investing in Workplace Breastfeeding Programs and Policies

National Business Group on Health, Center for Prevention and Health Services (2008, adapted)

- This toolkit includes specific information on setting up a lactation room, storing milk, and cleaning the room, and explains how to promote support for breastfeeding workers from co-workers and supervisors. In addition, it shares case studies examining program components and program impact across different companies, and provides tools for employers including a sample policy and sample timeline, and even program evaluation surveys.

Lessons from the Workplace: Caregiving During COVID-19

National Alliance for Caregiving (2021)

- This resource shares experiences from working caregivers and recommends solutions, like job flexibilities, that help caregivers manage and employers retain talent. It includes a comprehensive list of additional resources for further learning.

Making it Work: Tool Kit

Work Well NC (n.d.)

- This guide outlines employers' legal obligations and includes a checklist for employers to use when an employee requests lactation accommodations as well as tips for providing lactation accommodations in non-office environments, including retail stores and construction sites.

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard)

Mental Health Commission of Canada (2013, reaffirmed 2018)

- The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) – the first of its kind in the world, is a set of voluntary guidelines, tools and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.

Paid Leave: Workplace Policy

Paid Leave for the United States (n.d.)

- The resource offers an FAQ on paid leave, a toolkit and template proposal to achieve a quality paid family leave policy, cost benefit analysis resources, and paid family and medical leave trends.

Pursuing Paid Family and Medical Leave

Better Life Lab, New America (2020)

- The resource includes a collection of reports, articles, and resources on paid family and medical leave as well as a story series and a collection of recent events, hearings, and writings that call for action on paid family and medical leave.

Race-Explicit Strategies for Workforce Equity in Healthcare and Information Technology (IT)

Race Forward (2017)

- The report identifies major internal and external barriers to greater adoption of race-explicit strategies for equity in the workforce development field, including racial bias and discrimination, limited tracking of racial disparities and outcomes, and a lack of services to support low-income workers of color.

Ready for Equity in Workforce Development: Racial Equity Readiness Assessment Tool

Race Forward (2018)

- This resource is designed as a guide for workforce development organizations and practitioners to evaluate their programs, operations, and culture in order to identify strength areas and growth opportunities. Practitioners can use this toolkit to familiarize themselves with various practices and policies that support institutional racial equity, evaluate their current efforts, and plan action steps.

Strategies to Support CHW Sustainability

Health Leads (2019)

- This resource utilizes perspectives from three organizations that have taken a creative approach to their community-facing workforce to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to sustaining community health worker (CHW) roles in clinical settings and identify strategies to mitigate those challenges.

Strengthening accountability for discrimination: Confronting fundamental power imbalances in the employment relationship

Economic Policy Institute (2021)

- This resource outlines solutions to confront power and information asymmetries in the workplace that create more powerful incentives for employers to adopt practices designed to prevent discrimination, audit systems for bias, and proactively correct problems. Additionally, it details how government enforcement agencies can vindicate workers' rights by strengthening relationships with stakeholders to help identify patterns of violations and barriers to compliance.

What Can I Do to Promote a Culture of Pay Equity

California Pay Equity Task Force, California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (2018)

- This guide walks through actions employers can take to promote pay equity, including improving the hiring process and compensation structures, training managers, implementing compensation reviews, and offering paid leave.



**Raising
the Bar**
Healthcare's Transforming Role

2022