

# A Framework for Promoting Equity and Excellence in Healthcare

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

The United States has many of the assets needed for a healthier nation, including wealth, committed health providers, and technology. The healthcare field includes bright spots where innovative organizations are transforming the payment and delivery of care and strengthening engagement with and service to communities. But broad transformation remains too slow and often focused on narrow fixes to the most visible problems; the healthcare system, as it has evolved, is not delivering on key health goals, frustrates many of its participants, and often fails those most in need. The COVID-19 public health emergency and the national reckoning over equity and racial justice have amplified the importance and opportunity for change and shows the need for a new path for healthcare in recovering from the scope of overwhelming need.

*Raising the Bar: Healthcare's Transforming Role* is a framework and call to action for the healthcare sector to embrace all the levers, resources, and opportunities available to advance equity and excellence. At the heart of the framework are five foundational principles for a transformed healthcare system. To put these principles into practice, healthcare organizations need to take action across four primary roles, and 14 specific actions are defined. The *Raising the Bar* report highlights organizations already embracing these principles and taking action and incorporates a set of curated resources to support all healthcare stakeholders in pursuing this work.

## Five Foundational Principles for Equity and Excellence

The project generated five principles that put the priorities of individuals, families, and communities at the center of healthcare. They were informed by discussion with those who give, get, and pay for care. *Raising the Bar* seeks to accelerate healthcare's efforts to achieve health equity, and to improve the healthcare experience and well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

### *Raising the Bar: Foundational Principles*

The principles are at the heart of *Raising the Bar* and outline commitments for healthcare to comprehensively and holistically raise the bar for equity and excellence. The principles are neither intended to be mutually exclusive nor expressed in any priority order.

- **Mission:** Commit Above All to a Mission of Improving Health and Well-being
- **Equity:** Systematically Pursue Health Equity, Racial Justice, and the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
- **Community:** Serve the Community as an Engaged, Responsive, and Proactive Partner
- **Power:** Share and Effectively Use Resources, Influence, and Power
- **Trust:** Earn and Sustain Trusting Relationships

These principles are designed for stakeholders who provide care, including individual clinicians or healthcare professionals, mental and behavioral health providers, provider and physician groups, hospitals, hospital systems, community health centers, integrated systems, those who pay for care—including public and private payers, and those who help facilitate the delivery and payment of physical, mental, behavioral, and social care and services.

## Roles and Actions to Put the Principles into Practice

While multiple sectors must work together to address the issues that drive health, *Raising the Bar* focuses on the unique and important roles healthcare possesses across the spectrum: from payment and delivery of care to individuals and their families to promoting the health of employees and communities.

The project defined four essential roles played by healthcare, providing a framework for putting the principles into practice. Within each role, there are concrete actions. In total, there are 14 actions, each with a commitment that healthcare organizations and institutions can make to advance equity and excellence, a statement of the action's importance, and a set of tactical strategies.

### PROVIDER ROLE **Provide Whole-Person Care to Achieve Health Equity**

Achieving equity and excellence is grounded in the ability of individuals to access and receive the full range of affordable care they need and experience being treated with dignity and respect.

**Action 1** **Actively promote and facilitate access to care for all in ways that accommodate diverse life circumstances and needs.**

**Action 2** **Establish and sustain a trusting environment where everyone feels they are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect.**

**Action 3** **Provide holistic, effective, high-quality care responsive to plans co-created with individuals, families, and caregivers.**

### 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.

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

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

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

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

## **PARTNER ROLE**

### **Engage with Individuals and Organizations in the Community, Prioritizing Those Most Affected by Inequities**

Communities thrive—and healthcare delivery is more effective—when healthcare meaningfully involves communities; respects and centers their expertise, needs, and priorities in governance and decision-making; and works in partnership with individuals and organizations in the community on activities and initiatives that reflect that engagement.

**Action 8**      **Meaningfully involve individuals from the community in governance and decision-making.**

**Action 9**      **Build trusting relationships with individuals and organizations in the community.**

**Action 10**     **Respect and build on the expertise and power of individuals and organizations in the community.**

## **ADVOCATE ROLE**

### **Advocate for and Invest in Health Equity**

Healthcare's economic resources and influence can be harnessed as positive forces for payment reform, community well-being and resilience, and equity.

**Action 11**     **Actively push for and adopt payment reforms, especially reforms that align investments with the mission of improving health and well-being.**

**Action 12**     **Use healthcare's voice to shape public understanding about the importance of health equity and dismantling racism and all forms of discrimination.**

**Action 13**     **Use power and influence to advocate for health equity in the development and implementation of public policies.**

**Action 14**     **Use investment and procurement power to contribute to the health and resilience of communities.**

## The Path Forward: What Can You Do to Raise the Bar?

Healthcare can lead the way with a commitment to *Raising the Bar's* principles, and by taking the concrete actions described in this report.

- **Make a commitment.** We call upon leaders in healthcare—institutions, clinicians, payers—to make a commitment to incorporate the *Raising the Bar* framework in their organizational strategy and practice. For some, this is a starting point in the journey toward the system we need. For the many already seeking or making transformational change, it is an opportunity for further and sustained efforts to raise the bar and accelerate change.
- **Share or adapt our framework for your networks.** We also encourage others to adapt or refine the *Raising the Bar* framework for their own unique circumstances, and to help carry this work forward in their own networks. At [rtbhealthcare.org](http://rtbhealthcare.org), you can learn more about how many are already responding to this call.
- **Take immediate action while seeking broader changes.** Finally, we emphasize the importance of taking immediate and constructive steps while participating in broader efforts to reform public and private payment systems. Healthcare can both lead the effort to improve the experience of individuals and communities now, while simultaneously advocating for broader systems change that will make this transformation sustainable.
- **[Watch for detailed maternal health guidance.](#)** Part Two of the *Raising the Bar* project focuses on applying the *Raising the Bar* principles and actions to maternal health. This guidance will be available at [rtbhealthcare.org](http://rtbhealthcare.org) in early 2023.



**My aspiration for this project is to change healthcare in a fundamental way. I'd like to be able to look back and say we changed the way we think about health—away from a just the process of being cared for to one where in fact, we prevent poor health."**

**Governor Michael O. Leavitt**, *Raising the Bar* Stewardship Council Co-Convener,  
Former Governor of Utah and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services



**Raising  
the Bar**

Healthcare's Transforming Role