

Taking Action to Raise the Bar

Community Health Centers

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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Community Health Centers

Community health centers are critical to the *Raising the Bar* mission

The health center movement, born during the Civil Rights Movement and rooted in community-based models of providing comprehensive, equitable services for all, uniquely understands the various roles healthcare must play to ensure individuals, families and communities can thrive. As the medical home for more than 29 million people, many of whom are members of special populations, uninsured, underinsured, and underserved, community health centers are exceptionally positioned to demonstrate the impact that is possible when provider organizations embrace the *Raising the Bar* framework. In fact, *Raising the Bar* was influenced by powerful and innovative examples from community health centers pushing the needle to advance health equity in their communities. While the health center model and the *Raising the Bar* framework have many shared charges, adoption of *Raising the Bar* Principles, Roles, and Actions allows health centers to be at the forefront of the transformation envisioned by *Raising the Bar*.

Community health centers have unique roles and responsibilities

Every type of healthcare organization has a role to play in raising the bar—in their own organization and in support of others. For community health centers, as with others, this starts with an organizational commitment to a mission of improving health and well-being, and to institutionalize health equity as part of their organizational strategy. These commitments need to be executed through a diverse, sustainable, and well-supported workforce. Organizations of all sizes can adopt strategies for how they engage with and support communities through procurement, investment, and power sharing.

Community health centers, health center look-alikes, and their partners have unique opportunities and responsibilities in furthering the work of *Raising the Bar*. Many community health centers are already taking up many of the specific *Raising the Bar* Actions and can lend their support and encouragement to the broader healthcare system. Others can assess their own progress and identify new opportunities to address the full range of *Raising the Bar*'s principles, roles, and actions.

The following highlights draw from the 14 actions included in *Raising the Bar* and provide a starting point for health centers hoping to raise the bar for their patients and communities:

1) Addressing equity and excellence in individual interactions with patients.

- Establish and sustain a trusting environment where everyone feels they are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect—providing culturally and linguistically congruent care, recognizing and addressing community histories of distrust and harm, and breaking down barriers to receiving care. These efforts are ongoing and may include regular assessment of and response to patient and community feedback; investing in additional community outreach activities to build a rapport with community members and gather feedback; investing in implicit bias training for all staff; ensuring that all phone and patient-portal services provide language options appropriate for the diverse communities you serve.
- Provide holistic, effective, high-quality care responsive to plans co-created with individuals, families, and caregivers. For example, this may involve exploring the provision of spiritual and cultural care in conjunction with traditional medical and social interventions, either at your health center or through partnerships.

2) **Supporting the workforce of health centers and developing employees who can champion equity and excellence.**

- Invest in and grow leaders who advance and embed equity, quality, and value across the organization, providing opportunities for growth and professional development, and creating succession plans that assure equity and diversity in future leadership.
- Employ and cultivate a representative workforce at all levels, working with training programs and other healthcare organizations to develop workforce pipelines in the communities they serve.
- Create and sustain workplaces and jobs where employees can be healthy, thrive, and help guide effective and equitable care, providing a livable wage to all employees and contractors and working to include supports such as mental health and wellness services, childcare services, etc.
- Leverage procurement to ensure the diversity and well-being of contract workers, ensuring that all working in health centers have security and opportunity and that contractors prioritize diversity and equity.

3) **Demonstrating what meaningful community partnership and power sharing can look like.**

- Build and maintain trusting relationships with individuals and organizations in the community, fostering long-term, collaborative partnerships that benefit the places we operate in and the individuals we serve.
- Ensure there are equitable memorandum of understandings in place with community partners, honor commitments, and ensure your health center is not duplicating efforts that already exist in the community.
- Respect and build on the expertise and power of individuals and organizations in the community—elevating the role of individuals and advocates from “engagement” to partnership and community leadership.
- For programs that involve community partners and community-member participation, consider how new and existing programs include community voices in key decision-making roles, and how future programs can be co-created with those your health center aims to serve.
- Build the visibility of community organizations doing this work.

4) **Engaging as an advocate in interactions with other healthcare organizations and leaders in the community.**

- Help other organizations recognize the value of community health centers' (CHC) community engagement, and the roles that community members play on CHC boards.
- Participate in collective, community-wide needs assessment efforts with other healthcare organizations and public health agencies to identify joint initiatives to address community needs and priorities.
- Join or help establish coalitions that can advocate for policy change at the community level.
- Actively push for and adopt payment reforms, especially reforms that align investments with the mission of improving health and well-being. Working alongside your state primary care association and other member organizations to create a unified health center voice helps advance these efforts.
- Use your health center's voice to shape public understanding about the importance of health equity and dismantling racism and all forms of discrimination. Acknowledge historic and current patterns of racism in healthcare and society, and advocate for sustainable and equitable conditions in the community.
- CHCs are often providing services to those most affected by structural and political determinants of health and can point to demonstrable health outcomes that result from these structures and policies, making them compelling advocates for change. Use your power and influence to advocate for health equity in the development and implementation of public policies, providing insight into housing, transportation, and environmental justice impacts on health outcomes.
- Use investment and procurement power to contribute to the health and resilience of communities. For example, prioritize local purchasing, take steps to create wealth in communities, and invest in social determinants of health interventions.

Resources for Community Health Centers That Want to Raise the Bar

Community health centers of all types are already taking many of the steps to raise the bar for their communities, but there are still opportunities for health centers, large and small, to advance their efforts. See examples of health centers *Raising the Bar* in the [Framework in Practice: Bright Spots](#) and the chapters on the four *Raising the Bar* Roles: [Provider](#), [Employer](#), [Partner](#), and [Advocate](#).

The following are a set of curated resources particularly relevant for community health centers looking for a place to start, or to accelerate ongoing work aligning with the *Raising the Bar* Actions. To see the full set of *Raising the Bar* resources, visit the [Resources chapter](#).

[Training for Health Center Professionals](#)

National Association of Community Health Centers (n.d.)

- The National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) was a key partner in developing the *Raising the Bar* Principles, Roles, and Actions. On their website, NACHC offers training and technical assistance and will continue to develop resources to support health centers as they adopt the *Raising the Bar* framework.

[Protocol for Responding to & Assessing Patients' Assets, Risks & Experiences \(PRAPARE\)](#)

NACHC and Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) (n.d.)

- The Protocol for Responding to & Assessing Patients' Assets, Risks & Experiences (PRAPARE) is a standardized tool that supports healthcare and their community partners to better understand and act on individuals' social determinants of health. The assessment is accompanied by an implementation and action toolkit and empowers users to improve health equity at the individual, community, and systems levels. Find additional social determinants of health (SDOH) resources and stories from the field of health centers and primary care associations pioneering SDOH and health equity-related work.

[Health Center Resource Clearinghouse](#)

Health Resources and Services Administration National Resource Center (NRC) for Training and Technical Assistance (n.d.)

- The NRC provides training and technical assistance on a range of topics including [governance](#), [social determinants of health](#), [special and vulnerable populations](#), [value-based healthcare transformation](#), and the [workforce](#). The NRC is regularly updated.

[Education & Training](#)

The Fenway Institute (n.d.)

- The Fenway Institute offers health center-related resources, including educational programs, resources, and consultation to healthcare organizations, on providing quality, cost-effective healthcare for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and all sexual and gender minority (LGBTQIA+) people.

[Training and Services](#)

Association for Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) (n.d.)

- AAPCHO offers health center-related support and resources for supporting Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. Find a set of webinars, learning collaboratives, initiatives, and opportunities for consultation available on the AAPCHO website.



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

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