

The health equity index

How health plans can get ahead of the curve



The pursuit of health equity is one of the most pressing challenges facing healthcare today.¹

Social determinants of health (SDOH), such as education level and employment, play a huge role in a patient's health outcomes.² Now, there is a dedicated measurement system to assess how plans are helping achieve health equity.

In 2022, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) updated their framework for the Health Equity Index (HEI) to help health plans, particularly Medicare Advantage (MA) ones, revitalize their health equity strategies.³ The HEI will be incorporated into the Star ratings in 2027, so it is important for plans to start preparing their strategies right away.^{4,5,6}

Within the recently updated framework for the Health Equity index, **CMS will focus on 5 key priority areas³:**



Expanding data strategies and systems



Assessment of disparities across programs and policies



Building workforce and organizational capacity



Advancing language access



Increasing accessibility of healthcare services³

To advance health equity, CMS recommends building, strengthening, and expanding data strategies and systems surrounding demographic information and SDOH through using screening tools.^{2,6} These tools can help MA plans identify members facing barriers due to SDOH. In turn, they can provide targeted support and resources to improve health outcomes.⁸



Navigating the data dilemma

Data is an industry-wide challenge in healthcare.⁹ Despite so much available data, most of it is hard to share and use because in many cases, it lacks interoperability, completeness, or relevance.^{10,11} Because of this, MA plans may face decision-making challenges when it comes to getting a complete understanding of their members' health.

This means that MA plans must invest in technologies that can break down data silos and gather useful, micro-level insight. Improving data infrastructure can shed light on valuable information that can enhance plans' health equity strategies, such as identifying the specific factors that put members at risk of conditions.^{12,13,14} By implementing this cohesive data-driven strategy, MA plans may advance health equity, improve quality of care, reduce costs, and improve health outcomes.



The goal of strategic data implementation is to be able to analyze and act on reliable data that is relevant, real-time, and interconnected. It signifies a move from fractured care to personalized healthcare, relying on evolved data technologies plus a culture of data-driven decision-making.

Customizing screening tools for precision

Utilizing and optimizing the SDOH screening tools used to identify members at risk can help plans provide targeted interventions and support to improve their health outcomes. While pre-existing tools like PRAPARE® provide a good foundation, customizing the tool to member needs can make it more impactful.^{13,15,16}

Collaboration with digital patient engagement platforms can usher in a new era of personalized screening because of their focus on relationship-oriented and person-level care. This enables a new lens for insight, one that considers the nuances of demographics, socioeconomic factors, and cultural sensitivities. Through customization and collaboration, MA plans can transform SDOH screenings from routine processes into compassionate interactions that embody patient-centered care.²



Digital patient engagement platform



Relationship-oriented care



Nuanced, personalized screening

- Demographics
- Socioeconomic factors
- Cultural sensitivities
- Customization & collaboration

It's worth noting that in deploying screening tools, plans must carefully consider how member trust can impact uptake. Members want to know why their data has been collected, how it will be used, and most importantly, how it benefits them directly.^{12,17} Instituting measures that can build a foundation of consistency and trust with members is essential to ensuring they feel secure and safe in taking the actions asked of them.

Leveraging technology for seamless integration

Harnessing the power of digital tools can build stronger lines of communication between providers and members while building enriched patient profiles with real-time data.¹⁸ By leveraging technologies that enhance interoperability, MA plans can transcend geographical boundaries and provide more timely yet accessible care to members. Seamless integration ensures that every piece of information helps contribute to an enhanced patient experience.

Pack Health works to provide health plans with a unique all-in-one solution that can help:

- ✓ Screen members for social need
- ✓ Provide condition-specific health coaching
- ✓ Direct members to SDOH-related resources (such as Instacart Health™ and Quest Diagnostics® Lab Services)

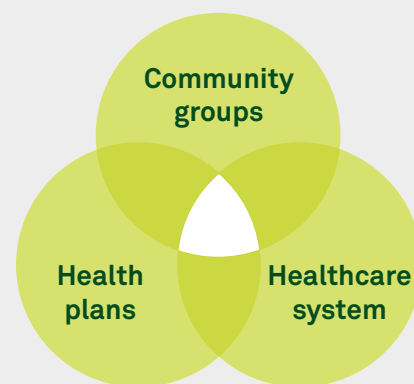
A call to collaborative action

Achieving health equity through Medicare Advantage plans is a team effort. It requires collaboration between health plans and the entire healthcare system.¹⁹ By working with community organizations, local healthcare providers, and government agencies, MA plans can make a bigger impact.¹⁹

The path ahead to make healthcare more equitable is challenging yet promising. Through strategic data implementation, transparent communication, and collaborative efforts, Medicare Advantage plans can not only meet the requirements of the Health Equity Index but exceed them.^{12,17,19} **By acting now, MA plans can demonstrate their commitment to health equity and improving the health of their members.**



Achieving health equity through cross-collaboration



Pooling resources and expertise can help MA plan leaders understand community needs, improve data collection, and ensure cultural sensitivity.

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Pack Health is an evidence-based patient engagement platform that helps change health behaviors to close gaps in care and improve outcomes. Pack Health comprehensively addresses chronic conditions, comorbidities, social determinants, and barriers. The model is proven to drive results across industries, including life sciences, health plans, and research. For more information on Pack Health's health plan offerings, visit packhealth.com/health-plans.

In 2022, Pack Health was [acquired by Quest Diagnostics](#), the nation's leading provider of diagnostic information services. Pack Health is part of Quest's Extended Care portfolio of services designed to facilitate access to care beyond traditional healthcare settings. Quest annually serves 1 in 3 adult Americans and half the physicians and hospitals in the United States.

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