



NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION

to End Health Disparities

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Southwest Regional Health Equity Council 'Blueprint' Highlights Health Disparities in the Southwestern United States

San Antonio, TX, April 7th, 2016 — The Southwest region of the United States is disproportionately affected by adult obesity, diabetes and infant mortality, while Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma have substantially higher heart disease death rates than the national average, according to Southwest Regional Health Equity Council's (SWRHEC) [Blueprint for Action](#) that was released today. The region includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

The Blueprint also found that over the next 25 years, the region will be classified as majority –minority, meaning that people of color will exceed the number of non-Hispanic Whites in the region. Recognizing the diversity of the region, the Blueprint calls for bilingual and multi-lingual speakers, as well as English language speakers who can translate medical terminology for lay people to become engaged in the promotion of health equity. The SWRHEC will support efforts to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services and strive to increase health literacy levels for all racial groups in the region.

The SWRHEC will launch a health literacy campaign as part of its efforts to eliminate health disparities. "Health literacy is one's capacity to obtain, process and understand health information and services," said Lovell Jones, SWRHEC councilmember. Health literacy has been a major barrier to accessing health care especially among African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos and immigrants. "Through improving health literacy levels, the SWRHEC can reduce barriers to accessing information that can impact health outcomes," added Mr. Jones. A major component of eliminating health disparities is providing care that is not limited by race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or health literacy levels.

The *Blueprint for Action* found that the region faces key regional challenges and opportunities in relation to demographics and geographic distribution, health and health care disparities, and the impact of specific social determinants of health, such as housing and food security. Key findings in the Blueprint include:

- Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas are among the states in the US with the highest percentages of households with food insecurity.
- Populations most likely to experience low health literacy are older adults, racial and ethnic minorities, people with less than a high school degree or GED certificate, people with low income levels, non-native speakers of English, and people with compromised health status.



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- Hispanics/Latinos workers have the lowest median hourly wages in the region. Thus Hispanics/Latinos workers earn \$5-\$9 less than white workers in all the states in the region
- African Americans have a high overall frequency for living in high-poverty neighborhoods across the five states and the US; the greatest percentage of African Americans living in high-poverty neighborhoods in 2000 was found in Louisiana.
- In the five states within the region, renters had housing costs above 30% of household income with a much greater frequency than did homeowners.

The intention of the blueprint is to encourage stakeholders to identify and implement the strategies and actions most important for their communities to improve health literacy and subsequently health equity. “Health disparities affect us all, regardless of one’s ethnicity, location and/or economic background,” added Jones. “These persistent and pervasive health disparities carry a high societal burden in terms of the loss of valuable resources, such as financial capital, healthy children and families, and workforce capacity.”

The Southwest Health Equity Council is one of 10 regional councils that falls under the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities (NPA) implementation structure. The NPA is a national movement with the mission to increase the effectiveness of programs that target the elimination of health disparities through increased coordination with leaders, stakeholders and supporters across multiple sectors. SWRHEC aims to end health disparities in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. The Council maintains a diverse membership representing several sectors such as state government, higher education, health care delivery, private foundations, community organizations, advocacy groups, volunteer organizations and more.



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