



**Driving toward health equity  
in the communities we serve**



# What is health equity?

Health equity means helping people live their healthiest lives by ensuring they receive the care and support they need to achieve optimal health. This also means eliminating inequalities, or unfair differences, in how people access and receive health care. Also known as health disparities, these inequalities can be based on a person's:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Language
- Income
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity

# Why does health equity matter?

**Health equity is needed before attaining true equality to ensure everyone has access to the health care they need and deserve.**

To support whole-person health and provide affordable care through a personalized experience, we need to address both the cultural and social barriers that often prevent people from receiving the best possible care. According to one study, eliminating racial disparities in health could save \$93 billion per year in excess medical costs.<sup>1</sup>



# Creating a world where every person can live their healthiest life requires an intentional and lasting commitment to advancing health equity.

**Optum was made for this. We lead with compassion and are continually listening, learning and taking action to build trust, remove barriers and tailor support to the unique health needs of individuals and our local communities.**

Our goal is to design simple, effective and comprehensive solutions that benefit everyone, encourage clear communication and empower all people to live their healthiest lives.

The insights we uncover and connections we make are aimed at expanding access and closing gaps in quality and care for everyone. Our ability to evaluate millions of data points and adapt emerging technologies is improving the health experience. We uncover clinical health disparities and are taking action to minimize their effects on efforts to stay healthy, coordinate care, manage illness and pay for services.

We're continuing to develop a diverse workforce that reflects those we serve and establishing a culture of inclusion that is reflected in our products and the partnerships we form.

We enable care providers to deliver better care. Care that is coordinated, predictive and, most importantly, personalized. Care that can elevate the health of whole populations.



Together, we can ensure equal access to affordable, high-quality care and health services to improve health outcomes for all people.

# Building an equitable future, today

Health equity has long been a fundamental part of our mission to deliver whole-person care while reducing cost of care. Today it's an explicit priority, with clear, measurable goals. And we're making progress on those goals every single day. From 2020 to the present, we have:



Served over **127 million** unique members



Provided over **20 million** clinical visits through Optum Care locations



Filled **1.3 billion** prescriptions via OptumRx



Served **2.9 million** veterans and military service members

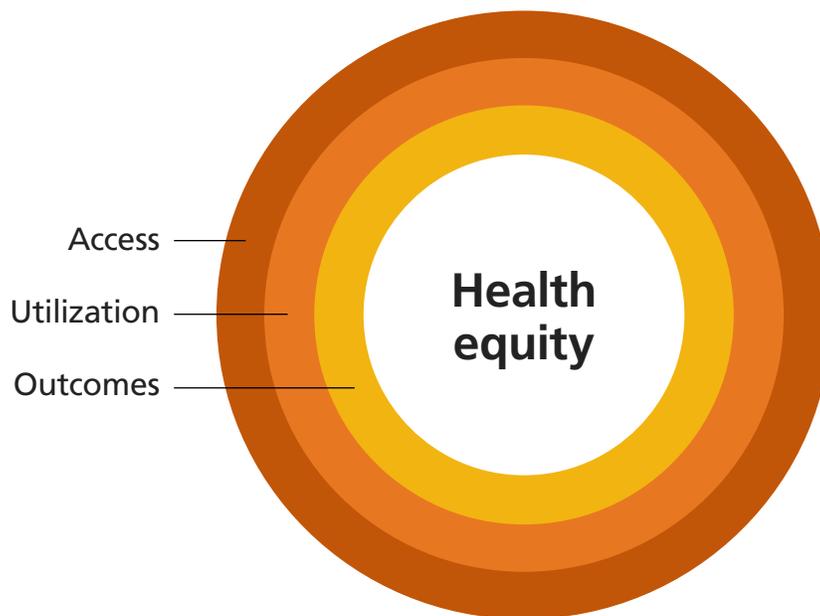


Helped providers complete more than **1.7 million** video visits

Each one of these interactions presents us with an opportunity to deliver fair, equitable and culturally competent care based on individual needs. It's an opportunity to consider the whole person and make a positive difference in their quality of life.

That's an opportunity — and a responsibility — we take very seriously.

Our commitment to health equity has three main components — access, utilization and outcomes. Each builds on the other to guide us toward a more equitable future and make it a reality today.



# Advancing access

## Challenges include:

- Lack of insurance coverage
- Financial status
- Cultural differences
- Communication hurdles
- Lack of transportation
- Other issues that disproportionately impact underserved communities

**These challenges may create obstacles to health equity and result in preventable health disparities.**

Optum is working toward identifying and breaking down barriers that prevent people — all people — from living their healthiest lives.

Our aim is to help everyone receive the best care possible, with an emphasis on understanding individuals' needs, serving communities and embracing our leadership role in innovation and empowerment. All in service to ensuring that quality care is accessible to each and every person we serve.



Here are just a few examples of how Optum is improving health care access for underserved communities and individuals:

## Virtual care broadens access

Optum is investing our breadth of operations and experience in community care models that emphasize meeting people where they are to provide them with the services they need. Our work in virtual care is rapidly broadening the ways in which people can access services.

For instance, OptumRx is addressing pharmacy deserts through telepharmacy and other remote care options. Telepharmacy uses digital communications to deliver medicines from a distance. It can include counseling patients by video and delivering medications to patients at home or in the hospital.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the value of virtual care. To ensure equitable care could continue while people quarantined, Optum launched the Digital Response Team in partnership with Optum Advisory Services in March 2020. This telehealth strategy combined video tools, app-based acute and chronic care management and digital nurse monitoring teams.

The strategy needed to be human-centered and flexible enough to meet the various clinical needs of each practice. And it needed to be able to scale and to embrace diversity.

More than 1.7 million video visits were completed in 2020. That's about 25% of all visits — up from less than 1% in 2019.

We will continue to innovate in redesigning care models and breaking down barriers to access through virtual care blended with in-person services.

**In three months, more than 10,000 physicians were added to video visit platforms, up from fewer than 1,000 pre-COVID-19.**

# Mobile care delivers access where it's needed

Roadblocks to accessing health care include structural barriers such as lack of transportation, inability to find convenient appointment times, technical difficulties and lack of nearby providers.

Optum is creating initiatives and partnerships that enable mobile care to reach people in our communities.

The **Medicine on the Move** mobile care center is bringing care to managed Medicaid patients across northern and southern Nevada who face access barriers. This state-of-the-art medical center travels to schools, charities and other organizations where people need care. It's offered by OptumCare Network of Nevada, Health Plan of Nevada and Sierra Health and Life.

## The results highlight the benefits of this improved access for patient care:

- **4- or 5-star ratings** on 15 of 17 key Quality Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures for Medicare patients
- Provider engagement **improved by 11%** from 2018 to 2020
- **10% lower cost of care** for commercial patients compared to peers

**Medicine on the Move is delivering care to people of all ages, including annual wellness visits and preventative care including mammograms, pediatric wellness checks, sick visits, immunizations, lab tests and X-rays.**



**Optum is also supporting Ascension St. Vincent's Mobile Health.**

They provide access to quality health care for vulnerable and underserved communities in northeast Florida and southern Georgia. The people served by mobile health often lack insurance, financial resources and transportation. They may also face language barriers when trying to access health care through traditional points of entry.

Mobile Health is part of Optum efforts to increase access to medical care, disease management and preventive health education.



**This powerful partnership is making a real difference in the lives of those most in need.**

— Virginia Hall,  
President,  
Ascension St. Vincent's  
Foundation



# Sharing our expertise to promote access

Optum is uniquely positioned to make a difference in improving health care access. Our ability to connect people, health insights and technology positions us as a trusted advisor in the delivery of care. In 2020, we committed \$1 million in pro bono volunteer professional expertise and services to the San Francisco Bay Area's not-for-profit health care system John Muir Health.

This three-year cooperative initiative supports 17 community-based organizations that focus on health access, behavioral health, and food and economic security. Optum employees will be involved in impactful contributions such as:

- Website development and redesign
- Business strategy development
- Marketing and communications
- Grant support and corporate giving strategy
- Financial assessment
- Assessing local behavioral health support services

All these activities are geared toward helping these organizations enhance their commitment to serving their communities.

This donation is aligned with John Muir Health's Community Health Needs Assessment, which serves as the basis for implementation strategies and identifying top needs for greatest impact. The organizations Optum employees will serve include initiatives on childhood obesity, access to health and dental care, family justice assistance, housing support, support for seniors, food insecurity and health education.



**It's exciting to know that the Optum social responsibility strategy focuses on health equity, which aligns with our mission. This support is truly a gift for us and the timing couldn't be any better.**

— Ali Uscilka,  
Program Director,  
Healthy & Active Before 5

# Pro bono access to medications

Disparities in access to much-needed medications represent a significant barrier to health equity. Too many people have to choose between buying food or necessary medications. OptumRx® has surpassed more than \$20 million in prescription medication donations to help tens of thousands of uninsured and underinsured people through the Kansas Unused Medication Donor Program.

This innovative state law is the first of its kind in the United States. Throughout the state of Kansas, 38 clinics have participated. OptumRx worked with the Kansas legislature and the Kansas Board of Pharmacy to craft a law allowing adult care homes, mail-service or home-delivery pharmacies and medical care facilities to donate unused medications in their original or pharmacist-sealed packaging to safety-net clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers across the state. Before this law was passed, OptumRx and other facilities were required to destroy unused medications.

## Medications made available include:

- Insulin and diabetic supplies
- Antibiotics
- Antidepressants
- Other prescription medications that are in short supply at the clinics served

The Optum Rx state-of-the-art home delivery pharmacy in Overland Park, Kansas, has donated hundreds of thousands of these medications. They've gone to underserved individuals to support communities, deliver better health outcomes and break down barriers to access.



**One doesn't have to look far to see how this program and the medications provided by OptumRx have been truly life-changing and life-saving for so many.**

— **Bob Burke**, Director of Community Relations for the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas

# Integrated care facilities offer whole-person support

In 2020, Optum Care opened a newly constructed clinic, OptumRx® pharmacy and neighborhood community center, all under one roof. Hemet Clinic and Community Center in Hemet, California, is designed to meet the needs of a diverse, rural population with a multidisciplinary team of providers and integrated services.

Hemet has been designated a “Health Professional Shortage Area” by the Health Resources and Services Administration. Its population includes retirees, young families with children and traditionally underserved communities. The Optum Care North American Medical Management (NAMM) team examined the opportunities. They saw a need for an integrated system of care that would be both innovative and accessible for the diverse community.

The Hemet Clinic represents the commitment Optum has to improving patient satisfaction, lowering costs and delivering high-quality outcomes — for everyone from kids to seniors.

The center makes it easy for residents to access health care and social support. It combines a full range of primary care services for children and adults, an on-site pharmacy, radiology services, laboratory, a community center, gym, healthy lifestyle classes and rooms for small group gatherings.

A social worker is also on hand to help navigate connections with food banks, transportation and other community resources.

“By bringing together multiple health care and social support services under one roof, we hope to improve the health and wellness of the Hemet community,” says Dr. Amar Desai, CEO, Optum California.

The Hemet Clinic serves as a model for combined clinics and pharmacies being planned in three other California locations and six sites nationwide.

“Improving health is all about building deeper relationships with the communities we serve. The center makes that so easy,” says Trisha Patel, lead pharmacist at the Hemet OptumRx pharmacy. “Being on site, we create a bridge between patients and their doctors.”



# Expanding utilization

Access alone isn't enough.

**To achieve health equity, we must ensure that social and health resources are targeted and effectively used to serve those who need them most. Ethnicity, culture, gender identity, geography and age are among the factors that drive both barriers to access and deficits in utilization.**

Some people avoid care due to a lack of trust or previous negative experiences with providers. Some are confused or frustrated in trying to navigate the health care and they give up — especially those with complex conditions that require high levels of care or coordinated care.

There are many reasons too many people aren't receiving the care they need, when and where they need it. Optum is constantly seeking to increase care utilization by pursuing partnerships with impactful organizations and harnessing the power of our experience and resources.



Here are a few ways Optum is working to ensure that the people we serve not only have access to quality care but also take advantage of it.

## A more equitable and personal model of chronic care

Optum has entered a partnership with **Landmark Health**, giving rise to a unique collaboration delivering 24/7 home-based integrated health services to support high-need patients with multiple chronic conditions. This model of case management and chronic disease management promotes equity for individuals who have historically experienced worse health outcomes due to their complex health histories.

The Landmark–Optum partnership is designed to span the range of utilization, including post-hospital management, urgent care visits and preventive treatment. It utilizes a full complementary team from pharmacists to social workers to health care professionals. This model supplements in-person visits with telehealth when necessary and possible. It addresses the needs of a largely elderly and vulnerable population with an emphasis on individual solutions, a personal touch and round-the-clock access to promote health and quality of life.

The chronic care patient population has traditionally seen treatment challenges because of the time required to address their intersection of polychronic conditions. Landmark’s model enables difficult but necessary conversations about end-of life care. It allows nurses and social workers to see conditions in the home firsthand and offer social support that leads to more personalized treatment. Greater access leads to better, more timely care. It helps avoid costly (and often traumatic) escalation of preventable health issues that can lead to needing emergency care.

**97%**

of Landmark members say Landmark’s services have saved them a trip to the emergency room

**26%**

reduction in mortality over 12 months

**15%–25%**

reduction in inpatient admissions per thousand

**20%**

reduction in medical costs over last 12 months of life

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) presented opportunities to improve health care utilization. OptumServe created a comprehensive dashboard to help Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) identify need and allocate resources to older adults and people with disabilities who needed them most.

The dashboard was used to help the Arizona State Unit on Aging and local ADRCs reflect on trends and strategies for outreach to hospitals, nursing facilities and health plans.



# Strengthening support for mental health in the Black American community

Persistent racial disparities and a lack of diverse, culturally cognizant providers in mental health care prevent Black Americans and individuals from many ethnic communities from receiving, or even accessing, personalized, effective mental health support. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), racial and ethnic minorities may encounter cultural stigma, discrimination and language barriers. They may also be misunderstood and underrepresented among mental health care providers.

The lack of effective mental health support for Black Americans and other ethnic communities was exacerbated following the killing of George Floyd and due to the disparate impact of COVID-19 on their health. To address these barriers, Optum is partnering with the Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation. Founded by actress Taraji P. Henson in honor of her father, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following his service in the Vietnam War, the Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation provides support and brings awareness to mental health issues in the Black American community.

Optum made a \$300,000 donation to the foundation to support a range of initiatives, all focused on ensuring that Black Americans are able to receive mental health services meeting immediate needs, and building a mental health system that can provide culturally cognizant supportive services moving forward.

### The two organizations collaborated to provide:

- More than 1,000 mental health visits to Black American youth
- Group therapy sessions at several Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Matched scholarship funds provided by the Henson Foundation for Black Americans pursuing graduate degrees in direct mental health practice to help build the diversity of the mental health workforce

The philanthropic funds also contributed to the development of a five-part cultural competency training program offered through the Henson Foundation to providers nationwide. The OptumHealth education team is also in the process of developing an additional focused training for its provider network to support their continuing education on this topic. And the Optum® Behavioral Health leadership team engaged in intensive small-group racial equity trainings.

“Our organization’s mission is to create a health system that works for everyone,” says Graham McLaughlin, vice president of social responsibility, UnitedHealth Group. “We can only do that if we are focused on addressing the pernicious way historical structural inequity has woven its way into cultural norms, individual thinking and biases, and access to education and opportunity. Our Henson Foundation partnership, internal commitments at every level of the organization to build our cultural cognizance and understand how structural racism has created unconscious biases within all of us, and investments to build the diversity of the mental health workforce are all focused on addressing the fact that the system does not currently work for everyone, and we therefore need to make intentional, focused efforts to build a system that does.” says Graham McLaughlin, vice president of social responsibility, UnitedHealth Group.

At every level of the organization, from leadership to providers, we are committed to shrinking disparities and ensuring accessible, equitable mental health care is available to all.

# Leveraging data for smart, targeted utilization

A major component of health equity is connecting underserved people with services and care specifically tailored to their unique individual needs. Optum leadership in data innovation has driven the creation of the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), an individual-level data analysis that creates a score between zero and 100. This score reflects an intersection of factors that can be used to connect individuals with services and care across a range of community resources.

The mission of SVI is to identify and incorporate a deeper set of data elements previously used for indexes of the social determinants of health (SDOH) — and build on that framework for greater insights.

Factors incorporated into the SVI individual score are:

- **Socioeconomic status**  
Including employment status, income and educational attainment
- **Household composition and disability**  
Factoring in members of household, their ages and marital status
- **Minority status and language**  
Incorporating background and language facility
- **Housing type and transportation**  
Understanding size of home and crowding, and vehicle status and mobility

Optum SVI analysis operates on a personal level that makes it more powerful for custom intervention and impactful aggregation. It opens doors for individuals and groups to be efficiently connected to resources to address the impacts of social

## Social determinants of health

- Nutrition
- Lifestyle
- Environment
- Economics

vulnerability. And it works with analytic platforms to produce granular and actionable data to direct health care and SDOH resources to specific individuals and populations.

Millions of patients across the United States are already benefiting from the analytical insights of Optum SVI, with more to come. Previously, care providers reported at times being overwhelmed by data around SDOH. They now report that the SVI provides specific, in-the-moment recommendations for action. It identifies vulnerable individuals where they live, increasing utilization and promoting equity.

### **The work is just beginning.**

The Optum team is working on the development of the **Health Equity Pathways model**. This uses data to connect upstream factors of the SVI and SDOH to the downstream outcomes of health. Greater data and analysis will reveal even more opportunities to increase health equity.



# Driving equitable outcomes

Intentions matter less than impact. That's why we take accountability and measurability seriously. At Optum, we hold ourselves responsible for creating concrete, positive outcomes in the communities we serve. Here are several ways we're making progress in delivering equal access to affordable, high-quality care — and creating more equitable health outcomes as a result.

# Serving the LGBTQ+ community

**The LGBTQ+ Task Force and Optum Health Education are rolling out a first-of-its-kind, continuing education-eligible training on LGBTQ+ health equity. The goal is to improve the care experience and drive quality for LGBTQ+ individuals.**

Historically, LGBTQ+ health care needs have not been covered in medical training. Partly as a result, the LGBTQ+ population experiences a wide range of health care disparities. These include a greater risk of mental health issues, substance abuse and suicide, chronic conditions, breast cancer, HPV and obesity.

Many LGBTQ+ people report having had negative experiences with a health care provider who either refused to treat them or was simply uneducated about the LGBTQ+ community. This leads to delays in care, increased ER visits and overall poorer health.

In 2021, Optum California staff are participating in a pilot LGBTQ+ Health Equity and Cultural Competency Training program. The training is expected to scale across the organization. Two 90-minute training sessions will prepare staff and providers to create a more welcoming health care environment for LGBTQ+ individuals and their families and equip them to be true allies.

Optum Behavioral Health launched the **Pride365+ program**, a client-facing program offering:

- A terminology guide
- A guide on how to be an ally
- Transgender support
- Peer-to-peer community groups
- Additional resources

**Pride365+**

The program will feature an insignia that will be a visual identifier of our support of the LGBTQ+ population and designate Optum care facilities locations as LGBTQ+-friendly.

[pride365plus.com](https://pride365plus.com)



**Our efforts to better serve LGBTQ+ individuals are showing positive results.**

We partnered with a nonprofit organization to provide cultural competency training to staff at one of our Texas contact centers. This work is resulting in significant increases in overall LGBTQ+ cultural competency, knowledge, attitudes and preparedness. These improvements will translate into deeper trust within our LGBTQ+ clients, as well as more welcoming environments, better care and communication, and improved health outcomes.



# Supporting LGBTQ+ youth of color

Despite having similar rates of mental health support needs, Black LGBTQ youth are significantly less likely to receive professional care than their white peers. Optum donated \$25,000 to the Trevor Project, a nonprofit focused on suicide prevention efforts among LGBTQ+ youth, to fund outreach and investment in Black LGBTQ+ youth mental health.



# Caring for moms and moms-to-be

The U.S. has a maternal health crisis. Our country currently ranks last among all industrialized nations in maternal mortality. Sixty percent of pregnancy-related deaths may be preventable, and people of color face the greatest risk of complications and mortality.

At Optum, we're working toward a world where every pregnant person is given the support they need to make the healthiest choice, every time. A world where every patient voice is listened to and understood, and where structural support — in care settings and beyond — helps all pregnant people thrive.



**The following examples highlight how Optum is using our resources, power and market position to create maternal equity.**

- In 2001, Optum created **pregnancy.org**, a no-cost maternal online community forum featuring clinically based maternal health and lifestyle information. The website provides support especially to low-income people and people of color, who face greater risks of pregnancy-related morbidity and mortality.
- **Community of Hope (COH)** operates maternal health-focused community centers, including the only freestanding, no-cost birthing center in Washington, D.C. Optum helps COH obtain sustainable funding beyond grants so they can expand and strengthen the support they provide to pregnant people.
- In partnership with **Wake Forest Baptist Health** in North Carolina, Optum is developing an assessment tool to be used in clinics and upon hospital admission to identify pregnant people suffering from intimate partner violence.
- Optum is partnering with maternal health collective **Cradle Cincinnati** to help them scale and spread their infant mortality reduction strategy in up to eight U.S. cities. The goal is to reduce preterm births, the leading cause of infant death.
- **Ladies of Hope Ministries (LOHM)** in New York is partnering with Mama Glow, a doula support program, to offer training, certification and birth support for current and formerly incarcerated pregnant people. With Optum support, LOHM and Mama Glow will recruit, train, certify and support up to 50 doulas across the country. These doulas will provide prenatal and birth support and postpartum care to incarcerated pregnant people.
- Optum is providing volunteers to recruit and conduct interviews as part of quantitative research by the **Center for Maternal Health Equity at Morehouse College** in Atlanta. This research will lead to better understanding of severe maternal morbidity among women of color.

In partnership with **The Everett Clinic and The Polyclinic** in Washington State, Optum is piloting a remote monitoring program to support pregnant women who have, or are at risk for having, high blood pressure during pregnancy (gestational hypertension). The program enables at-home patient monitoring through the patient's internet-enabled phone, or Optum tablet if they don't have a phone. This technology virtually engages patients to keep them involved in their care plans and address concerns when and wherever they need it. Frequent touch points are provided to patients via daily prompts related to their health. As patients answer questions remotely, alerts can be triggered to the nurse monitoring team. The nurse monitoring team can intervene, assess patients' needs and coordinate interventions with the patient's local provider to reduce the incidence of complications from gestational hypertension. Patients enrolled in the monitoring program have 24/7/365 access to a nurse.



# Rising to the challenges of COVID-19

COVID-19 highlighted the urgency of addressing health inequities. At Optum, we're proud that our work enabled several states to meet the challenges of the moment.

In Indiana, Optum worked with the state Offices of Medicaid Policy and Planning to improve their data and analytics. The new framework, launched right before the pandemic:

- Enabled state agencies to better monitor testing
- Provided an accurate daily dashboard
- Empowered state health leaders to make real-time strategic adjustments to their response

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, Optum partnered with the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. We supported an integrated eligibility system that processes benefits for medical coverage, food and housing assistance.

This scalable system was able to extend critical benefits quickly in response to policy changes. Within 72 hours, Medicaid and CHIP benefits were extended to more than 77,000 recipients.





OptumInsight is exploring the impacts of race/ethnicity and comorbidities on outcomes related to COVID-19. We'll use what we learn to deliver more targeted, personal care for everyone we serve.

# Enterprise-wide efforts

Our parent company, UnitedHealth Group, has been working to address health equity for more than 10 years. The Health Equity Services program through UnitedHealth Group addresses foundational issues of health and well-being for vulnerable members of our communities.

# Breaking down barriers to better health and well-being

**The food you eat, how much you exercise and family history are all known factors that influence our health and well-being.**

Social and economic issues such as access to housing, food, education, transportation, quality employment and even social support can have significant impacts on our health and well-being. These factors are what health experts call the social determinants of health (SDOH).

**For example, research has shown the following:**

- Those who don't have easy access to transportation are less likely to see a doctor on a regular basis.
- If you live in poor housing conditions, you are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19.
- Inconsistent access to nutritious food has been directly linked to increased emergency room visits.
- Those who make less money often have higher health care costs.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

There are resources available to help that you may not be aware of. Churches, nonprofits and senior centers often run programs or have access to volunteers who can help. And, if you are on Medicaid, things like transportation to a doctor's appointment and food assistance may be covered.

At Optum, we are working tirelessly to help break down the barriers standing between you and better health and well-being.

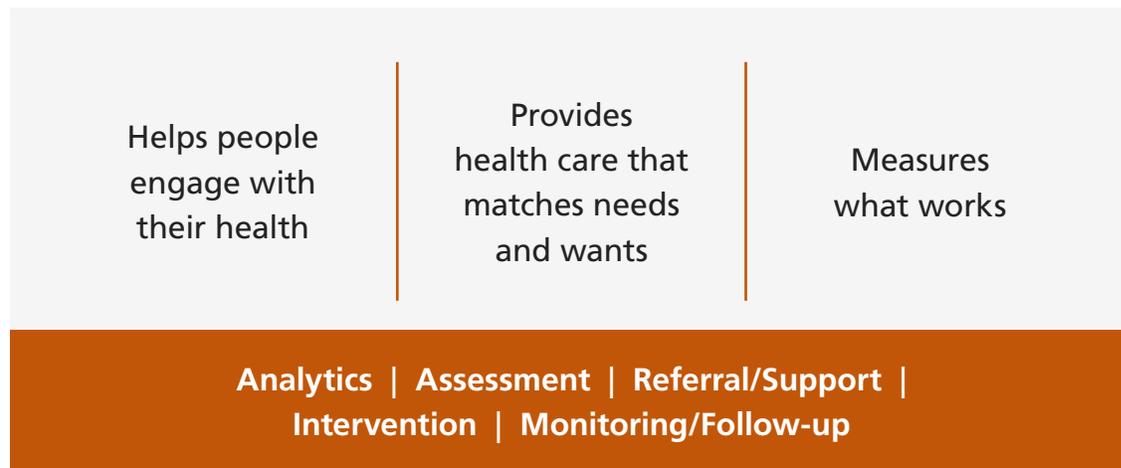
**80%**

of health is determined by what happens outside of the doctor's office.

# Transforming care:

Supporting whole-person health and well-being

## Building a foundation for better health care:



## Intervening to remove barriers to care:



Here are a few examples of our enterprise-wide initiatives to make our communities healthier, stronger and more resilient.

## Improving access to affordable housing

Research shows that 80% of an individual's health is determined by what happens outside of a doctor's office. Housing stability, quality, safety and affordability all impact people's health, as do physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods. Access to safe and affordable housing is one of the greatest barriers to better health for many people.

**Since 2011, UnitedHealth Group has invested more than \$500 million in 83 affordable housing communities across the United States.**

UnitedHealth Group has built more than 5,500 new homes for seniors, veterans, individuals with disabilities and those struggling with homelessness. UnitedHealth Group has also provided more than \$27 million in below-market-rate loans to expand the supply of affordable housing.

The connection between housing and health is undeniable and the COVID-19 pandemic has increasingly brought this further to the forefront as an urgent need throughout the communities we serve.



**Through our continued leadership and investments in affordable housing and support services, we are helping drive better health outcomes for some of the nation's most underserved populations.**

— Heather Cianfrocco,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
OptumRx

# Nurturing our neighbors

Nutrition is one of the most important pillars of health. But too many Americans do not have adequate access to healthy, nutritious food. This is contributing to our nation's most pervasive chronic health problems, including obesity, diabetes and heart disease. The food insecurity crisis was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. UnitedHealth Group stepped up to make a difference, pledging \$5 million to provide care and support for people experiencing food insecurity or homelessness.

UnitedHealth Group also addresses food insecurity with its Empowering Health grant program. In 2019, UnitedHealth Group provided a \$500,000 Empowering Health grant to Mid-South Food Bank, a Feeding America affiliate food bank. This funding was used to purchase two Nutrition on Wheels refrigerated mobile pantry trucks and three refrigerator/freezer units for school-based food pantries.

The Nutrition on Wheels trucks visit medical clinics and senior centers serving uninsured and underserved Memphis residents to distribute fresh and healthy food to people who need it the most. These efforts have made it possible for Mid-South Food Bank to provide more than 260,000 meals to residents of Memphis and surrounding areas.



# Tackling public health crises at the local level

Infant mortality remains a stubborn and serious problem in the U.S., and Ohio has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the nation. In 2016, the United Health Foundation provided a \$1.7 million grant to fund training and deployment of 72 community health workers to educate mothers-to-be, mothers and their families in and around Columbus, Ohio.

The grant supported **CelebrateOne**, a community engagement initiative led by Columbus Public Health and the Greater Columbus Mortality Task Force. It enabled them to provide training to community-based caregivers to conduct outreach, build trust and reduce barriers to care. Since the initiative's launch, it has helped to reduce the risk for chronic morbidity and infant mortality across metro Columbus.

The initial goal of the grant was to fund training of 72 community health workers. Yet the funds ultimately resulted in more than 87 residents successfully completing the Community Health Worker certification program through the Ohio State University College of Nursing.

Lillie Banner, a Columbus Community Connector, says: "This type of program will have a lasting impact as we reach out to families door-to-door, face-to-face and within their neighborhoods. The response we've seen from participants is overwhelmingly positive and life changing."



**This collaboration with United Health Foundation will mean even more women and their babies will be stronger, healthier and happier.**

— Lillie Banner, Columbus Community Connector

# Ending disparities in care guidelines

There is mounting evidence that race is not a useful predictor of risk for most medical conditions. But diagnostic algorithms still rely on race. It's one input among several used to determine the severity and course of treatment for more than 18 conditions, including kidney disease, urinary tract infections, breast cancer and pulmonary disease.

UnitedHealth Group is on the leading edge of ongoing research to understand the impact of these algorithms on care and ensure that flawed diagnostic tools do not exacerbate racial disparities.

“By shifting people into the correct diagnostic category, we can engage with them sooner,” says Aaron Cohen, MD, chief medical officer with Optum Enterprise Clinical Services/ UnitedHealth Group.

“UnitedHealth Group sees this, and we are taking action to develop the information needed to help the clinical community move ahead and deliver better care. Because of our data, capabilities and access, we can drive these conversations.”



# Cultivating diversity in tomorrow's workforce

The digital revolution continues to transform the world of work. Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) must attract and nurture demographically diverse talent to ensure an equitable future.

The **Optum STEM Outreach Program** pairs students between the ages of 10 and 18 with volunteer mentors from UnitedHealth Group who work in a tech-focused role. The program aims to educate and inspire the next generation of health-tech professionals. In 2021, the program targeted high school and middle school students, especially those belonging to communities under-represented in STEM.

Team members from across UHG mentor students and host sessions covering Python programming, Java/JavaScript, webpage design, mobile app development, cybersecurity and user experience. And a Girls in STEM miniseries — open to all but geared primarily toward female students — features women tech professionals at UHG sharing their journeys and experiences in the world of tech.

Being paired with women mentors and learning about the journeys of women tech professionals inspires and excites many of the girl participants about their future in STEM.

"I am not sure what I want to do, but I know it will be in a STEM field," said one female student. "My mentor provided me with some amazing insight."

**Being paired with women mentors and learning about the journeys of women tech professionals inspires and excites many of the girl participants about their future in STEM.**

# Driving systemic equity in our supplier network

UnitedHealth Group relies on hundreds of suppliers to provide goods and services, including contingent labor, printing services, marketing, IT support and clinical services. Optum Social Responsibility is partnering with UnitedHealth Group Enterprise Sourcing and Procurement to increase opportunities for businesses owned by people of diverse demographic backgrounds.

The **supplier diversity program** works with businesses owned by ethnic minorities, women, veterans, persons with a disability and members of the LGBTQ+ community. UnitedHealth Group works with organizations such as the Women's Business Enterprise National Council and the National Minority Supplier Development Council, among others, to identify potential candidates.

But the relationship doesn't end there. In recognition of possible gaps in resources and opportunities for diverse suppliers, select diverse suppliers are paired with UnitedHealth Group subject matter experts to help them build capacity and capability. That might mean building new skill sets, increasing hiring capacity or enhancing the business' digital presence. This pro bono mentorship leaves the suppliers positioned for accelerated growth, increased engagement and expanded reach.

"The supplier diversity program helps us fulfill our mission to help people live healthier lives. It drives value creation for our business and economic impact in the communities we serve," says Darren Harmon, senior director of Supplier Diversity & Sustainability.

"The program supports job creation, wage growth and investment in underserved communities through a multiplier effect, fueling community development and positively influencing social determinants of health."



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— **Darren Harmon,**  
Senior Director of Supplier  
Diversity & Sustainability

**Here are some of the ways Optum and our partners are working to provide help.**

- Offering transportation support through subsidies, travel vouchers, public transportation passes and pooled arrangements
- Improving housing by providing rent subsidies, creating low-cost housing stock and offering financial support to shelters
- Providing access to affordable and nutritious food by offering food debit cards, sponsoring food pantries and delivery services, supporting community gardens and farmers markets, and providing subsidized meal programs
- Working with communities and employers to improve access to Wi-Fi internet access via hot spots at community locations such as libraries or through employer-sponsored internet subsidies
- Minimizing social isolation challenges by connecting people one on one through programs and access to social clubs and gatherings
- Partnering with agencies that can provide health advocacy, condition management, maternal health and behavioral health services

**We believe health care should be equally available to everyone, when and how they want it. It is our guiding mission across our clinical, behavioral and pharmacy solutions.**

This commitment also guides what we do for our clients — employers, government agencies, health plans, pharmacy care services and providers — as we work to help them transform their capabilities to deliver more sustainable and human-focused care.

For health care to be effective, we need to see the whole person and all the factors that contribute to their overall health and well-being. Focus cannot be on the symptom alone. It must be on the root cause moving forward.

**As a part of UnitedHealth Group, the efforts Optum is making in addressing whole-person care, tackling disparities and closing gaps move us closer to an equitable health care system, in which everyone receives the care they need and deserve.**

We are committed to doing our part to help create an unbiased health system that delivers equal access to affordable, high-quality care and health services to improve health outcomes for all people. By improving health care access, utilization and outcomes, we're turning a more equitable future into reality, today.



To learn more about how Optum is addressing health equity, visit [optum.com/healthequity](https://optum.com/healthequity)



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