

Closing care gaps in 2026: Four health equity priorities for plan sponsors

How to effectively address disparities in access, outcomes and experiences across increasingly diverse populations



Are you ready to lead the way in building more inclusive and resilient health strategies?

Health equity will be a defining measure of success for plan sponsors in 2026. Use this checklist to assess your readiness across benefit design, digital access, data-driven care and social needs integration, and to guide your next steps.

1

Inclusive benefit design will be a strategic imperative

As health care costs continue to rise and workforces grow more diverse^{1,2}, moving beyond uniform coverage to meet people where they are is essential to advancing health equity.

Plan sponsor opportunities: Audit benefits for gaps in coverage, expand mental health and caregiver support, offer flexible plan tiers and promote language access and culturally tailored services.

Inclusive benefit design checklist

- ☐ We regularly audit benefit strategies to identify gaps in coverage across race, gender, income and geography
- ☐ Our mental health and caregiver support resources are accessible across all population groups
- ☐ We offer flexible tier plans to accommodate different financial situations
- ☐ We ensure language access and cultural relevance across our communications and provider networks

2

Digital health equity will be essential to expanding access

Virtual care and digital tools are reshaping access for many underserved populations. Addressing barriers such as limited internet availability and low digital literacy is critical to ensuring their equitable adoption.³

Plan sponsor opportunities: Assess digital readiness across employee/member populations, invest in mobile-first platforms, provide digital literacy resources and embed digital health equity into design.

Digital health equity checklist

- ☐ We have assessed and addressed digital readiness across our patient/member population
- ☐ We currently/have plans to invest in mobile-first platforms and low-bandwidth solutions
- ☐ We provide access to digital literacy resources and community-based technology navigators
- ☐ We use established frameworks to embed equity into our benefit design

3 Data-driven equity measurement will become foundational to health strategy

Improving equity starts with understanding where care gaps exist. Using data to identify disparities and monitor progress can help shape health strategies that advance Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) goals.

Plan sponsor opportunities: Integrate social determinants of health (SDOH) data into population health analytics, use predictive modeling, track equity metrics and align reporting with larger measurable objectives.

Data-driven equity measurement checklist

- ☐ We currently/have plans to integrate SDOH data into population health analytics
- ☐ We use predictive modeling to identify care gaps and at-risk groups
- ☐ We track preventive care utilization by demographic and/or similar equity metrics
- ☐ We align health equity reporting with larger organizational goals for transparency and accountability

4 Whole-person care will require deeper integration of social needs

Health outcomes are influenced by more than clinical care. Meeting social needs — including housing, food and transportation — is integral to advancing equitable, whole-person care.

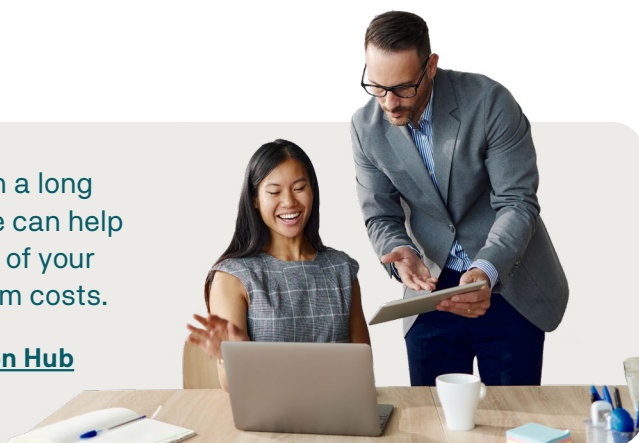
Plan sponsor opportunities: Partner with community organizations to address non-clinical drivers of health, cover social needs screenings, offer navigation support for public benefits and local resources and incentivize providers to coordinate holistic care.

Whole-person care and social needs integration checklist

- ☐ We currently/have plans to partner with community organizations to address social drivers of health
- ☐ We include social needs screenings as part of our comprehensive benefit strategy
- ☐ We help employees/members navigate public benefits and local resources
- ☐ We incentivize providers to coordinate care across physical, mental and social domains

If your checklist reveals some gaps, you're not alone. With a long history in developing solutions that close gaps in care, we can help you create equitable care strategies that meet the needs of your evolving patient/member population and reduce long-term costs.

Visit the [Evernorth Health Services Health Equity Information Hub](#) to learn more.



1. Business Group on Health, 2025. "2026 Employer Health Care Strategy Survey: Executive Summary". <https://www.businessgrouphealth.org/resources/2026-employer-health-care-strategy-survey-executive-summary>

2. Mercer, 2025. "Survey on Health & Benefit Strategies for 2026". <https://www.mercer.com/en-us/insights/total-rewards/employee-benefits-strategy/2026-benefit-strategies-report/>

3. Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2025. "Bridging the Digital Divide in Health Care: A New Framework for Equity". <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/bridging-the-digital-divide-in-health-care-a-new-framework-for-equity>

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