

Strategic Plan to Advance Health Equity



Executive Summary

Kidney disease disproportionately affects Black, Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Latine, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities – groups that have long faced inequities in healthcare. As some of the most medically vulnerable individuals in our society, many people with kidney disease also grapple with comorbidities and economic hardship when, intensified by health inequities, make kidney care more complex.

Northwest Kidney Centers Health Equity framework guides the organization in delivering inclusive, trauma-informed, equitable care to remove barriers that perpetuate disparate health outcomes for people living with kidney disease. Our comprehensive approach is aimed at reducing disparities and improving health outcomes for our patients.

Guiding Principles

At Northwest Kidney Centers we are working to increase opportunities for everyone -- regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background – to receive the care that supports them living their healthiest life. With an extraordinary team of compassionate care individuals , we build people's trust and confidence through our integrated and equitable approach to person-centered care.

We believe quality healthcare is a right and what is just for all people.

We support all patients through their kidney journey regardless of who they are, where they live or the insurance card they carry.

Health Equity Framework

Health Equity Defined

Health equity is defined as “the attainment of the highest level of health for all people, where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their optimal health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identify, socioeconomic status, geography, preferred language, or other factors” [Source – U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services].

Pillars

- **Patients:** We are committed to providing equitable care that meets the diverse needs of our patient population.
- **People:** We believe that by equipping our people with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to deliver equitable care, we can create a more inclusive and effective healthcare environment.
- **Community:** We are dedicated to engaging and collaborating with community members, partners, and organizations to co-create solutions that advance health equity and improve the well-being of the communities we serve.

Domains

Seven core health equity domains will guide our work:

- Addressing Determinants of Health Equity
- Data Collection & Analysis
- Quality Improvement
- Advocacy & Leadership Engagement
- Workplace & Workforce Development
- Community Investment & Partnerships

Priority Populations

The following groups are known to experience disproportionately higher rates of adverse kidney health outcomes compared to the overall population of individuals living with kidney disease in the United States.[1][2]

- Black or African American
- American Indian and Alaska Natives
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- Asian American
- Hispanic and Latine

[1] United States Renal Data System: 2023 USRDS Annual Data Report: Epidemiology of kidney disease in the United States. Bethesda, MD, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

[2] Rizzolo K, Cervantes L, Shen JI: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Home Dialysis Use in the United States: Barriers and Solutions. J Am Soc Nephrol 33: 1258-1261, 2022



Goals and Action Plan

Northwest Kidney Centers is taking a multi-year approach to achieve our Health Equity Goals. This approach includes short-term foundational objectives, as well as an initiative-based multi-year action plan that will be refined each year to ensure alignment with our vision, mission and values and that we are reflecting the latest environment, challenges and available resources.

Patients

Addressing Determinants of Health Equity

Advance kidney care and improve health outcomes for people living with kidney disease by:

- Providing inclusive, equitable, and trauma-informed clinical care
- Identifying barriers and obstacles facing specific groups of people living with kidney disease and tailoring our care delivery efforts
- Leveraging systems innovation to serve the communities where there is the greatest need, in facilities that promote the best possible care

Action plan

- Initiate an evaluation of our current Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) program, to assess whether changes in content, messaging, or delivery modality need to be made to reduce existing racial and ethnic disparities in referral to and uptake of home dialysis modalities and kidney transplantation.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a NKC Transplant Navigator Program to assist NKC patients treated with in-center or home dialysis therapies overcome the specific barriers they face when navigating the transplant evaluation and listing process through local transplant program partners.

Data Collection & Analysis

Collect patient-level data to inform how we support staff, providers, and partners in providing equitable care to patients.

Action plan

- Implement interactive clinic-specific health equity reporting dashboards that will stratify key performance indicators (KPIs) by key demographic variables to allow each clinic to identify specific interventions to target facility-specific health disparities.
- Implement updated collection and reporting of self-identified race and ethnicity data for all patients according to the new standards overseen by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), ***ensuring data is reflected in our electronic health record (EHR) system and staff are trained on culturally sensitive collection of race and ethnicity data.***

Quality Improvement

Participate in local, regional, and national quality improvement activities focused on reducing health disparities and improving patient outcomes.

People

Advocacy & Leadership Engagement

Foster a culture in which leaders advocate for and are actively engaged in addressing the root causes of health inequities.

Action plan

- Senior leadership attend weekly working Nonprofit Kidney Care Alliance (NKCA) calls, annual meetings, and participate in activities that promote non-profit kidney care groups as key providers of dialysis to underserved populations, regularly sending representatives to meet with legislators as part of annual advocacy day in Washington, D.C.
- Bi-annually, a delegation of Northwest Kidney Centers senior leadership, staff, donors and volunteers travel to Olympia to speak with state legislators on issues critical to advancing health equity for kidney patients.

Workplace & Workforce Development

Recruit and retain individuals with diverse backgrounds and build a culture where staff feel valued and appreciated for their expertise, time, and talent.

Action plan

- Incorporate “Cultural Competency: Diversity and Social Determinants to Health” training as a part of our annually required training for all staff.

Community

Community Investments & Partnerships

Collaboratively build responsive strategies to reduce health disparities and enhance health outcomes for people living with kidney disease.

Action plan

Engage with the communities we are rooted in and serve to:

- Raise awareness and provide education about kidney health,
- Remain informed on emerging needs in the community,
- Leverage community resources to support patients’ needs and desires to lead a healthy life,
- Create a pipeline of diverse talent, and
- Provide opportunities for community wisdom and experience to inform the delivery of our care services.