

Health Equity in Action

Our mission is to bring vision and imagination through a multisector frame to achieve equity in health

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HOW HEALTH EQUITY PLAYED A ROLE IN ALABAMA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

Reaching for Health Equity in Alabama

Health inequities are reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rate of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment. To address these inequities, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), in partnership with the Alabama National Guard (ALNG), Alabama's Emergency Management Agency, and other stakeholders, scheduled mass vaccination clinics in 24 traditionally underserved, rural counties in the state that were identified as high-risk for adverse health outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic: Sumter, Greene, Hale, Perry, Dallas, Choctaw, Marengo, Wilcox, Conecuh, Monroe, Clarke, Washington, Convington, Coffee, Dale, Henry, Lowndes, Bullock, Macon, Russell, Butler, Crenshaw, Pike, and Barbour.

Due to the significant population of adults with functional and access needs/disabilities in the state (over 33 percent), the differences in health outcomes and behaviors experienced, and the high incidence of death associated with contracting COVID-19, the functional and access needs population was a priority for vaccination. Accommodating, communicating with, and ensuring accessible vaccine sites for the disabled community was also a priority.

As such, ADPH, along with the Disability and Preparedness Specialist from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), provided Disability Etiquette Training to approximately 150 members of the ALNG on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, at the ALNG Headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama.

For more information on how ADPH is reaching for health equity during the COVID-19 pandemic, check out the launch of the Alabama Unites Against COVID campaign.



THE ADPH OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY AND MINORITY HEALTH: ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING A CULTURE OF HEALTH EQUITY

“Bringing vision and imagination through a multi-sector frame to achieve equity in health” is the mission of the Alabama Department of Public Health’s Office of Health Equity and Minority Health—an established priority area for ADPH.



ADPH, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recognizes that health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to “attain his or her full health potential” and no one is “disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.” Health inequities are reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment.

The re-envisioned Office of Minority Health is the newly established Office of Health Equity and Minority Health (OHEMH), located in the Office of Governmental Affairs and Community Relations Division. The OHEMH, with stakeholder input, has developed a 2-year blueprint for elevating health equity as a priority in Alabama. The OHEMH 2021-2023 Strategic Plan mirrors the mission and vision of ADPH through an equity lens. Utilizing reliable data to identify communities at highest risk of health disparities and inequities, the ADPH OHEMH and its myriad of partners seek to deliver intentional strategies that will build health equity into daily practices. Other newly established Offices of Health Equity include Jefferson County and Mobile County Health Departments. The OHEMH will work with and support the efforts of these partners.

The OHEMH Strategic Plan has both an internal and external focus which is outlined in the following five goals:

- **Goal 1.** Establish common language that ADPH staff and partners can use when communicating health equity strategies, applying an ‘equity lens’ in daily work activities, and operationalizing health equity-specific public health best practices throughout ADPH.
- **Goal 2.** Use data effectively to plan, monitor, and measure the equity impact of ADPH policies and programs, with a specific focus on the social determinants of health. This goal will be achieved in collaboration with the new Office of Informatics and Data Analytics.
- **Goal 3.** Utilize external partnerships established through the CDC Health Disparity Grant Sub-recipients to build stakeholder capacity, advise on equity-focused work, and establish common language that partners can use when recommending health equity strategies.
- **Goal 4.** Work to attain the full potential of health and well-being of Alabama’s citizenry as a component of decision-making and policy formulation across all sectors.
- **Goal 5.** Report annually on progress toward eliminating health disparities, achieving health equity, and attaining health literacy for the improvement of the health and well-being of all Alabamians.

Health Equity in Action is a monthly publication of the ADPH OHEMH, which highlights programs, partners, and collaborators engaged in advancing health equity among populations at higher risk and the underserved.

GREETINGS FROM THE OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY AND MINORITY HEALTH

Welcome to the first installment of our *Health Equity in Action* newsletter! ADPH is pleased to bring you informative content from the community partners as well as internal and external Health Equity Team Members throughout the state. *Health Equity in Action* is designed to highlight innovative, creative, and successful strategies deployed in the communities of focus through a multi-sector frame.

It is ADPH's commitment with this publication, to advance health equity by using a 'Show and Tell' approach. *Health Equity in Action* will show the many areas of community engagement in which ADPH and its partners are involved, that will demonstrate community members reaching an equitable outcome regardless of the historical or present challenges. Health Equity in Action will shine a light on programs and activities statewide focused on closing existing gaps contributing to disparate health outcomes.

ADPH recognizes COVID-19 has uncovered a myriad of underlying health inequities and environmental vulnerabilities that pre-existed the pandemic and has now been exacerbated. Both community members and staff have endured the brunt of this horrible virus, but ADPH is grateful for their personal sacrifice and their perseverance despite it all. The OHEMH recognizes its first Health Equity Champions, State Health Officer, Dr. Scott Harris, and Chief Medical Director, Dr. Mary McIntyre, for demonstrating their commitment to equity and support for reinvigorating the former Office of Minority Health, as the Office of Health Equity and Minority Health (OHEMH). Dr. Harris and Dr. McIntyre are commended for the courage, foresight, and vision to carry health and environmental justice forward for all Alabamians.

The OHEMH is not creating something new, instead, it is engaging in cross-sector collaborations and eliminating existing silos to leave an indelible impact on the community—leaving the community much more resilient to withstand the next public health emergency or natural disaster.

You are welcome to join us in this necessary endeavor! Contact, Felecia Barrow, Interim Director, OHEMH, at 334-206-3930, or via email at felecia.barrow@adph.state.al.us.

These are a few of the internal team members who are helping to make great things happen in the space of health equity—the staff of the OHEMH—TEAM HEALTH EQUITY:



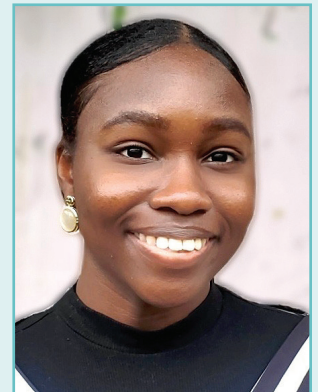
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In 2021, the Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) established a leadership-level Health Equity Office (HEO) to address health disparities in Mobile County. Funding came from the National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved, Including Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations and Rural Communities. MCHD has identified four target areas in the county, comprised of 15 zip codes, in which health disparities exist alongside high COVID-19 rates and low vaccination rates. The MCHD HEO is responsible for evaluating internal and external programs and policies, identifying weaknesses, and laying a foundation for serving community members living in these vulnerable zip codes through a health equity lens.

The MCHD HEO wants to help create a community where everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible. To create this community, upstream factors like social inequities, institutional inequities, and living conditions must be addressed. This work is moved forward by:

- Connecting with and listening to the community
- Building community partnerships
- Collecting and analyzing data to drive the mission forward
- Providing education, outreach, and supportive services to chronically underserved target areas
- Advocating for program and policy decisions that use a health equity lens
- Strengthening the capacity of the community to create its own health future

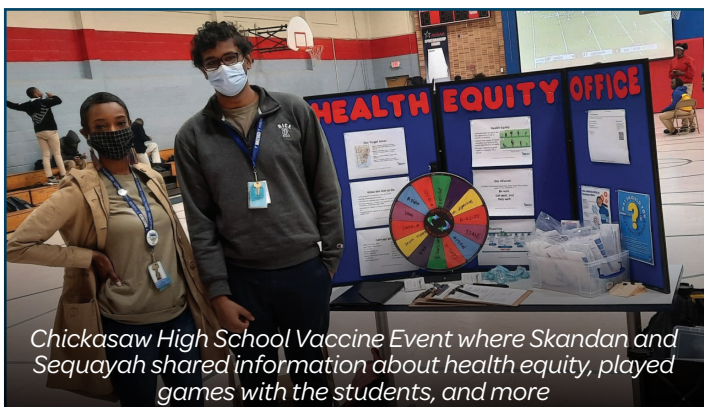
In summary, the MCHD HEO wants to support the community to be well, get well, and stay well.



Saraland Lions Club Vaccine Event where Skandan & Sequayah shared information on health equity and surveyed participants



AKA Community Health Fair where Skandan shared information about health equity and surveyed participants



Chickasaw High School Vaccine Event where Skandan and Sequayah shared information about health equity, played games with the students, and more



HEO Team Photo (From L to R: Skandan Ananthasekar, Melissa McKnight, Sherita Anderson, Sequayah Chaney)