



DOH - INDIAN RIVER

HEALTH EQUITY

PLAN

June 2022 – June 2025

**ADDENDUM TO THE DOH-INDIAN RIVER
COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CHIP)
JANUARY 2024**

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This is an addendum to the Community Health Improvement Plan and specific to the original DOH-Indian River Health Equity Plan (also referred to as the Minority Health Plan).

Click [HERE](#) for the complete, original DOH-Indian River Health Equity Plan.

The terms, “Social Determinants of Health” and “Social and Economic Barriers” are used interchangeably in various DOH-Indian River documents.

I. VISION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health Equity is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Persisting legacies of social problems such as structural racism are hampering the attainment of health equity, causing economic loss and, most overwhelmingly, the loss of human lives and potential. Harmful inequities and other failures of the nation’s health system have been underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also highlighted “the urgency for strategic, equitable investments in our public health infrastructure” and the need for a “bold reimagining” of the medical tradition’s policies and practices.¹

The Health Equity Task Force is a subset of the Indian River County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and is rooted in three priorities: housing, health, and economic opportunity and employment. The CHIP was developed with a health equity component in each of its priorities and aligns with the goals of the American Medical Association to push health equity forward by advancing policies on racism as a public health threat, health equity in medical education, health care delivery and research and practice.² The Task Force furthers these efforts to improve the accessibility, quality, and safety of health care; reduce costs while using resources efficiently; and improve the health and quality of life of the residents of Indian River County.

The Florida Department of Health in Indian River engages community partners and stakeholders in assessing the health needs of underserved communities, prioritizing health needs and devising an action plan through strategic planning. Task Force members include representatives from the fields of healthcare, social services, education, community development, philanthropy, city and county government, hospitality, and business.

The Task Force held a series of meetings chaired by the Community Health Improvement Manager, from DOH-Indian River and including the Minority Health Liaison. Task Force members contributed their knowledge and viewpoints. The identified health inequities outlined in this plan are based on the review of quantitative data and qualitative data from various key stakeholders and community members including the Indian River County Health Needs Assessment, Healthy People 2030, Asset-Limited Income-Constrained Employed (ALICE) reporting, Florida Health Charts, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) among others.

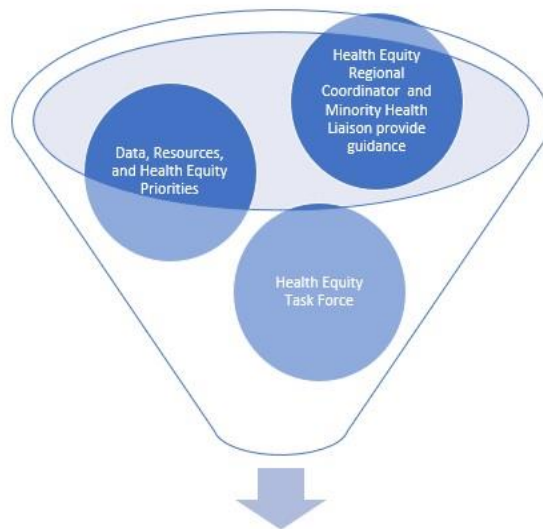
Discussions about health disparities and gaps in education and services to under-resourced communities of color resulted in a consensus that all efforts to attain health as defined by the World Health Organization must include addressing equity to be successful at attaining a state of complete

¹ “Race, Racism, and the Policy of 21st Century Medicine”, Mia Keeys, Joaquin Baca and Aletha Maybank, Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine, (2021)

² American Medical Association, House of Delegates November 2020 AMA Special Meeting

wellbeing for our community. A series of draft vision statements were discussed, but ultimately, “Achieve Health Equity for Indian River County” was chosen because it is targeted, brief and powerful.

The participation and dedication of the individuals that comprise the Task Force, as advocates for their agencies and the populations they serve, brought tremendous value to this visioning process.



Health Equity Vision

Achieve Health Equity for Indian River County

II. PURPOSE OF THE HEALTH EQUITY PLAN

Health Equity is achieved when everyone can attain optimal health.

The Florida Department of Health’s Office of Minority Health (OMH) works with government agencies and community organizations to address the barriers inhibiting populations from reaching optimal health. This requires recognizing and eliminating the systemic barriers that have produced disparities in achieving wellness. In response to Chapter 2021-1700 of the Florida Statute, effective July 1, 2021, each county health department (CHD) has been provided resources to create a Health Improvement Plan to address health disparities in their communities.

The purpose of the Health Equity Plan is to increase health equity within Indian River County. To develop this plan, the Department of Health in Indian River (DOH-Indian River) followed the Florida Department of Health’s approach of multi-sector engagement to analyze data and resources, coordinate existing efforts and establish collaborative initiatives. This plan addresses key Social and Economic Barriers indicators affecting health disparities within Indian River County. This Health Equity Plan is not a county health department plan; it is a county-wide Health Equity Plan through which the Health Equity Task Force, including a variety of government, non-profit, and other community organizations, align to address the Social and Economic Barriers that impact health and well-being in the county.

III. COLLABORATION

Cross-sector collaborations and partnerships are essential components of improving health and well-being. Such collaborations interconnect to form the whole cloth from which the Health Equity Plan was formed and play an integral part in creating a community effort to eliminate health disparities and promote equity in all Social and Economic Barriers. Subsequently, uncovering the impact of education, health care access and quality, economic stability, social and community context, neighborhood and built environment and other factors influencing the well-being of populations. Cross-sector partners provide the range of expertise necessary to develop and implement the Health Equity Plan.



DOH-Indian River and the Health Equity Task Force work with partner organizations throughout the county to increase the reach of programs and potential solutions.

Communication between providers and between providers and clients is essential when working to address Social and Economic Barriers. Each Task Force member shares information within DOH-Indian River as well as with coalition members and community partners.

Through these associations, DOH-Indian River strengthens its collaboration with community organizations, professionals and specialists and extends its reach and impact in underserved communities.

A. Florida State University School of Medicine

A cross-sector partnership was formed between Florida State University (FSU) School of Medicine, the DOH-Wabasso site, Treasure Coast Food Bank and DOH-Indian River with a goal of education and awareness of healthy behaviors and good nutrition among children in underserved areas within Indian River County. FSU sends medical students to DOH-Indian River for a public health training rotation, much like a brief internship. While at DOH-Indian River, these medical students review health data and determine effective measures to reduce health disparities. DOH-Indian River provides data sources, information about public health services and programs in the area as well as information about the history of the underserved communities in Indian River County.

The results of this collaboration are beneficial for all partners. The FSU medical students receive an education on public health services, but more importantly, they are exposed to living conditions that will have lasting effects on the health of the patients they interact with. Each medical student learns the value of considering the social and economic barriers as well as medical diagnosis when dealing with their patients. They are also made aware of doctor shortages and the need for accessible health care in underserved communities.

B. Nurse Family Partnership

The Nurse Family Partnership program operates jointly with Head Start and DOH-Indian River to provide expecting and new mothers the best chance of a healthy life. They partner with CareNet for physical checkups, Early Learning Coalition for childcare, Career Source Research Coast for job training and employment, Safe Space for intimate partner violence, Kids Closet for clothing, baby seats and other essentials and assist their clients with mental health evaluations in partnership with the Mental Health Collaborative. These partners provided insights on the Social and Economic Barriers to service, common health problem statistics, usage rates for services and communication blocks between agencies.

C. Mental Health Professionals

Another example of Health Equity Task Force member collaboration: Indian River County's mental health professionals, Mental Health Collaborative and the Mental Health Association provided speakers and materials for distribution to the Senior Resource Association and Senior Collaborative to combat isolation and depression. The Mental Health Collaborative is also providing train the trainer classes in Mental Health First Aid to members of the community.

D. DOH-Wabasso No-Cost Programs and Services

DOH-Indian River has extended its reach by establishing a community resource center in Wabasso. The programs and services include:

1. **Florida Blue Educational Gardening Program** – On-site Educational Garden - Nutrition Education workshops and trainings on specific topics such as reading food labels, preparing healthy meals, the “Healthy Plate” concept and healthy lifestyle. DOH partners with other organizations (Douglas Head Start and St. Vincent de Paul) to help cultivate their own gardens.

2. **Indian River County Human Services** – Provides rental, utilities, prescription, and indigent cremation assistance to qualifying applicants.
3. **Indian River County Parks & Recreation Fitness** – Bi-weekly classes for Seniors involving walking, aerobics, weights and bands.
4. **Senior Resource Association (SRA)** – Daily Congregate Meals for Seniors to socialize and enjoy lunch with other community members. Nutrition education materials provided with topics: Facts on Fats, Sodium, Magnesium, Heart Health, Exercise, etc.
5. **Treasure Coast Food Bank (TCFB) Nutrition Education Classes** – Monthly Presentations to Senior Resource Association Clients including food preparation demonstrations and recipes with topics such as: Nutrition Labels, Setting Goals, Serving Sizes, Seasonal Foods, etc.
6. **Treasure Coast Food Bank (TCFB) Pantry** – TCFB provides frozen and nonperishable foods, fresh produce, household, baby and personal items for the pantry. Clients have access to the pantry once a month to choose items according to the number of people in households and limits of inventory. Currently serving over 107 families (250 individuals).
7. **Senior Collaborative Program** – UPSLIDE: Utilizing and Promoting Social Engagement for Loneliness, Isolation and Depression in the Elderly - “Friends Connection Group” for men and women (60+) who want to socially connect with others. The program offers: individual counseling, peer sharing groups, social support engagement, congregate meals, and transportation.

IV. HEALTH EQUITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

Defining Health Equity as the attainment of the highest level of health for all people and making it a part of the vision for DOH-Indian River is a big undertaking. Understanding social and economic barriers to health care, evaluation of gaps in services and recognizing the level of understanding of health equity are first steps to achieving this vision.

Social and economic barriers to health care are continuously identified and addressed through actions taken by Coalition members in CHIP working group meetings, Health Equity Task Force meetings and in DOH- Indian River Program Management Council and Expanded Management meetings.

DOH-Indian River’s Minority Health Liaison (MHL) is fully engaged in under resourced communities providing health information, connecting people to assistance for food, utilities, mortgage or rent and collecting community feedback. The MHL also engages community partners to accomplish our health equity goals and objectives and tracks DOH-Indian River’s progress towards meeting these goals.

The Office of Minority Health and our Regional Health Equity Coordinator provide training and technical support to the MHL on topics such as: the health equity planning process and goals, facilitation and prioritization techniques, reporting requirements and taking a systems approach to address health disparities. Eliminating gaps in services are key to providing effective care and the attainment of the highest level of health. An effective treatment for a health issue is worthless if those who need the treatment cannot access it because of transportation issues, internet only access or costs.

Education is key to achieving health equity. DOH-Indian River understands that training in health equity and cultural competency are critical for creating a sustainable health equity focus. Each year, DOH-Indian River identifies worthwhile training opportunities and notifies staff of these opportunities. Participation is on a voluntary basis in some instances, mandatory in others.

DOH-Indian River recognized the need to determine the level of understanding about health equity among staff and the level of integration of health equity in DOH-Indian River programs and services. Evaluations began with senior leadership. In July 2023 the Program Management Council (PMC) used, “Improving Health equity: Assessment Tool for Health Care Organizations” from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to assess leadership’s understanding of health equity and determine how leadership is integrating and supporting health equity efforts in programs and services.

This evaluation reinforced a need for education and expanded discussions about the role of health equity in all staff functions. DOH-Indian River has increased the number of mandatory classes with equity and cultural competency focus for management and staff, used bulletin boards and Teams sites to promote equity awareness and is including discussions about the role of health equity in staff meetings.

Our community partners work shoulder to shoulder with us to expose and reduce social and economic barriers to health care. DOH-Indian River shares grant opportunities, educational materials and our vision, goals and objectives for health equity with this coalition.

Outreach is essential for both community input and education. DOH-Indian River and the MHL work with our community partners to organize and present health fairs, screening events and panel discussions about areas of community interest such as chronic disease and food security.

Since the development of the DOH-Indian River Health Equity Plan in June of 2022, many events have been conducted:

- **December 10, 2022** - Pathway to Homeownership (DOH-Wabasso site) - Presentations from a low-income housing provider, mortgage broker, legal expert and realtor.
- **January 27, 2023** - Health Screening Event (DOH-Wabasso site) - Including blood pressure, blood sugar, A1C, comprehensive eye exams, cancer screening, nutrition education, diabetes education, flu vaccinations, and HIV tests.

- **April 22, 2023** – Minority Health Month Event (DOH-Wabasso site) focused on raising awareness of Sickle Cell Disease, the disparities in Indian River County, and the importance of blood donation. The event featured a panel discussion including SCD Survivors, a Case Manager and Minority Health Regional Coordinator.



During the Minority Health event, supportive DOH Partners provided incentives, health and wellness education information, and health tests and screenings:

- 1) Sickle Cell Disease Foundation
- 2) Cleveland Clinic IR Hospital
- 3) Visiting Nurses Association
- 4) Treasure Coast Food Bank
- 5) United Against Poverty
- 6) DOH-HIV/AIDS Prevention
- 7) Friends After Diagnosis
- 8) WIC Florida
- 9) One Blood - Big Red Bus

- **June 29, 2023** - Food Security Summit (Gifford Youth Achievement Center, Vero Beach) - Representatives from food producers, vendors and consumers discussed issues in food distribution, communication between providers and gaps in service to under-resourced communities
- **December 1, 2023** - World AIDS Day Event (DOH/Wabasso site) – Partners provided free health screenings, flu vaccinations, Body Mass Index (BMI) evaluations, health information, blood donations and HIV/AIDS testing.

V. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To appropriately align goals and objectives with the health equity priorities of the county, the Task Force determined to identify the root causes of each priority. DOH-Indian River and the Health Equity Task Force work with partner organizations and professionals on common goals to implement programs and provide services focused on assessing and addressing Social and Economic Barriers.

GOAL #1	
Establish a DOH site in Wabasso as a community and Health Equity Resource Center	
OBJECTIVE: By July 30, 2024, provide place-based services and information, increasing the number of residents who receive assistance due to Social and Economic Barriers on an annual basis at FLDOH site in Wabasso from 0 in February 2024 to 240.	STATUS: Completed/Met
GOAL #2	
Institute policy, system and environmental structures to address Social and Economic Barriers and mitigate disproportionate burden from emergencies on vulnerable communities.	
OBJECTIVE: By September 30, 2024, engage community members in setting health equity priorities through the use of PACE-EH Methodology’s 13 steps starting from 0 in September 2021.	STATUS: Ongoing/On Track
GOAL #3	
Increase the number of agencies in Indian River County that provide assistance to SCD patients and caregivers from 0 in 2022 to 1.	
OBJECTIVE: By December 30, 2025, increase the number of agencies in Indian River County that provide assistance to SCD patients and caregivers from 0 in 2022 to 1.	STATUS: On Track
GOAL #4	
Significantly reduce barriers to care	
OBJECTIVE: By December 30, 2025, identify and reduce the effects of Social and Economic Barriers to care for underserved communities including patients and their care givers from 0 known barriers in February 2022.	STATUS: On Track
GOAL #5	
Reduce the number of SCD crises requiring hospitalization	
OBJECTIVE: By June 30, 2026, decrease Emergency Department Visit Rate for Sickle Cell Disorders with Vaso-Occlusive Crises as Primary Diagnosis by 10% from 22.1 per 100,000 in 2020.	STATUS: In Process
GOAL #6	
Improve the mental and physical health, housing, economic opportunities and employment for people in Indian River County	
OBJECTIVE: By December 30, 2026, local partners will develop and execute a sustainable Community Health Improvement Plan that focus on five new health and economic issues from no focus in these areas in September 2021.	STATUS: On Track