

H.R. 3014, The Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007

The U.S. health care system continues to fall short in providing adequate care to America's racial and ethnic minorities and rural populations. *The Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007* is comprehensive legislation aimed at the root causes of the current health disparities crisis - access to health care, research, and education. This bill, which was developed by the Health Chairs of the House minority caucuses, will help eliminate the persistent health disparities that leave millions of Americans in poorer health and more likely to die prematurely during their most productive life years.

Highlights

Strengthens educational institutions. This legislation will strengthen the capacity of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Asian-American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.

Incorporates efforts to reduce health disparities throughout the federal government. This bill strengthens the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health and codifies the Minority AIDS Initiative and the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health across all relevant federal agencies. It also addresses the environmental determinants of health.

Bolsters efforts to ensure culturally and linguistically appropriate health care and remove language and cultural barriers to healthcare. The bill will help patients from diverse backgrounds, including those with limited English proficiency, by codifying existing standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate health care, assisting health care professionals to provide cultural and language services, and increasing federal reimbursement for these services.

Increases workforce diversity. The bill strongly supports the programs covered under Title VII and will expand programs to address the shortage of under-represented health care providers. Increasing the number of such providers will improve access to care because these providers are more likely to serve low-income, uninsured, and racial and ethnic minority patients, and are more likely to do so in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

Strengthens and coordinates data collection. The bill, with appropriate safeguards to protect privacy, will require federal agencies and recipients of federal funds to collect and report data on race, ethnicity, and primary language. This bill will also provide grants to minority-serving institutions to access and analyze such data to assess the effectiveness of efforts to eliminate health disparities.

Ensures accountability and improves evaluation. The bill will require each federal health agency to develop and implement a national strategic action plan to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities. It expands the Office of Civil Rights and the Office of Minority Health at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), creates minority health offices within agencies at DHHS, and establishes compliance offices in federal health agencies.

Advances rural health. The bill will establish the Rural Health Quality Advisory Commission, which would oversee a national plan for rural health quality improvement, ensure proportional representation of interests of rural areas on MedPAC, and provide grants for rural health care providers.

Improves health care services. *The Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2007* will establish community-centric initiatives to coordinate existing resources to address health disparities, provide grants to launch cancer prevention demonstration projects, address border health issues, promote positive health behaviors among women and ensure that low-income legal immigrants can ensure access to health care for their children. It also supports the implementation of health information technology as a means to measure, monitor and reduce health disparities.