

# News Release

Blue Cross Blue Shield  
Association  
225 North Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60601-7680  
[www.BCBS.com](http://www.BCBS.com)

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**Contact:**  
[press@bcbsa.com](mailto:press@bcbsa.com)

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## **Blue Cross Blue Shield Association Announces National Health Equity Strategy to Confront the Nation's Crisis in Racial Health Disparities**

### **Sets Goal to Reduce Racial Disparities in Maternal Health by 50% in Five Years**

**CHICAGO, IL (April 20, 2021)** – Today, as part of its ongoing mission to improve the health of America, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) announced its National Health Equity Strategy to confront the nation's crisis in racial health disparities. This strategy intends to change the trajectory of health disparities and re-imagine a more equitable healthcare system. BCBSA has convened a national advisory panel of doctors, public health experts and community leaders to provide guidance.

"Your health shouldn't depend on the color of your skin or the neighborhood you live in," said Kim Keck, president and CEO of BCBSA. "The crisis in racial disparities in our country's health care is unconscionable and unacceptable. While BCBS companies have made great strides in addressing racial health disparities in our local communities, there is so much more to be done."

"Starting here and starting now, we can begin to put an end to the racial disparities in health care," continued Keck. "Our deep roots in the local communities we serve, combined with the scale and scope of our national reach, enable all of us at Blue Cross Blue Shield companies to drive this new strategy and bring real change. But we cannot do it alone. It is a moment in time when we as a nation must come together to build a new model of equitable health care."

BCBSA's National Health Equity Strategy is comprehensive and relies on close collaboration with providers and local community organizations. This collaboration was essential in recent months as BCBS companies worked with local leaders to support vulnerable communities with COVID-19 vaccine access. The strategy includes collecting data to measure disparities, scaling effective programs, working with providers to improve

outcomes and address unconscious bias, leaning into partnerships at the community level, and influencing policy decisions at the state and federal levels. The multi-year strategy will focus on four conditions that disproportionately affect communities of color: maternal health, behavioral health, diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. BCBSA will first focus on maternal health, then behavioral health in 2021.

### **Setting a Goal to Address Racial Disparities in Maternal Health**

BCBSA has set a public goal to reduce racial disparities in maternal health by 50% in five years.

“BCBS companies are fully committed to reach this goal,” said Keck. “We will continue to collaborate with our local partners and providers to continually improve our programs and build momentum, and we will seek out new ideas and proven initiatives that accelerate health equity reform.”

Metrics will include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [Severe Maternal Morbidity](#) measures. BCBSA will report results annually. Use of nationally consistent measures will evolve over time based on research, industry development, and in-market learnings.

BCBS companies currently have a range of maternal health programs supporting women of color during their pregnancies. Each program is tailored to the needs of the communities they serve. These BCBS companies’ maternal health programs support both BCBS members and non-members of their partner organizations.

Commenting on the breadth of the BCBS companies’ maternal health programs, Dr. Rachel Hardeman, Founding Director, Center for Antiracism Research for Health Equity and Assistant Professor, Division of Health Policy & Management, University of Minnesota School of Public Health, and member of the newly formed advisory panel, said: “Who better to address racial disparities in maternal health than Blue Cross Blue Shield? BCBS companies serve every ZIP code across the U.S., and they have the scale and resources needed to ensure women of color get equitable maternal health care.”

### **A Panel of Experts Focused on Closing America’s Gap in Health Equity**

“The more people we bring to the table, the more we can create lasting change,” said Keck about the nine handpicked members of the BCBSA National Advisory Panel on Health Equity. “I’m excited we have brought together such experienced, highly regarded leaders in health equity and the community, and I look forward to their guidance as we move forward.”

Members include: **Tracey D. Brown**, CEO of the American Diabetes Association®; **Marshall Chin**, MD, MPH, Richard Parrillo Family Professor of Healthcare Ethics at the University of Chicago; **Gilbert Darrington**, CEO of Health Services, Incorporated; **Adaeze Enekwechi**,

PhD, MPP, Research Associate Professor at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University; **Maria S. Gomez**, RN, MPH, President and CEO of Mary's Center; **Rachel R. Hardeman**, PhD, MPH, Tenured Associate Professor in the Division of Health Policy & Management at the University of Minnesota; **Stacey D. Stewart**, President and CEO of March of Dimes; **Richard Taylor**, CEO of ImbuTec; and **Kevin Washington**, President and CEO of YMCA of the USA.

*The National Health Equity Strategy is part of the Blue Cross Blue Shield [Pledge to Make Meaningful Change](#). The Pledge speaks to BCBS companies' broad commitment to addressing racial disparity in health and all its forms.*

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## **ABOUT BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD ASSOCIATION**

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is a national federation of 35 independent, community-based and locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies that collectively provide healthcare coverage for one in three Americans. BCBSA provides healthcare insights through [The Health of America Report](#) series and the national [BCBS Health Index<sup>SM</sup>](#). For more information on BCBSA and its member companies, please visit [BCBS.com](#). We also encourage you to connect with us on [Facebook](#), check out our videos on [YouTube](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). You can read our [Pledge to Make Meaningful Change](#) here. To learn more about our National Health Equity Strategy and our Maternal Health Program, visit [BlueHealthEquity.com](#).