

ORANGE COUNTY HEALTH EQUITY FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS LEAGUE (HEAAL) COLLECTIVE

HEALTH EQUITY PLAN

The Equity in OC (EiOC) Initiative was a limited-term project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under 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 (CDC-RFA-OT21-2103). The initiative concluded in May 2024. This document and any associated EiOC branding were developed as part of that grant-funded effort.



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INTRODUCTION

The Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA) Office of Population Health and Equity (OPHE) received nearly \$23 million in grant funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) national initiative to address COVID-19 health disparities among populations at high-risk and underserved, including racial and ethnic minority populations and rural communities (CDC-RFA-OT21-2103).

The long-term strategies of this two-year **Equity in OC Initiative** will:

- Expand existing and/or develop new mitigation and prevention resources.
- Increase or improve data collection, reporting, and infrastructure.
- Build, leverage, and expand the capacity and infrastructure of local health departments.
- Mobilize partners and collaborators to advance health equity and address social determinants of health.

As a part of EiOC, seven Population Health Equity Collectives were created:

- Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander community
- Black or African American community
- Individuals with disabilities
- Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, or Latin American community
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community
- Older adult community
- South Asian, Middle Eastern, North African (SAMENA)

The overarching goals of these Collectives are to:

- Address health inequities and improve social determinants of health through collaboration, partnership, and inclusion of lived experiences and authentic voices.
- Overcome inequitable access to opportunities, resources, and support services for targeted and prioritized populations in Orange County.
- Build and support cohesive and sustainable Collectives in Orange County, and address systemic health inequities facing prioritized impacted communities.
- Provide venues for community voice in identifying and determining solutions, and priorities in addressing health inequities of the Collective.

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The purpose of the Health Equity Plan (HEP) is to support the creation of practical, meaningful, and sustainable improvements in the health and well-being of the Black and African American community in Orange County. The HEP for each community will guide the vision, including unique strategies and calls-to-action that will help to propel the community toward health equity.

PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY

Health Equity for African American's League ("HEAAL" or "the Collective") plays a key role in aligning with equity planning groups while focusing on Black and African American communities. We endeavor to identify social determinants of health, provide education, actively advocate and influence decision-making in local, state, and federal organizations.

Our primary mission is to gather, synthesize, share relevant data, feedback and lived experiences that identifies the social determinants of health outcomes within the Black population of Orange County, California.

HEAAL's survey targets Black residents ages 16+, who work and worship in Orange County, the unhoused and those who are at risk (pregnant, sexually active, and senior citizens).

The Executive Board consists of five churches—Second Baptist, Friendship Baptist, Christ Our Redeemer A.M.E., Johnson Chapel A.M.E. and New Hope Presbyterian—two health-focused organizations—Divinely Restored and HerStory Inc.—and one faith-based organization—the Orange County chapter of the National Action Network. A total of eight organizations make up the Executive Board. The Collective includes additional churches, small business owners, sororities, fraternities, civic organizations, local colleges/universities, community advocates, and individual citizens committed to improving the health outcomes of Blacks in Orange County.

For the HEAAL community in Orange County, we, the members of this Collective, are operating under the common shared understanding of what will lead to health equity for our community.

Due to the absence of empirical data for the Black population of Orange County, the Collective desires to become a network for Black, Orange County residents to share culturally relevant information, events, and surveys that will assist with addressing social determinants of health to achieve equity in health care.

The HEAAL Collective has three primary roles in promoting health equity:

- Serving as a trusted advisor to the Black community.
- Facilitating the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on health-related issues affecting black residents of Orange County.
- Identifying and addressing the factors contributing to toxic stressors and traumatic experiences that negatively impact health outcomes and increase healthcare costs within the Black community.

Unfortunately, during the pandemic, statistics revealed that African Americans were disproportionately negatively affected by COVID-19 compared to other races. In response to the challenges faced by the Black community, in the midst of efforts to combat racial division and ensure equitable access to medical attention and support, the five churches in Orange County serving predominantly black congregations joined forces. Their aim was to educate, share resources, and host COVID-19 testing clinics in addition to advocating for social justice in Orange County. In January 2021, a partnership was formed with the HCA to establish vaccination clinics. Subsequently, other organizations such as CalOptima, UCI, and Kaiser engaged the churches for clinics as well. These clinics were accessible to all traditionally underserved segments of the county's population, but particular attention was given to addressing vaccine concerns within the dispersed Black communities. Through this collaborative effort, over 1,700 Black and Latinx individuals were vaccinated. The churches joined forces with the aforementioned medical and faith-based organizations to form HEAAL which was awarded a \$200,000 Population Health Equity grant in June 2022.

The grant enabled HEAAL to build capacity within the Black community, and receive training and support to contribute to the Equity in OC initiative funded by the CDC.

Through a partnership with Advance OC, HEAAL was able to collect data from 1% of the Black population in Orange County, leading to the [first survey](#) of its kind—created and administered by Black residents. The collaboration with Advance OC was seen as a fortunate partnership, enabling the successful administration of the survey and strengthened HEAAL’s efforts. HEAAL also organized forums and focus groups to develop an Equity Action plan.

It is important to note that when referring to the Black and African American community, we intend to be inclusive of all who identify as Black, which includes people of African ancestry from all continents.

The collective actively engages in ongoing panel discussions, forums, and roundtables to express our thoughts, share experiences, and communicate with the community. However, the members of the collective also have individual influence within their respective businesses and church settings where we serve Blacks at various stages of life.

Dr. Tony Evans, a nationally recognized minister, speaker, author, and widely syndicated radio and television broadcaster, serves as the Senior Pastor of Oakcliff Bible Fellowship. As the first black graduate with a doctoral degree from Dallas Theological Seminary and an associate professor in the DTS’ Pastoral Ministries Department, Dr. Evans emphasizes in his book “Oneness Embraced” that the church, rather than the government, is the most effective social service delivery system. It is closer to the needs of the people, possesses a substantial potential volunteer force, has facilities for impactful programs, and provides a moral and spiritual frame of reference for making right choices.

The pandemic experience has revealed the strong desire for trusted leadership in the Black community. Despite being dispersed throughout the county, black individuals sought out trusted groups for information, support, and clarity as the pandemic neared its end. This was evident through the gradual increase in church attendance, higher participation in online meetings, and unprecedented turnout at the Black History Unity Festival held in Anaheim.

These developments enhanced the Collective’s ability to educate people about the importance of participating in the survey.

Moving forward, HEAAL will host an Equity Action Lab, with medical, city and county stakeholders, as well as community members. Equipped with data, we will collectively develop plans for our county to become more equitable for Blacks and African Americans. For this, the Collective expresses sincere gratitude.

COLLECTIVE MEMBERSHIP

Our Collective has a total of 24 members from a variety of organizations. Which includes individual community members also engaged in the work. HEAAL recognizes that true holistic well-being is achieved when physical, mental, and financial health intersect. Before the pandemic, Black churches (which serve predominantly African American congregations) played a vital role in our communities, going beyond their worship services to provide additional services such as health and wellness fairs, mammogram clinics, cancer screenings, counseling services, exercise classes, and food distribution. These events served as valuable sources of reliable information for the widely dispersed Black population.

Type of Partner Organizations	Name(s) of Partner Organizations
Academic Institutions	UCI, Chapman University, Cal State Fullerton
Corporation, Industry or Private Sector	Edwards Lifesciences, Advance OC
Correctional Facilities and Institutions	
Council, Community Group or Coalition	Orange County chapters of: NAACP, 100 Black Men, National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Sororities & Fraternities: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority
Faith-Based Organizations	Second Baptist Church, New Hope Presbyterian Church, Johnson Chapel, Christ Our Redeemer AME., Friendship Baptist Church, National Action Network-Orange County Chapter
Federal Agency (other than CDC)	
Healthcare Providers	HerStory Inc.
Health-Related Organizations	CalOptima-Medical, Association of Black Cardiologists
Individual Community Members	Johnice Williams, Princess Osita-Oleribe, Rev. Dion Thomas
Local Governmental Agencies	Chorus-OC Navigator, OC Links
Local Health Department	OC Health Care Agency (OCHCA), Office of Population Health (OPHE)
Mental or Behavioral Health Organization	Be Well, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
Nongovernmental Organizations	Orange County Center for Social Justice
Schools/School Districts	
State Health department	
Tribes, Tribal Organizations	
Other Relevant Black-Owned Businesses	Barber Shops, Beauty Shops, Massage Spas, etc.

Blacks and African Americans are highly dispersed throughout the county.

The pastors of the major Black churches in Orange County determined to collaborate for the betterment of Black residents in the county. These five churches serve the Northern, Mid, Southern and Eastern portions of the county. Through networking, we connected individuals who serve in additional organizations, sororities, and fraternities. This organic growth extended to Black owned businesses and other smaller churches in the county who are also committed to improving the health disparities of Black residents in the county.

The HEAAL Collective employs a collaborative approach to decisions and uses the democratic voting process where all members have an equal vote as our [governance](#). Voting is conducted by our Governance Board which is the five churches and two organizations who were the original members of the grant. A quorum for a vote during HEAAL meetings is seven which equates to one per member organization. However, HEAAL allows up to two votes per organization with the Executive Director as the tiebreaking vote.

We desire to expand to be more representative of the various cross sections of the Black community. This goal has been met with resistance due to challenges with power sharing. The power dynamic is competitive in nature in the Black community. However, we will continue to work to break down silos and engage additional Black-led community organizations.

PROCESS AND DATA

We reviewed data in the 2020 national census data as well as Orange County data. According to the U.S. Census, Orange County, California has 792.9 square miles of land area and is the 47th largest county in California by total area. While the county is home to a diverse population, 2% of its 3.1 million residents are Black, African, or African American. Researching further, we found that data on the Black population in the U.S. Census Advance OC's reporting was underrepresented. We believe this is largely due to the lack of trust within this community.

Conversely, local churches have been trusted voices throughout history for Blacks and the HEAAL Collective members is no exception. It was and is our intention to leverage our relationships to gain trust and thereby collect sorely needed data. While the aforementioned data is important, we determined that a needs assessment of Orange County's Black community was necessary.

The HEAAL Collective benchmarked the community needs assessment created by Advance OC as our basis and added culturally relevant questions. The Collective then dispersed the surveys throughout the Black community via members, partner organizations and electronically to Black residents and folks who worship and work in Orange County but live in a neighboring county. These surveys were also taken through community forums, town halls, community events, local businesses, organizational meetings and post worship services to maximize our reach. The results were tabulated, summarized, and analyzed to determine the top health equity goals and focus areas for the Black community.

Overall, this process led us to the creation of the following OC Residents, Blacks working and worshipping in OC, Unhoused/Homeless and Sexually active/At Risk Black population. These focus areas will be where we focus our work for the upcoming 2-3 years.

The health and wellness of Blacks throughout Orange County is our chief concern. Once we completed our survey, based on the findings, we prioritized the following strategies and objectives.

"... My Healthcare provider is not as knowledgeable about health care concerns that affect African Americans and does not provide preventative measures as a part of my care plan."

—ANONYMOUS FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENT

STRATEGIC HEALTH EQUITY ACTION AREAS

Historically, Orange County has lacked a comprehensive county-wide initiative to address the specific health issues faced by Black and African American residents. To effectively allocate resources and identify health inequities within this population, a needs assessment became imperative. Recognizing this gap, the HEAAL Collective undertook the responsibility of conducting a survey with the aim of assessing the health needs of over 1,500 residents, approximately 3% of the Black and African American population in Orange County. Although we did not collect 1,500 surveys, we were able to achieve 96% significance with 636 surveys. The survey focused on specific priority areas to gather relevant data and insights.



Inclusive Community Representation

The survey targeted teens, adults, pregnant women, unhoused individuals, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and people living with HIV/AIDS. By focusing on these specific populations, HEAAL sought to gather valuable data on their unique health needs and challenges, enabling targeted interventions and resources to address health inequities.



Identify Key Health Related Issues

HEAAL aimed to pinpoint key health issues and their contributing factors by examining social determinants of health and Equity in OC initiatives. This involved assessing the impact of COVID-19 on overall health and wellness and surveying. We found Mental Health, Affordable Housing, Access to Affordable Health Care and Nutrition to be key areas of concern.



Identify Healthcare Discriminatory Practices

To better understand the historical distrust amongst Blacks and African Americans regarding the health care system, the HEAAL survey asked key questions targeted at possible discrimination experiences with healthcare professionals.



Develop Health Plan with Key Stakeholders

HEAAL will organize a health equity action lab, bringing together healthcare professionals, insurance agencies, non-profit organizations, city officials, and community members. The goal is to collaboratively develop a sustainable plan to address and bridge the gap in health equity for Black and African American individuals in Orange County.

1 Policy and Systems Changes

Strategies to Impact Policy and Systems	Objective	Measurable Outcome	Timeline
Publish and build action plan based on results	Educate and Inform key stakeholders of findings Review recommended actions	Invite key stakeholders to attend action lab—over 120 attended	May 20 and August 12, 2023
Provide specific feedback to key local health care companies	Participate in Community Needs gathering focus groups	Scheduled and participated in focus groups and needs assessments	August 2023
Identify intersectional results from surveys, share results and recommend actions	Provide findings to key stakeholders that are specific to their jurisdiction (patients)	Meet with key stakeholders, gain commitment to 2-3 key actions	October 2023
Road shows	Schedule meetings with Board of Supervisors, CalOptima, local mayors, and state legislature	Share report findings and recommendations for key actions for implementation	April 2024
Advocate for allocation of earmark funding	Identify opportunities for funding	Share report with key stakeholders and educate on why funding needs to be allocated for culturally sensitive and competent mental health care professionals and community workshops	March 2024
Sustainability	Identify and source funding from philanthropists	Facilitate traveling farmers markets, educate community on correlation of nutrition, mental health, and chronic diseases	April 2024

2 Meaningful Partnerships, Power Building, and Power Sharing

Strategies to Build Partnerships and Power	Objective	Measurable Outcome	Timeline
Identify who is not in our meetings	Track diversity of participants, group agreement (ground rules) attendance tracked	Increase participation in our groups to be more representative of the community	Bi-Monthly
	Encourage Collective members to invite someone to join the Collective meetings	Gain new perspectives	Monthly
Engage members of churches and organizations and share report findings with invitation to participate in subcommittees	Keep our commitment to the community to share results and invite participation with creating solutions	Number of additional volunteers	October 2023
Community Health Advocate Training (C.H.A.T.) events	HEEAL members providing training on cardiac health	Number of trainings	December 2023
Collaboration	Work with the LGBTQ+ population collective and HCA	Educate the Black population of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the community and strategize ways to educate for testing and resources	April 2024
Power sharing and building	Build relationships with key Black leaders in community: Black Chamber of Commerce, CAPOC, NAACP, New Director of HCA and CEO of CalOptima	Share report and key recommendations. Request ability to participate in commissions and discuss workforce enhancements	May 2024

In addition to the partners already engaged, we believe that to be fully representative, we need to expand our Collective’s membership. In particular, we feel that some members do not have the bandwidth to attend every meeting weekly. We have changed our governance structure to enable pastors to be advisors and working members are the Governance board. We decided to create sub-committees and prioritize our focus on mental health and subtopics with strong correlation such as access to mental health services, impact of nutrition on mental health, etc.

Second Baptist Church (SBC) is also a member of the Aging Collective. We have shared data and invited members of the Collective to attend their meetings. SBC has also become a sub-contractor with Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Alliance (OCAPICA) for the Mental Health and Wellness in Diverse populations grant. This grant exposed us to Be Well and the employment of training of peer volunteers. After we graduated the first group, HEAAL members enrolled in the second. We are also educating groups on Mental Health First Aid, Suicide prevention and Mental Hygiene locally and on social media.

HEAAL’s community needs assessment has been used as a benchmark for the LGBTQ+ and South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African (SAMENA) Population Collectives. With the help of Advance OC, the LGBTQ+ Collective was able to launch their needs assessment this month. HEAAL is also looking to identify safe spaces with the LGBTQ+ collective for the communities that attend church to grow and network. We provided best practice sharing regarding our data collection with SAMENA and HCA on our strategic approach as well. We also participate in the Office of Aging work that is being performed as mentioned previously.

3 Infrastructure, Data, and Other Capacities

Strategies to Strengthen Infrastructure, Data or Other Capacities	Objective	Measurable Outcome	Timeline
Require two people from each organization in the collective	Increase participation Increase diversity of thought	Attendance in meetings	July 2023
Join County Homeless Commission	Ensure concerns from the Black community are considered	Attendance in meetings	August 2023
Partner with Advance OC to assist with surveying LGBTQ+ and Unhoused Populations	Gain additional insights on Black residents who are in these two communities	Survey responses from Black residents	October 2023
Establish additional roles	Expand responsibilities	Reporting from various roles: Secretary, Finance, various subcommittees	December 2023
Equip teams for roadshows	Develop templates and packages for roadshows	Establish dates for roadshows, Key deliverables, and incorporation of feedback	December 2023
Equip members for advocacy with legislature	Prepare documentation to educate members on expectations of law makers, presentation requirements, clearly defining our requests and follow up/accountability conversations	Assign members and schedule travel, appointments and presentations	February 2024
Resource guides	Develop resource guides for culturally sensitive mental health care providers	Publish resource guides	February 2024

HEAAL has increased participation by requiring two (2) people from each organization. HEAAL and key stakeholders have also initiated action plans with tactics that can easily be employed by our organization. We serve as a network for information to be distributed throughout the black community as well as with various support vehicles such as OC Navigator, OC Links etc. HEAAL members have also secured training from the Association of Black Cardiologists (ABC) to become health advocates in our community (CHAT-Community Health Advocate Team). We host monthly training on topics related to cardiac health in addition to distributing materials such Heart Health evaluations, whole food plant-based soul food recipes and conduct health screenings at health fairs. We have networked to expand our breadth with Mental Health education, Health Fairs and Food Distribution to address Health and Nutrition issues.

Intersectional data as well as the supplemental data for the Unhoused and LGBTQ+ communities will further assist us with implementing systematic changes beyond the recommendations from our Action Labs.