



Strengthening Science and Community Impact Through Equitable Research Practices

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Executive Summary

This report describes the Humana Foundation's strategy to promote health equity across research funds.

We highlight three research method themes found in our research partners' projects and conclude with recommendations for funders interested in starting a research strategy or those who want to attract research partners who follow equitable research practices.

Research Funding Strategy

Our research funding strategy is built on two pillars: 1) a rigorous test-and-learn approach to identify effective interventions; and 2) a commitment to health equity and transparency. Each year, we develop a research agenda targeting gaps in health equity, seeking multidisciplinary teams who focus on serving low-resourced and diverse communities to foster community-centered collaboration. Since the program's launch in 2023, the Foundation's research partners have demonstrated insightful trends in equitable research practices, focusing on access and opportunity, community leadership, and respecting human dignity.

Community-Engaged Research

Over several decades, community-engaged research has emerged as a strategy to address historic community mistrust and low study participation rates among minority populations.¹ Studies indicate that participant trust in research institutions is essential for increasing engagement and facilitating the development of effective interventions to improve health outcomes.² Recognizing the importance of this approach, we used community-engaged research as a lens to assess how research partners in our portfolio are employing equitable research practices. Based on an analysis of 11 partner projects and six interviews, we identified the research partners engaged in community-based participatory research (CBPR) and other methods within the community-engaged research (CEnR) continuum. CBPR fosters collaboration between researchers and community members, ensuring interventions are responsive to community needs.³

We found three themes in how the academic partners are practicing community-engaged research:

- 1 Expanding access and opportunity:** The research teams design culturally responsive methods and interventions. They also removed barriers to participation and expanded opportunity by working with trusted local institutions such as schools, churches and non-profits to increase outreach. Finally, they have research teams with direct knowledge and expertise with the local populations they are serving and their everyday challenges.
- 2 Promoting community leadership:** The academic partners also work together with local communities to design and implement practical health solutions. Through trusted partnerships with local institutions, community-led formative research and advisory boards made up of local leaders, those who know the issues best play an active role in shaping research.
- 3 Respecting human dignity:** The research projects weave principles of compassion and care throughout the research process, ensuring participant safety and sensitivity. They also model fair compensation practices to respect participants' and community organizations' contributions. Additionally, they work to reduce stigma associated with participation in studies that provide services or benefits. Finally, they prioritize welcoming and multilayered communications.

Conclusion

Our partners' innovative research strategies focus on achieving health equity through culturally responsive and community-led research practices that prioritize human dignity. By working along the community-engaged research spectrum, they aim to build trust, deepen relationships and increase their impact.

Next Steps and Recommendations

We invite funders to collaborate with us in developing or revising their research strategy. Key actions include:

- 1 Ensure your research strategy is focused on achieving health equity goals.
- 2 Focus on how health equity goals are achieved through innovative and community-engaged research practices.
- 3 Familiarize yourself with equitable research trends to best identify them in research proposals.
- 4 Clarify to applicants that you are seeking equitable approaches to research and targeting underserved, lower-resourced, and diverse populations.
- 5 Consider funding models that provide researchers with the flexibility needed to work effectively with communities. Ensuring they have the resources to adapt and address public health challenges is a vital investment in healthier, more resilient communities.

Together, we can drive lasting change by prioritizing equitable approaches to research, ensuring better health outcomes for everyone.

To read the full report, visit www.humanafoundation.org/content/dam/humana-assets/design-assets/sites/humana-foundation/assets/humana-foundation-report.pdf.

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About Us

The Humana Foundation is dedicated to fostering health equity by dismantling social and structural barriers to health and healthcare through evidence-based interventions. Our mission is to support diverse communities, including seniors, veterans, and school-aged children, to live healthier, more connected lives. Our approach emphasizes creating emotional connections and promoting nutritional health as part of a holistic care strategy. By engaging directly with communities, we aim to improve health outcomes by listening to and learning from those on the ground.

Citations

1. Ortiz, K., Nash, J., Shea, L., Oetzel, J., Garoutte, J., Sanchez-Youngman, S., & Wallerstein, N. (2020). Partnerships, processes, and outcomes: a health equity-focused scoping meta-review of community-engaged scholarship. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 41(1), 177-199. Last accessed on 11/27/24 at: [Partnerships, Processes, and Outcomes: A Health Equity-Focused Scoping Meta-Review of Community-Engaged Scholarship | Annual Reviews](#)
2. Smirnoff M, Wilets I, Ragin DF, Adams R, Holohan J, Rhodes R, Winkel G, Ricci EM, Clesca C, Richardson LD. A paradigm for understanding trust and mistrust in medical research: the Community VOICES study. *AJOB empirical bioethics*. 2018 Jan 2;9(1):39-47.
3. Cook, W. K. (2008). Integrating research and action: a systematic review of community-based participatory research to address health disparities in environmental and occupational health in the USA. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 62(8), 668-676.