

Using an Anti-Racist, Family-Centered Focus to Improve Pediatric Care

Children and families need a health care system that serves their unique needs and supports opportunities for life-long health and well-being. The current system, however, fails too many children, especially Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other children of color. The pediatric field can better support children and families by taking steps to transform care beyond medical care and involving children and families in the process.



The Need to Improve Child Health Care

Many disparities in child health care can be addressed by integrating an anti-racist, family-centered focus in pediatric care. Examples include:



When Black providers care for Black newborns, the mortality rate of Black infants is [cut in half](#) and other racial disparities are reduced.



When providers examine their bias and mistrust of patients and families of color, the likelihood of providers [wrongly reporting suspected abuse](#) to child protective services can be reduced.



Family-centered care is associated with [improved care access and health outcomes](#) for children, particularly children with special health care needs.

Strategies to Support Child Health Care Transformation

Pediatric health care teams are uniquely poised to affect life-long health and well-being by supporting opportunities to prevent development delays, address health-related social needs, and reduce the risk of chronic disease, trauma, and mental health difficulties. When pediatric health care is consistently anti-racist, strengths-based, and delivered in partnership with families and communities, more children have access to the relationships, resources, and care they need to thrive.

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This fact sheet is a product of the Center for Health Care Strategies' (CHCS) **Accelerating Child Health Transformation** initiative. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CHCS is working with pediatric pilot sites to improve children's health care through anti-racist practices and family-driven approaches. To learn more, visit chcs.org/project/accelerating-child-health-transformation.

Following are strategies for improving child health care and examples of practical recommendations for providers, payers, and policymakers to consider adopting:

1. Adopt anti-racist policies and practices to advance health equity

Child health care providers can intentionally acknowledge and [undo harmful biases and dismantle racism](#) at the individual, organizational, and system levels by establishing anti-racist policies and practices that promote equity and dignity for patients, families, and staff. For example, practices can:



- Promote a [trauma-informed environment](#) of mutual trust and respect, rooted in dignity.
- Provide cultural humility, implicit bias, and race equity trainings for staff at all levels.
- Develop training, recruiting, hiring, and retention strategies for a more diverse workforce.

2. Co-create equitable partnerships between patients, families, community partners, and providers

Since families are experts on themselves and their experiences, providers should engage patients and their caretakers in practice transformation and care decision-making. For example, practices can:



- Co-design engagement practices with families and set up family advisory boards.
- Engage patients, families, and community partners in the design of screening and referral processes.
- Value family autonomy, expertise about their child, and priorities to establish a [trusted partnership](#).

3. Identify family strengths and health-related social needs

Providers can collaborate with families to move beyond a traditional health care approach, which is often problem-oriented, to one that uplifts family and community strengths and values physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being.



For example, practices can:

- Co-create a strength-based [eco-map](#) to understand family and community attributes and resource gaps.
- Expand care teams to include community health workers, social workers, or family navigators.
- Develop partnerships with managed care organizations to better support resources and referral pathways to address social needs.

Health System Levers to Support Child Health Transformation

To address disparities in pediatric care and support a more holistic and family-centered approach, a shift is needed to finance care delivery that provides more than clinical care and help the field think beyond clinical measures. Innovative financing structures and accountability measures can help address the lack of time and resources that pediatric care teams need to commit to practice transformation:

- **Financing mechanisms** should encourage investment in healthy child development and upstream prevention, and provide flexibility for providers to best meet these goals; and
- **Accountability measures**, including ones that are patient-centered and more holistic, are needed at the practitioner, community, and policy levels to assess child well-being, track performance, incentivize practice change, and increase accountability in pediatric settings.