

Federal Agency Equity Plans – What Do They Mean for Older Adults?

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JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

Justice in Aging is a national organization that uses the power of law to fight senior poverty by securing access to affordable health care, economic security, and the courts for older adults with limited resources.

Since 1972 we've focused our efforts primarily on fighting for people who have been marginalized and excluded from justice, such as women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, and people with limited English proficiency.

Housekeeping

- All on mute. Use Questions function for substantive questions and for technical concerns.
- Problems with getting on to the webinar? Send an email to trainings@justiceinaging.org.
- Find materials for this training and past trainings by searching the [Resource Library](https://justiceinaging.org/resource-library), justiceinaging.org/resource-library. A recording will be posted to [Justice in Aging's Vimeo page](https://Justice%20in%20Aging's%20Vimeo%20page) at the conclusion of the presentation, vimeo.com/justiceinaging.
- Enable closed captioning by selecting "CC" from the Zoom control panel.

Justice in Aging's Commitment to Advancing Equity

To achieve Justice in Aging, we must:

- Advance equity for low-income older adults in economic security, health care, housing, and elder justice initiatives.
- Address the enduring harms and inequities caused by systemic racism and other forms of discrimination that uniquely impact low-income older adults in marginalized communities.
- Recruit, support, and retain a diverse staff and board, including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and presentation, sexual orientation, disability, age, and economic class.

Agenda

- Overview of Executive Order 13985
- Review Federal Agency Action Plans
 - Health & Human Services
 - Social Security Administration
 - Housing & Urban Development
- Panel Discussion
- Q&A



Overview of Executive Order 13985

Affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our Government

Executive Order 13985

Background

- Signed on January 20, 2021
- Goal: provide everyone with the opportunity to reach their full potential
- Within 200 days, each agency will assess whether underserved communities and their members face systemic barriers in access
- OMB to identify opportunities to promote equity in budget
- Within 1 year, each agency will produce a plan to address barriers, engaging community
- Creation of a data working group

Defining Equity

The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Defining Underserved Communities

Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of "equity."

Broader Equity Agenda

- National strategy on gender equity and equality
- Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in government workforce
- Environmental justice
- LGBTQ+ civil rights

Equity Action Plan Summaries

- Summaries of 24 federal agencies' plans are available on the White House [equity webpage](#).
- Complete plans are available on agency websites.
- Several have already been engaging stakeholders since plans were released earlier this year.



Reviewing the Plans

Health and Human Services (HHS) Equity Action Plan

Overview of HHS

- Mission:
 - Enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services.
- Divisions (11)
 - Administration for Community Living (ACL)
 - Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
 - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
 - Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
 - Indian Health Services (IHS)
 - Etc.
- Office of the Secretary (15)
 - Office of Civil Rights (OCR)
 - Office of Inspector General (OIG)
 - Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals
 - Etc.

HHS Equity Plan: Strategies

- Meant to be illustrative, not comprehensive
 - **Civil Rights**
 - Language Access (interpreter services; webpages; program & benefit information in other languages)
 - **Acquisitions**
 - reduce equity barriers/increase opportunities for small disadvantaged businesses to apply for HHS contracts
 - **Grants**
 - Increase diversity of applicants and successful awards of grants
 - **Capacity Building**
 - Each HHS operating division will conduct an equity assessment
 - **Maternal Mortality**

Other HHS Equity Initiatives

- [HHS Strategic Plan \(2022 – 2026\)](#)
 - Goal 1: Protect and Strengthen Equitable Access to High Quality and Affordable Healthcare
- [CMS Framework for Health Equity \(2022-2032\)](#)
 - Data collection & reporting
 - Assess and address disparities in CMS programs
 - Build capacity of organizations and workforce
 - Advance language access, health literacy, and cultural competency in services
 - Increase all forms of accessibility of health care services and coverage
- [Executive Order on Advancing LGBTQI Equity](#)

Secretary of HHS shall address discrimination, social isolation, and health disparities faced by LGBTQI+ older adults

Social Security Administration (SSA) Equity Action Plan

SSA Programs

- SSA administers Social Security retirement, survivors, and disability benefits, including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Critical for older adults and people with disabilities who have little to no other sources of income
 - Can address intersectional inequities occurring throughout a person's lifetime (e.g., people of color, women, LGBTQ individuals)
- Equity plan addresses 5 priority areas

SSA 5 Priority Areas

(This presentation primarily addresses the bolded items)

- **Identifying inequities in programs and services (race and ethnicity data collection)**
- **Addressing Systemic Barriers to Program Participation (especially SSI)**
- **Ensuring equitable service for unrepresented claimants in the disability application process**
- Gender equity and equality (focused very specifically on sex designation process)
- Increased equitable access to research grants by HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions

SSA Action Plan Strategies

- Identifying inequities in programs and services (race and ethnicity data collection) (examples)
 - Examining and publishing tables in the Annual Statistical Supplement
 - Exploring ways to get more race and ethnicity data (data exchange, statistical methods, other analyses)
- Addressing systemic barriers to program participation (especially SSI) (examples)
 - Establish Agency Priority Goals for FY22-23 focused on equity and improving the customer experience
 - “Explore” development of office that partners with Tribal Nations
 - “Explore” how to get more race and ethnicity data (voluntary collection, expanding data exchange, using other statistical methods, etc.)
 - Conduct research activities on DI/SSI to understand and address barriers
- Ensuring equitable service for unrepresented claimants (examples)
 - Evaluating existing data to identify potential bias in the disability application process
 - Mandatory training on unconscious bias
 - Explore collaborations with pro bono and legal aid groups to increase representation
 - Outreach to unrepresented claimants to prepare them for the hearing process and explain their right to representation

Shortfalls/Challenges in SSA's Equity Action Plan

- Too much “exploration” and high-level discussion;
 - Office closures, phone issues, and general customer service problems were not sufficiently addressed
 - Topics like language access are too vague; gender equity section is too sparse and needs to be fleshed out
- Lack of defined timeframe for many activities
 - Agency Priority Goals regarding equity must be more concrete
- Lack of commitment to real dialogue with advocates and other stakeholders to increase accountability

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Equity Action Plan

HUD's 4 Plan Areas to Prioritize Equity

- Procurement
- Fair Housing and Civil Rights Resources
- Homeownership
- Homelessness

HUD-Identified Areas for Improvement

- Acknowledges past discrimination; bring programs to underserved communities
- Promote equity in work to end homelessness
- Data collection & analysis for disparities
 - Gender/SOGI
 - Race
- Remedy homeowner disparities to:
 - Eliminate the racial homeownership gap
 - Preserve existing homeownership

What's Missing?

- A plan for equitable outcomes in the provision of quality affordable rental homes, in diverse neighborhoods
- Ensuring Older Adults, particularly Black/Latinx, LGBTQ+ and older Adults with Disabilities are able to access equal housing opportunities
- Data plan to measure #2



Policy Advocacy Opportunities

HHS Opportunities

Center intersectionality and age as an equity issue.

- Medicare Advantage Equity RFI: [Comments due 8/31](#)
- Medicare Provider Payment Proposed Rule: [Comments due September 6](#)
- Section 1557 – Health Care Rights Law: [Comments due October 3](#)

Centering Age Equity in Housing

- Why does Age Belong, along with Race/ Disability & other factors in Housing Equity Analysis?
 - The Trifecta of Race/Age/Disability
 - Greater Risk of Housing Unaffordability
 - Surge in Older Adult Homelessness
 - Racial Disparities in Risk of Homelessness Intensify with Age

Data to Center Equity

- HUD does not currently collect granular, age data
 - Adding 50+, 65+ with intersectional data
- SOGI data focuses only on LGBTQ+ youth, could examine older adults



Panel Discussion

Questions?

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