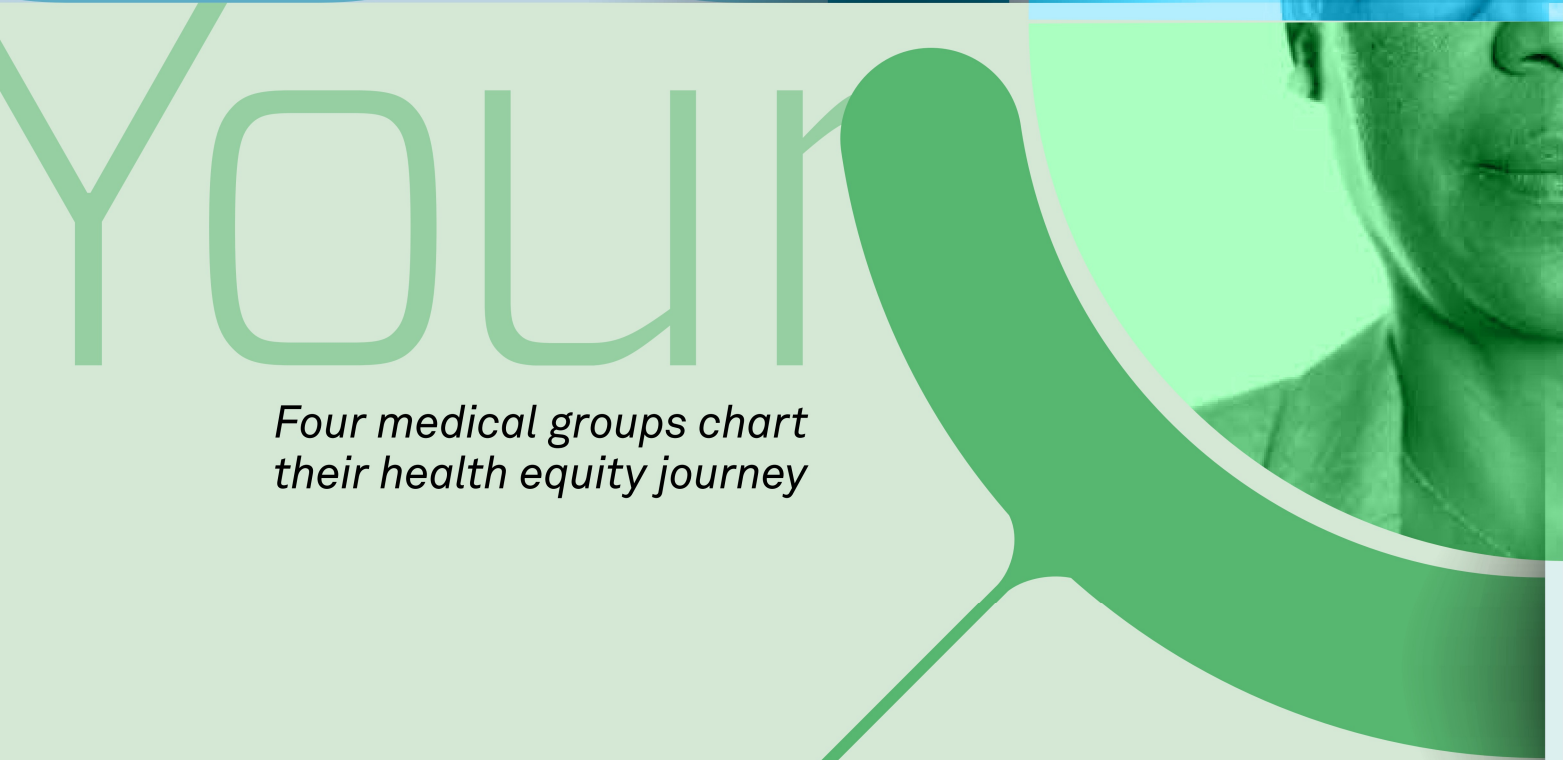




**Premier Medical Associates**  
*2023 Acclaim Award Winner*



*Four medical groups chart  
their health equity journey*


**Henry Ford Health**  
*2023 Acclaim Award Finalist*



**Atlantic Medical Group**  
2023 Acclaim Award Finalist



■ **By Mike Hilleary**



In recent years, we have witnessed a shift in healthcare to focus on health inequities and address social determinants of health (SDOH). Numerous studies and mountains of anecdotal evidence have demonstrated that treatment and outcomes are often related to race, economic status, gender, age, and other factors beyond the control of healthcare providers. Many innovative medical groups recognized these discrepancies more than a decade ago and have been creating processes and interventions to promote equity within their organizations and communities.

**Allina Health**  
2023 Acclaim Award Finalist

## What Is Health Equity?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain the highest level of health possible.<sup>1</sup> Achieving this goal requires ongoing societal efforts to:

- ▶ Address historical and contemporary injustices;
- ▶ Overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare; and
- ▶ Eliminate preventable health disparities.

The mission to achieve health equity is clear, but the devil is in the details.

## AMGA Programs and Initiatives

To help our members identify necessary details and create a culture of equity and inclusion, AMGA has developed resources and programs that offer tools and guidance. Health equity is a vital component of all of our population health initiatives, including the Best Practices Learning Collaboratives, National Health Campaigns, and research and analytics projects. One vehicle for driving improvement is the AMGA Acclaim Award, which has a specific health equity component.

For more than two decades, the Acclaim Award has recognized health-care delivery organizations for their efforts to become an ideal medical group and health system. In addition to being structured around the components of the Quadruple Aim—improving the patient experience of care, bettering the health of a population with a focus on quality outcomes, reducing the cost of care, and enhancing workplace wellness—the award framework also places significant consideration on health equity.

Following are some examples of how the 2023 Acclaim Award recipient and three finalists are addressing health equity in their communities.



## Premier Medical Associates

Premier Medical Associates (PMA) received the 2023 Acclaim Award. Becoming the first medical group to be honored with the award twice, PMA navigated its particular pathway to improving equity when it was presented with data pertaining to colorectal cancer screening rates. Recognizing a 9% disparity in screening rates between White (82%) and Black (73%) patients in 2021, PMA not only began issuing large-scale mailer reminders for patients overdue for screenings, but also utilized patient navigation services that included outreach calls to Black patients at one and three weeks after the initial mailer's delivery. This simple adjustment was so successful that within six months, the racial disparity between White and Black patients narrowed to just 2% (83% and 81%, respectively). PMA also initiated the development of an equity dashboard, tracking not only colorectal screenings, but also hypertension control, diabetes control, and immunization rates.

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## Atlantic Medical Group

Although PMA was ultimately celebrated as AMGA Foundation's 2023 Acclaim Award winner, numerous finalists in contention for the prize pursued their own equally admirable efforts to make their care more equitable to their respective patient populations.

Take, for example, the work of Atlantic Medical Group (AMG) in reducing disparities in diabetes care. "In 2017, we noted increasing numbers of patients from surrounding urban centers enrolling in suburban primary care practices of [our medical group]," according to their Acclaim Award application.

"Many are immigrants, live at or below the poverty level, have limited or no health insurance, have low health literacy, are non-English speakers, and experience substandard housing, poor nutrition, and discrimination. These disparities have a significant impact on the health of this population, with a high rate of uncontrolled diabetes and diabetes-related death, especially among African Americans and Latinos. A regional diabetes center of our health system with certified diabetes care and education specialist had limited appointments and a difficult to access location." In order to properly confront the unbalanced needs of these patient populations, AMG established The Diabetes Health Partnership.

Meeting monthly, the Partnership involved a family medicine faculty physician, nephrologist, advanced practice nurse, registered nurse, certified dietitian, two social workers, and an academic clinical pharmacist. The initial focus of these meetings was directed toward

self-management education and medical management, resulting in the development of an electronic health record (EHR) diabetes report to populate a registry of high-risk and poorly controlled diabetes patients. That list was made accessible to all practices to identify and track these patients and their outcomes data and to schedule them for office self-management education and primary care diabetes visits. In addition, advanced practitioner nurses were trained in self-management education and embedded in internal medicine residency and nephrology practices.

Despite these adjustments, another hurdle quickly presented itself as social needs prevented patients from adhering to appointments. In response, AMG quickly pivoted, changing its focus to uncontrolled patients and screening them for SDOH barriers to care. To assist in this effort, community health workers were implemented to perform SDOH screenings and provide resources. Patients' needs were subsequently identified before a scheduled visit so that Medicaid or charity care applications could be completed, medication coupons, and pharmaceutical assistance, and transportation could be arranged, food and utility resources were identified, mental health needs were addressed, and patients could be bridged to potential counseling. If necessary, the community health worker would visit the patient at their place of residence. Despite various challenges to the operation of the Diabetes Health Partnership, AMG was successfully able to lower the A1C overall for all three of its participating practices from 10.8% to 10.2%.

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## Henry Ford Health

Henry Ford, another Acclaim Award finalist, also made great strides in its health equity development. After participating in the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Pursuing Equity initiative, the system, like PMA, constructed an equity dashboard to track quality outcomes across the diverse patient populations it served. Henry Ford's Chief Diversity Officer also spearheaded a Pursuing Equity in Patient Care Steering Committee, which would go on to provide strategic guidance for the organization as a whole to align equity strategies; monitor the newly established equity dashboard; stratify performance metrics into categories such as race, ethnicity, primary language, and gender to identify inequities; and sponsor equity improvement efforts in both patient care and patient experience across the entire health system.

Henry Ford additionally developed several targeted programs to address SDOH and alleviate key health disparities within specific communities. This included its Women-Inspired Neighborhood Network, a program to address disparities in birth outcomes; Groceries for Health, a partnership with the Community Food Bank to bring free grocery deliveries to the doors of patients with chronic health conditions; and a greater investment in telehealth to accommodate those patients with unreliable transportation and the difficult working schedules that so often prevent them from accessing the healthcare services they need.

Perhaps Henry Ford's most significant stride in achieving greater health equity was the launch of its Behavioral Health Integration (BHI) with Primary Care initiative. After assessing data points that indicated mental health screening and diagnosis were less common for patients in lower income groups and among non-White racial and ethnic groups, the BHI initiative implemented routine and structured behavioral health screening for *all* patients. According to their application, "Individuals who engaged in BHI experienced a significant reduction ( $p < 0.05$ ) in emergency department visits, achieved remission rates of  $>75\%$  for depression and anxiety, and increased engagement in supportive outpatient treatment."

Additionally, the application stated: "Research demonstrated that the chosen screening tools were effective in identifying risk across these groups when implemented. This was particularly important given the research demonstrating that individuals in non-White racial and ethnic groups have less access to mental health services. By creating this systematic process, the health system is able to ensure that equal access to care is afforded to all patients across all groups."



## 2023 Acclaim Award

Premier Medical Associates was named AMGA's 2023 Acclaim Award recipient. Premier Medical Associates was recognized for the following initiatives:

- ▶ Developing a strong focus on improving the control of chronic diseases, increasing screening rates, and improving immunization rates to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases
- ▶ Creating a patient experience committee, and appointing patient experience managers
- ▶ Participating in a Clinically Integrated Network (CIN) that includes provider and hospital participants in a three-state footprint
- ▶ Attaining level 3 NCQA Patient Centered Medical Home certification continuously since 2013
- ▶ Creating an equity dashboard for CRC screening rates, hypertension control, diabetes control, and more

For their accomplishments, Baylor Scott & White Medical Group and Utica Park Clinic were also named Acclaim Award honorees.

Acclaim Award finalists were:

- ▶ Allina Health
- ▶ Atlantic Medical Group
- ▶ Henry Ford Medical Group
- ▶ Houston Methodist Physician Organization
- ▶ Lehigh Valley Physician Group
- ▶ SIMEDHealth
- ▶ Valley Health
- ▶ Vancouver Clinic

The 2023 Acclaim Award is generously sponsored by Novo Nordisk, Inc.

For more information about applying for the 2024 Acclaim Award, visit [amga.org/acclaim](https://amga.org/acclaim).

## Allina Health

To better understand the social needs impacting patient health and the disparities in need across all populations, Acclaim Award finalist Allina Health established a Health-Related Social Needs Program. This universal screening and navigation program builds off of learnings and experience gained from participation in the Accountable Health Communities (AHC) cooperative agreement. While participating in the AHC model with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Allina Health observed significant disparities in screening offer rates for patients of color. This patient population was offered screenings 11% less often than patients not in the equity population. Through a mix of data sharing and incorporating equity in system scorecards to increase staff's cultural responsiveness (e.g., screening through an interpreter, retraining, and the development and distribution of cultural humility videos), the screening disparity was reduced to less than 5% in 2021 and less than 3% by 2022.

As part of the Health-Related Social Needs Program, Allina Health has also worked to identify root causes of disparities in its patient population and developed operational strategies to overcome real and perceived barriers to screenings. This increased attention on equity has opened new pathways, including focused partnerships and advocacy at the community level, as well as the acquisition of grants to reduce health disparities and improve health outcomes of all patients.

Additionally, the care management team has partnered closely with primary care to provide targeted outreach services to patients who are experiencing gaps in their care, such as Medicare annual wellness visits and preventative screenings in child and teen check-ups. Allina Health's system outreach team is now also staffed by care guides and registered nurses trained in navigating health-related social needs. The team uses motivational interviewing techniques to uncover the "why" behind certain care access barriers and gathers a fuller picture of the needs of a patient to build out a care plan that promotes better access. "It is through this whole-person approach to this model that we have seen success rates of patients attending an annual Medicare wellness visit after outreach reach greater than 90%," according to their Acclaim Award application.

## Your Journey to Health Equity

As PMA, AMG, Henry Ford, and Allina Health each demonstrated in their own way, there is no singular starting point for a health system to begin its journey into addressing health equity. What is clear, however, is that once those first steps are taken, the air of health equity quickly circulates into all facets of care delivery, creating quality healthcare for the entire patient population. [GPI](#)

### Acknowledgment

The 2023 Acclaim Award is generously sponsored by Novo Nordisk, Inc.

**Mike Hilleary** is multimedia editor at AMGA and a contributing editor for Group Practice Journal.

## Reference

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2023. What Is Health Equity? Accessed August 8, 2023 at [cdc.gov/healthequity/whatis/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/whatis/index.html).