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## A CALL TO ACTION TO IMPROVE HEALTH EQUITY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

When it comes to healthcare in South Carolina, we all agree there's room for improvement. Because of economic, racial, and geographic disparities, it's hard for many citizens in the Palmetto state to live healthy lives. Many organizations are trying to improve health and healthcare in South Carolina, but their efforts are often not as coordinated as they could be, resulting in fragmented, duplicative activities that don't always achieve the best results.

We're trying to change that. Members of the Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina are forging common ground and coordinating action around shared goals. In critical areas, we're aligning existing efforts throughout South Carolina to improve health and healthcare, while also lowering costs. Underpinning this effort is a commitment to equity, where all South Carolinians have the same prospect of attaining the best health status possible, independent of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, neighborhood, ethnicity, disability status, education level, or socioeconomic status. Results are intended to meet the tenets of healthcare's "Triple Aim" – improved population health, better quality care, and lower per-capita costs of care.

To be successful, we need to work together. We encourage all organizations and people working to improve health and healthcare to be a part of this effort to transform South Carolina.

### The Situation

The health outcomes of South Carolinians rank lower than those of people in 41 other states.

An analysis of the distribution of these outcomes inside South Carolina shows significantly poorer health for some population groups such as rural communities, low income communities and minorities.

Unless we do something bold, and soon, our children will live shorter lives than those of their parents.

Recognition of these major challenges sparked the creation of the *Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina*; an unprecedented partnership of senior leaders in more than 50 organizations committed to optimizing the health of everyone in South Carolina through collaboration and goal alignment.

In June 2014, the Alliance leadership approved its common agenda of five goals for health improvement by 2020 which included six equity indicators:

- Decrease by at least 8% the Low-Birth Weight rate of African Americans and for births paid by Medicaid
- Decrease by 19% the proportion of low-income third graders not reading at grade level
- Decrease by 25% the number of geographic primary care shortage areas
- Decrease by 10% the proportion of people who needed to see a doctor but couldn't due to cost
- Decrease by at least 10% preventable ED visits for African Americans
- Decrease by 20% the proportion of low-income people who spent more than a week feeling mentally unhealthy last month

On June 23, 2015, the Alliance released a framework to collectively accelerate health improvement; Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, Healthy Minds, and Healthy Bodies for ALL South Carolinians.

There is growing recognition among health experts that the conditions in which we live and work, income level, education level, impact of systemic barriers rooted in history, access to care, and healthy lifestyle choices, all influence our ability to reach optimal health. While the extent of the challenges may vary, South Carolinians of all ages experience daily obstacles to obtaining good health.

Limited resources require us to use targeted interventions to maximize the potential for achieving our health improvement goals. A high-level analysis of the health status of South Carolina has shown striking differences among groups of the population. These disparities can be decreased or eliminated through collective action. Some of these are presented below:

- **3 in 10** adults earning less than \$15,000 a year spent more than one week during the previous month feeling mentally unhealthy. Only **1 in 10** adults earning more than \$50,000 experienced the same health status.
- African Americans, for reasons related to greater prevalence of diseases, overrepresentation in the lowest income brackets, and other factors, rely **twice** as much as Whites on emergency department care for conditions that could be prevented or managed by better access to and use of primary care services.
- African American babies are **93%** more likely to be born with low birth weight than White babies.
- When comparing two school districts in the same area of the state, in one district **7 in 10** low-income third graders are not reading at grade level, while only **1 in 10** low-income third graders in the other school district is reading below grade level.

Calls to action to eliminate racial, economic, and ethnic disparities in health, have been issued by national groups such as the American Hospital Association, American College of Healthcare Executives, Association of American Medical Colleges, America's Essential Hospitals, Catholic Health Association of the United States, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Department of Health and Human Services. In South Carolina, we have the collaborative capacity to lead the nation in this effort.

Although national and state-level focus on these issues is of utmost importance, more in-depth analyses and coordinated action at the local and community level has the greatest potential to accelerate health improvement in a way never seen in South Carolina. Over the past year, a team of subject matter experts in the Alliance for a Healthier South Carolina and other partners have developed a systematic approach to how organizations can most effectively engage in this acceleration process.

*The Call to Action for Health Equity* focuses on changing the way organizations see their role in helping diverse populations make healthy choices, access health and social services, and enjoy healthier physical and social environments. It is composed of four actions that will help our organizations understand obstacles to health improvement and how to work together to develop sustainable solutions for accelerating health improvement for everyone in South Carolina.

#### CALL TO ACTION FOR HEALTH EQUITY

1. **Collect and use data to identify and guide decision making** regarding health equity challenges in South Carolina.
  - a. Collect data to identify health equity challenges experienced by our employees and clients and that data to design and implement targeted interventions.
  - b. Identify health equity challenges in our organizations' geographic areas of influence and use secondary data to design and implement targeted interventions.
2. **Develop and maintain a culturally competent and responsive organizational culture** for employees, clients, and partners
3. **Ensure our organizations are designed to guarantee inclusive decision making**, through enhanced emphasis on the recruitment of highly qualified minorities for leadership positions, and the investment in filling the pipeline with diverse leaders for this and future generations.
4. **Engage the community as partners** in the design and delivery of sustainable health solutions.

Enroll in the health equity call to action now! Email [pperret@scha.org](mailto:pperret@scha.org) for more details.