



Health equity is essential to improving health outcomes by ensuring all patients receive the best care possible, regardless of factors such as income, education, and race. By fostering an inclusive environment and implementing targeted strategies, we can work toward a health care system that meets the needs of all, and not just some.

Applying for **The Joint Commission’s (TJC) Health Equity Certification** is one strategy hospitals can use to make meaningful progress toward a more just, effective, and patient-centered health care system. It empowers hospitals to strengthen leadership accountability, leverage data-driven decision-making, and enhance cross-sector collaboration.

To explore best practices and the impact of achieving this certification, the Quality Institute engaged 3 health systems—AtlantiCare, Bergen New Bridge Medical Center, and Hackensack Meridian Health—all of which have successfully achieved the Health Equity Certification.



### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. Engage Staff and Health Care Providers

- a. Call on leaders to champion equity-driven policies that align with organizational goals.
- b. Embed health equity education at all levels to promote cultural humility. Develop creative opportunities for staff in non-leadership positions to lead and participate in trainings.

#### 2. Build a Culture of Accountability and Continuous Improvement

- a. Incorporate equity into organizational structures. Establish Health Equity Councils with diverse membership, including areas such as food service, security, marketing, and language assistance, to create space for differing perspectives and shared learning.
- b. Collect and share feedback from staff and patients about their sense of belonging. For example, asking patients if they feel welcomed at your facility and staff if they feel comfortable working in your facility based on their culture or identity.

#### 3. Identify Community Needs and Address Social Determinants of Health

- a. Leverage data-driven insights to better understand health needs and disparities, such as through community health needs assessments, surveys, and meeting with patients and staff.
- b. Implement targeted interventions to respond to identified needs. All 3 hospitals focus on community events, training opportunities, and educational programs.



### HOSPITAL SPOTLIGHTS

**Bergen New Bridge Medical Center** hosts “Taste and Learn” sessions to celebrate cultural foods and raise awareness of different traditions. Led by staff with support from an executive sponsor, these events foster understanding and empathy for diverse communities. They contribute to a more **inclusive workplace culture** and **directly impact patient care and outcomes**.

**Hackensack Meridian Health** took a whole system approach to assess the equity of their governance (processes and structures that guide decisions), staff demographics, data collection methods, and more. They use this **data to drive priority setting and improvement efforts**.

**AtlantiCare** partners with a historically Black university to employ health science graduates. Graduates receive guidance toward nursing licensure, including tuition & housing support. They also work with high schools to hire students who do not plan to enter college or the military. Students gain benefits and a career pathway. To date, **they have hired over 120 students**.

### Interested in Applying for the TJC's Health Equity Certification?

Here is a roundup of tips and insights from our discussions with **AtlantiCare**, **Bergen New Bridge Medical Center**, and **Hackensack Meridian Health**.



#### WHY APPLY?

- Most organizations are already doing the work. The certification process helped these health systems organize and align efforts across the system.
- For those new to health equity, TJC provides direction on getting started.
- Most organizations are already familiar with TJC standards, measures, and processes.
- Unlike other frameworks, this certification largely focuses on staff inclusion and community collaboration.



#### HOW TO PREPARE

- Review TJC's [Health Equity Resource Page](#) and [Review Process Guide](#).
- Understand that developing a culture around health equity takes time. Sites took about 3 to 4 years to prepare and feel ready to apply for certification.
- TJC wants to see how equity is integrated throughout the organization.
- Sites receive a 30-day notice for their on-site certification review with a TJC surveyor.
  - TJC will review medical records, performance improvement projects, and HR policies.
  - Be ready to discuss topics such as how you're supporting patients with behavioral health disorders and their families, actions to identify and provide support to victims of human trafficking, and method to collect stratified data.
  - Help staff and providers prepare for at random interviews. Ask about their understanding of health equity and social determinants, and share how their work connects to these concepts.



#### IMPACT OF ACHIEVING THE CERTIFICATION

- Better alignment across the organization.
- Working more closely with staff and communities revealed needs, which led to new initiatives and programs.
- Improved outcomes like reduced falls and enhanced language support.
- Helped identify ways to track and monitor progress as well as set goals for the future.
- Sites described the journey as fun, creative, and collaborative for leadership and staff.



Achieving TJC's Health Equity Certification serves as both a recognition of progress and a guiding framework for organizations beginning their journey. By taking steps to advance meaningful equity initiatives, New Jersey hospitals can improve outcomes for the diverse communities they serve.

