



**A Report to the Mayor's Task Force on Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities:
Year One of the Disparities Project
March, 2007**

Executive Summary

In the spring of 2005, Boston became the first city in the US to establish a blueprint for addressing racial and ethnic disparities in health. In September, 2005, Year One of the Disparities Project was launched using the priorities set by the Mayoral Task Force to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. The resulting efforts reflect the mix of short term innovation and longer term planning and development the Task Force knew would be needed to address this serious problem. The overarching goals of the first year's efforts were to:

- *improve the ability to measure disparities;*
- *build the capacity in communities and institutions to respond to the problem;*
- *promote innovative practices in accessing care, diversifying the workforce, and creating public policy change; and*
- *raise public awareness.*

Considerable progress was made in each of these arenas:

- Through the thirty-three one-year grants, over 6,100 people from across the City directly participated in education, training, advocacy, planning and direct services focused on understanding and addressing health disparities.
 - Thousands more were reached through media outlets that chronicled the issue and many more will be affected as a result of the institutional, policy and other changes that have occurred through the Project's efforts.
- Boston has become the first city in the country with regulations governing hospital based data systems that will allow improved mapping of and intervention with the problems of disparate health care access and utilization.
 - These regulations will also require the Health Commission to convene a Health Equity Committee that will identify quality measures to be used in monitoring disparities in care access and outcomes.
- Quality improvement efforts were launched at several hospitals and health centers.
 - Launching new strategies during this period were Children's Hospital and MGH which both established Disparities Dashboards, and Uphams Corner and Harbor Health Systems Community Health Centers which put in place new patient and provider-based quality assessment programs.

- Over 1,000 individuals received care linkage, case management, and clinical screening services through innovative programs seeking to remove barriers to care faced by many racial and ethnic minority patients.
 - Disparities Project funds helped develop important new patient navigation models that are now the subject of considerable federal and other interest in the resolution of racial and ethnic health disparities.
 - Half of the participants receiving patient education and support services were from Roxbury and Dorchester.
- Over 450 health professionals participated in cultural competency and anti-racism trainings, assuring more welcoming and responsive care for all.
- Through new partnerships with higher education and the Boston Public Schools, the Project worked to improve the path to diversity in the health professions.
 - A preliminary assessment for the replication of a Sophie Davis college-through-medical school model was completed; a novel dual enrollment program with Bunker Hill College for high school students interested in nursing was initiated; a collaborative program with the Red Cross for training high school students as Certified Nurse Assistant and Medical Interpreters was begun; and a first time planning process with all health degree granting higher education institutions issued recommendations for improving recruitment and retention of Boston-based students into their and other health programs.
- Numerous programs provided targeted and community-wide disparities education programs and planning efforts focused on getting the disparities issue well-placed within their institutions.
- Health Care for All and several other Project recipients took on needed health policy development concerns, issuing several critical recommendations.
- Reports, videoconferences, and materials for replication and further use have been produced by Project grantees.

This was an ambitious and unprecedented undertaking. Remediating racial and ethnic disparities is complex and there are no simple roadmaps. Year One Projects have served as catalysts for change and have provided, as the Task Force anticipated, real laboratories for assessing effective mechanisms for engaging the challenges of long term disparities in health. The successes are already informing both current Commission practices and Year Two priorities. The work continues with an ongoing commitment to engage the diverse sectors through which change must occur.

The Disparities Project is an initiative of Mayor Thomas M. Menino
and the Boston Public Health Commission.