

Health Affairs Theme Issue on “Child Health” Publishes Paper on the diversitydatakids.org
Policy Equity Assessment Framework

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WALTHAM, MA—Researchers from diversitydatakids.org have published the article “Integrating Racial/Ethnic Equity into Policy Assessments to Improve Child Health” in the December 2014 Theme Issue of *Health Affairs* on Child Health. The U.S. is an increasingly diverse society; today nearly half of children are from racial/ethnic minority groups. Yet, large inequities in child health and development persist, and will increasingly affect the health and economic productivity of the U.S. population. Recognizing this reality, several government agencies have committed to identifying and reducing racial/ethnic inequities among children. Although some federal agencies and policy think tanks already translate complex research evidence into policy effectiveness ratings, systematic attention to equity—including evidence of policies that reduce racial/ethnic inequities—is largely absent. The Policy Equity Assessment makes a needed contribution by filling this gap.

The article presents a new framework to systematically assess policy effectiveness for reducing racial/ethnic inequities in child health and development. Dr. Pamela K. Joshi of Brandeis University and coauthors developed this framework, which integrates rigorous equity analysis methods into a traditional policy assessment approach. The framework guides analysts through three assessment stages (Logic, Capacity, and Research Evidence), embedding questions of racial/ethnic equity throughout. The article applies this framework to three important programs/policies that affect child health and development: Head Start, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

The results show that relatively few families are served by these programs compared to those who are eligible, and access is inequitable by race/ethnicity. When data was available, research showed variation by race/ethnicity in the amount and quality of services that children receive. Low-income Hispanic children are especially disadvantaged in access to early childhood education and housing vouchers, supports which are crucial for healthy child development.

Not only do these results provide new information on equity in each policy, they also reveal important gaps in available data. These gaps hinder researchers’ ability to conduct more definitive analyses of policy impacts by race/ethnicity, obstructing efforts to identify and reduce existing inequities. Joshi comments that this work “provides policymakers with a step-by-step framework to assess whether data and rigorous research evidence are available to assess “what works” to reduce persistent racial/ethnic disparities in access to quality services and child health outcomes. Given the substantial data and evidence gaps on the equity impact

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data for a diverse and equitable future

of these landmark policies, we hope these results motivate policy makers to strengthen data collection and analysis efforts.”

This Health Affairs theme issue includes a number of studies that examine child health in the U.S. Many articles from this issue, including “Integrating Racial/Ethnic Equity into Policy Assessments to Improve Child Health,” will be discussed at a December 8th briefing at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The diversitydatakids.org project gratefully acknowledges support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.