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2022 ELAM IAP Abstract: Landscape Analysis of Health Equity Strategies in Academic Medicine

“There’s never been a time, not a single year, where the [U.S.] population of African descent hasn’t been sicker or died younger than whites”. This quote from Dr. Mary Bassett is not from 1920; it was from 2020 as COVID-19 rampaged Black and Brown communities across the US. Health Equity remains an attainable, but elusive, goal in the US, a country with the highest per capita healthcare cost in the world. As diseases become more amenable to treatment, disparities emerge and widen. This is often due to lack of access, lack of adequate understanding of the complex drivers of health disparities, lack of rigorous implementation of evidence-based interventions, and a critical shortage of a trained, diverse, and culturally competent workforce to address these issues. There are no shortages of well-intentioned strategies, especially since 2020 with growing recognition of the pervasiveness of systemic racism and its impact on health. What is often lacking is thoughtful, intentional, evidence-based, and effective strategies to advance health equity across the key pillars of academic medicine: research, clinical care, education, and community engagement. Without rigorous strategies that are robust, cohesive, and integrated, gaps will remain in our ability to address this problem, and racial gaps in health outcomes will persist. The goal of this Institutional Action Plan is to create a framework for assessing 3 key measures: robustness, cohesiveness, and integration, of health equity strategies in academic medical centers, defined as:

Robustness: a measure of the scope and depth of health equity programming. Highly robust programs have clear goals and objectives that are aligned with the needs of the organization, patient and community; are part of institutional strategic priority with associated allocation of resources, dedicated leader and staff; have clearly defined impact and outcome metrics

Cohesiveness: a measure of alignment within and between health equity pillars and strategies. Highly cohesive programs have a shared value and work towards a common goal such that each part informs the other and together work together to achieve the overall mission

Integration: a measure of inter-connectedness of strategy and activities. Highly integrated programs have cross-cutting themes, for instance, training in health equity is integrated within workforce development, and research is informed by and impacts community engagement activities. Within each pillar, there is also clear integration of activities, e.g., all health equity training inter-connected, a health equity research center that integrates all health equity research projects, etc

This IAP, focused on evaluating health equity strategies across US academic medical centers, will help shed light on critical components needed for a comprehensive and impactful health equity program. It will help highlight gaps that exist and provide a common framework for future steps. As an ELAM fellow, my career goal is to become a leader in bridging the gap between research, clinical care, education, and community engagement, leading efforts to implement cross-enterprise health equity strategies that have measurable impact.