

U.S. House and Senate Introduce Legislation Vital to Ending Health Disparities

The Health Equity and Accountability Act aims to improve access to cancer research, prevention, early detection and care for minority and underserved communities.

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[On July 25,] the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate introduced legislation to help eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities. Sponsored by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) and Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), the Health Equity and Accountability Act (HEAA) of 2024 provides a comprehensive set of strategic policy solutions designed to enhance the health and well-being of underserved and marginalized communities, including policies that help enhance cancer research and improve access to cancer prevention, early detection, and care. The legislation also addresses the intersection of racial and ethnic health inequities with immigration status, age, disability, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, language, and socioeconomic status.

HEAA is strongly supported by the Congressional Tri-Caucuses which includes the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

A statement from Lisa Lacasse, president of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) follows:

“Cancer is a disease that affects everyone, but it does not affect everyone equally. We thank Rep. Lee, Rep. Chu and Sen. Hirono for championing legislation that includes several provisions that will help ensure that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer.

“Early detection of cancer through screening can help reduce the unequal burden of cancer and help improve survival by finding cancer at an early stage when treatment is more effective and less costly. We are pleased that HEAA includes provisions that will address the alarming trend in prostate cancer incidence and disparities, including federal research efforts to identify better early detection tools for prostate cancer and increase representation in prostate cancer clinical trials. The bill also permanently lifts the cap on federal Medicaid spending in the U.S. Territories and

brings federal matching rates in line with states, which will fix a longstanding and unjust imbalance that has left many limited-income individuals in the territories without access to lifesaving medical care, including access to breast and cervical cancer screenings.

“HEAA also focuses on timely collection and publication of demographic data, which is critical to identifying and addressing disparities in cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. In addition, the bill includes universal free school meal policies that will help increase access to nutritious school meals to help address food insecurity and improve diet quality, which may reduce risk of diet-related cancer in adulthood.

“Achieving our vision of ending cancer as we know it, for everyone requires reducing the cancer burden across all communities. We look forward to working with Congress on important policies to enhance the health and well-being of underserved and marginalized communities.”

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