

Health Quality and Equity Strategic Plan: Executive Summary

Steward Medicaid Care Network (SMCN), known as Steward Health Choice to members, aims to advance health equity through all its programs and services. SMCN uses the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) definition of health equity: “health equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Achieving this requires ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices; overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and health care; and eliminate preventable health disparities.” The CDC’s definition closely aligns with our efforts in achieving health equity for our members.

Four preliminary health equity strategic goals SMCN is focused on are (1) NCQA health equity accreditation, (2) reducing disparities in health outcomes, (2) improving physical and behavioral health integration, and (4) establishing sufficient data infrastructure to measure quality baseline and improvement opportunities. SMCN aims to achieve health quality and equity by eliminating disparities, improving member health education, providing staff and provider training and education, and fostering ways for employees to engage in initiatives that advance health equity. SMCN has begun work to achieve these objectives. SMCN’s health equity committee reviews the strategy and implementation plan to offer insight on how to ensure we meet our members’ needs. SMCN works closely with our providers to collect race, ethnicity, language, disability status (RELD), sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (SOGI). data, which we use to stratify quality measures and assess for disparities. We apply the results of these analyses when implementing initiatives focused on reducing disparities in our population. We have launched forums to discuss, train, and educate staff on the fundamentals of health equity, racism, and implicit biases. These ongoing efforts will continue to guide the next four years of our health quality and equity strategic plan as we continue to advance on our goals.

We aim to greet and welcome new members with our culture of respect, inclusion, and accessibility. We are committed to ensuring that all our members have knowledge of and easy access to information and assistance through multi-lingual forms of communication, oral interpretation services, and alternative formats for our members with special needs. We will make every effort to communicate with members in their preferred language and will make materials available in the most commonly spoken languages among our member population. If a member has special needs, such as visual impairment or limited reading proficiency, we will make the information readily available and accessible in alternative formats and in an appropriate manner, such as oral interpretation or through an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. We recognize the needs of hard-to-reach, high-need populations and will develop all member communications in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner for our member population.

SMCN provides all new members with comprehensive information about Steward Health Choice, which ensures that members have access to materials that meet the requirements specified in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) contract. The new member information is made widely available and accessible to members in prevalent languages and in alternative formats, including American Sign Language. Oral interpretation services are also available for all non-English languages spoken by members at no cost to members. Steward notifies members of this service and how to access it. In addition, new member materials are available in alternative formats, including the availability of additional auxiliary aids and services.

Our commitment to cultural competence and accessibility for members with disabilities and other language/communication needs extends to our entire provider network and partners. We promote patient-centeredness and culturally competent care delivery through our multi-disciplinary provider care team comprised of physicians, advanced primary care practitioners, nurse care managers, licensed clinical social workers, home health teams, interpreter services, and health educators and coaches. The team works together to ensure socio-economic and cultural barriers to wellness and care are addressed with resources available within Steward or in the patient's community. For example, patient education materials are developed, reviewed, and graded at a sixth grade reading level or lower to ensure materials are understandable at a basic literacy level and thoughtfully designed for layout and readability. We make translations in the prevalent member languages available upon request. In addition, the care team leverages culturally sensitive approaches to motivational and behavioral modification to engage beneficiaries in developing personalized clinical care plans and monitoring progress against goals. Each hospital in SMCN's network also has a Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) in place for patients and family members to advise each hospital on issues including, but not limited to, patient/provider relationships, quality improvement, and patient education.

SMCN ensures that all members continue to receive respectful, understandable, and effective care and will ensure that all communications, services, and supports are inclusive and accessible to all members. Building on SMCN's culture and competency in this area, we will ensure that all Members have access to culturally competent, language-appropriate communications and services. Steward provides accommodations to ensure communications and services are accessible to members with disabilities, including members who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, visually impaired, physically/developmentally disabled, and intellectually challenged. SMCN aims to ensure providers have the resources and training they need to meet all Members' needs. SMCN regularly evaluates our member demographics to identify any new language needs, needs related to health literacy, and needs related to cultural appropriateness of care.

SMCN's culture of compliance with member protections for all prospective and enrolled members includes protecting members' right to be treated with respect and with due consideration for their dignity and privacy; their right to not be discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, medical or claims history, mental or physical disability, health condition, health needs, genetic information, or source of payment; and their right to expect communications and services that are timely, accessible, culturally and linguistically competent, and evidence-based.

SMCN works with Steward's Disability Coordinator who oversees Steward-wide diversity initiatives, interpreter services, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. Our Disability Coordinator oversees SMCN's compliance with federal and state laws and regulations pertaining to persons with disabilities, including compliance for providers related to physical access, communication access, accommodations, and accessible equipment for members with disabilities. In addition, our Disability Coordinator oversees and ensures cultural competence and linguistic accessibility across SMCN and throughout our provider network. We will assess and address current capabilities and needs, including training needs of our staff, providers, and partners to meet the cultural, language, and disability access needs of all members. We also include member protections and cultural competency requirements in all contracts with community partners and referral circle providers.