

Equity Action Plan Digest: Office of National Drug Control Policy

Summarized by Travis Reginal

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Office of National Drug Control Policy's equity action plan is available at https://assets.performance.gov/cx/equity-action-plans/2022/EO%2013985_ONDCP_Equity%20Action%20Plan_2022.pdf (PDF).

Overview

What problem is the agency trying to solve?	The harms done to Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color by the criminal legal and health care systems need to be acknowledged and dismantled (p. 5) through actions intended to address racial disparities in three areas (pp. 6–7): the criminal legal system, access to harm reduction services and low-barrier buprenorphine treatment for opioid use disorder, and data systems and research
Priority groups	Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) people; people in rural and urban areas; people with disabilities; youth
Historic harm mentioned?	Yes
Partners in implementation	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Equitable Data Working Group in the Executive Office of the President's Office of the US Trade Representative; federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Office of Management and Budget
Equity defined as	Eliminate and dismantle racial disparities “in the areas of prevention, harm reduction, substance use disorder treatment, recovery, illicit drug supply, criminal justice, and data systems research” (p. 1)

Pillars and Principles of Equity

Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers	Injustice and racial disparities in criminal legal system (p. 6), which impact racial health inequities in health care (p. 4); structural racism (p. 4); inequity in substance use treatment system (p. 4)
Impact goals	Expand access to life-saving medications (methadone and buprenorphine) to underserved people in correctional settings (p. 8); reduce the number of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color with substance use disorder who are arrested and incarcerated for nonviolent crimes (p. 8); increase unbiased and fair decisionmaking in courts regarding Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color (p. 8); fortify community treatment and recovery supports, particularly in Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color (p. 8)
Actions and activities	Engage prosecutors and judges to ensure equitable treatment for people involved in the criminal legal system (p. 8); facilitate low-barrier buprenorphine induction through harm-reduction organizations (p. 8); ensure evidence-based reentry support (p. 8); improve linkages to the community and reentry and recovery outcomes (p. 8); expand training for staff in drug court (p. 8); development of data systems to allow for disaggregation of subpopulations of underserved communities (p. 9); prioritize data and analytic efforts to support advancing equity for traditionally underserved populations (p. 9)

Accountability measures and approaches	Internal evaluation (p. 17); monthly partner meetings (p. 17); internal equity group (p. 18)
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Note: For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf.

Types of Equity and Related Activities

Procedural (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Developed a Spanish workshop for potential applicants to the Drug-Free Communities Support Program grant (p. 2); provided a presentation in Spanish that provides an overview of the grant program (p. 2); sent letters to federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages requesting their opinions and feedback on drug policy (p. 2); incorporated language in notice of funding opportunity encouraging applicants to work in and with communities disproportionately impacted by substance use (p. 3); included a focus on health equity in notice of funding opportunity (p. 3); increasing access to harm-reduction service (p. 8); hold quarterly calls with people with lived experience, researchers, and organization leaders (p. 9); dedicated point of contact and email address for inquiries from tribal communities (p. 14); annual consultations with tribes (p. 14); regularly scheduled stakeholder roundtables with community leaders, with Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color, with representatives from rural communities, and with people with lived experiences (p. 18)
Distributional (example: creating new procurement program)	Requiring grantees to adhere to Executive Order 13985 (p. 12)
Structural (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Work with federal, state, and local partners to support prearrest diversion programs (p.8); simplify the regulation of methadone and buprenorphine to create the necessary flexibility for jails and prisons to offer medications for opioid use disorder (p. 8); internal equity audits (p. 11); Critical Conversation training (p. 11); internal equity working group (p. 18)

Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

- success is generally defined as the completion of activities
- feedback from instruments such as postwebinar surveys and grantee progress reports (p. 16)

Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Reducing the number of people of color with substance use disorder who are arrested and incarcerated for nonviolent crimes; leveraging lived experience to inform implementation and evaluation of equitable access and outcomes
Areas for future investment and growth	Reducing punitive criminal legal inequities; add a focus on demand reduction; room for growth on process for assessing whether plans are achieving equity; expand access to methadone, in particular for people of color, through federal regulatory and other powers; investment in culturally effective substance use prevention programs in schools for youth; increase capacity for harm reduction, treatment, and recovery systems; reimagine treatment system to align with the desires of impacted communities