

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Repairing and Building Relationships with Elected Officials | In October 2022, Equitas Health and our Government Relations consultants, Sean P. Dunn and Associates, hosted a Franklin County Statehouse delegation for a tour and meeting at King-Lincoln Medical Center. Legislators learned about the agency’s work in the community and Equitas Health’s public policy priorities. They also met with senior leaders and toured the mobile unit, pharmacy, and clinic.

Protecting Patient Access to Life-Saving Medications | Throughout 2022, Equitas Health played a key role in advocating for House Bill 135. This bill would ban the use of copay accumulators by health insurance companies. Use of copay accumulators forces patients to pay more out of pocket for expensive, life-saving drugs. This would impact people living with HIV and people with disabilities. Equitas Health worked with a group of patient advocates and gave testimony before the House and Senate. HB 135 passed the House but did not get a vote in the Senate. We expect HB 135 to return in early 2023.

Fighting Anti-LGBTQ+ Discrimination | The Ohio Fairness Act returned to the General Assembly in 2022 and gained Republican support. The act protects LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in their jobs, housing, and seeking public services. Two new GOP legislators became co-sponsors in the Senate this year, and a House legislator sponsored a companion bill. Lawmakers will consider the act again in 2023.

Advocating for Trans Inclusion in Sports | Equitas Health has pledged to fight unfair laws against transgender, non-binary, gender-expansive, and intersex student-athletes. We helped push back against legislation dubbed the “Save Women’s Sports Act.” Leading the testimony in the Senate, Equitas Health set the tone for the Senate hearings linked to Senate Bill 132. During the final hours of the General Assembly in 2022, the companion HB 151, thankfully, did not pass. We expect one or both chambers to reintroduce the bill in 2023.



Supporting Gender Affirming Care for Youth and Young Adults | Through testimony, historical research, and scientific studies, Equitas Health strongly advocated to stop HB 454. This bill would have banned gender affirming care for youth and young adults. The legislation contained inaccurate medical information that would also harm intersex youth. HB 454 gained ground in the final months of the year, but a vast amount of opposing testimony led to its withdrawal. We expect HB 454 to return sometime in 2023.



Championing the Rights of Trans, Non-Binary, and Intersex Youth in Ohio Schools | Over four months, Equitas Health attended all of the events linked to the Ohio State Board of Education's anti-trans resolution. Equitas Health also filed testimony at all four general meetings and worked with partners across the state to keep the broader community informed. While the board removed some troubling language from the resolution, it passed in December 2022. As always, the fight for students' rights carries on in 2023.

Protecting Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) | This fall, the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services announced a proposed rule change to Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This section of the ACA defines their non-discrimination statute. It makes sure LGBTQ+ people and people living with HIV can get the care they need. Equitas Health worked with groups across the country to file testimony supporting more non-discrimination provisions linked to:

- intersectional discrimination based on race
- stronger protections for transgender people
- protections for intersex people

This vital rule change should take effect in early 2023.

Advocating for Greater Title IX Protections for Women and Trans, Non-Binary, and Intersex Students | From summer to fall 2022, Equitas Health pushed for the U.S. Dept. of Education to remove Trump-era Title IX regulations. We joined the National Women's Law Center in filing testimony in support of greater Title IX protections for women and transgender, non-binary, and intersex people. The rule should take effect in early 2023.

Working with the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus to Equitably Distribute ARPA

Funds | In fall 2022, the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) asked Equitas Health to give recommendations for a more equitable distribution of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. While these funds have some limits, Equitas Health gave suggestions that would support pharmacy staff needs, raise wages for syringe-service program (SSP) staff across Ohio, and make sure lower-income urban neighborhoods and rural counties have access to broadband internet. The OLBC used the recommendations to distribute ARPA funds in late 2022.

Working to Protect Patient Access to Qualified Social Workers |

Along with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Equitas Health protected patient access to skilled social workers. Introduced in fall 2022, HB 509 would let people without social work degrees become licensed social workers. This would hurt the quality of mental health care in Ohio. The coalition’s work helped to remove language in HB 509, and patients can trust that social workers have the skills to meet their needs.

Fighting for Access to the Mpox Vaccine |

In summer and fall 2022, Equitas Health advocated for access to the mpox vaccine in Ohio and nearby states. We spoke to the media and joined national coalitions. We pushed the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services and the Health Resources and Services Administration to make sure LGBTQ+ people, especially Black and Brown communities, could get the vaccine. Equitas Health also worked with Columbus Public Health (CPH) to expand access to the vaccine for gender expansive people, regardless of their sex assigned at birth.



FACTS AND FIGURES

07.01.22 – 12.31.22

10 Blog Posts | Equitas Health engaged the broader community with 10 blog posts about public policy issues affecting the LGBTQ+ and HIV+ communities in 2022. The External Affairs team wrote 6 of those posts.

13 News Articles | The External Affairs team appeared in articles in The Buckeye Flame, The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio Capital Journal, and more.

16 National Coalitions | Equitas Health joined 16 national coalitions seeking

- greater access to long-acting injectable PrEP for HIV prevention
- bail reform in Ohio
- national reforms to remove anti-trans bias in credit reporting
- and more.

18 Pieces of Public Testimony | Equitas Health filed 18 pieces of public testimony to legislative bodies, including the Ohio State Senate, the Ohio House of Representatives, the U.S. Dept. of Education (DOE), and the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS).

60+ Community Events | The External Affairs team attended more than 60 community events and protests where they interacted with more than 2,500 people.

20,000+ Views on Social Media | The External Affairs team – in coordination with internal and external partners – logged more than 20,000 views on social media with their consistent updates about public policy issues in Ohio.