

# Integration and Advancement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Within a Health-System Pharmacy Department

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The integration and advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the workplace has been a topic of interest across the United States for many years. A corporation's commitment to DEI showcases value for their employees and customers socially and may simultaneously benefit business performance.<sup>1</sup> Strong organizational emphasis on DEI is associated with improved employee satisfaction, staff engagement, workplace innovation, and better relations with external entities.<sup>2-5</sup> Enhanced awareness around events related to social inequity and racial tensions have accelerated the need for meaningful and actionable changes by organizational leadership. Current efforts toward more robust incorporation of DEI within organizations include: developing metrics to assess retention, promotion, and compensation of historically marginalized groups; creating accountability measures for employees who engage in discriminatory behavior; establishing workplace environments that view DEI training as leadership development; and recognizing the need for ongoing DEI conversations among all employees, not merely those in human resources or involved in employee resource groups.<sup>6</sup>

The healthcare industry has taken a particular interest in DEI initiatives due to the increasing need to address disparities in patient outcomes related to social determinants of health. It is vital for healthcare practitioners to create safe, open spaces to better understand their implicit biases and devise meaningful, sustainable changes to provide a more inclusive and equitable environment for all. This creates a culture of collaboration among healthcare teams where clinicians feel comfortable in sharing their expertise and variable

## Abstract

**Objective:** To design a sustainable and effective model for integrating and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within a health-system pharmacy department.

**Methods:** Frontline staff and leadership were engaged to design an effective model for improving DEI. Extensive background research and employee focus groups informed the creation of departmental goals and proposed DEI initiatives for implementation. A DEI steering team was established to systematically develop DEI recommendations aligned with departmental goals, which were then modified based upon findings from a department climate assessment survey. Recommendations were sent to pharmacy staff to provide comments for changes and were refined based upon feedback. Final recommendations were prioritized and assigned to department managers, who collaborated with frontline staff to operationalize initiatives. An initiative tracker was created to organize planned initiatives, goals, and action steps.

**Results:** Three overarching DEI goals for the pharmacy department were identified: increase equitable opportunities for diverse representation in the pharmacy workforce; foster self-development and self-awareness to contribute to a culture of inclusion; and make changes to pharmacy systems, policies, and procedures for sustainable advancement of DEI. The DEI steering team developed a total of 53 recommendations aligning with these goals, 31 of which were prioritized to implement first by pharmacy managers and frontline staff.

**Conclusions:** The use of a highly collaborative, team-based approach was successful in identifying actionable opportunities for integration and advancement of DEI within the pharmacy department. Outcomes have yet to be determined and will require sustainable implementation strategies to create positive and meaningful change.

perspectives with other team members, which improves accuracy of patient care decisions.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, evidence shows that patients from historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups report increased care satisfaction and higher quality of care when treated by someone of their same racial or ethnic background.<sup>8</sup> Workplace

environments that celebrate DEI may attract clinicians who represent the diversity of patient populations served. Beyond this, when DEI is emphasized in the healthcare workplace, all clinicians can be inspired to expand their understanding of cultural, social, and other factors that influence patient care, which has been correlated with

improved health outcomes.<sup>9-11</sup> Recognizing this, leaders within the nursing profession have called for enhanced commitment to DEI in organizational strategic goals, recruitment and retention of staff from historically marginalized backgrounds, and promotion of shared governance models in which frontline staff have an active voice in decision-making.<sup>12</sup>

As the profession of pharmacy grows and pharmacists become more patient-facing, it is imperative that pharmacists, like nurses and other healthcare professionals, are well equipped to address health disparities and issues of bias while working with both patients and other providers. In a recent article discussing the pharmacist role in dismantling systemic racism, pharmacists are urged to take individual responsibility to improve their awareness of DEI.<sup>13</sup> This individual responsibility calls for pharmacists to engage in personal learning and development opportunities to increase self-awareness rather than looking to leadership or members of historically marginalized backgrounds for education on DEI topics. Additionally, pharmacy departments are encouraged to create an environment for pharmacy practitioners, leaders, and learners to participate in dialogue regarding anti-racism and implicit bias. The authors also call for the creation of specific task forces within healthcare organizations and professional societies to lead anti-racism efforts.

Given the urgent need for pharmacists to engage in DEI, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) created a Task Force on Racial Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and made specific recommendations for health-system pharmacy departments.<sup>14</sup> These recommendations include educating residents on diversity and cultural competence, encouraging residency applications from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) student pharmacists, incorporating expectations of the pharmacy service related to DEI in departmental statements, and providing DEI-focused continuous professional development and training to pharmacy leaders and staff.

Advancing DEI has been a priority of facility leadership at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital, known colloquially as the Madison VA, for

several years as part of the facility's strategic plan. Pharmacy department leaders have likewise showcased a strong commitment to integrating DEI within workplace culture and patient care. However, actionable steps towards this priority had been limited to specific projects without a broader overarching plan until the initiation of this project. The purpose of this project was to design a robust, sustainable, and effective model for integrating and advancing DEI among employees of the Madison VA pharmacy department. As DEI was emphasized among employees, it was intended that DEI would naturally become a focus of patient care and healthcare team interactions.

## Methods

Drawing from human-centered design principles, frontline staff were engaged to co-design a sustainable and effective model for integrating and advancing DEI within the pharmacy department with the overall goal of achieving an optimally inclusive work environment. A team was formed to lead the project, including a pharmacy resident with support from a pharmacy intern and pharmacy leadership at the site. The project involved five main stages of implementation: pharmacy leadership and staff engagement; creation of a DEI steering team; climate assessment survey analysis; call for comments and refinement of recommendations; and operationalizing recommendations through pharmacy leadership and staff re-engagement.

### *Pharmacy Leadership and Staff Engagement*

Extensive background research was initially performed by the pharmacy resident on current best practices for integrating and advancing DEI within pharmacy and the healthcare industry as a whole. After the initial research was complete, the pharmacy resident facilitated a meeting with the pharmacy leadership team to present findings and develop key goals for the pharmacy department. These goals were then presented at a staff-wide meeting. Following the meeting, a call for focus group members was sent to all pharmacy staff, and two frontline employee focus groups were held virtually with participation from clinical pharmacist staff, pharmacy technicians, pharmacy residents, and

pharmacy students. Led by the pharmacy resident, focus group members reviewed the information presented at the staff-wide meeting, refined proposed departmental goals, and brainstormed potential initiatives aligned with the departmental goals. The pharmacy resident then collaborated with interested members of the focus groups and leadership to operationalize proposed initiatives.

### *Creation of Pharmacy DEI Steering Team*

Information and outcomes from DEI focus groups were shared with the department via staff-wide email, and a call was sent for the establishment of a DEI steering team. The DEI steering team was tasked with developing a set of recommendations for the integration and advancement of DEI within the pharmacy service. Interested frontline staff established a Steering Team Charter (Supplementary Material Figure S1) and met biweekly for several months to develop recommendations aligned to each departmental goal. Upon completion, pharmacy leadership reviewed the proposed recommendations and provided feedback. The DEI steering team made additional edits based on leadership suggestions. The recommendations were then forwarded to the pharmacy intern to integrate into an initiative tracker (Supplementary Material Figure S2) to organize initiatives, associated departmental goals, individual action items and deliverables, responsible parties, and anticipated completion dates.

### *Climate Assessment Survey Analysis*

Concurrently, a facility-wide climate assessment survey (Supplementary Material Figure S3) was sent to all Madison VA staff via e-mail to gain an understanding of their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences related to DEI. The survey was created by facility leadership and was intended to be generalizable to all employees at the Madison VA. Results were sorted by department, and the pharmacy intern analyzed the results specific to pharmacy. Findings were presented to the pharmacy leadership team at a granular level with data for each question. Results were then presented to the department as overall themes alongside the recommendations developed by the DEI steering team. The aim of this presentation was to inform and

gather feedback about the current climate and the proposed DEI initiatives.

**Call for Comments and Refinement of Recommendations**

In order to ensure the proposed recommendations would provide sustainable and effective progress, an anonymous and optional “call for comments” survey was distributed to all pharmacy staff via Microsoft Forms following the staff-wide presentation on the climate assessment survey results. As it was vital for every member of the pharmacy department to have a voice in the creation of the recommendations and initiatives, the “call for comments” presented staff with each recommendation and the option to indicate support, support with revisions, or hesitation, as well as a section to provide overall feedback and comments. The DEI steering team used this feedback to finalize the recommendations, which were then updated in the initiative tracker. Leadership in other departments requested pharmacy department guidance in assessing their specific climate assessment survey results, leading to the creation of a pharmacy model roadmap (Supplementary Material Figure S4) detailing the process outlined above.

**Operationalizing Recommendations through Pharmacy Leadership and Staff Re-Engagement**

The pharmacy leadership team engaged in a series of monthly standing managers’ meetings to review the list of finalized DEI recommendations via the initiative tracker. Recommendations were discussed within the team and each initiative was assigned a manager liaison to fulfill action items in collaboration with interested frontline staff members.

To engage front-line staff members, these DEI initiatives were converted into a sign-up survey by the pharmacy intern for distribution to frontline pharmacy staff. The pharmacy resident, chief of pharmacy, and associate chief of ambulatory and specialty care services presented a DEI update at a monthly pharmacy staff meeting. The presentation consisted of a timeline of the department’s DEI efforts, a review of the finalized DEI steering team recommendations, and a request for frontline pharmacy staff to respond to the sign-up survey to express their interest in

**TABLE 1. A List of Initiatives Proposed and Developed by Pharmacy Staff to Meet the Departmental Goal of Increasing Equitable Opportunities for Diverse Representation in the Pharmacy Workforce**

<i>Equitable Opportunities for Diverse Representation</i>
Integration of a point-based application screening process (including allocation of points for DEI-related activities) and blinding of CVs in hiring practices
Addition of DEI-focused questions to interview process
Development of a DEI Commitment Statement and incorporation into recruitment materials
Expansion of recruitment efforts to new geographic areas and engagement with historically black colleges of pharmacy
Review of residency recruitment materials to incorporate inclusive language (e.g. use of gender-neutral pronouns)
Addition of gender pronouns to Zoom calls during the virtual recruitment and interview process
<i>DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion, CV = curriculum vitae</i>

**TABLE 2. A List of Initiatives Proposed and Developed by Pharmacy Staff to Meet the Departmental Goal of Self-Development and Self-Awareness to Contribute to a Culture of Inclusion**

<i>Fostering Self-Development and Self-Awareness</i>
Establishment of a DEI Self-Development and Awareness Group and DEI Open Forum
Ongoing pharmacy manager article discussions/bias assessments incorporated into standing managers’ meetings
Incorporation of DEI presentations and updates into monthly all-staff pharmacy meetings
Implementation of department-wide DEI holiday calendar
<i>DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion</i>

**TABLE 3. A List of Initiatives Proposed and Developed by Pharmacy Staff to Meet the Departmental Goal of Changing Pharmacy Systems, Policies, and Procedures for Sustainable Advancement of DEI**

<i>Systems Integration</i>
Establishment of DEI Steering Team
Development of DEI Steering Team recommendations
Integration of DEI into pharmacy service strategic plan
<i>DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion</i>

contributing to the presented initiatives. The pharmacy resident compiled the survey results and added interested team members to each recommendation within the initiative tracker. To improve staff commitment and engagement, all staff who expressed interest in a certain initiative were able to participate in its implementation as desired.

At a standing managers’ meeting, the

leadership team reviewed sign-up survey results and established which initiatives were highest priority or most time-sensitive based on alignment with service needs, capacity of manager liaisons, and total number of interested staff members. Each manager selected initiatives they would be responsible for implementing based on the determined priority. Anticipated timelines and completion dates were updated on

the initiative tracker to reflect pharmacy leadership discussions.

## Results

The five stages of DEI integration and advancement took place over the course of 24 months. Implementation of DEI recommendations within the pharmacy department remains ongoing.

### Pharmacy Leadership and Staff Engagement

Three overarching goals were identified and refined through pharmacy leadership discussions and DEI focus groups: increase equitable opportunities for diverse representation in the pharmacy workforce; foster self-development and self-awareness to contribute to a culture of inclusion; and make changes to pharmacy systems, policies, and procedures for sustainable advancement of DEI. Concurrently with the formation of a pharmacy DEI steering team to formalize DEI recommendations for the department, a series of initiatives were operationalized by pharmacy leadership and frontline staff aligning with each goal, as outlined in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Additional details about several of these initiatives are described as follows.

To meet the first departmental goal of increasing equitable opportunities for diverse representation in the pharmacy workforce, the leadership team made several interventions within the residency recruitment process. A DEI commitment statement was developed by the pharmacy resident and leadership team, which was then reviewed and updated by frontline pharmacy staff during the focus group meetings. This DEI commitment statement (Figure 1) was added to residency program brochures and other recruitment materials that were shared with candidates. In addition to including a DEI commitment statement, residency recruitment materials

**TABLE 4. Example DEI Interview Questions Integrated into the Residency Recruitment Process**

<i>Example DEI Interview Questions</i>
We are interested to know how you mindfully engage with diversity. Please give us an example of a situation you're either proud of or learned from with respect to diversity.
Please give us an example of a way that you could incorporate cultural factors into a patient's medication consultation.
What is your approach to understanding the perspectives of colleagues of different backgrounds?
Please share an example that demonstrates your respect for people and their differences. How have you worked to understand the perspectives of others?
How has your background and experience prepared you to be effective in an environment that values diversity and is committed to inclusion?

were reviewed to ensure that inclusive language, such as gender-neutral pronouns, was used throughout the text. The residency interview panel was expanded to include members of the pharmacy technician workforce for additional insight and input. The interview panel met to create and implement a point-based application screening process, which included specific allocation of points toward candidates who included didactic or extracurricular activities related to the advancement of DEI. Prior to scoring applications with the updated rubric (Supplementary Material Figure S5), resident applications were blinded by pharmacy administrative support staff to ensure equitable review. Additionally, interview templates for each panel member were updated to include questions where candidates could showcase their knowledge and commitment to DEI (Table 4).

Under the second departmental goal of fostering self-development and self-awareness to contribute to a culture of inclusion, a DEI self-development and awareness group was established. This is a voluntary group of pharmacy staff, residents, and students who meet to discuss various topics related to DEI, with the ultimate goal of promoting self-learning and self-

reflection. Two meeting times are offered quarterly to all pharmacy staff. Meetings have been hosted on a virtual platform in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics focus on various historically marginalized groups, including BIPOC individuals, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, various forms of media and literature are provided prior to each meeting to facilitate discussion (e.g. movies, podcasts, books, news articles, etc.). Each discussion has a moderator, which includes either the pharmacy resident or a volunteer frontline staff member. Discussion questions are prepared in advance, and breakout groups are utilized to encourage vulnerability and participation among attendees.

The third departmental goal of changing pharmacy systems, policies, and procedures for sustainable advancement of DEI was largely operationalized through the creation of a pharmacy DEI steering committee to guide DEI efforts within the department.

### Creation of Pharmacy DEI Steering Team

The DEI pharmacy steering team consisted of 11 active frontline staff members, including pharmacists, pharmacy

**FIGURE 1. The Pharmacy Department's DEI Commitment Statement, Which was Developed and Updated with Input From Frontline Pharmacy Staff and Included in Residency Recruitment Materials**

#### Pharmacy Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

At the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans hospital, we are committed to growing and maintaining an environment which celebrates diversity, provides equitable opportunities for employment and promotion, and supports inclusiveness in pharmacy culture. We embrace our differences as individuals and unite as a pharmacy team toward a common goal: to provide optimal, patient-centered care for our Nation's Veterans.

technicians, and pharmacy residents. The steering team reported to three members of the pharmacy leadership team, including the chief of pharmacy service, the associate chief of ambulatory and specialty care, and the associate chief of acute care and operations. The team developed a set of 53 total recommendations (Supplementary Material Figure S6) for the pharmacy service, which aligned with the three overarching departmental goals. Recommendations included the continuation and optimization of current initiatives developed by pharmacy staff in addition to new recommendations.

### ***Climate Assessment Survey Analysis***

The climate assessment survey provided insight into the current experiences and feelings surrounding DEI from the pharmacy department staff. Highlighted within the results were the current celebration of racial and ethnic identities within the pharmacy team and a culture of team members' voices being valued and included. Staff emphasized a desire to continue small group conversations surrounding DEI topics along with the need for leadership to continue to demonstrate commitment to these issues. Additionally, staff underscored the need to incorporate training for staff to feel more confident intervening when faced with racism and to ensure opportunities for equitable career advancement. These findings reinforced the importance of the recommendations proposed by the DEI Steering Team and also identified opportunities for modification of the recommendations to meet the specific needs of the department.

### ***Call for Comments and Refinement of Recommendations***

Thirteen staff members (6.5% of total pharmacy staff) responded to the "call for comments" survey over a two-week period. The feedback gathered through the "call for comments" showed an overall support and alignment with the recommendations developed by the DEI Steering Team from the pharmacy department. There was unanimous support for most of the recommendations. Among the feedback, there were concerns related to an initiative to incorporate a DEI measure in performance appraisals. The concerns included a lack of direction and fear of subjective critique over individual

DEI involvement. Specific aims and opportunities for DEI involvement were added to the initiative to guide staff and build objective criteria for this performance measure. The concerns and incorporated feedback were presented by pharmacy leadership to the department during a staff-wide meeting. This presentation highlighted the purpose behind the recommendation and included specific examples of how to achieve the performance measure within the context of pharmacist and pharmacy technician roles.

### ***Operationalizing Recommendations through Pharmacy Leadership and Staff Re-Engagement***

All recommendations within the initiative tracker were assigned to one or two manager liaisons to oversee the initiative and carry the initiative forward alongside frontline pharmacy team members.

A total of 40 frontline staff members and residents (20% of total pharmacy staff) responded to the sign-up survey, demonstrating interest in various recommendations. For each recommendation within the sign-up survey, a range of two to 17 staff members were interested in operationalizing each initiative. The survey results were shared with the pharmacy managers. Of the 53 total recommendations, five had been completed at the time of prioritization at the managers' meeting. Thirty-one recommendations were deemed high-priority or time-sensitive to initiate or continue. Each manager liaison selected one to two of the high-priority or time-sensitive recommendations to gather interested frontline staff, develop a timeline for completion, assign action items, and implement. Of the 31 recommendations, 16 have been initiated by pharmacy leadership and staff and are ongoing. The department's administrative officer has been tasked with continuously updating the initiative tracker to ensure accountability amongst team members.

## **Discussion**

The results of this project are initial steps for the integration and advancement of DEI within a pharmacy department. Meaningful and enduring changes will require ongoing, intentional thought and planning, as well as personal growth and vulnerability at the individual level. The

pharmacy service will continue to listen, support, and follow recommendations of the groups and communities most impacted by DEI initiatives to ensure sustainability and continuous growth. Of note, the recommendations developed as part of this project are specific to the needs of frontline staff and strategic goals within the Madison VA. The intent of this project is not to provide a step-by-step guide for the implementation of specific DEI initiatives within a pharmacy service, but rather to provide an example approach or framework for advancing DEI.

### ***Limitations***

There were several limitations with this project. First, there is minimal data available regarding DEI initiatives that are proven effective, especially within the field of pharmacy. The pharmacy department at the Madison VA utilized existing frameworks as a platform and adapted these based on the current needs and available resources of the pharmacy service and the facility. Due to the lack of validated tools to measure outcomes of DEI work in existing literature, it has proven difficult to determine what is a "successful" result of these initiatives. Long-term outcomes have yet to be defined and assessed, but the current goal of this project is to provide a cultural shift within the pharmacy service to ensure that pharmacy staff and leadership are looking at their daily work through a DEI lens. In other words, the goal is that these initiatives provide a platform for pharmacy staff to continuously grow and engage in meaningful DEI work.

Given that this project was initiated during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, focus groups and team meetings were hosted in a virtual format. This may have limited the comfort of pharmacy staff to have candid, open discussions about a potentially sensitive topic and may have limited the opportunity to obtain accurate and meaningful feedback. With vaccination and additional on-site presence of staff members, there will be increased opportunity to host in-person meetings in the future.

Furthermore, the climate assessment survey (Supplementary Material Figure S3) was developed at the facility level and focused on racial and ethnic disparities compared to other aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This had the potential

to introduce bias into departmental initiatives given that the results of this survey informed the refinement and finalization of the department's DEI recommendations.

It is important to acknowledge that a commitment to the advancement of DEI requires allocated time to collect information from staff, manage a team, and coordinate the implementation of DEI initiatives. The 16 recommendations that are either completed or in progress were operationalized based on the capacity of the pharmacy resident to facilitate their implementation. The resident was designated this responsibility as part of a longitudinal residency project. While the dedication of a pharmacy resident project toward DEI advancement is a potential strategy for other sites to utilize, it may not be a long-term solution and will require commitment by frontline staff and support from pharmacy leadership to achieve a sustainable model.

### Future Directions

Pharmacy leadership will continue to work with frontline staff to implement and maintain the remaining DEI steering team recommendations. These will be integrated into the pharmacy service's annual strategic plan to ensure long-term sustainability of DEI advancement. The pharmacy management team plans to review the current recommendations at least quarterly and report on their progress. In the future, when new initiatives are proposed by staff members, a process will need to be developed to prioritize these initiatives and assign to an appropriate manager liaison.

Inspired by this work, a subsequent residency project is underway at the Madison VA to address health disparities at the patient level using existing VA population health management tools. Primary care clinical pharmacists and pharmacy interns provide outreach to patients identified on clinical dashboards to optimize guideline-directed therapies for the management of chronic disease states including diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia.

DEI efforts continue to grow within the VA system, both at the Madison VA facility and nationwide. The Madison VA pharmacy department plans to leverage partnerships with leadership to share best practices and minimize duplication of

work. Representatives from pharmacy leadership will participate in the facility's annual strategic planning meeting as part of a DEI workgroup to share service-level initiatives. This will provide a model for the integration of DEI among other services within the organization and on a broader scale. Additionally, front-line pharmacy staff and leadership at the Madison VA serve as members on the facility's Anti-Racism Action Team and participate in the national VA DEI Community of Practice, which will inform future changes in organizational culture.

### Conclusions

The use of a highly collaborative, team-based approach with a focus on frontline staff and leadership engagement was successful in establishing the integration and advancement of DEI within the Madison VA pharmacy department. Utilization of a systems-based approach is crucial for ensuring sustainability and long-term growth of DEI initiatives.

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# Integration and Advancement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Within a Health-System Pharmacy Department

## Supplementary Material

FIGURE S1. DEI Steering Team Charter Developed by Pharmacy Department

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Pharmacy Steering Team Charter William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital

#### Charter

The pharmacy leadership Team at the Madison VA, including the Chief of Pharmacy, Associate Chief of Pharmacy, and Associate Chief of Acute Care Operations, has commissioned the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Pharmacy Steering Team to brainstorm, create, and execute pharmacy-led initiatives surrounding improvement in DEI. This charter will establish principles, as well as clarify roles, processes, and procedures for the structure of DEI Steering Team.

#### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

At the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital, we are committed to fostering and sustaining an environment which celebrates diversity, provides equitable opportunities for employment and promotion, and supports inclusiveness in pharmacy culture. We embrace our differences as individuals and unite as a pharmacy team toward a common goal: to deliver optimal, patient-centered care for our nation's Veterans.

#### Definitions

**Diversity:** Diversity refers to the composition of a groups of people from any number of demographic backgrounds, identities (innate and selected), and the collective strength of their experiences, beliefs, values, skills, and perspectives. The variability in a diverse group is apparent in the characteristics that we see and hear as well as through behaviors and expressions that we encounter and experience in our workplaces and organizations. Diverse organizations are not by definition inclusive.

**Equity:** Creating opportunities for equal access and success for historically marginalized underrepresented populations, in three main areas:

- Representational equity, the proportional participation at all levels of an organization;
- Resource equity, the distribution of resources in order to close equity gaps; and
- Equity-mindedness, the demonstration of an awareness of and willingness to address equity issues among organizational leaders and staff

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is the act of establishing philosophies, policies, practices, and procedures to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources to support individuals in contributing to the organization's success. Inclusion creates infrastructure for allowing the diversity within the organization to exist and thrive in a manner that can enhance innovation and problem solving. Inclusive organizations are by definition diverse at all levels.

#### Team Commitments

- Meet at least monthly as a large team to provide updates from committees and divide into breakout rooms for groups to work as a team
- Communicate via email as appropriate in between team meetings
- Follow through on commitments and communicate with co-leads if responsibilities/timing needs to be adjusted
- Schedule calls/meetings with Madison VA Pharmacy leadership as needed

**Team Roles/Responsibilities**

**Supervisor:** Oversee and provide approval for DEI projects and receive periodic updates from DEI Co-Leads.

**Chair/Co-Chairs:** Work collaboratively to prepare for meetings in order to lead and facilitate effective discussions, develop structure to guide the team’s work, exhibit servant leadership, support team members in executing ideas to result in improved diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Secretary:** Send out meeting agenda prior to each monthly meeting. Transcribe pertinent discussions and team reports into meeting minutes and send to all team members.

**Team Members:** Attend scheduled DEI Team meetings (notify co-leads in advance if unable to attend), contribute meaningfully to discussions/decision making, volunteer to assist with follow up/deliverables, follow through on commitments, raise ideas and/or concerns openly and honestly to ensure the team is able to benefit fully from diverse perspectives and execute meaningful change. Members will be divided into three committees, with each committee focusing on different overarching areas of DEI:

1. **Workforce Diversity Committee:** strong focus on investigating strategies for improving diversity in the pharmacy workforce through engaging pharmacy students, residency candidates, and community members in Madison VA Pharmacy.
2. **Inclusive Culture Committee:** focus on determining ways to foster a culture of inclusion within the pharmacy department.
3. **Self-Development and Awareness Committee:** focus on finding creative ways to encourage pharmacy staff to engage and self-learn in regards to topics surrounding DEI.

**Reporting Relationship**

Progress of the DEI Team will be reported to the following members of the pharmacy leadership team:

- Chief of Pharmacy
- Associate Chief of Pharmacy
- Associate Chief of Acute Care Operations

**Start Date:** January 2021      **End Date:** TBD

**FIGURE S2. Initiative Tracker Template Used to Organize DEI Initiatives and Action Items Within the Pharmacy Department**

*Please note: This is an excerpt from the full initiative tracker at the Madison VA to aid health system pharmacy departments in implementation of a similar process and not intended to be comprehensive.*

Objective	Goals/ Initiatives	Action Items	Responsible Group, Group Leader	Designated Team Members	Deliverables	Anticipated Completion Date	Days Until Due	Call for Comments Survey Results	Status/Current Barriers/ Comments	Group Contact Information
<i>Example Entry:</i>										
Self-Development and Awareness	Raise awareness about available DEI resources and activities	Maintain DEI Holiday Calendar	PGY1/PGY2, (Chaplain Service in tandem?)	xxx		9/26/22	xx	13 of 13 support	"I absolutely support resources and activities. I do think bystander training should be required and this should be the ONLY activity that is required for performance appraisal."	xxx
		Set goal for 100% of pharmacy department to complete Bystander Intervention training by February 2022	xxx	xxx		2/28/22	xx		"I would love to see more DEI content and opportunities disseminated to pharmacy staff more frequently."	xxx



**FIGURE S3. Climate Assessment Survey Sent to Staff Facility-Wide to Garner Information on Staff Experiences Regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

1. Racial and/or ethnic identities of our team members are acknowledged, valued, and celebrated.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
2. I have felt under-valued on my team because of my race.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
3. The value of racial equity is clearly articulated by my supervisor.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
4. My supervisor provides feedback that helps me be conscious of potential bias.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
5. My team regularly engages in discussions that challenge our recognition of bias (race, class, gender, disability, ethnicity, etc.) that may affect our work.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
6. Promotions and rewards are free from bias on my team.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
7. I have the same opportunity to advance my career as colleagues in similar roles.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
8. My organization's recruitment process for diverse talent is transparent.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
9. My voice is heard on my team.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
10. Diverse perspectives are included in decision making on my team.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
11. There are regular opportunities within my team to challenge racist organizational attitudes and practices.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
12. There are regular opportunities outside of my team to challenge racist organizational attitudes and practices.
  - a. Do not know
  - b. Strongly Disagree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Neutral
  - e. Agree
  - f. Strongly Agree
13. I have witnessed other people being undervalued because of their race.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe or Unsure
14. Do you currently feel undervalued because of your race?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe or Unsure
15. Within your team, how often do you feel racial bias results in the unfair treatment of team members?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
16. Within your team, how often do you feel racial bias negatively affects work with Veterans?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
17. How often have you personally experienced racial bias in your organization in the past year?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
18. How often do you ask about race related issues in your work with Veterans?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
19. How often do you feel confident in your abilities to intervene when witnessing or identifying racism with Veterans?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
20. How often do you feel confident in your abilities to intervene when witnessing or identifying racism with colleagues?
  - a. Do Not Know
  - b. Never
  - c. Rarely
  - d. Sometimes
  - e. Often
  - f. Always
21. Please select and/or provide options below that you think would have the greatest positive impact in addressing issues of race and racism at the Madison VA. We value every employee's input and would especially encourage those who identify as a person of color to share your perspectives. With your insight, we can make truly meaningful change.
  - a. Change recruitment strategies to recruit more diverse talent
  - b. Continuing small group conversations
  - c. Executive leadership and Department Chiefs demonstrating commitment/ understanding of these topics
  - d. Focus groups
  - e. Include questions surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in interviews
  - f. More diverse representation in leadership (Pentad and Service Chiefs)
  - g. Trainings/education for all staff
  - h. Trainings/education for supervisors

**FIGURE S4.** Pharmacy Model Roadmap Which Was Disseminated to Other Service Lines at the Madison VA to Aid in Interpretation of Climate Assessment Survey Results



# Utilizing the Climate Assessment Survey

## Pharmacy Model Roadmap

### 1. Establish a team to work on project

- Engage management and interested staff; option to charter a steering team

### 2. Obtain your service's Climate Assessment Survey data

- Obtain data - reach out to organizational contact for service-level data
- Analyze the results - reach out to organizational contact for data analysis support

### 3. Cross-reference other survey results & resources

- Compare results with All Employee Survey DEI results
- Review DEI: A Supervisor's Guide for additional resources and ideas for actions

### 4. Develop recommendations

- Develop recommendations for action

### 5. Share results and recommendations with service leadership

- Present granular survey results to managers and supervisors

### 6. Present overview and recommendations to staff

- Present overall themes and recommendations communicated to entire staff
- Follow presentation with call for comments survey
  - Staff can support, offer revisions, or state they are hesitant with an opportunity to provide additional feedback

### 7. Operationalize the recommendations

- Create workgroups of staff volunteers and/or DEI steering team

### 8. Track and report actions and outcomes

- Create dynamic document to capture progress and impact; report out at service meeting

**FIGURE S5. Residency Applicant Screening Rubric Updated to Include Points for DEI-related Activities**

**Residency Candidate Applicant Screening  
Assignment of Scores  
Revised December 2021**

**Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_ **(max 87\*)**  
**Reviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_ \*Candidates scoring less than 20 are not likely to be invited to interview

In each category, identify highest point value applicable unless otherwise specified. Example: for pharmacy work experience, max points is 10 if an applicant has served as a pharmacist as well as a technician. If an applicant does not meet any of the item criteria in a section, 0 points should be awarded.

Assignment of Scores		Score
<b>Quality of Letters of Recommendation* (subtracts points only)</b>		
Letter(s) identify significant concern by mention of one or more blatantly negative factors that is potentially problematic in any letter		
Generic letter(s) that describe ideal program desires that do not match with our program or seems to be a templated letter		
*Scoring considerations include level of recommendation, relationship to applicant, level of detail/thoroughness of recommendation, personalization to program		
<b>Quality of letter of intent</b>		
Exceptional (Program matches goal, enthusiasm expressed, professional without significant formatting or grammatical errors)		
Average (General goals, letter professional but feels templated, minor formatting or grammatical errors)		
Concerning (Candidates goals are unclear or do not match program, lukewarm letter, significant formatting or grammatical concerns)		
*Consider how well written, tailored to program, future goals, how the candidate could bring something to the program, and overall style/flow.		
<b>CV and Application Packet Review – information can be found in CV or other areas of application</b>		
<b>Pharmacy Work Experience</b>		
Pharmacist (dual appointment or other)		
Technician or Intern ≥1 year		
Technician or intern ≤1 year		
None		
<b>Non-Pharmacy Career Experience</b>		
≥1 year		
≤1 year		
None		

<b>Additional Graduate or Post-Graduate Degree (any for PGY1 program; degree that provides relevant skills to program for PGY2)</b>	
Yes	
No	
<b>VA Experience as student or resident</b>	
High (multiple APPE rotations, current or past VA employment, special projects volunteer)	
Moderate (1 APPE rotation)	
Low (shadow, IPPE, other)	
None	
<b>Pertinent Clinical Experiences or Elective APPE (or Residency Rotation) Experiences</b>	
High (3 or more experience directly in the program's specialty)	
Moderate (2 experiences related to the specialty)	
Low (1 experience that required writing progress notes)	
None	
<b>Research (completed outside a student or residency rotation)</b>	
High (led a research project or was noted to be student project lead on a faculty project)	
Moderate (involved in a research project outside of rotation for $\geq 1$ year)	
Low (involved in a research project outside of a rotation for $< 1$ year)	
None	
<b>Publications</b>	
High (1 peer-reviewed publication OR 6 or more publications of any type)	
Moderate (1 non-peer reviewed publication OR 3-5 publications of any type)	
Low (1-2 publications of any type, including local/facility level)	
None	
<b>Posters &amp; Presentations</b>	
High (6 or more presentations or posters of any type OR presentation at a national level)	
Moderate (3-5 presentations or posters of any type OR presentation at a state level)	
Low (1-2 presentations or posters of any type, including local/facility level)	
None	
<b>Leadership</b>	
High ( $\geq 2$ committee positions)	
Moderate (one or two orgs with extensive engagement or specific leadership training)	
Low (member with active engagement)	
None	
<b>DEI Specific Activities</b>	
High (Leading activities supporting DEI advancement)	
Moderate (Recurrent engagement in activities supporting DEI advancement)	
Low (Engaged in one DEI activity)	
None	
<b>AVG GPA as a consideration (consider explanation in letter of intent)</b> No points awarded. "YES" if concerns about academic performance or "NO" if no concerns regarding academic performance.	

**Other considerations regarding application that is not included above:**

**FIGURE S6.** A Complete List of 53 Recommendations Made by the DEI Pharmacy Steering Team for Implementation Within the Madison VA Pharmacy Department

## **DEI Pharmacy Steering Team Recommendations 2021: William S. Middleton Pharmacy Department**

**Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** The William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital pharmacy department is committed to fostering and sustaining an environment which celebrates diversity, provides equitable opportunities for employment and promotion, and supports inclusiveness in pharmacy culture. We embrace our differences as individuals and unite as a pharmacy team toward a common goal: to deliver optimal, patient-centered care for our Nation's Veterans.

To honor this commitment, the Madison VA pharmacy department has formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Steering Team to develop recommendations for pharmacy leadership to prioritize and execute. To encompass the broad perspectives of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Steering Team's recommendations, these recommendations have been divided into three focus areas (with specific actions included for consideration and implementation):

- **Self-Development and Awareness**
- **Inclusive Culture**
- **Workforce Diversity**

### Self-Development and Awareness

**Overarching goal:** To develop and implement practices within the Madison VA pharmacy department which encourage staff engagement and self-learning in topics surrounding DEI.

- Ensure DEI remains a priority within the pharmacy department long-term (combating action bias)
  - Highlight DEI work in performance appraisals
  - Meet quarterly to discuss DEI-related media (books, podcast, movies, television shows)
  - Include DEI material regularly in staff meetings (at least quarterly) and encourage staff to share stories and DEI-related content
- Raise awareness about available DEI resources and activities
  - Provide updates regarding impact of DEI initiatives, including showcasing our work beyond our facility to help disseminate successful practices
  - Maintain DEI Holiday Calendar
  - Include DEI-related topics into Preceptor Development meetings
  - WhatsApp open forum group for sharing resources, including volunteer opportunities
  - Set goal for 100% of pharmacy department to complete Bystander Intervention training by February 2022
  - Incorporate DEI material into pharmacy publications/emails (stories, advertise DEI-related programs)
  - Introduce Implicit Association Tests to pharmacy staff
- Ensure DEI remains a priority to leadership

- Incorporate pharmacy manager discussions/bias assessments into standing manager meetings
- Leverage DEI training materials for all supervisors
- Incorporate DEI topics into annual Strategic Goals
  - Utilize results of facility-wide Climate Assessment Survey
- Vetting/Utilizing existing resources
  - Review work of other facilities/organizations (University of Wisconsin, Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin, other VA pharmacy departments, YWCA, Project Implicit)
  - Recommend trainings to staff and provide protected time to complete these and review
  - Partner with DEI Diversity Officer and DEI groups at our VA

## Inclusive Culture

**Overarching goal:** To establish a baseline of current feelings of inclusivity across all pharmacy staff, and develop unique and meaningful ways to ensure all staff feel the pharmacy department is a safe space to be their authentic selves, regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, culture, national origin, sexual orientation, age, sex, gender identity, social class, physical ability/attributes, religious or ethical value systems, language, or other perspective shaping backgrounds.

- Gather baseline information on current state of inclusivity in department
  - Ensure the following information is obtained via survey:
    - How often you personally feel a lack of inclusion
    - How often you notice a lack of inclusion of other individuals
    - Management handles diversity matters appropriately
    - Level of comfort going to supervisor with matters related to DEI
    - Organization values diversity/inclusion
    - Open-ended questions
  - Distribute survey and meet to reassess baseline needs and reform DEI plan
- Establish sustainable mechanism for peer accountability
  - Changing cultural norms around how peers respond to microaggressions and leverage resources/training to be prepared to address situations in real-time.
  - Maintaining contact with Equal Employment Opportunity office to ensure continued visibility and reinforcement in bystander training resources
- Increase presence of DEI initiatives at new employee and learner orientations (e.g. new employee orientation, residency orientation, student pharmacist orientation, etc.)
  - Work with leadership to determine current DEI-related material at orientation
  - Develop new materials as needed and embed within mandatory orientations
  - When creating email signatures, encourage new employees to include pronouns
- Taste of Madison VA Pharmacy (potluck)/holidays
  - Potential partnership with UW-Madison School of Pharmacy Multicultural Affairs Program in Pharmacy
- Convert DEI Holiday Calendar into an active learning experience
  - Send out announcement email (opportunity to pair with monthly birthday email)
  - Provide staff with the opportunity to identify missed holidays
- *Anonymous* DEI comment/question box

- Allows individuals to start conversations/safely ask questions/provide suggestions regarding culture and inclusivity
- Introduce at new employee orientation for new employees
- Increase visibility of Pharmacy Mission/Vision/DEI Statements
  - Make more visible/accessible (on SharePoint and to public)
  - Print out and distribute lanyard cards with mission statement/vision/DEI statement
    - **Pharmacy Mission:**
      - *Our mission is to provide safe, evidence-based, cost-effective and efficient pharmacy services through exceptional patient care, research, and education.*
    - **Pharmacy Vision:**
      - *Our vision is to provide the best, integrated pharmacy care to every patient, every day. Our high performing team of pharmacy professionals strives to advance pharmacy practice through evidence-based, diverse, and innovative clinical practice. We continue to improve patient safety through advancement of medication use systems and technology. Our department serves as a premier training and research site. Our employees practice in a safe, engaging environment that values teamwork and always places the patient at the center of all we do.*
    - **Pharmacy Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**
      - *At the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans hospital, we are committed to growing and maintaining an environment which celebrates diversity, providing equitable opportunities for employment and promotion, and supporting inclusiveness in pharmacy culture. We embrace our differences as individuals and unite as a pharmacy team toward a common goal: to provide optimal, patient-centered care for our Nation's Veterans.*

## Workforce Diversity

**Overarching goal:** To institute cultural change through implementing equitable hiring practices, decreasing barriers to entry, and showcasing the department's inclusive culture that makes candidates of all backgrounds desire to work as part of the team.

- Leverage partnerships to begin understanding perceptions of diversity and inclusiveness in the Midwest/Wisconsin
  - Leveraging University of Wisconsin diversity programs to perform study on opinions and possible impact on recruitment and retention
  - Applying for grant funding through pharmacy organizations or other avenues
  - Determining local awareness on opinions and impact and identifying specific areas of opportunity to increase diversity and inclusion
- Outreach to more diverse populations of students, pharmacy personnel, and pharmacists – broaden recruitment to reach more diverse areas across the country

- Leverage current pharmacist relationships outside of the Midwest to reach out to other pharmacy schools for resident recruitment as well as to reach out to pharmacists across the country for open positions
- Focused emphasis on historically black schools
- Work with local and national organizations that foster diversity and accommodate disabilities
  - Consider specific outreach to high schools to encourage pharmacy as a career
- Expand the hiring process to be more inclusive and decrease barriers to entry
  - Not rely only on grade point average and/or interview questions in the hiring process
  - Within interview process, continue incorporating DEI-related interview questions
  - Begin including pronouns as part of introductions and including next to names on Zoom/online interviews
  - De-identify applications
    - Consider having a third-party complete this to ensure adequate blinding
  - Review and calibrate current application grading system.
    - Consider having a third-party review to ensure minimal bias
  - Review and calibrate current questions being asked during interviews
    - Consider having a third-party review to ensure minimal bias
  - Consider adding supplemental questions to answer along with cover letter for initial application
  - Consider collaborating with University of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy to explore PharmD application processes.
- Maintain inclusive pharmacy culture to retain diverse population
  - Ensure adequate career growth and opportunities for promotion for all pharmacy employees

### Additional Recommendations for Pharmacy Leadership:

- Prioritize Recommendations
  - Create and maintain a detailed timeline for completion with assigned champions/responsible persons for each initiative
- Engage *all* members of the pharmacy leadership team in DEI work
  - Consider having each member of the management team choose a DEI recommendation, put together a team, and see the project through to completion
  - Consider having members of pharmacy leadership rotate through facilitating DEI discussions, such as during:
    - Weekly manager meetings
    - Quarterly DEI Self-Development and Awareness Groups
    - Pharmacy staff meetings