



External Affairs Strategic Plan



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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS | OVERVIEW

Equitable and accessible healthcare depends on government programs and public policies rooted in the pursuit of health justice. As a federally qualified community health center look-alike, Equitas Health works hard to make sure those policies support the communities we serve. Through our words and actions, we continually advocate for affordable healthcare, LGBTQ+ equity, and racial justice.

The External Affairs team monitors federal, state, and local policymakers and their proposed legislation. They challenge laws that threaten access to insurance, low-cost meds, harm reduction programs, and gender-affirming care. They work to protect programs like the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, and the 340B Drug Pricing Program. They understand that silence in the presence of injustice is collusion.

“Our External Affairs team keeps their fingers on the pulse of policies impacting our work. They know that the health of the communities we serve depends on access to affordable care. Access depends on actions, whether that means speaking out at public meetings, drafting letters, or testifying before legislators. This strategic plan supports the important work of External Affairs that is critical to advancing our mission to care for all.”

– Robert Copeland,
Interim CEO & Chief Development Officer, Equitas Health

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS | BUILDING A STRATEGIC PLAN

The work of this team matters more than ever. Every day, the communities we serve face legislators and laws determined to deny or limit their access to healthcare and education. External Affairs advocates for legal protections for the LGBTQ+ community. We address racism as a public health crisis. We monitor threats to healthcare programs and inform our staff, so that our clients and patients receive the care they need and deserve.

We have the opportunity to be a leader among activists by advocating for public policy priorities, engaging our patient populations in legislative issues, collaborating with external stakeholders, and organizing and advancing community relations projects with those stakeholders.

WHO?

A sound plan relies on a variety of sources who understand how External Affairs impacts the delivery of equitable and accessible healthcare. Contributions to this strategic plan came from all levels of the organization in partnership with the External Affairs team.

WHAT?

Through a discussion of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for External Affairs, the designers of this plan named four themes that will be vital to our success. These themes have the full support of our senior leadership.

WHEN?

Development of the plan began in December 2022. Application will continue over this fiscal year, with full implementation by June 30, 2026.

WHY?

External Affairs has strong connections to community partners who advocate for people at the intersections of sexuality, gender identity, and race. Our public policy work operates at the federal, state, and local levels. Our gender-affirming legal clinics – coordinated with TransOhio – have grown by over 300 % in the last three years. We have added our voice to harm reduction policies, and we continue to adapt to the changing political environment. This is just the beginning.

While External Affairs does not generate income, our role in the community is invaluable. By mobilizing our teams and resources around public policy priorities, engaging and amplifying the voices of the people we serve, and collaborating with external stakeholders, we can lead the way for healthcare advocates and strengthen Equitas Health's ability to care for all.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS | 3-YEAR STRATEGIC GOALS

ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES | ENGAGE PATIENT POPULATIONS | COLLABORATE WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS | ORGANIZE & ADVANCE COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROJECTS

Equitas Health has identified (4) three-year strategic goals to advance the work of External Affairs.

ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

What is our goal?

We will lead others in approaching large, systemic issues that impact the communities we serve. We will use our unique purview to mobilize Equitas Health's dedicated teams and resources to place our organization at the forefront of advocating for public policies that ensure greater access to care.

Why is this important?

In pursuit of Equitas Health's mission to "care for all," we must advocate for public policies that benefit the people we serve and the healthcare they receive. Key populations include people living with HIV, communities of color, the LGBTQ+ community, and people who use drugs (PWUD).

We can be on the cutting edge. External Affairs is not restricted by funders or contracts, and with our 50,000-foot view of the needs and issues of the communities we serve, we can help move the organization forward.

How we get there | FY 2024-26

Define the roles and major responsibilities of the External Affairs team and share the updated org chart with internal stakeholders.

Complete our website revamp in collaboration with the Marketing department.

Create a communications schedule to inform and engage staff, patients, and stakeholders about our public policy priorities.

Share our strategic plan and brainstorm opportunities for collaboration with internal stakeholders.

Combat anti-LGBTQ+ legislation at the local, state, and federal level.

ENGAGE PATIENT POPULATIONS

What is our goal?

We will engage patient populations with civic and legislative issues vital to the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve, including people living with HIV/AIDS, people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, and people who use drugs (PWUD).

Why is this important?

This is critical to the overall success of the organization and our ability to fulfill our mission. It allows us to rebuild trust and develop stronger relationships with those we serve. It also gives patients the opportunity to engage with policies that impact healthcare.

How we get there | FY 2024-26

Provide ongoing education related to evolving issues affecting key populations, especially LGBTQ+ people of color and gender-expansive people.

Increase our online presence via social media posts that include specific and actionable ways people can get involved in the legislative process.

Increase voter registration and track the number of voters we register annually, especially during midterm and general election cycles.

COLLABORATE WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

What is our goal?

We will collaborate with key external stakeholders to rebuild community trust, solidify our place in advocating for the people we serve, and unite with other like-minded organizations for the greater good.

Why is this important?

We need to rebuild community trust and develop strong relationships with other organizations. We are better and stronger together!

How we get there | FY 2024-26

Focus on increasing collaboration with national organizations like The National Center for Transgender Equality and Center Link and statewide organizations like TransOhio, the ACLU of Ohio, and more.

Facilitate communication with other organizations at the local, state, and national level.

Set an agenda for meaningful collaboration with our external stakeholders.

ORGANIZE & ADVANCE COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROJECTS

What is our goal?

We will organize and advance community relations projects focused on increasing access to care, cultivating relationships, and developing new markets for services, which will support departments across the agency and patients across the state.

Why is this important?

We can enhance and expand services for the communities we serve when we cultivate new relationships and grow existing relationships with stakeholders, which will increase access to care for our patient populations.

How we get there | FY 2024-26

Add personnel to support our public policy work, which will increase our bandwidth in the fight against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

Expand gender-affirming legal clinic capacity to eliminate the wait list and to provide even more access to this service.

Grow our presence in new markets with the support and guidance of Senior Leadership and colleagues across the agency.



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS | IMPLEMENTATION

External Affairs will fulfill its mission to advocate for public policy priorities, advance community relations, and engage others in that advocacy. To do this, we will develop a Project Priority Plan with biannual goals and key performance indicators to measure our progress. We will share our progress on a regular basis with the entire organization, senior leadership, and—most importantly—the people we serve.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS | CONCLUSION

The External Affairs team works to make Equitas Health a leader in the fight for equitable and accessible healthcare. We continue to build trust among internal and external partners who see our work as fundamental to Equitas Health’s mission. Proposed laws that negatively impact the LGBTQ+ community, people living with HIV/AIDS, communities of color, and people who use drugs (PWUD), prove the need for our work and this strategic plan.