Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Delivering equity through OPM

As the federal government's strategic partner for human resources policy, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is committed to a whole-of-government approach to advancing equity and supporting underserved communities. Through efforts such as future of work hiring initiatives, recruitment of early career talent, and identifying barriers to public service, OPM continues to build a federal workforce that draws from the full diversity of the American people.

New strategies to advance equity

Through internal OPM reviews, engagement with local communities via outreach events, and reviewing existing evidence, OPM identified five areas of focus for its 2023 Equity Action Plan. OPM will continue to engage the public on these action areas, its progress, and next steps throughout the year and beyond.

1. *Increase access and use of Applicant Flow Data (AFD) government-wide to inform agency strategic workforce planning and data-driven decisions. Although the federal workforce attracts a highly diverse applicant pool, post-audit AFD trends consistently show a drop-off in representation for certain groups in later stages of hiring. The primary cause or causes of this effect is unclear. More research and barrier analysis are required to better understand any barriers in agencies' hiring processes. Several known challenges prevent agencies from fully using post-audit AFD as part of the materials to identify and mitigate barriers to federal employment. To address these barriers and others, OPM will:*

   - Partner with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to provide training and resources for federal agencies on conducting barrier analysis and creating action plans.

   - Partner with talent acquisition systems to develop and implement government-wide data standards and business rules for agency access and usage of AFD.

   - Conduct a government-wide barrier analysis project that seeks to create resources to enable agencies to accelerate their ability to uncover, examine, and remove barriers to equal participation at all levels of the workplace.

New strategies to advance equity

- Develop initial guidance for agencies and talent acquisition systems for how AFD should be structured and made available to different roles in agencies.

2. ***Build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people by reducing barriers to federal career opportunities.*** *Some students and recent graduates from high schools and college students from underserved communities, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), have expressed a lack of awareness around availability of government jobs and guidance on how to apply for federal jobs. There are also many students who are aware of federal job opportunities, but face challenges with the application process. To address these barriers and others, OPM will:*

- Conduct outreach events for high school and college students from underserved communities, HBCUs, and other MSIs, detailing the availability of federal jobs and providing guidance on how to apply for them.

- Conduct a qualitative research study and engage with focus groups that include underrepresented candidate audiences. OPM will conduct this study to better understand the motives behind seeking government work, job seeker behavior, applicant needs, and barriers to entry (e.g., distrust, fatigue, clearance debt, incarceration, citizenship issues).

- Create an agency-facing microsite to support federal agencies seeking to hire applicants from MSIs, persons with disabilities, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

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- Conduct a survey for participants from institutions that OPM partners with, and community outreach events to better understand how people from partner institutions and organizations experience the federal application process and timeline for federal jobs.

- Launch a media campaign to engage and increase awareness of federal job opportunities among underserved communities and drive traffic to the newly created Candidate Landing Page, a tailored USAJobs application page.

- Leveraging the Chief Diversity Officers Executive Council and Chief Human Capital Officers Council to work closely with other federal agencies to prioritize and assist them with their efforts to recruit, hire, and retain qualified individuals from underserved communities.

- Ensure effective implementation of the Fair Chance Act Rule, which was published in August 31, 2023.

- Promote federal hiring opportunities by, as appropriate, partnering with nonprofit service organizations that specialize in recruiting and supporting students from underrepresented groups with paid internship opportunities.

New strategies to advance equity

3. *Advance the equitable participation of federal employees in the Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) Program by conducting an FEHB Affordability Study to identify barriers and potential solutions to accessing health benefits.* *Some federal employees and retirees face increasing health care premiums and difficulty affording paying their share of premiums, as well as health plan copayments and coinsurance. To address these barriers and others, OPM will:*

- Conduct a mixed methods study that will access and analyze data on FEHB enrollment and use patterns by health plan and enrollee demographics to explore demographic and geographic variation in FEHB enrollment and affordability.

- Review existing studies on methods for improving access to employer-based insurance coverage.

- Document findings that will help OPM understand the trends and the reasons behind employees not accessing FEHB.

- Provide OPM with actionable insights and policy recommendations based on steps taken by other public and private sector employers to improve participation and reduce inequities in the program.

- Model coverage improvements based on proposed policy options, to the extent allowable by law.

- Identify participants and conduct focus groups to understand the root causes leading to non-participation in FEHB.

New strategies to advance equity

4. *Advance equitable access to and the quality of maternal health benefits by expanding the scope and availability of covered prenatal and postpartum FEHB services.* *As stated in the White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis, women in the U.S. die from pregnancy-related causes at a higher rate than any other developed nation in the world. The maternal mortality rate is even higher for Black women, Native American women, and women who live in rural areas – all are significantly more likely to die due to pregnancy-related complications. But there are other barriers including access to prenatal care (particularly for marginalized communities), inadequate reimbursement for services offered by appropriate providers (e.g., midwives and doulas), and providers insensitive to the needs of women of color regardless of income. To address these barriers and others, OPM will:*

- Strengthen coverage, benefits, and services around maternal healthcare, especially in support of prenatal and postpartum care, such as improving reimbursement and coverage of perinatal support visits and providing coverage of self-measured blood pressure cuffs and associated services to prevent hypertension.

- Increase reimbursement and coverage for childbirth education classes, group prenatal care, home visiting programs, care management for high-risk pregnancies, self-measured blood pressure monitoring, certified nurse midwives, birth centers, and perinatal support services, like doulas.

- Encourage FEHB Carriers to provide quality bonuses to maternity providers whose Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers & Systems (CAHPS) scores improve, reimburse at a higher rate those health systems using Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) patient safety bundles or those having Joint Commission

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certification, use the "Birthing-Friendly" hospital designation coined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and to adopt the [Centers for Disease Control (CDC) HEAR HER® campaign](#).

- Work with FEHB Carriers to improve the collection of maternal race and ethnicity data.

- Analyze race and ethnicity data on maternal health quality metrics from the National Committee for Quality Assurance for possible inclusion in the FEHB Plan Performance Assessment program and identify appropriate next steps.

- Continue work to make improvements in access to postpartum depression care and services offered by FEHB plans, as measured by reported increases in coverage of postpartum depression screening and treatment.

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5. ***Assess use and equity of use of paid parental leave (PPL) to identify potential areas where employees may not be maximally using this new benefit or may be constrained from using the full amount of the benefit.** Multiple studies have shown that parents often do not take advantage of the full duration of their paid parental leave benefit, with men and people of color reporting less leave use. Research suggests that the longer the leave for mothers, the greater the benefits to improved child health, and the longer the leave for fathers, the greater their later involvement in child caretaking. To address these barriers and others, OPM will:*

- Leverage existing data including payroll data (use of leaves and use of PPL by type of qualifying event), employee personnel status data (for example, retention status and base pay), employee performance data (for example, award hours and award pay), Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and Federal Employee Benefits Survey data, and employee demographic data (for example, gender, race and ethnicity, age, work schedule, and agency) to assess use and equity of use by demographics.

- The focus of the evaluation for FY 2024 will be on identifying short-term outcomes for federal employees for which there is sufficient, good quality data.

- Produce a report to help the federal government understand where employees are not fully accessing PPL.

- Identify areas where agencies can provide more informational support on use of this benefit.

What OPM accomplished

Below is a sampling of OPM's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- *Launched a new reporting capability (Power BI), which includes reporting capabilities and dashboards, to expand federal agency access to and use of Post-Audit AFD.*
  The use of Power BI expands beyond improved access to AFD and includes broad access to talent acquisition data for agencies and the public, as well as other OPM data products. OPM has established connectivity between most agencies and OPM's Power BI environment.

- *Obtained federal employee input to inform OPM's development of a new FEHB Program Decision Support Tool.*
  In 2022, OPM conducted ten focus groups of federal employees and completed a report on our findings. The findings helped OPM identify key features and functionality that federal employees desire in a Decision Support Tool and informed the user-research for the Decision Support Tool for Postal employees. In addition, OPM finalized a customer experience web survey and published the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) notice to implement the web surveys. OPM also included questions in the 2023 Federal Employee Benefits Survey to assess employee views on the current plan comparison tool.

What OPM accomplished

- ***Supported Benefits Officers across government to advance financial security.***
  OPM's Retirement Services is continuing to advance initiatives that seek to improve retirement readiness and financial literacy for members of underserved communities within the federal government. This effort is targeted at examining disparities in financial security outcomes across the federal government. OPM has collected data on existing financial literacy programs from relevant agencies across government and has conducted a rigorous literature review that focuses on summarizing evaluations of employer-based retirement and readiness for financial security. OPM is using this information to develop a financial literacy curriculum.

- ***Issued employee wellness guidance in May 2023, that is designed to foster the mental, emotional, and physical prosperity of federal employees through workplace wellness tools and resources which can optimize both employee and organizational success, and launched a new Mindful FED governmentwide program.***
  By reframing Employee Assistance Programs as wellness programs, OPM is striving to destigmatize the use of mental health services. OPM also has continued efforts to achieve mental health parity through access to mental health services offered by FEHB Carriers, by working with Carriers to ensure mental health services are reimbursed similarly to physical health services. In addition, OPM launched a new governmentwide initiative, which presently offers 30-minute practices, resource sharing, and community building four times a week.