

JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE: ADVANCING EQUITY

In 2021, Justice in Aging launched a new strategic initiative to advance equity. The strategic initiative aims to center our advocacy strategies and projects on issues that directly address systemic inequities faced by older adults of color, older women, LGBTQ older adults, older adults with disabilities, and older adults who are immigrants or have limited English proficiency. Primary emphasis will be placed on advancing racial equity specifically.

WHY NOW?

The past year has laid bare the racism that is woven into the fabric of America and every one of our systems. Videos capturing the murders and assaults of Black men and women at the hands of police have drawn increased awareness of the potentially deadly effects of racism Black people face at every stage of life, contrasted with the lenient and permissive attitudes demonstrated toward white supremacists who stormed the Capitol. The xenophobic hatred and violent physical attacks aimed at Asian Americans, the high numbers of COVID-19 infections among Black, Indigenous, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, and Latino/a people, many of whom are doing the essential work of caregiving and food service, the disproportionately high number deaths of older adults from these communities, the inequitable distribution of vaccines—all of these are part of the racism that is embedded into every aspect of American life.

The impact of racism only intensifies as people of color age and also confront ageism. For older adults in these communities, the effects of the systemic racism they face throughout their lives compound, leading to higher rates of senior poverty and homelessness, biases in health care systems contributing to health inequities, institutionalization in poorly performing nursing homes, and even premature death. Ageism in our society exacerbates these challenges as policymakers are slow to address these problems because of the way our culture and systems devalue older lives.

Racism and ageism are not the only forms of systemic discrimination older people may face throughout their lives. Older adults who are women, people with disabilities, limited English proficient, immigrants, and part of the LGBTQ community also experience systemic inequities that create and sustain disparities in their health and economic security as they age. For older adults who live at the intersection of more than one of these communities, the discrimination and inequities they encounter intensify as they age.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ADVANCING EQUITY?

Advancing equity means pursuing systemic change in law and policy to improve the lives of low-income older adults who experience inequities rooted in historical, persistent, and structural racism, ageism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and xenophobia.

To center equity in our work, we will be more intentional in selecting the issues we work on, whom we work with, and the policy solutions we advocate for. We will prioritize issues, projects, and cases that either significantly impact or uniquely target older adults of color, older women, LGBTQ older adults, older adults with disabilities, and older adults who are immigrants or have limited English proficiency. We will seek policy solutions that are tailored to these communities and that go beyond one-size-fits-all approaches that can mask, or worse, exacerbate existing disparities. We will ground our advocacy in the lived experiences of these communities by strengthening relationships with existing partners and intentionally forging relationships with new ones.

FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING EQUITY

To implement this strategic initiative, we developed this framework that includes six elements. The elements outline areas where we as an organization must undertake new work and/or reimagine current work to make progress toward our goal.*



LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

Centering equity in our work will involve all staff and programs, and we will have dedicated leadership and staff whose jobs are specifically designed to help us build this new capacity, skillset, and expertise.

In March 2021, we hired a Director of Equity Advocacy to lead our efforts to center equity across our programs. The Director will work with the Executive Director, Deputy Director, other Directors, and all other staff to center equity in our work. The Director of Equity Advocacy will lead a new Equity Team composed of current staff.



PARTNERSHIP AND OUTREACH

Centering equity in our work requires a thoughtful, purposeful, intentional strategy and plan for partnerships. We will implement new approaches for working with current partners and identify and build relationships with new partners. We will build these partnerships with principles of true and meaningful inclusion in mind, avoiding tokenism. From these partnerships and outreach, we will identify new and expanded avenues for our education, advocacy, and litigation efforts and work to elevate the prominence of equity issues within our community.

**Our efforts to center equity on our program work will be complemented by several efforts to ensure Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within and among our staff and board. Those efforts will include the [ongoing work of our existing DEI committee](#), expanded opportunities for staff involvement in organizational decision-making, and an initiative to increase the diversity of the Board of Directors.*



RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

We will gather and analyze data on the ways in which inequities, especially racial ones, manifest in the communities of older adults we serve. We will also conduct legal research on significant and unique issues experienced by these communities. We will do this with support and feedback from existing and new partners. Given the pervasive and ingrained systemic inequities our older adult clients face, existing research may be limited or not publicly available, so we will engage in strategies to obtain the data. The research and analysis will intimately inform our systemic advocacy and litigation to end those inequities.



PLANNING AND EVALUATION

We will adopt new planning and evaluation processes and tools that enable and require us to center equity in the decisions we make about the issues and cases we work on. We will build upon tools we received from prior participation in the Shriver Center Racial Justice Institute, and we will continue to listen to and learn from partners who work with diverse communities. Our planning tools will help us identify who is impacted by the issues we are working on, recognize and understand disparities, and pursue solutions that will advance systemic change to address those disparities. We will evaluate our work across our projects and programs to assess our progress toward building more equitable systems for older adults.



COMMUNICATIONS

We will adapt our communications strategies and tactics to support and advance the other elements of this framework. We will develop communications and messaging tools for discussing equity and aging. We will highlight racial equity and other equity issues in our social media channels and ensure that we are being strategic about the people, organizations, and issues we promote and engage with via those channels. We will equip staff with the training and messages they need to raise equity issues in all communications opportunities, including public speaking and traditional media as well.



EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, AND LITIGATION

Justice in Aging uses three primary levers to bring about change: education, policy advocacy, and impact litigation. We will enhance our education projects and programs to ensure that our trainings, case consultations, and technical assistance address inequities in health care, long-term services and supports, economic security, housing, legal services, and elder justice for older adults. We will focus our policy advocacy to deliver targeted, meaningful, positive change to the communities where we are centering our work that address root causes of structural inequities. We will bring cases that significantly impact or uniquely target older adults of color, older women, LGBTQ older adults, older adults with disabilities, and older adults who are immigrants or have limited English proficiency.

For more information about the strategic initiative,
[contact Denny Chan, Director of Equity Advocacy.](#)

