

# A Strategic Framework for Improving Racial/Ethnic (R/E) Minority Health & Eliminating R/E Health Disparities

## Key 'Take-Away' Messages

Office of Minority Health

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Message: Leadership, Coordination, Strategic & Active Partnerships are Needed to Improve R/E Minority Health (MH) & Address R/E Health Disparities (HD)

- OMH has a unique leadership & coordination role to play within HHS and across the Nation, but leadership & coordination are needed at all levels.
- To achieve improved r/e minority health & reductions in r/e health disparities, we also need:
  - o the active engagement & sustained efforts over time of all stakeholders;
  - o a re-examination of what we are doing/what needs to be done differently; and
  - o a determination of *how best to work together* to enhance individual & collective effectiveness & impacts.

## Message: The *Strategic Framework* Can Help Guide, Organize, & Coordinate Our Efforts for Better Results

- The *Strategic Framework* developed by OMH is intended to help guide, organize, & coordinate the systematic planning, implementation, & evaluation of efforts within OMH, HHS, & across the Nation to achieve better results relative to MH improvement & HD reduction.
- It is not an action plan per se, but a way of conceptualizing what we are doing & what needs to be done so we keep our “eye on the prize” (i.e., the ultimate objectives & goals).

# Message: There Must Be a Science-Based Rationale for Action(s)

- A rational basis – based on existing science & knowledge – must be reflected in individual & collective efforts to address racial/ethnic minority health problems.
- The *Strategic Framework* offers one way to think about & organize such efforts using current science & knowledge about the nature & extent of the problem, factors that cause or contribute to the problem (a.k.a. determinants of health), strategies & practices that ‘work,’ & desired outcomes & impacts linked to long-term *HP2010* objectives & goals.

# Message: “Systems-Level” Factors Play a Critical Role in Promoting or Inhibiting Success

- Other frameworks use essentially the same science, but focus primarily on biological/genetic, behavioral, & social determinants of health.
- The *Strategic Framework* emphasizes the critical role that “systems-level” factors play in promoting/inhibiting effectiveness of our efforts:
  - o Available resources & how they are used
  - o Coordination & collaboration thru partnerships & communication
  - o Leadership & commitment thru strategic visioning & sustained attention
  - o User-centered design (i.e., the system is designed with the needs of its users in mind)
  - o Use of science & knowledge to inform programs & policies

# Message: Identify Expected Outcomes & Relevant Measures for Assessing Progress as Part of the Planning Process

- Identify expected results (in terms of outcomes &/or impacts) and how such results will be measured (i.e., the performance measures/ indicators to be used)\* in the planning stages (not after the fact). Monitor & assess progress during & after implementation via measures selected.

\*During the development of the *Strategic Framework* & identification of the types of outcomes/impacts needed at the individual, environmental/community, & systems levels, OMH initiated a process to identify performance measures/indicators of the outcomes/ impacts. Findings indicate that valid measures of individual-level outcomes/impacts are more readily available than those for environmental/community & systems levels; clinically-based measures are much more available than population-based ones. More research & evaluation are needed to develop & test measures where gaps & weaknesses exist.

## Message: Evaluate Efforts in a *Systematic* Fashion to Generate New Knowledge & Facilitate Continuous Improvement

- We must do a much better job at evaluating our efforts to address MH/HD problems – and do so in a more systematic way\* – to:
  - o determine the effectiveness of our program-, policy-, & research efforts;
  - o promote meaningful ‘returns on investments’ of funding & other resources;
  - o generate new knowledge about what works for ongoing & continuous improvement; and
  - o ensure movement, both individually & collectively, in the same general direction towards a common set of objectives & goals (e.g., *HP2010* objectives & goals for the Nation).

\*OMH has developed a “9-step evaluation protocol” to ensure a consistent approach to evaluation planning & implementation among its grantees.

## Message: A “Systems Approach” is Also Critical to Achieving R/E Minority Health Improvement & R/E Health Disparities Reductions

- Achievement of the long-term objectives & goals requires movement beyond our “silos” & working together in more strategic, concerted, methodical, & consistent ways to improve our *collective* effectiveness & impacts.
- The *Strategic Framework* suggests that seeing ourselves & other (who are or need to be involved) as part of a ‘system’ – &, as importantly, acting accordingly – is critical & necessary for more efficient use of resources, talents, & other assets as well as for greater effectiveness in achieving objectives & goals relative to our collective mission.
- The focus on systems also applies to how various fields of research work together for greater effectiveness & efficiency to address weaknesses & gaps in scientific knowledge & data.



# Message: A Number of Weaknesses & Gaps in Science & Knowledge Have Been Identified

- Weaknesses & gaps in current science/knowledge related to MH/HD were revealed through the literature reviews conducted during OMH's development of the *Strategic Framework*. Such weaknesses & gaps include, but are not limited to:
  - o Nature & extent of MH/HD problems in small & hard-to-reach populations (e.g., AAPIs & AIANs) due to lack of data;
  - o Knowledge & understanding of systems-related factors & how they promote or inhibit MH/HD problems;
  - o Relative importance & interrelationships of factors known to inhibit or promote health;
  - o Strategies & practices that work, esp. in producing desired outcomes & impacts at the environmental/community & systems levels;
  - o Development & testing of outcome measures/indicators, esp. at the environmental/community & systems levels;
  - o Evaluation of strategies & practices relative to more 'distal' outcomes (e.g., behavioral change, improved use of clinical preventive services) vs 'proximal' outcomes (e.g., short-term increases in awareness/knowledge, changes in attitudes/perceptions);
  - o User- or practitioner-centered research that brings development & dissemination of research results & integration of such results into practice at the same time.

## Message: Nature & Extent of Funding Can Provide Incentives for the Kinds of Research & Evaluation Needed

- How racial/ethnic minority health & health disparities efforts are funded needs to be reconsidered, so that:
  - o existing data and scientific evidence is more effectively used to support proposed strategies/practices & desired outcomes, & to support research that fills gaps in data, science & knowledge;
  - o systems thinking & approaches are promoted amongst partners & stakeholders, including those conducting research;
  - o planning & evaluation of efforts is conducted systematically and moves us towards the achievement of common objectives & goals

## Message: The *Strategic Framework* Can Serve as the Basis for—& Drive—More Results-Oriented Action by OMH, Its Partners, & Other Stakeholders

- The *Strategic Framework* is a leadership tool that can promote informed, coordinated, & collective action for MH improvement & HD reduction.
- The structure and approach outlined in the *Strategic Framework* offers a rational & systematic, yet broad & flexible, way of viewing & informing our efforts.
- The *Strategic Framework* provides context for efforts needed by OMH, & its partners across HHS & the Nation, to: better leverage resources; establish priorities for ensuring effectiveness of programs & activities funded & conducted; identify & promote best practices & concrete solutions at all levels; & create a national results-oriented culture on r/e minority health improvement & the elimination of r/e health disparities.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING RACIAL/ETHNIC (R/E) MINORITY HEALTH & ELIMINATING R/E HEALTH DISPARITIES

