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A data-driven approach to rise above health inequity

An academic medical center system's leadership team works to advance health equity

In 2020, a large academic healthcare system pledged to promote healthy equity and improve patient access to healthcare services. It worked within its system to eliminate racial biases that contribute to disparate health outcomes.

During this time, the healthcare system promoted a physician to the newly created role of vice president and chief health equity officer. It also began working to create a more inclusive culture by educating team members about unconscious bias and microaggressions and mandating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) training.

One of the first things the newly appointed leader did was to join the Vizient® Health Equity Strategy Accelerator, which enabled their team to work collaboratively with peers from 50 health systems around the country.

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The intensive, six-week virtual program offered educational content and networking opportunities for physicians and administrators as well as frameworks to use for strategic planning and leading practices.

Vizient provided analytical tools and custom data to help each healthcare organization understand the specific patient needs and vulnerabilities in their patient population. Each participating organization also worked to assess how ready their organization was to implement strategic initiatives related to health equity and which metrics to focus on improving.

"The rigor of the process is important," says the chief health equity officer. "I'm a health services researcher and a physician by training, so I come to this with a commitment to rigor."

Examining data in new ways

The strategy accelerator provided health equity leaders with data from the newly released Health Equity Strategy Alignment Tool and the Vizient Vulnerability Index™, which identifies social drivers of health in specific neighborhoods. By using the tools and reverse-engineering patient outcomes, it is possible to determine which social

drivers upstream were potentially contributing to health disparities and develop work plans to reduce them.

The academic healthcare team was able to see where disparities were occurring and assess the distribution of need in their community. The data tools also helped them plan how resources should be distributed. For example, when the healthcare system needed to distribute a therapeutic treatment related to COVID-19 that was in short supply, the team reviewed Vizient data to target areas that needed additional resources.

Another discovery made during the strategy accelerator was around stroke mortality data. The chief health equity officer realized that people in the community were not aware of the signs of an impending stroke, nor how time sensitive it is to get medical care. The health system needed to ensure that its patients could trust that their closest medical facility could provide appropriate medical care.

"Advancing health equity is a mission-critical goal for healthcare providers. Given the myriad of challenges health systems face, those organizations that can make measurable progress reducing healthcare inequities for their patients today can build trust and better partnerships with the communities they serve, including those that have been underserved in the past."

Karyl Kopaskie, PhD, Principal, Vizient

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Expanding upon the Vizient foundation

While collaborating with the healthcare system's DEI team, the chief health equity officer used the knowledge and analytical data from Vizient to educate team members about health disparities.

By having conversations with staff about how race and racism were affecting patient care in the health system, leaders were able to better understand where inequities and racial

disadvantages existed and were undermining their ability to deliver exceptional patient care.

By sharing data and knowledge from the Vizient Strategy Accelerator, the chief health equity officer has seen that decision-makers throughout the healthcare system are thinking more critically about health equity. ■

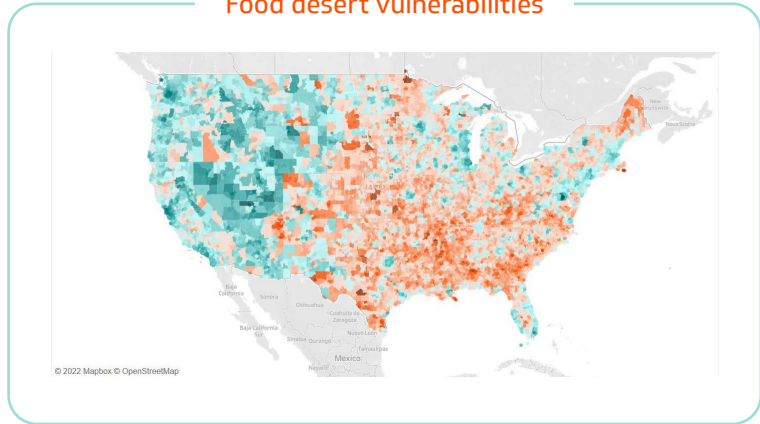## Using data to target interventions

The Vizient Vulnerability Index provides a look at variation in community vulnerabilities by zip code or census tract. By incorporating data from the Vizient Clinical Data Base (CDB) and the Vizient Vulnerability Index, providers can identify the relationship between specific neighborhood vulnerabilities and their impact on patient health outcomes and utilization metrics.

The combination of these two datasets have revealed that neighborhoods with the higher vulnerabilities and specific obstacles to care are more likely to have a greater burden of disease, increased emergency department utilization, and less engagement with primary care resources. By revealing the commonalities, providers can identify specific obstacles to care and create then test actionable interventions.
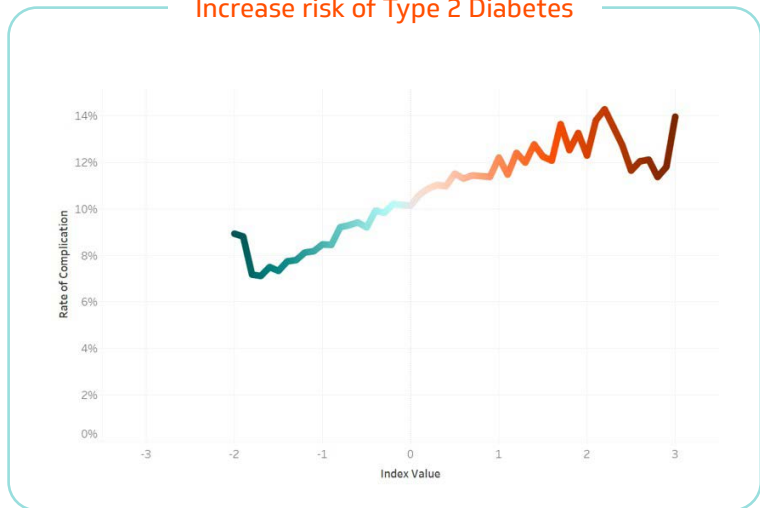
The figures to the right show how food desert vulnerabilities correlate to the increased risk in type 2 diabetes.

→ Want more insights on reducing healthcare disparities?
Visit our Health Equity page

Food desert vulnerabilities

© 2022 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Increase risk of Type 2 Diabetes

Sources: The Vizient Vulnerability Index and the Clinical Data Base.

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