

# “When All Are Counted”: Improving Healthcare Equity in West Virginia

## Demographic Challenges to Equitable Healthcare in WV

Understanding and addressing the unique healthcare needs of marginalized groups is crucial for creating inclusive policies and systems that ensure equitable healthcare access. West Virginia (WV) is home to 1.7 million residents, of which 37% report living with a disability, 5% identify as Black (alone or combined race), and 4% identify as LGBTQIA+.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The relatively low numbers of these populations, as well as their intersecting identities, have made it challenging to understand how to make healthcare more accessible to marginalized communities in WV.

## “When All Are Counted” Project- If West Virginia Could Hear Our Story

In 2022, Think Kids WV, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, launched the “When All Are Counted” project. The project aimed to understand the healthcare experiences of marginalized populations within WV. To accomplish this goal, the Think Kids WV project team conducted six focus groups with 47 individuals identifying as Black, LGBTQIA+, or living with disabilities. This was followed by a statewide convening where representatives from each group discussed current and future steps to address health disparities.

## Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

Despite varying individual experiences, the focus groups identified common areas for inclusive policies and systems that would benefit all. Here are the recommended areas for improvement:

### Representation is Critical

- *Health Equity and Cultural Sensitivity Training:* Policies and resources that support health equity and cultural sensitivity training are essential to understand the challenges faced by marginalized communities and develop supportive strategies. For example, participants shared policies that ensured state-funded health organizations had staff and resources dedicated to health equity work and cultural sensitivity training.
- *Engaged and Informed Policy Makers:* Participants stated the importance of politicians engaging in events to learn more about the challenges faced by marginalized populations.
- *Representation in medical and political sectors:* Participants emphasized the need for more representation from marginalized communities in medical and political sectors. It is crucial to create systems and resources that support marginalized individuals in becoming medical professionals or political representatives. This enables a greater understanding of the issues and lived experiences of those marginalized served by medical professionals and policymakers.

### Welcoming Spaces for Civic Engagement and Healthcare

- *Accessible Government Spaces:* Participants highlighted the need for all spaces in WV to be accessible to all people, especially persons living with disabilities. In particular, participants voiced concern that inaccessible government spaces prevented people living with disabilities

from participating in advocacy and related civic engagement activities. Participants named the WV's Capitol Complex in Charleston as an example of inaccessible government space.

- *Welcoming Healthcare Spaces:* Positive healthcare experiences depend on healthcare spaces that accommodate those with mobility issues, provide mental health support, and have culturally aware and responsive providers and staff for Black and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- *ADA Compliance:* Policies that support compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 are particularly important for improving the accessibility of government and community spaces in West Virginia and beyond.

## Next Steps

- Collaborate across communities to address shared challenges, share information, and support one another, including developing a sustainable leadership structure for representative groups across the state.
- Advocate across communities for policies and legislation that will improve access to healthcare, demonstrate a focus on health equity, and reduce health disparities.
- Improve access to data on marginalized populations in the state, including better sampling and involvement in the data collection processes, engaging communities in the collection, interpretation, and dissemination of findings *within* their communities for decision-making.
- Increase policies that provide resources for cultural sensitivity training for healthcare professionals to ensure that Black and LGBTQIA people and persons living with disabilities receive attentive healthcare that is responsive to their needs and healthcare experiences.

## Learn More About Health Equity Work in West Virginia





## References

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(<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT&area=54#density>).
3. US Census Bureau. 2020. “West Virginia Population Declined 3.2% From 2010 to 2020.”  
(<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/state-by-state/west-virginia-population-change-between-census-decade.html>).