

One way to honor your Black employees for Juneteenth—and beyond—to address equity in the workplace



You don't need a business-driven reason to invest resources in diversity, equity and inclusion—social justice is a reward in and of itself. But if your company has been doing the work on DEI, you may well be aware of its benefits: Companies that have higher levels of diversity outperform companies with less diversity.¹ And one of the joys of being a small business is that your agility allows you to address DEI needs more nimbly than larger organizations.²

Celebrating [Juneteenth](#) is a part of that. The holiday commemorates the date—June 19, 1865, more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect—when Union soldiers reached Texas and word of emancipation became widely known in the westernmost Confederate state. Though slaves had been legally free for more than two years, the relative lack of a Union presence in the state meant that tens of thousands of slaves continued to be in bondage, including those who were moved from other Confederate states by slave owners who understood that Texas would be a de facto safe haven for their illegal ownership of people.

Long celebrated in Black communities as a day of independence, a growing number of businesses large and small are making Juneteenth an official holiday.³ Others are incorporating a “floating holiday” policy to address culturally specific holidays more broadly, giving employees the option to take off Juneteenth.

Marking Juneteenth is a start to supporting your Black employees. But given the health and financial disparities Black people in the United States face, there's more you can do to enable all your staff to thrive.

Health and financial challenges combine to create worse health outcomes

Maternal mortality, infant mortality, heart disease, cancer, diabetes—all of these conditions disproportionately affect African Americans.⁴ This isn't just about certain people being more susceptible to things like diabetes; it's about the social structures that give some people better access to health care than others.

For example, getting to the doctor for preventive care isn't just a matter of showing up to the appointment. You need a way to get to the appointment, time off work without penalty and perhaps child or elder care (African American caregivers spend more time on caregiving with less assistance than white caregivers).⁵ Low-income people, including people of color, are less likely to have the resources and flexibility that simply getting to the doctor requires.⁶ And once they're at that appointment, they may face discrimination within the health care system.⁷

The concept of health equity isn't new. In fact, researchers have been studying it for decades. But that research reveals that even as the health care system has made some strides in racial equity over the past 25 years, some metrics of health equity have actually gotten worse.



It's impossible to separate economic health from physical health at the community level. Poor people have barriers to health care—they're less likely to be insured,⁸ more likely to delay care⁹ and more likely to have poor health outcomes.⁴ Given that Black people are likelier than their white counterparts to be poor, that poses another barrier specific to the Black community.¹⁰ Black women in particular face financial hardship—for every dollar earned by a white man, a Black woman earns 63 cents.¹¹

You can help alleviate stress—and help spark celebration too

To help protect the health of your employees, you need to give them the means to seek the care they need. Health insurance is a part of that, but it doesn't cover everything. With 22% of employees having avoided getting care because they couldn't afford it,¹² giving people the ability to see the doctor without fear of unexpected medical costs can be a literal lifesaver.

Supplemental insurance for your business is available at the group level, meaning that you can offer it to all your employees while providing a vital protection to those who are most vulnerable. Programs such as Aflac's MeMD telemedicine system can offer additional health support, including mental health resources—a service that's important for all employees, but particularly people who face systemic discrimination.

Through all the health and financial disparities faced by Black Americans, though, it's important to remember that Juneteenth is a day of celebration. Employee benefits don't solve the root problems that people of color endure. But when people have the peace of mind afforded by knowing they can seek and receive the care they need, they're better able to focus on the things that matter to them—like celebrating the promise of freedom that paves the way toward greater equity all around.

¹ McKinsey. "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters." Published 5.19.2020. [Accessed 4.12.2021.](#)

² Business Insider. "How to Build a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce as a Small Business." Published 10.20.2020. [Accessed 4.12.2021.](#)

³ USA Today. "Off for Juneteenth: Will NFL, Nike, Twitter and Corporate Celebrations Across America Make a Difference?" Published 6.18.2020. [Accessed 4.12.2021.](#)

⁴ The Century Foundation. "Racism, Inequality, and Health Care for African Americans." Published 12.19.2019. [Accessed 4.12.2021.](#)

⁵ AARP. "Fact Sheet The 'Typical' African American Caregiver." Published May 2020. [Accessed 4.12.2021.](#)

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups." Updated 2.12.2021. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

⁷ American Academy of Family Physicians. "Institutional Racism in the Health Care System." Published July 2019. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

⁸ Kaiser Family Foundation. "Key Facts About the Uninsured Population." Published 11.6.2020. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation. "Disparities in Health and Health Care: Five Key Questions and Answers." Published 3.4.2020. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau. "Inequalities Persist Despite Decline in Poverty for All Major Race and Hispanic Origin Groups." Published 9.15.2020. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

¹¹ National Partnership for Women & Families. "Black Women and the Wage Gap." Published March 2021. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

¹² Aflac WorkForces Report. "Workplace Benefits Trends Executive Summary." Published September 2020. [Accessed 4.20.2021.](#)

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