Civic Engagement and Population Health

Policy Statement

September 2023

Position Statement

The American Heart Association believes an active and engaged electorate strengthens the ability of a community to preserve, protect, and improve health. The association encourages and

An informed democracy requires many voices to be heard in shaping and implementing public policy.[4] As a 501(c)(3) organization,[1] the American Heart Association, and its volunteers, are well-positioned to be a non-partisan trusted voice to provide subject matter expertise, evaluation, innovation, and education to policymakers on the prevention of heart disease and stroke.[5] The American Heart Association commits substantial resources to develop scientific statements, guidelines, policy statements, and original reports based on rigorous, peer-reviewed research, providing a trusted resource for policymakers that reinforces the Association's credibility for its advocacy positions to improve cardiovascular health.[6] Furthermore, The American Heart Association is committed to operating in accordance with laws surrounding permissible activities for 501(c)(3) organizations in all of its advocacy activities, including those pertaining to lobbying, candidate education, and other civic engagement activities.

Background

According to the African American Collaborative Obesity Research Network (AACORN), civic engagement can promote policy changes at the community level through collective efficacy and advance health promotion and equity efforts.[7] However, unequal access to civic engagement opportunities leads to inequitable civic participation—thus, unjust investments, conditions, and outcomes for historically marginalized populations.[8,9] Civic engagement is not only a set of practices but a set of conditions informed by how individuals are positioned in their communities. According to the Health and Democracy Index (2021), states with more voter restrictions have worse public health outcomes than states with fewer restrictions.[10] Expanding civic engagement opportunities empowers the entire community, including underrepresented groups to advocate for policies that respond to community needs and improve health and social outcomes. However, research on the roles of different types of civic engagement (e.g., social and community organizing, grassroots advocacy, voting), how those civic engagement approaches vary by social and demographic context, and how effective strategies are in advancing health equity is needed.[11] Civic engagement strengthens community resilience and improves mental and physical health and overall well-being. [12,13]

Public health organizations can strengthen existing civic participation infrastructure by partnering with organizing groups, centering the voices of community members in coalition decision making, and shifting resources to organizing groups.[14] Influencing public policy through advocacy is an essential strategy for the American Heart

Section 501(c)(3) is the portion of the US Internal Revenue Code that allows for federal tax exemption of nonprofit organizations, specifically those that are considered public charities, private foundations, or private operating foundations. It is regulated and administered by the US Department of Treasury through the Internal Revenue Service.

Association to achieve its health impact goals and priorities, with the added benefit of strengthening civic participation of advocates across the country. This work involves engaging the Association's national officers, researchers, volunteer advocates, staff, and the public.

To achieve its goals and priorities, the American Heart Association works across the public policy continuum to influence policy through:

- stakeholder and coalition development,
- policy research and analysis,
- development of comprehensive legislative and regulatory advocacy campaigns,
- media advocacy,
- grassroots strategies, and
- evaluations to assess the impact of laws

American Heart Association Advocacy Department 1150 Connecticut Ave, NW Suite 300 Washington, D.C. 20036
policyresearch@heart.org

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