

Where the Sawgrass Meets the Digital Highway: A Global Health Equity Journey in South Florida

As the morning sun illuminates the Everglades, South Florida HIMSS members wake up to another day of helping our community improve their health through technology.

In South Florida, healthcare disparities are visible and pressing, from the advanced medical towers of Miami's Health District to the essential, modest clinics in Belle Glade. Elderly Cuban Americans frequently encounter difficulties with English-only telehealth platforms, and Haitian communities grapple with patient identification issues that can lead to significant health risks. In light of Global Health Equity Week 2024 (November 11-15), these disparities underscore our critical mission in South Florida HIMSS:

To identify health equity challenges and advocate for healthcare technology solutions that bridge gaps and promote equity across all communities.

The Data That Drives Us

Findings from a 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment authored by the Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County reflected stark disparities:¹

- **Black Maternal Health:** Black mothers in Miami-Dade face a maternal morbidity rate 4.5 times higher than the state average.
- **Dental Access:** In 2018, 59% of adults in Miami-Dade visited a dentist, compared to the state average of 65.6%.
- **Haitian Infant Mortality:** Haitian infant mortality is close to 4 times higher than the Miami-Dade average.
- **Diabetes in Hispanics:** Miami-Dade Hispanics face a mortality rate 1.68 times higher than the state average for Hispanics and non-Hispanics.

These aren't just numbers—they represent the lives and health of our neighbors.

Fostering a Connected Healthcare Ecosystem

South Florida HIMSS connects diverse organizations to create a unified healthcare ecosystem. We highlight collaborations that yield tangible results, including:

- **Health Choice Network (HCN):** HCN has implemented data-driven initiatives across its network to enhance health outcomes. It collaborates with various academic, research, and community organizations to address priorities within diverse populations. Click here to review [HC Network Research](#).

- **Community Care Plan (CCP):** CCP recently established an OB/GYN clinic in a maternity care desert in Broward County to address health equity among the region's Black communities. Their focus on access aligns with our mission to advocate for technology that reaches underserved groups. Click here to review the [Heart Community Resource Center](#).
- **Memorial Healthcare System (MHS):** MHS integrated a customized module in their Epic electronic health record system that would screen patients for social determinants of health and connect them with clinical and socioeconomic services. Dr. Jennifer Goldman, an MHS physician and our Education/Professional Development Co-Chair discussed the impact of this initiative on patient care^{2,3}:

"We standardized the way that we were capturing that data so that we could run analytics on it, and show that information in the EHR to physicians. It opened our eyes as clinicians to understanding what our patients are going through. It's something that we should be doing in healthcare anyway, that is customizing the treatments based on what our patients need."

Joining Forces for Change

During Global Health Equity Week 2024, we invite you, the healthcare professionals, community leaders, and technologists to help spread the message of health equity and even experience these innovations firsthand:

- **Tour Clinics:** Visit organizations such as MHS and CCP to hear about how they are transforming care for underserved populations.
- **Participate in Community Health Fairs:** Experience how mobile health units equipped with diagnostic and consultation tools are expanding healthcare access.
- **Attend Technology Demonstrations:** Attend National HIMSS's [AI in Healthcare Forum](#) and visit sessions with our partner hospitals to witness AI-driven diagnostic tools and culturally adapted telehealth platforms in action.
- **Support Aspiring Health IT Professionals:** Contribute to our [scholarship program](#), which empowers students from diverse backgrounds, including veterans, to pursue careers in health IT.
- **Participate in Health Equity Innovation Challenges:** Apply for our annual [Innovation Award](#) and showcase your healthcare organization's solutions addressing health disparities.
- **Join the Conversation:** Attend Use #HealthEquityFL and #HIMSSEquity and find [South Florida HIMSS on LinkedIn](#) to share your insights and experiences.

A Shared Vision for Tomorrow

As we mark Global Health Equity Week 2024, we urge all healthcare stakeholders to join us in this vision. Through collective efforts in advocacy, partnership, and innovation, we're driving South Florida toward a healthcare system where every community member receives equitable care. Together, we can ensure that digital healthcare reaches every corner of our diverse region—not just during Health Equity Week but year-round.

In the words of our Program Co-Chair Grant McGaugh:

"I envision a South Florida where healthcare technology breaks down barriers, reaching every individual regardless of background, language, or income. South Florida HIMSS is committed to a future where healthcare disparities diminish and equity becomes the norm."

Join the Movement: <https://southflorida.himss.org/>

Sources:

1. Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County. 2022 COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT: Miami-Dade County, Florida (March 2021-March 2022). 2022:623. https://www.floridahealth.gov/_media/miami-dade/community-reports/miamidade-cha.pdf
2. Mace S. Social Determinants of Health Measures, Baked into the EHR, Are Improving Patient Care. 2022. <https://www.healthleadersmedia.com/technology/social-determinants-health-measures-baked-ehr-are-improving-patient-care>
3. Diaz N. How Memorial Healthcare System uses social determinants of health to 'customize' patient treatments. 2022. <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/ehrs/how-memorial-healthcare-system-uses-social-determinants-of-health-to-customize-patient-treatments.html>