

## Opportunity to improve, advance health equity; reduce disparities

Written by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius  
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April is National Minority Health Month, a time when we reflect on the incredible opportunity we face as a nation to improve minority health, advance health equity, and eliminate health disparities.

Fifty years ago, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to remind America of the “fierce urgency of now.” That message is as meaningful today as it was in 1963. While our nation has made significant progress in reducing health disparities over the last fifty years, historically minorities have been less likely to get preventive care, and more likely to suffer from serious illnesses. They have been less likely to have access to quality health care and insurance coverage.

Because of the Affordable Care Act, the landmark legislation signed by President Obama, we are making strides in advancing quality, affordable health coverage regardless of race or ethnicity. The health care law addresses the needs of minority populations and other underserved groups by investing in prevention, supporting improvements in primary care and Medicare, and making health care coverage affordable and accessible for all Americans. The theme for National Minority Health Month this year is “Advance Health Equity Now: Uniting Our Communities to Bring Health Care Coverage to All.”

Later this year, millions of Americans, will gain access to health coverage that meets their needs and fits their budget no matter who they are or where they live. New [Health Insurance Marketplaces](#) will give all Americans who are uninsured or who buy their own coverage a simple way to shop for insurance. Starting Oct. 1, 2013, Americans can enroll through the Marketplaces for health coverage beginning as early as Jan. 1, 2014.

For the first time, Americans will be able to go to one place to learn about their coverage options and be able to make side-by-side comparisons of private insurance plans. With a single application, they will also be able to find out if they qualify for a new kind of tax credit that lowers their monthly premiums. And because the law finally bans discrimination against pre-existing conditions like diabetes or asthma, nobody will be turned away because of their health status.

Achieving health equity means each of us has an equal opportunity to attain optimal health. Let’s recommit ourselves and our communities to act now to eliminate health disparities and

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increase access to quality care. We cannot afford to wait.

To learn more about National Minority Health Month and what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is doing to reduce health disparities and achieve health equity, see [www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov](http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov)