

A COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT PUTS HEALTH EQUITY AT THE CENTER OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

When Hackensack Meridian Health in New Jersey discovered broad opportunities identified by a CHA to reduce health disparities, its first step in creating change was to change itself.

A new organizational strategy driven by health equity emerged.

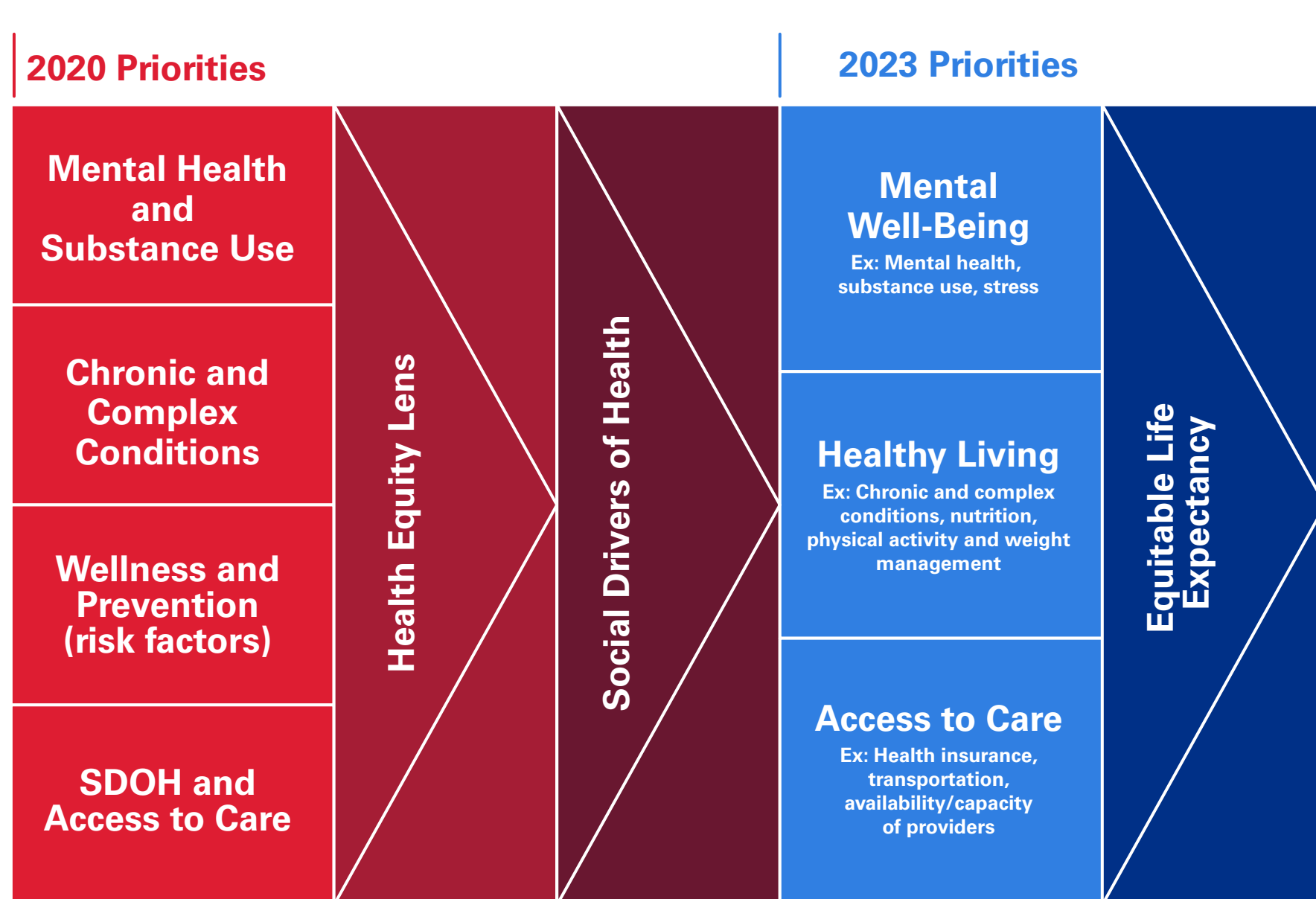
- Health equity and social drivers of health now inform objectives and care.
- Senior executives and board members are assessed on health equity improvement.
- A vice president and team were recruited to lead SDOH efforts.
- Screenings were initiated during clinical care including annual wellness visits and emergency department visits.
- The electronic health record system was upgraded to record and track social determinants.

“The inequities highlighted by the pandemic elevated health equity and social determinants as a lens through which we look at everything.”

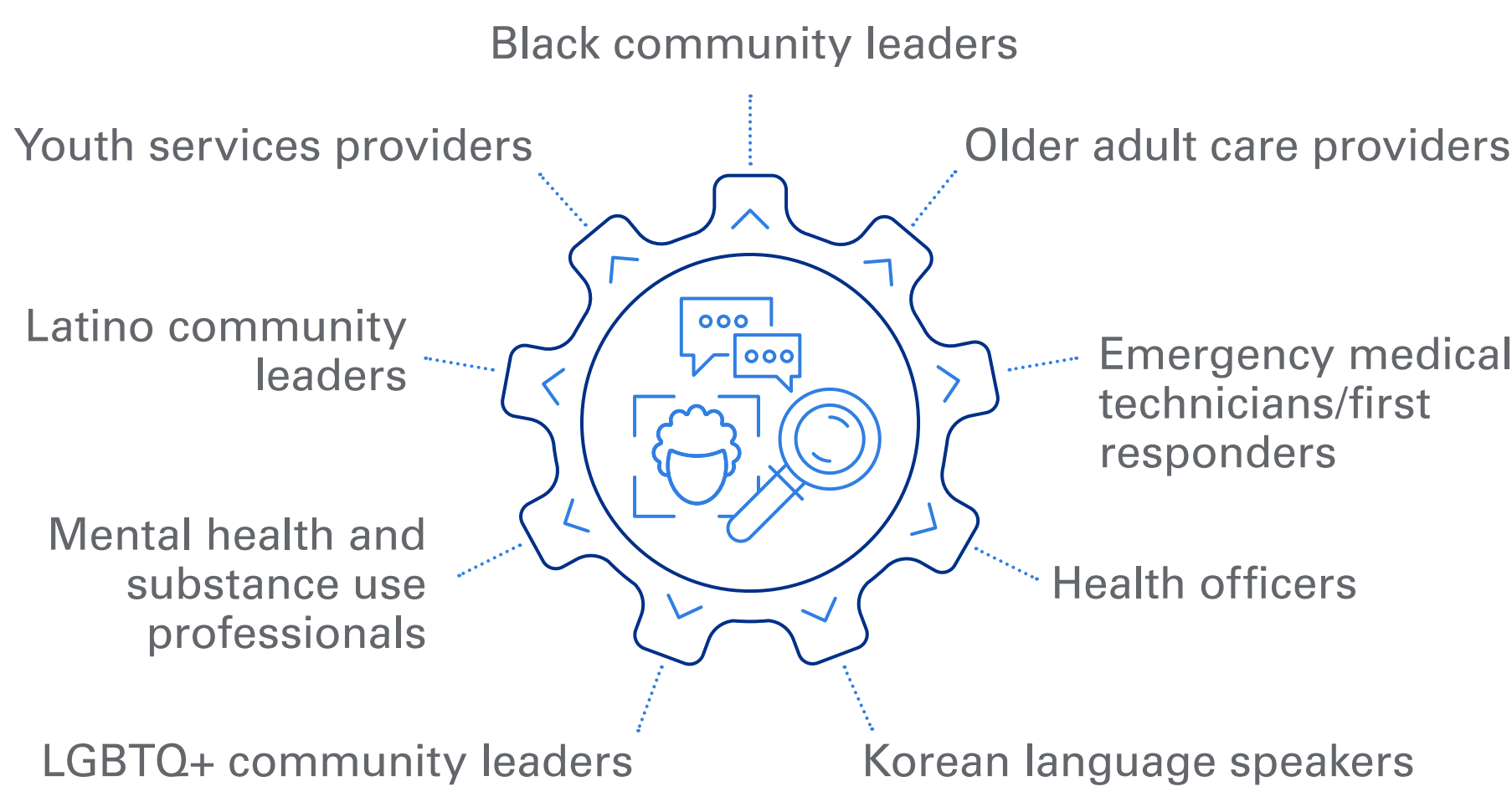
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In a multiyear strategy, Hackensack Meridian reshaped its priorities for maximum impact with equity as its guide.



Hackensack Meridian overhauled its CHA process by oversampling select populations in its key informant electronic survey, focus groups and interviews, and also working with community partners to reach:



Hackensack Meridian then verified the data and findings with three regional community forums that explored:

- New priorities for gun violence and mental health
- Ongoing needs of access to care and healthy living
- Skyrocketing food and housing insecurity



Systemwide changes were implemented based on CHA findings.

Hackensack Meridian provided a corporate framework for its hospitals’ implementation plans with objectives and strategies focused on three intervention areas:



Prevention and awareness



Building capacity



Strengthening community partnerships

Hackensack Meridian partnered with local organizations and grants to make programs go further:



Received \$3M state grant and \$500K USDA grant to address food insecurity.



Combined the grants with its own funding and financial support from community partners.



Brought together and grocers to create a weekly fresh produce voucher for SNAP recipients.

Hackensack Meridian implemented systemwide resources to support local programs:



Unite Us software connects patients to social services through a free consumer app that houses all community resources in one place.



Physicians and hospitals use Unite Us to screen for social needs, triggering referrals that enable agencies/ community organizations to initiate contact with patients and track the help that is provided.

Hackensack Meridian’s strategic changes have inspired new initiatives across its network.

JFK University Medical Center in Edison, N.J., is home to the highest U.S. concentration of South Asians. Realizing this population was underrepresented among its patients, JFK took action to increase care access by:

- Collaborating with the community to raise needed resources and drive change.
- Recruiting more South Asian doctors, nurses and staff to enhance cultural competency.
- Hiring an outreach coordinator to develop relationships and events with partners in the South Asian community.
- Adding a patient navigator to help secure health coverage for uninsured patients.

Equity improvement work continues, demonstrated by Hackensack University Medical Center's accomplishment as the first hospital in the U.S. to receive Health Care Equity Certification from The Joint Commission.

As either the only provider or one of two providers in some New Jersey counties, Hackensack Meridian provides care across ages, ethnicities and income levels through 18 acute, children’s, long-term acute, rehab and behavioral health hospitals.