

# American Heart Association's Strategic Policy Agenda 2024-2028

## Overview

The American Heart Association is a global leader advancing population health and translating research into evidence-based policy that transforms systems, the environments where people spend time, and health care to help people live healthier, longer lives. The Association's strategic policy agenda and policy landscape guides our advocacy work at all levels of government and aligns with our 2028 impact goal, organizational priorities and mission – to be a relentless force for longer, healthier lives. The Association speaks with one advocacy voice across all levels of government which enhances our credibility and ensures we are advancing evidence-based, equity-focused policies that are strategically aligned with our mission and goals. This policy landscape and strategic policy agenda was developed by engaging the Association's councils, issue experts, and constituents who have research, clinical, implementation and lived experience across these issue areas and integrates a review of the quality and quantity of evidence for specific public policy interventions and their strategic alignment, health, and equity impact.

## Equity Focus

The Association prioritizes equity throughout its policy development and advocacy campaigns. This foundation in equity works to ensure that everyone has an optimal and just opportunity to be healthy, giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk, assuring that no one is disadvantaged from achieving their potential because of social position or any other socially defined circumstance. Although we have made progress toward longer, healthier lives, significant inequities persist across the United States and globally. Latest forecasting predicts significant increases in heart disease, stroke and associated risk factors through the next few decades, especially in Black, Hispanic, Alaska Native, Native American, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander populations.<sup>1</sup> Disparities in health and well-being are often driven by social drivers of health, the conditions in the social, physical, and economic environment where people are born, live, work, and age including housing, access to care, crime, education, and wages.<sup>2,3</sup> These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels.

## Additional framing for our strategic planning

In addition to the strategic alignment considerations and evidence review for health and equity impact, the Association applies other considerations to assess whether we will add an issue to our work in public policy. This decision-making checklist includes positioning, feasibility, likelihood of success, engagement of grassroots and external partners, resource commitment, lived experience, regional considerations, internal will, level of risk, opposition, potential unintended consequences, internal as well as partners' capacity, readiness, and expertise. Evaluating our policy priorities across these criteria is important for strategic planning and internal prioritization, campaign planning and resource management, as well as engaging with the funding community.

## **Evidence for Impact – Policy Implementation and Outcome Evaluation**

Fundamentally, to optimize the impact of our efforts, we must understand whether the policies we advocate for are implemented as intended, the specific population impact (if any), whether they improve equity or create disparities, and their contribution to creating longer, healthier lives. Policy implementation and outcome evaluation is an integral component of the policy process that provides an overall performance management framework to guide responsible decision-making.<sup>4</sup> Effective policy implementation and outcome evaluation assesses adoption, acceptability, penetration, feasibility, fidelity, implementation cost, equity impact, unintended consequences, and sustainability.

## **Major Areas of Focus for our 2024-28 Strategic Policy Agenda**

To achieve mission-aligned impact in our public policy work and advocacy campaigns, the American Heart Association will annually prioritize impactful public policy levers across different issue areas. These issue areas have shifted only slightly since our previous strategic policy agenda. While issues addressing tobacco, nutrition security, access to care, heart and brain research and systems of care remain a core priority, we are expanding work in areas of digital health, artificial intelligence, public health infrastructure and modernization, maternal health, hypertension and cardiokidney metabolic disease. We are continuing work in supporting families, physical activity, non-profit issues and cardiac rehabilitation.

***Assuring Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care and Optimizing Health Insurance Coverage across the US Population:*** Support health care and insurance coverage that is adequate, affordable, and accessible, enhancing the availability of evidence-based preventive services, eliminating disparities that limit the availability and equitable delivery of health care and creating a culturally competent public health and health care work force that can meet the challenges of delivering high-value health care for optimal patient outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

***Tobacco:*** Advocate for the ultimate end to all commercial tobacco and nicotine addiction in the United States and globally<sup>6,7</sup> considering the structural, political and social dynamics that sustain nicotine and tobacco addiction. Work within a coordinated effort across national, state, and community partners, incorporating the long-standing, evidence-based tobacco control strategies that have significantly reduced tobacco use and initiation and then pursue bolder endgame strategies with product- and place-based focus.

***Acute Systems of Care:*** Support comprehensive, fully funded emergency management, out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, stroke, and heart attack systems of care that include the full spectrum of prehospital services necessary for the acute care of patients with cardiovascular disease and stroke. Also, heart attack and stroke facility designation, EMS protocols, and state and federal registries which catalyze organizational-level policy development and research and implementation that improves patient care at the health system level.

**Nutrition Security and Healthy Food and Beverage Consumption:** Advocate for nutrition policy priorities that create an equitable, sustainable food system for all and ensures equitable and stable availability, access, affordability, and utilization of foods and beverages that promote well-being and prevent and treat disease.<sup>8</sup>

**Heart and Brain Research:** Increase state and federal funding for lifesaving cardiovascular and brain research.

**Hypertension:** Address one of the leading modifiable risk factors for coronary heart disease, stroke, congestive heart failure, dementia and end-stage renal disease,<sup>9</sup> by increasing equitable access to treatment, including self-measured blood pressure monitoring.

**Maternal Health:** Address disparities in maternal health outcomes with impactful public policy solutions that ensure that all mothers can live healthy lives before, during and after giving birth.<sup>10</sup>

**Supporting Families:** Advocate for impactful public policy solutions that increase equitable access to early care and education and provide all employees with access to paid family and medical leave programs.

**Digital Health:** Advocate for digital technology public policy solutions that revolutionize our ability to collect medical information, conduct biomedical research, provide more accurate diagnoses and treatments, and streamline the care delivery process for both providers and patients/consumers.

**Public Health Infrastructure and Modernization:** Advocate for a robust public health infrastructure, data modernization and diversified public health work force.

**Physical Activity:** Support infrastructure, programming, health system integration, and technology solutions that advance physically active lifestyles for all.

**Obesity and Cardiometabolic Kidney Disease:** Advocate for equitable access to all evidence-based treatment options for obesity, including lifestyle modification through dietary intervention, physical activity and behavior modification, pharmacological treatment and bariatric surgery.

**Cardiac Rehabilitation:** Ensure access to and utilization of comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation services for the best possible patient outcomes in secondary prevention.

**Non-Profit Issues:** Work collectively toward public policy solutions that preserve the ability of nonprofits to advance their mission.

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