

# Background Information

## Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Medical Care

---

### Background

A substantial and growing body of research indicates that race/ethnicity – independent of income and insurance status – continues to matter in the U.S. health care system. A recent Institute of Medicine report, *Unequal Treatment*, provides sound evidence that racial/ethnic background continues to affect access to health care and the quality of care obtained. While the evidence varies for specific conditions and racial/ethnic minority groups, the data is sufficiently compelling to begin undertaking actions to systematically and aggressively eliminate disparities in needed medical care. As major decision-makers in health care, physicians have a key role to play when it comes to addressing disparities in medical care.

### The Initiative

As a first step in what ultimately must be a multifaceted effort, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation have undertaken an initiative to raise physician awareness about disparities in medical care, beginning with cardiac care.

### Co-Sponsors

Thirteen national medical, public health, and business organizations are co-sponsors in this initiative. Co-sponsoring organizations include: the American Academy of Family Physicians; the Association of Black Cardiologists; the American College of Cardiology Foundation; the American College of Physicians; the American Heart Association; the American Medical Association; the American Medical Women's Association; the American Public Health Association; the Association of Academic Health Centers; the Association of American Medical Colleges; the National Hispanic Medical Association, the National Medical Association; and the Washington Business Group on Health.

### Major Activities

The initiative has three main components:

- **Evaluation of the Evidence**  
To assess the quality of the evidence and summarize the information for a physician audience, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation collaborated with the American College of Cardiology Foundation to review the body of research on racial/ethnic differences in cardiac care and to produce the report *Racial/Ethnic Differences in Cardiac Care: The Weight of Evidence*.
- **Ad Campaign**  
A print advertisement highlighting the initiative and encouraging physicians to review recent research and engage in dialogue has appeared in 11 leading medical publications, beginning in October 2002 and lasting through March 2003.
- **Physician Outreach**  
The initiative organizes a variety of activities to engage physicians in a dialogue about the mix of patient, provider and health system factors that likely contribute to disparities in medical care.