

# VITAL DIRECTIONS FOR HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE: PRIORITIES FOR 2021



The 2021 Vital Directions for Health and Health Care series sends a clear message: **Health equity must be the foundational principle for all health system reform**. There is an obligation to use an equity lens when reviewing existing policies and making policy decisions, and to engage communities most affected by inequities in policy solutions. The National Academy of Medicine launched the Vital Directions initiative in 2016 to provide objective analysis of compelling opportunities and priorities in health, health care, and biomedical science to incoming presidential administrations. The 2021 articles, published in *Health Affairs*, address five issues that require attention from the current presidential administration and nation. The five priorities, as well as key policy actions that could be taken to spur change, are below.



**Health Costs and Financing:** expand insurance coverage; accelerate transition to value-based care; advance home-based care; improve the affordability of drugs and other therapeutics; and develop a high-value and adequately paid workforce



**Women and Children's Health and Well-Being:** collect robust maternal mortality and health outcome data to inform research and policy; expand maternal safety programs; remove regulatory barriers that prohibit pregnant women from participating in research; diminish disparities by expanding coverage; and transform health care to include population health models



**Mental Health and Addiction:** transform behavioral health systems to meet people where they are; decriminalize mental illness and substance use disorders; and raise awareness of social context and needs as essential to effective care



**Better Health and Health Care for Older Adults:** create a workforce prepared to care for a complex population of older adults; strengthen the role of public health; evaluate and implement new approaches to care delivery that incorporate telehealth; allocate resources to achieve patient-centered care, including palliative and end-of-life care; and redesign the structure and financing of long-term services and supports



**Infectious Disease Threats:** launch an expert pandemic preparedness and response commission; strengthen and modernize health and public health systems; renew U.S. status as a global public health leader and partner; reinforce a science-based approach to public health policy; ensure pandemic agencies have political independence and long-term support; and support a strategy to mitigate drivers of pandemics

These five areas highlight the nation's persistent challenges and underscore the disproportionate negative health and societal impacts on historically marginalized and underserved populations. The articles reflect the implications for action going forward post-COVID-19, including the need to give highest priority to eliminating inequities.

Policymakers and health system decision-makers constitute a powerful force and have a responsibility to provide leadership along the priority areas of Vital Directions 2021.

**Learn more at [NAM.EDU/VitalDirections](https://nam.edu/vitaldirections)**