

# THE MARCH TOWARD HEALTH EQUITY



*“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”*

*- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

*2015 Congressional  
Black Caucus Health  
Braintrust Issues &  
Action Agenda*

CONGRESSWOMAN ROBIN L. KELLY (D-IL)  
CHAIRWOMAN OF THE CONGRESSIONAL  
BLACK CAUCUS HEALTH BRAINTRUST



*“I am honored to have been chosen to lead the CBC Health Braintrust at such a critical time, as we work toward the continued implementation of the Affordable Care Act and increasing access to healthcare and improving health outcomes across the country.”*

The call for a healthy America is as American as our nation itself. When Founding Father Benjamin Franklin and Philadelphia surgeon Thomas Bond conspired to create the nation’s first public hospital in 1751, they envisioned a system that would provide free healthcare to the city’s “sick-poor” and “diseased foreigners,” with the colony’s taxpayers footing the cost of healthcare in exchange for the lasting benefits of healthier city-dwellers, minimal health related poverty, and averted epidemics.

Nearly 150 years later, University of Pennsylvania sociologist W.E.B. DuBois noted in *the Philadelphia Negro* that not only did the health of Philadelphia blacks vary by neighborhood condition; but that black men had poorer overall health than black women, and gender differences in health were larger for blacks than for whites.

Generations after Dr. Franklin and Dr. DuBois, America has made significant gains on the healthcare front. We’ve developed pioneering research and rehabilitation hospitals like the Cleveland Clinic and Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. We have successfully vaccinated millions to prevent diseases like polio, improved the science of organ transplantation, and produced more than half of the world’s new medicines in the last decade. Today pharmaceutical drugs in our cabinets help regulate our blood pressure, filters help us breathe better and everyday technologies like Smartwatches and Fitbits help monitor our daily exercise, food, weight and sleep.

Still, there is work to be done in pursuit of a healthier America. Your zip code, ethnicity, and bank balance shouldn’t determine your health. I am honored to have been chosen to lead the CBC Health Braintrust at such a critical time, as we work toward the continued implementation of the Affordable Care Act and increasing access to healthcare and improving health outcomes across the country. I look forward to Chairing the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. I welcome the opportunity to bring together health policy experts, community advocates, and elected officials to meet the challenge of developing strategies that improve health outcomes for vulnerable Americans across the socio-economic spectrum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin L. Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress

## STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES



### *Through Research*

One of our principal goals for the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress is to increase the body of research that Congress commissions to measure the impact of social factors on health. Our aim is to create community-based responses to the factors responsible for health disparities.

Because so many of the health issues facing communities of color are rooted in the confluence of social determinants of health that make communities sicker, the Health Braintrust will support research efforts that examine:

1. **The Relationship Between Economic Stability and Health** (e.g., poverty, employment, food security, housing security)
2. **The Relationship Between Education and Health** (e.g., high school graduation, enrollment in higher education, language and literacy, early childhood education and development)
3. **The Impact of Neighborhood and Built Environment on Health** (e.g., access to healthy foods, quality of housing, crime and violence, environmental conditions)
4. **Social and Community Context and Health Outcomes** (e.g., social cohesion, civic participation, perceptions of discrimination/equity, incarceration/institutionalization)
5. **Health and Health Care** (e.g., access to quality health care, access to primary care, health literacy)

### *Through Action*

During the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, our *Stronger Communities Initiative* will coordinate legislative and on the ground action that directly engages communities. Among other activities, the Health Braintrust will coordinate the following activities to work in tandem with our goals:

1. **Health Braintrust Breakfasts** – Monthly information exchange breakfasts with healthcare advocates and policy experts.
2. **Community Health Fairs** – The Braintrust will host a series of health fair road shows across the country providing screenings and health awareness clinics.
3. **CBC Spring Health Braintrust** – Two-day April health forum to spotlight disparities in minority health.

4. **CBC Fall Health Braintrust** – All day health policy program during the CBC Annual Legislative Conference.
5. **Congressional Black Caucus Healthcare Alternative Budget FY 2016** – Chairwoman Kelly will assist in drafting the healthcare component to the CBC’s alternative budget. The Congressional Black Caucus has a long history of introducing a budget alternative that protects and invests in programs that are vital to minority communities.
6. **Introducing Health Legislation** – The Health Braintrust will continue to keep the issue of health equity and disparity reduction at the forefront of the national and political agendas through legislative efforts (and leading on bills such as the *Health Equity and Accountability Act*) that tackle our nation's most pressing health and health care challenges.
7. **Supporting Pivotal Programs and Partners to Close Gaps in Health Care** – Remaining engaged on issues that reduce incidence of chronic diseases, supporting CDC grant programs, and efforts like the *Ryan White Program; Healthy Start Program, REACH Program; HBCU health education funding.*
8. **The 2015 Kelly Report: Health Equity in America** – Building on the national success of the *2014 Kelly Report on Gun Violence in America*, the Congresswoman will bring together members of Congress, academics and health reform advocates to draft an official Congressional Report examining the root causes and impact of health disparities in America and provide a comprehensive set of legislative and policy recommendations to reverse them.
9. **Policy Rx** - The Braintrust will circulate a quarterly newsletter “The Policy Prescription” (PolicyRx) to keep interested stakeholders up to speed on legislative developments the Braintrust is focused on.

## IMPROVING HEALTHCARE ACCESS AND EQUITY



Health disparities are complex, multifactorial occurrences. Historically, lack of access to health care, health insurance and health providers has contributed to the gaps we observe in national health outcomes. Laws like the Affordable Care Act have opened up avenues of access for millions of Americans while simultaneously working to close the disparities gap.

The Health Braintrust will work to defend the ACA from legislative repeal attempts and continue championing the law's full implementation (particularly with respect to Medicaid expansion). It is only after we ensure that a maximum number of individuals have access to health care, that we can fully concentrate on the two other pillars of the external triangle of health care: cost and quality.

### *114<sup>th</sup> Congress Priorities*

1. **Defend the Affordable Care Act** against repeal and dismantling attempts. Support full implementation of the ACA;
2. **Listen to the People:** Engage health stakeholders and generate two, five and 10-year goals for health priorities;
3. **Foster Strategic Relationships With Vulnerable Communities** to increase health awareness, reduce medical redlining, and explore methods of alternative care that benefit communities;
4. **Coordinate with State Offices of Health** to identify federal legislative opportunities that serve as an adjunct to their efforts;
5. **Commission goal oriented/data driven research** around disparities and social determinants;

## *114<sup>th</sup> Congress Priorities (Continued)*

6. **Raise Awareness on African American Women's Healthcare:** Advance research with respect to life-threatening diseases such as breast and cervical cancers, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV;
7. **Promote African American Men's Health:** Provide access to health care and health information that will ultimately promote healthier lifestyles for black men. Support efforts geared toward reducing HIV/AIDS, prostate cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and stroke in black men;
8. **Addressing Mental Illness in Minority Communities:** According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in four adults experience mental illness in a given year and nearly 14 million live with a serious mental illness (SMI) like bipolar disorder, major depression or schizophrenia.

Equally concerning is the fact that according to the U.S. Office of Minority Health:

- Adult blacks are 20 percent more likely to report serious psychological distress than adult whites.
- Adult blacks living below poverty are two to three times more likely to report serious psychological distress than those living above poverty.
- Adult blacks are more likely to have feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness than are adult whites.
- And while blacks are less likely than whites to die from suicide as teenagers, black teenagers are more likely to attempt suicide than are white teenagers (8.2 percent v. 6.3 percent)

Statistics on barriers to treatment of depression cited by African Americans include:

- Denial (40 percent)
- Embarrassment/shame (38 percent)
- Don't want/refuse help (31 percent)
- Lack money/insurance (29 percent)

9. **Examining Gun Violence as a Public Health Epidemic:** Firearm violence is not only a criminal justice threat, but also a public health threat. Violent behavior often exhibits characteristics of an epidemic disease in the way it clusters and spreads. It directly impacts the health of those involved and negatively impacts the physical and mental well-being of others who are exposed to it;
10. **Lay the Legislative and Community Foundation to Achieving Health Equity in a Generation:** Design a blueprint to realize the goal of achieving health equity in a generation. Tailor health strategies for different age groups, genders, and regions;

# MARCHING TOWARD A HEALTHIER FUTURE



This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery marches, the generation defining events that led to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Like the right to vote, healthcare is a fundamental civil right that must be supported by the skilled hands and civic minds of concerned community leaders. The Affordable Care Act has strengthened health rights across our nation, just as it has built a legislative foundation that will sustain America's health future for generations to come.

In supporting the promise of a healthier future, the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust will work to strengthen our public health infrastructure and employ a community-oriented, multi-disciplinary approach to American health that leverages strategic partnerships to raise issues and enact policy (by identifying a coordinated combination of local, state, federal actions/efforts) to close the national healthcare disparity gap.

## ***Health Braintrust Priority: Achieving Health Equity in a Generation***

Interventions to achieve health equity benefit from a generational focus. This demands that the Braintrust continue working with healthcare experts, communities, and our Congressional colleagues to develop and strengthen policies and funding streams that address generational disparities. Through continually engaging these stakeholders, we will work to tailor health strategies for different age groups.

The Health Braintrust will help support the goal of generational health equity by investing in efforts that:

- 1. Optimize Access for the aging population by (but not limited to):**
  - Improving navigation of the healthcare system for our older citizens
  - Expanding Health IT and innovative technology use for seniors
  
- 2. Promote Healthy Behaviors in Middle-Aged Patients by (but not limited to):**
  - Expanding Health IT and innovative technology use for middle aged patients
  - Wellness & education clinics
  - Supporting healthy nutrition initiatives
  
- 3. Focus on Primary Prevention for younger, patients/constituents by (but not limited to):**
  - Physical fitness & health education clinics
  - Supporting healthy nutrition initiatives
  - Access to preventive services

**2015 CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS  
HEALTH BRAINTRUST STAFF**



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