

BOX 2.1

Principles of Health Equity



Fairness: Health equity emphasizes that all individuals should have an equal opportunity to achieve optimal health by removing obstacles such as poverty, discrimination, and their sequelae.



Inclusion: Health equity seeks to include all members of society, regardless of their social or economic status, in decision making about health, including service offerings and delivery.



Addressing Disparities: Health equity recognizes that disparities in health outcomes exist among different population groups. Practitioners make efforts to understand and address the underlying causes of these disparities, such as unequal access to health care services, differences in quality of care, or socioeconomic factors.



Social Determinants of Health: Achieving health equity requires addressing the social determinants of health, including the conditions in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, and age. These conditions affect various health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.



Cultural Competency: Health equity involves understanding and respecting the diverse values, beliefs, and needs of different communities and individuals and incorporating these into health care policies and practices.



Access to Care: Ensuring access to comprehensive, quality health care services for all individuals regardless of their ability to pay is critical to health equity. Achieving health equity requires establishing a system that assists with veterinary care expenses and other barriers (e.g., language, mobility, and transportation).



Community Engagement: Engaging communities in identifying and solving health problems is essential for achieving health equity. Engagement means actively involving those affected by health care decisions in planning, implementing, and evaluating strategies to improve health.



Systemic Change: Achieving health equity may require significant systemic changes to health care, education, public transportation, and economic and other systems, including policy changes at various levels of government to remove barriers to health and ensure that resources are distributed fairly.

The 2024 Community Care Guidelines for Small Animal Practice are available at aaha.org/community-care.

These guidelines were prepared by a Task Force of experts convened by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and were subjected to a formal peer-review process. This document is intended as a guideline only, not an AAHA standard of care. These guidelines and recommendations should not be construed as dictating an exclusive protocol, course of treatment, or procedure. Variations in practice may be warranted based on the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to each individual practice setting. ©2024 AAHA.

