

4 report

equity 4 | people 4
PEOPLE | EQUITY





Neighborhood
Health Plan
OF RHODE ISLAND™



Driven by Purpose: Open Letter to the Community

There is an important intersection of public health, population health and individual health. Understanding and addressing the underpinnings of each—education, income, housing, food, transportation—are essential to mitigating the health disparities that can trouble so many of our community members.

For almost 30 years, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island (Neighborhood) and its Community Health Center founders have been working together to address the myriad of nonmedical factors and age-old structures that influence health outcomes. We are rooted in advocating for access to cost-effective high-quality care, and our roots are growing. We are committed to taking action.

At Neighborhood, we know that ensuring equity is the cornerstone to change within communities, within the health care industry, and within our own workplace. Most importantly, to successfully advocate for the most vulnerable populations, we must ensure all employees are heard and empowered to strengthen Neighborhood's culture of inclusion across the organization.

Our long history serving our members in the community tells us that proximity creates access to care and services while simultaneously helping people build trust in the health care system. We understand that improving health and achieving

health equity requires data driven approaches that address the social, economic, and environmental factors that influence health outcomes. Acknowledging health equity in our community also must be anchored in empathy and by understanding others' experiences.

Neighborhood is at another threshold of this amazing journey, and proudly presents its inaugural 4Report, which defines the two principles and four commitments that guide us toward Equity4All. The goal of the report is to illustrate Neighborhood's purpose to ensure all Rhode Islanders have access to—and receive—the right care, at the right time, in the right place—regardless of where they live, their ancestry or their socioeconomic status. More importantly, by drawing attention to how Neighborhood is effectuating change, we remain committed to making a difference and the 4Report holds us accountable.



A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Marino'.

Peter Marino
President & Chief Executive Officer,
Neighborhood

Advancing Equity4All: Introducing the 4Report



It's an exciting time to be a part of Neighborhood. We are uniquely positioned with all the right ingredients to build upon our strong workplace culture, which in turn, will help re-shape the landscape of health care in Rhode Island.

Despite notable advances in health outcomes over the years, it is still a fact that not all individuals benefit equally. There are still seen and unseen barriers to accessing services. Here at Neighborhood, we look internally and externally for both simple and innovative ways to reduce disparities and improve health for all individuals. There is more work to do, and we are doing it by evolving and honing our strategy to better serve our members, providers, and employees.

In 2022, Neighborhood took a bold step and created its new People Division, designed to ensure its human resource services and processes are viewed through an equity lens with our chief human resource officer reporting to the chief diversity officer, who reports directly to the president and CEO. This reporting structure breaks down the typical silos between human resources and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs, and instead, ensures equity is embedded as a practice into everything Neighborhood does within its workforce. This shift in organizational structure also acknowledges that unless we are consciously creating and strengthening a culture of inclusion within our company, we cannot be as successful advocating for and building equity within the communities we serve.

While equity has been part of Neighborhood's mission since its inception, we have since developed more robust tools to lead more visibly and illuminate our accountability. This report—4Report—is the first time for Neighborhood to share our story widely in the

community. It is Neighborhood's promise to keep you informed on our progress as we continue our journey.

There are two distinctive sections in the 4Report: Equity4People and People4Equity that work together for one fundamental purpose. As you will read, Neighborhood has structured a two-prong strategy. Equity4People is focused on our employees, so we as an organization are well positioned to advocate for equity for Rhode Island communities. People4Equity is the continuation of Neighborhood's work to address health disparities in Rhode Island. For these principles, we have defined four commitments to take action. To hold ourselves accountable, we will track and share our progress through the 4Report Scorecard.

Neighborhood is so inspired by the work our teams do every day. We hope you will take time read through the 4Report as it underscores where we have been and where we are headed—and continue to follow us—and join us—in creating Equity4All.

A blue ink handwritten signature of Talia Brookshire.

Talia Brookshire
Chief Diversity Officer,
Neighborhood

A blue ink handwritten signature of Jason Vlaun.

Jason Vlaun
Chief Human Resource Officer,
Neighborhood







history



Our History

During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, community health centers were created across the United States including right here in Rhode Island.

In 1994, Rhode Island's community health centers came together and created Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island with a collective goal to strengthen efforts to make health care services accessible for people who live in the state's low-income areas. This bold innovation established Neighborhood's roots in addressing inequities to close health disparities and improve outcomes.

Since that time of inception, the organization has established a track record of being first and, sometimes, the only health plan in Rhode Island to provide access to health care services for those who need it most.

- In 1994, Neighborhood began enrolling pregnant women and children
- In 2000, Neighborhood was the only health plan to serve children in foster care
- In 2003, Neighborhood was the first plan to enroll children with special health care needs
- In 2014, Neighborhood was the first health plan to participate in Medicaid Expansion
- In 2016, Neighborhood was the only health plan to participate in the State's Medicare-Medicaid Dual Eligible demonstration
- In 2022, Neighborhood was the highest-rated Medicaid health plan in Rhode Island in National Commission for Quality Assurance's (NCQA) Health Plan Ratings for the 18th consecutive year

Today, we serve one in five Rhode Islanders and continue to work with our Community Health Center founders to ensure all members receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place. We understand that the environmental and social determinants of health—education, income, housing, food, transportation—are necessary for a safe, stable home life.

We also recognize systematic racism is often at the root of these limiting factors. Only when we address these issues will people feel empowered to manage their health proactively, and the broader health care system will be able to help minimize and eradicate prevalent diseases caused by health disparities.

Neighborhood is unique as it works at the intersection of public health, population health and individual health. We advocate for coverage for all. To be successful, it is necessary for employees to be passionate and engaged in addressing health disparities. This requires Neighborhood be a diverse organization with an equitable work environment.

Creating equity is the cornerstone to change—within large communities, within smaller groups, and for individuals.



Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

— James Baldwin





language



Our Shared Language

At Neighborhood, we recognize, appreciate, and celebrate the diversity of our workforce, members, providers, and communities that we serve. We strive to be Rhode Island's most inclusive and innovative health maintenance organization, improving the health and wellbeing across the state of Rhode Island.

Having shared language and beliefs are essential to common purpose and action. Therefore, we are identifying the following terms to ensure we are all working from the same starting point.

Diversity arises from the backgrounds, life experiences, and characteristics that make every one of us unique. As a group of people with a myriad of individual differences—race, ethnicity, culture, educational background, gender identity and sexual orientation, disability, religious beliefs, zip code, and socioeconomic status. We are an inherently diverse organization. That said, we strive to consciously and conscientiously ensure that our organization is representative of the communities we serve.

Equity is the fair and equal access to resources, opportunities, and benefits for all regardless of any seen and unseen barriers.

Inclusion is the active practice of ensuring that all voices, experiences, and backgrounds are heard, understood, and valued.

Health Equity is achieved when people can attain their full health potential, and no one is disadvantaged because of social position or other socially determined circumstances. Health inequities impact length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment.

Additionally, the focus of our work is within the health care space. Our commitment is to foster respect, inclusion, and equity for:

Employees: Neighborhood has a diverse and inclusive work environment where employees are encouraged to freely share their perspectives. This culture of respect stimulates open dialog across and throughout the organization. We embrace fairness, access, opportunity, and advancement for all employees, and try to identify and eliminate barriers to growth and development wherever our employees sit in the organization.

Members: Our diverse and inclusive work environment cultivates the empathy and perspective we need to understand and advocate for our members' needs. We create avenues to access high-quality care, and work to improve health outcomes regardless of cultural background or economic status, or lifestyle. We treat our members with dignity and respect and aim to create access to medical and behavioral health services and social supports with the goal of individuals achieving the best possible health.

Providers: We establish inclusive partnerships that bring together a diverse provider network to engage in authentic experiences with our members. We are committed to building a clinical network that reflects our members' diverse racial, socio-economic, and ethnic profiles. We collaborate in caring for individuals, developing research to address health disparities within populations, and applying fresh perspectives to solutions. Together, we help advance and promote health equity throughout the state.

Rhode Island communities: Vibrant communities make vital health and human services available to residents. They promote the well-being and healthy development for all by providing culturally relevant services without unconscious bias or unnecessary barriers. Our goal is to advocate for communities in which all people have the resources to thrive. We envision communities where every voice is heard.





principles



Health equity is everyone’s responsibility at Neighborhood, and we remain laser-focused on creating Equity4All.

Throughout the 4Report, you will learn more about our guiding equity principles and commitments that influence and drive our daily work. These Neighborhood4Equity principles are intended to create an inclusive environment for our employees and equitable access to quality and cost-effective health care for everyone that calls Rhode Island home. Our four commitments illustrate how Neighborhood puts its principles into action.

Neighborhood4Equity Principles

Within our organization: **Equity4People**

We will empower our workforce and sustain our purpose-driven culture. Our goal is to ensure our workplace is always welcoming, there is a sense of shared purpose, and equal opportunity prevails for all.

Within our community: **People4Equity**

We will collaborate with our Community Health Center founders and network of medical, behavioral health, social service, and public health professionals and policymakers to eliminate barriers to quality care and advocate for improved health outcomes for all.

Our Commitments

- 1. Build a stronger workforce by broadening our diverse and inclusive environment.**
- 2. Ensure everyone has a seat and a voice at the table.**
- 3. Use data to advocate for equity and achieve measurable impact.**
- 4. Accelerate health equity by supporting and working in underserved communities.**

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The essence of global health equity is the idea that something so precious as health might be viewed as a right.

— Dr. Paul Farmer



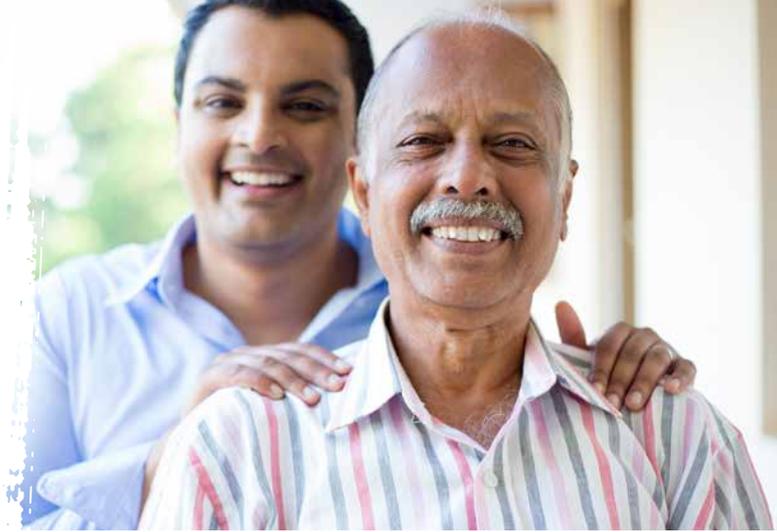


commitments



Our 4Report Commitments

Neighborhood4Equity Principles are central to our purpose driven work. We are pledging to evolve our efforts within our organization and within the Rhode Island communities by making the four commitments stated in this report. Neighborhood will track progress in advancing and maintaining these commitments through annual, measurable metrics documented in the 4Report Scorecard.



“One person with commitment accomplishes more than a thousand with an opinion.”

—Orrin Woodward





Equity 4 People



The 4Report: Equity4People Commitments are designed to create a **stronger Neighborhood** through a **more diverse Neighborhood**—which ensures our work to address health inequities is more impactful. We will empower our workforce and sustain our purpose-driven culture. **Our goal is to ensure our workplace is always welcoming, that there is a sense of shared purpose, and equal opportunity prevails for all.**



Neighborhood is asking the question, "is there a greater administrative burden because of who someone is, how one may identify, and where one resides." If ever that answer is "yes," we will hold ourselves accountable to determining why, and address it accordingly. We want to build inclusion without creating a feeling of exclusion.

We take a holistic approach to improving the employee experience.

Our work is grounded in prioritized and thoughtfully designed initiatives that enable all employees to bring their whole selves to work.

These endeavors are done with the assistance of an employee experience workgroup which helps to enhance two-way conversation to grow confidence and trust in where the organization is headed.

1

Build a stronger workforce by broadening our diverse and inclusive environment.

At Neighborhood, we are driven to improve the health outcomes and wellbeing of all Rhode Islanders. This can only be achieved when we recognize, understand, and respect the individual differences of all people, inside and outside of our organization. We think it's important to build an understanding of what "diversity" means in all its varieties including race, ethnicity, income, education, age, gender identity, military status, and more and listen to and learn from each other to build stronger teams.

As such, all of Neighborhood's executives, senior leaders, and employees are all committed to increasing diversity at all levels with organizational parity as the goal.

This journey begins before a prospective candidate applies, and it has important milestone markers along the way:

Recruitment: We continue to test ourselves when it comes to job descriptions, specific requirements, and pay grades. Our hiring team leverages technology to screen job descriptions for inclusive language and to reduce unconscious bias from the recruitment process. In addition, we ensure that the interview teams for all director level and above positions are diverse. Most importantly, we strive for equal representation at all levels at every function throughout the organization.

Onboarding: Welcoming new talent to the organization is an ideal time to begin understanding employees' wants, needs and capabilities. By listening first and remaining nimble at the onset, we are better able to design a workforce environment that builds bench strength and sets the stage for future success for all employees.

We are committed to improving onboarding, offering relevant professional development, and personalizing recognition to help increase retention.

Retention: We remain focused on promotability within the organization and ensure we stay true to our compensation philosophy of maintaining parity in pay beyond legislative mandates.

Workforce retention is paramount in our efforts to have a diverse workforce. We therefore aspire to provide meaningful experiences to our employees regardless of years of service. We work to listen and understand the needs of employees and remove as many barriers as possible to aid and create a pathway to success at Neighborhood.

While attrition is inevitable at any organization, Neighborhood plans to use data analytics to determine and address any trends that might suggest an unequal distribution of employees opting to leave the organization potentially putting parity at risk or revealing inequities in various pockets of the company.



2

Ensure everyone has a seat and a voice at the table.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is not about “fitting in”, but rather about creating an environment where all attributes and strengths are recognized.

We continue to listen and learn from our employees about the ways to shape an inclusive work environment as the pathway to equity. This is accomplished in a myriad of ways, including feedback from employee resource groups, employee opinion surveys and an “always open door” policy.

We embrace a culture of inclusion at every step of an employee’s journey, with the goal of ensuring our processes, practices, and policies are in place to create opportunities for career advancement.

Employee career mapping allows us to identify moments that matter most to our workforce. This process is supported by expanding listening to collect insights and desires throughout employees’ experiences. Then operational data and feedback is analyzed to determine how best to make improvements to the employee experience.

This process will be formalized in 2023 to establish employee engagement benchmarks to help ignite improvement initiatives in a few identified areas:

Employee Experience Insights: Our listen and learn culture is growing to establish a robust, ongoing process to give employees’ input on what it means to have an “exceptional workplace”. This includes a deep dive review of policies and procedures through a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion to offer avenues to leadership development, and to create pathways to sharing unique experiences and backgrounds. By reviewing our policies

and career paths, we can ensure there is diversity amongst teams and equity in opportunities and pathways.

Learning and Development: To create accessible, professional development opportunities, it is critical to listen to a broad range of ideas that hail from employees’ different experiences. Neighborhood wants to understand hidden barriers to excelling at work and implement changes to broaden access to career growth opportunities and improve the promotability of all employees by offering relevant training and development that serves as a gateway to success. A wonderful example of this is when, in 2022, Neighborhood changed its tuition reimbursement policy to invest in employees up front versus reimbursing after the completion of courses. The use of this employee benefit doubled from 2020.

Rewards and Recognition: Understanding our employees’ needs and expectations at each phase of their career is an integral element of ensuring employees feel included, seen, heard, and valued. We empower our leaders to determine what type of recognition will personalize experiences for all employees.

Compensation along with recognition and rewards help employees see that they—and their ideas and contributions—are valued. Importantly, recognition needs to happen throughout all job functions and levels throughout the organization. While we work collectively, we also know each employee is an individual and motivated in various ways. Realizing employee recognition is an integral part of building a trusting relationship, Neighborhood leaders are encouraged to look for opportunities to offer rewards both monetarily and non-monetarily based on individual motivators.





We are making bold steps by moving the Human Resources function away from a compliance-driven advisor to a trusted thought partner and demanding that we challenge the status quo.

With that, we reconfigured our organizational structure in 2022 by aligning our Human Resources department and our Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to both report to our chief diversity officer as executive leader of a newly formed People Division within the organization. We believe this framework will help us to look methodically and analytically at human resource management through a diverse, equitable, and inclusive lens, and encourage others to do the same.

Employee Resource Groups are an active partner in our retention efforts as well as offering an opportunity for expression, inclusion and leadership development.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are our company-sponsored, volunteer-based networks of employees that form based on shared characteristics, interests, or backgrounds. Supported by executive sponsors, ERGs enable employees to connect with and educate each other, encourage development both personally and professionally, and to facilitate communication across all areas of the organization. ERGs are an integral part of our long-term strategy to help create policies and practices that attract and retain diverse talent.



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In order to build a rewarding employee experience, you need to understand what matters most to your people.

—Julie Bevacqua





People 4 Equity



The 4Report: People4Equity Commitments are focused on **Neighborhood's mission** to address health disparities in Rhode Island. It is our **commitment to understand the needs, opportunities, and risks to our members, providers, and communities.** We will **collaborate with our Community Health Center founders** and network of medical, behavioral health, social service, public health professionals, and policymakers to **eliminate barriers to quality care** and **advocate for improved health outcomes for all.**





3

Use data to advocate for equity and achieve measurable impact.

Compelling evidence indicates health disparities exist and many, if not most, are caused by social, economic, and racial inequities. Neighborhood’s goal is to eliminate the seen and unseen barriers that exist, cut through the proverbial red tape, and intentionally and thoughtfully improve health outcomes for all.

By listening to our members’ perspectives and understanding their needs, we strategically collaborate with our partners to find and offer viable solutions to some of the state’s most pressing public and population health needs. This endeavor, coupled with compelling and accurate data, enables us to establish baselines, benchmarks, and goals to keep moving forward and make improvements. For us, it is about enhancing the quality of life for Rhode Islanders by studying trends and finding solutions to systemic problems.

Data allows us to study a potential concern, effectively look for positive solutions, and measure their impact. It also allows us to course correct if a proposed solution is not moving the needle.

While we know and understand inequities by listening to others’ experiences, gaining an understanding of the data will advance our efforts to create systematic change. This can only be achieved by using data to inform and draw attention to driving change in public, population, and individual health.

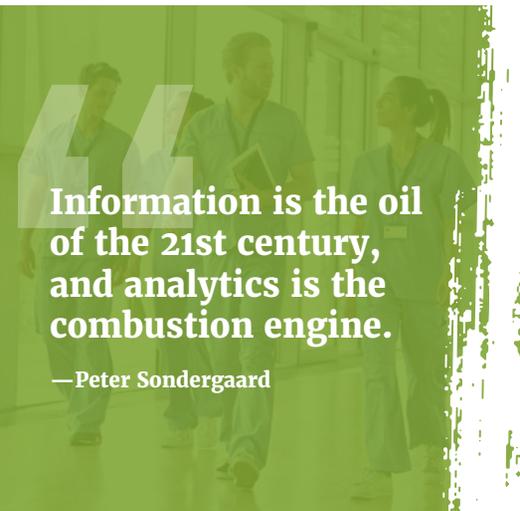
Areas of focus to improve data collection and analysis are:

Trust: We are mindful that systemic racism is compounded because those suffering are also fearful there will be consequences if they provide information. We are committed to building trusting relationships to gather better data and empower our members to take proactive pathways to better health.

Data: It is difficult to address equity in health care if there is not a clear understanding about what inequities truly exist and their impact on care. Neighborhood’s analytics team has created a way to merge race and ethnicity data from multiple internal and external sources to improve the completeness of the data. With this more complete data, the organization can better understand the health inequities identified and can now plan to target corrective interventions more accurately.

Change: Health equity is not only an issue for our members, but it is a state and nationwide one as well. Neighborhood’s Health Equity Committee is committed to:

- Identifying and bringing light to health disparities while focusing on specific areas where Neighborhood has the best opportunity to make a positive measurable, scalable, and replicable change.
- Influencing public policies that address health and social disparities and obstacles to achieve health equity and full health potential for all Rhode Islanders.
- Establishing a platform to fully consider and eradicate the range of systemic racial and ethnic inequities of health care.



4

Accelerate equity by supporting and working in underserved communities.

The work of Neighborhood's Health Equity Committee—which is a multi-disciplinary team bringing together clinical, behavioral health, analytics, marketing, customer experience and diversity, equity, and inclusion departments—will focus on three specific areas with a data-driven decision-making approach. These three areas will serve as the focal point of our work.

Behavioral Health: Within Neighborhood's membership, Black and Hispanic members experience lower rates of quality and access to care than White members on most of the Health care Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) quality measures relating to behavioral health. The rates for Black members fall below the rates for White members for 12 of the 16 HEDIS measures in 2021.

Childhood Obesity: In Rhode Island, 25% of children covered by Medicaid RIte Care health plans are obese compared to 15% of children with private health insurance. Hispanic children (15% overweight and 26% obese) and non-Hispanic Black children (16% overweight and 25% obese) have the highest statewide rates of overweight and obesity. Early national data shows that the rate of Body Mass Index (BMI) increase for children ages two to 19 nearly doubled during the pandemic.

Maternal Health: Based on 2021 HEDIS data, Neighborhood has identified that Black mothers in our membership experience lower rates of access to care, including timeliness of prenatal care and postpartum care, than White mothers. Statewide data from the Rhode Island Department of Health for 2021 show all mothers from populations of color had worse rates of low birthweight, very low birthweight, and prematurity than White mothers; and newborns of Black mothers were much more likely to require Neonatal Intensive Care than newborns of other mothers.

These findings enable our organization to focus on creating sustainable solutions to address important societal

concerns. Our scale and partnerships across Rhode Island, and our use of data, enables us to target specific populations and communities in need. We believe we can accelerate progress in health equity by concentrating our efforts on those communities that face measurable differences in access to quality and affordable health care.

We work in partnership with our network of providers to make our members' day better than expected. It is at the heart of everything we do at Neighborhood. We listen carefully and are empathetic to the specific circumstances of the communities we serve.

Neighborhood supports endeavors that reach those in need, benefit underserved communities, create health equity, and enhance lives. We seek to understand their needs, both big and small.

Education: Neighborhood presents to thousands of Rhode Islanders each year to ensure they know how to access social services, use their health insurance, and adopt healthier behaviors. We work with community groups, family services organizations, churches, criminal justice system, and housing and employment advocacy groups.

Volunteerism: Employees are encouraged to participate on non-profit organization boards and subcommittees to share their knowledge and commitment to building stronger communities. Additionally, the employee benefit package includes pay for one-day of community service, with departments often coordinating together to make a shared contribution to a community-based organization.

Sponsorships: Neighborhood is proud to support many community organizations each year. Some examples include food banks, shelters for homeless populations, youth development and mentoring programs, educational institutions, and workforce development initiatives for under-employed populations.

When a barrier arises, Neighborhood looks for solutions to remove it.

While a local food pantry was getting the donations it so desperately needed, it had no refrigerators or freezers in which to store the food. Upon hearing this news, Neighborhood purchased the refrigerators so that the food pantry could serve its constituents.

That was the case with South Side Community Land Trust, a change agent for food security providing land, education, tools, and support for people to grow food in Rhode Island. The organization wanted to construct a community center in an urban, underserved neighborhood; however, it needed fiscal support to accomplish its goal. When approached for assistance, Neighborhood joined forces with two other local organizations and established a loan that enabled the Land Trust to realize its goal of building a center for the community to enjoy.





progress



Our Progress

We are driven by purpose at Neighborhood. We do this work because it provides us with an opportunity, in collaboration with our Community Health Center founders, to make a difference for people who do not always feel supported, heard, or sometimes seen.

The guiding principles and commitments outlined in the 4Report are the first step in this journey toward Equity4All. Our organization is putting a stake in the ground, holding itself accountable to our workforce and community partners in health to address complex, systematic, long-standing barriers.

Each year we will establish incremental metrics to track our progress in making our commitments reality. We know we have much to learn, and we will need to adjust along the way. Documenting annual metrics and reporting on results holds us accountable to ourselves and to the communities we serve.

4Report Scorecard

We learn from best practices and are energized by developing innovative solutions to some of the most complex issues facing our state. The 4Report outlines our commitments to this work. The 4Report Scorecard, a companion document to the report, defines measurable goals within our workforce and in the community.

The Scorecard will capture results and paint a picture of all our endeavors for each of the Neighborhood4Equity Principles and associated commitments. It will hold us accountable to act—based on insights discovered throughout our effort—and to make a difference. Bringing our diverse backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and perspectives together is the best way to solve complex problems, fuel innovation, and create sustainable solutions.

At Neighborhood, we believe creativity ignites when great minds do not think alike!





journey



Our Journey

**This journey is ever evolving.
It will have peaks and valleys
as we all learn more and
address challenges and changes
in the landscape of equity
within Neighborhood and in
the communities we serve.**

We plan to recognize the barriers to progress, understand how to let culture take root, and strengthen the way in which we navigate our course with agility and resilience.

Please visit us at www.nhpri.org to keep up to date on our progress. If you want to learn more or invite us to share our story, please contact equity@nhpri.org.

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Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.

—Mattie Stepanek



Report



Neighborhood Health Plan

OF RHODE ISLAND™

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