

Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice

A Grand Challenge for Social Work



The Grand Challenge to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** recognizes glaring inequities in access to healthcare, affordable housing, quality education, and gainful employment. It sees a vital role for social work in deconstructing the underlying prejudice, bias, and stigmatization that perpetuate and exacerbate these inequities. And it sees social workers as agents of change in their communities and institutions.

Consistent with its vision of a society of equal opportunity and justice, Grand Challenge members have published and presented widely on the subject during the past five years and advocated for state and federal policies to accelerate integration and combat discrimination. For school districts, the network has also launched the School Success Project to identify and reduce disproportionate suspension and expulsion. Looking ahead, the network envisions teaming up with other Grand Challenges, such as **Eliminate Racism** and **Promote Smart Decarceration**, to further their common goals.

A VISION OF AN EQUAL AND JUST SOCIETY



Healthcare

In 2016, the uninsured rate among working-age members of the Latino community in states that had expanded Medicaid eligibility decreased from 36% to 23%. In states that opted not to expand Medicaid eligibility, the rate remained virtually unchanged.



Education

Although African American children and youth account for 15% of the U.S. public-school population, they represent 48% of those suspended from school, outpacing all other ethnic groups in school suspension rates, with no evidence that they engage in misbehavior at higher rates.



Housing

Although the 1968 Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination, American metropolitan areas remain highly segregated: the majority of White Americans live in neighborhoods that are more than 80% White, and nearly a third of White Americans — roughly 63 million people — live in neighborhoods that are more than 90% White.



Employment

The wage gap in the United States persists. As recently as 2018, compared to every \$1 that men of all races earn:

- White women working full time earn an average of \$0.79
- Black women earn only \$0.63
- Latina women earn as little as \$0.54

Network Leadership

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LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** network and their colleagues have:

- **Received** a \$174,423 [grant](#) from the Russell Sage Foundation to conduct a study on how older Latinx immigrants navigate community resources
- **Authored** five working papers on [addressing social stigma, integrating Latinx immigrants, supporting African American children, building inclusive communities, and reducing disparities in juvenile justice](#)
- **Launched** the [School Success Project](#), which aims to “raise awareness and promote school success by reducing disproportionate suspension and expulsion of school-aged youth.” Based at the University of Utah’s College of Social Work, this watchdog entity grew out of the 2017 [working paper](#), “Increasing Success for African American Children and Youth”
- **Published** numerous books and articles, including “[Facing Segregation: Housing Policy Solutions for a Stronger Society](#),” “[LGBT Stigma and Stress: How Social Workers Can Help](#),” and the [introduction](#) to a special issue of the Journal of Teaching and Social Work on “[Preparing Bilingual, Bicultural Social Workers to Serve the Growing Latino Population in America](#)”
- **Presented** at the [annual conference](#) of the Society for Social Work and Research
- **Co-sponsored** a congressional briefing on “[The Intersection of Health and Justice: A Look Inside County Jails](#),” calling for better physical and mental healthcare services for people admitted to jails
- **Worked** through the [Latinx Leadership Initiative](#) at Boston College School of Social Work to “increase the number of Latinx social workers in the United States and develop social work practitioners who are equipped to work effectively with Latinx communities across the country”
- **Spoken** out against the [immigration policies](#) of the Trump Administration with respect to their harmful implications for children
- **Advocated** for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, arguing for retaining financial supports to ensure affordability for students and including social work programs in Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need

LOOKING AHEAD

Members of the Grand Challenge to **Achieve Equal Opportunity and Justice** network have articulated the following objectives for the next five years:

- **Increase** collaboration with related Grand Challenges, such as **Eliminate Racism** and **Promote Smart Decarceration**
- **Emphasize** the Grand Challenge in light of the growing racial and ethnic inequities in U.S. society
- **Continue** to advocate for policy recommendations, including:
 1. **Accelerate** Latinx immigrant integration and expand coverage under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)
 2. **Enhance, expand, and strengthen** federal antidiscrimination laws, including the Voting Rights Act
 3. **Eliminate** zero tolerance policies in schools and promote the use of evidence-informed practices and policies to address racial disciplinary disproportionality

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