Our path forward: 2020 diversity, inclusion and equity report

A look at our relentless pursuit of diversity, inclusion and equity in the age of COVID-19 and social justice
Diversity and inclusion must be fully embedded in how we do our work every day.

Carl S. Armato
President and CEO, Novant Health
2020: Our relentless spirit in the face of challenge

Entering March 2020, none of us could have imagined what the year would hold. As people prepared to shed their winter clothes and look toward the spring, the words pandemic and containment slowly began to take hold in the news and in our consciousness. A national health crisis was about to upend our daily world and hold a permanent place in global headlines for months to come.

From this crisis, there was a heightened awareness about health disparities and inequities and the detrimental effects they would have on the members of our communities. Little did we know, we were about to experience another national crisis directly related to social injustice and inequity.

While we battled the COVID-19 pandemic and cared for our patients and communities, the nation faced a new resurgence of an old problem: racism. We at Novant Health knew we needed to take action.

The United States grappled with the death of George Floyd, and it brought conversations regarding systemic racism and equity to the forefront. Novant Health’s longstanding commitment to a diverse, inclusive and equitable culture is based on caring for, knowing and understanding each other and those who live and work within the communities we serve. This incident served as a catalyst to acknowledge a history of social and health inequities. It also caused us to redouble our efforts to embed diversity, inclusion and equity into everything we do, all while managing our response to COVID-19.

We recognize that our actions, especially in times of crisis, will continue to bring our mission, vision and values to life — and our commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity will help us do this. We are committed to our purpose and focused on improving the health of our communities by ensuring equitable access to remarkable care for all.

Carl S. Armato
President and CEO, Novant Health
How diversity, inclusion and equity unite us all

A message from our diversity, inclusion and equity officer

Usually in a crisis, we discover in the moment what really matters. We are forced to apply focus on the critical issues just to get through the crisis. What is important is that we learn from those moments so we can thrive long after the crisis ends.

So, the question is, where does diversity, inclusion and equity fit into the management of the crisis? “Maybe,” some would say, “it is a time to cut back on our focus on diversity, inclusion and equity.” But our commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity matters even more during a crisis.

A crisis can have profound consequences on people of every dimension of diversity. At Novant Health, we understand and value all dimensions of diversity, and our strategy strives to create equity through a comprehensive lens.

When an organization is committed to using diversity, inclusion and equity as a strategic business lever, the test of that commitment can come in a time of crisis. The two crises of 2020 — the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice — have affected all of us.

There are key actions organizations can take to apply the diversity, inclusion and equity lens in a crisis. Here are a few questions organizations should ask to ensure they thrive during a crisis.

What structures are in place (intentionally or unintentionally) that could be an advantage for some people and a disadvantage for others during a time of crisis? Those who lean into diversity, inclusion and equity will recognize and mitigate new threats and capitalize on new opportunities for growth.

Have you created committees, task forces or gathered input from diverse groups of people to make decisions that reflect the varied perspectives of your workforce and patients (consumers)?

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What is the positive reputation of your organization that you want to maintain or increase? And how can you do it? People will remember what your organization has done. The crisis will end, but the emotional toll will linger. Caring for our communities now will pay huge dividends in terms of goodwill and reputation for years to come.

Here are a few tips to use when applying the diversity, inclusion and equity lens to decision-making.

**Complete an assessment of your organization’s needs and your various teams.** Don’t assume the status quo will continue to work. Nothing is normal. This assessment requires understanding both the business and the needs of the people at an organization.

**Work harder to incorporate the perspectives of different voices.** It is easy to default to surrounding yourself with voices that have similar perspectives as yours. Create new communication and feedback channels. Use video calls, chats and polls to bring more people into your circle.

**Leverage your business resource groups or employee resource groups** and other team members to encourage innovation and to obtain suggestions and ideas or reactions related to proposed changes in the organization.

**Remember organizations exist inside of communities.** Leverage community partnerships to benefit the workforce and consumers.

**Debrief and review the interventions and behaviors,** both during the crisis and after the crisis, in order to course correct and to assess learnings.

Our commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity has to be long term and intentional, and a part of the organization’s strategic business imperatives. Because these crises, like all crises, are about people.

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**Tanya S. Blackmon**  
*Executive vice president and chief diversity, inclusion and equity officer*  
*Novant Health*
COVID-19: Our strategy
Information and inspiration. Help and hope. Those were the great needs on the Novant Health team when the COVID-19 pandemic struck our region. Like the public, our team members experienced fear and confusion in the outbreak’s earliest days — but also determination. We knew our team was more than ready to rise up and serve. We needed to quickly get team members the facts they needed — and the reasons we all had for hope.

That’s why Novant Health CEO and President Carl S. Armato and leaders immediately launched a weekly systemwide COVID-19 call for all team members. In the meetings, senior leaders updated the team on cases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention protocol and our preparation inside and outside our hospital walls.

We shared best practices and news that ranged from testing turnaround times to how to respond to questions from people in the community. We also opened the meetings up to questions — and our leaders provided answers in real time.

The open, frequent and in-depth communication ensured the team’s success. We showed up-to-date dashboards about cases and explained where we stood with everything from in-community screenings to our supplies of personal protective equipment. Our team was able to see that we had planned carefully to create a robust supply chain, were working with local, state and federal officials in our response and that we had a clear path forward.

At the same time we provided information, we also provided hope.

Our response to the pandemic

- Set up 13 testing centers outside, including some in communities with our most vulnerable citizens
- Tested more than 260,000+ patients
- 136,000+ have used the online coronavirus assessment tool to identify risk and next steps
- Conducted more than 500,000 virtual visits
- Promoted masking, social distancing and hand washing, reaching more than 4 million people
- Was first in region to launch assessment tool and 24/7 COVID-19 helpline, responding to 55,000+ calls
Our response to the pandemic

On our calls, we were able to point people to resources such as child care help and our “Thriving Together” site with resources for coping with stress, dealing with financial issues and helping children transition to remote learning.

We also were able to announce one of our proudest creations: the Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund team member assistance fund. That fund, which reached $11 million through donations from the Novant Health leadership, Novant Health Foundation, team members and the public, helped those on our team hurt financially by the pandemic.

The regular updates also gave us a chance to have a dialogue about the other crisis which was sparked by the death of George Floyd and other African Americans and the subsequent protests. The regular updates and separate Zoom chats created a safe space for everyone to share thoughts and feelings and to listen to the perspectives of others.

COVID-19: Our strategy

- Provided multilingual resources, including a Spanish helpline and assessment tool
- Distributed more than 450,000 free masks
- Participated in 4 COVID-19 clinical trials
- Established an $11M disaster relief fund for team members
- Partnered with 386 community members, businesses, organizations and churches to provide meals for team members and transportation for patients
- Used our 12 business resource groups to understand the unique needs of patients, team members and the community at-large
- Invested more than $1 million in subsidized dependent care resources for team members, including YMCA, Care.com and other resources

Our path forward
Healthy outcomes for all

Equity is about addressing structures that are in place that advantage some groups and disadvantage others. Our work in health equity is focused across all dimensions of diversity, with the goal of attaining the highest level of health for all people.

How we addressed disparities
For months, COVID-19 has been dominating our news, our organizations and our personal lives. Within our walls, we are addressing its impact by continued pursuit of health equity through our COVID-19 health equity workstreams. The aim is to target COVID-19 response and recovery efforts to address disparities in health and healthcare.

We analyze data using the REaL-GAPS (race, ethnicity, language, gender, age, payor and sexual orientation/gender identity) framework to identify health disparities, so we know where the gaps are and what needs to be addressed.

Equality versus equity
Equity is about eliminating structures that intentionally or unintentionally disadvantage some people. The bike here represents the structure. In the equality picture, everyone is given the same bike, but the bike can only be ridden by some.

When the goal is equity, everyone is given a bike that meets his or her needs, allowing all to pedal a little differently. In healthcare, it’s important to understand our patients’ needs — and to lower barriers so they can achieve the highest level of health and well-being.
The rapid spread of COVID-19 has touched every community and every life across the nation. But its effect has not been the same for all communities. People of all dimensions of diversity, including race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, size and ability have been disproportionately impacted.

Before the pandemic increased the spotlight on health disparities, Novant Health had been working for years to close health equity gaps and address social determinants of health in the communities we serve. With the help of our community partners, we have invested in community clinics, mobile health units, innovative wellness initiatives and a supplier diversity program to ensure people and businesses of all dimensions of diversity are cared for.

Improving access for all
Access to healthcare plays a big role in addressing healthcare disparities. “What was true before COVID-19 is undoubtedly true now — certain communities lack equitable access to healthcare,” said Pam Oliver, MD, executive vice president of Novant Health and president of Novant Health Physician Network. “We know our Black and brown communities tend to have higher rates of chronic conditions, and as a result of that, we’ve seen a higher number of coronavirus cases and deaths than in other groups.”

In an effort to serve all communities, Novant Health established mobile health units in areas with limited access to COVID-19 screening and primary care, with the goal

Making sure those at greatest risk for COVID-19 get the right care
Diversity and inclusion are the core values at Novant Health that prompted us to create a strategy for ongoing monitoring of health equity. This enabled us to take immediate action to analyze and assess for equity gaps among patients hospitalized with COVID-19.

The results are outcomes that are different from what hospitals are seeing nationally, said Chere Gregory, MD, chief health equity officer and neurology critical care physician for Novant Health. In addition, the COVID-19 testing rate in Novant Health for Blacks and Latinos has been higher than the overall North Carolina testing rate.

“Across all ethnicities, Novant Health’s mortality rate for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 is less than the national average,” Gregory said. “However, the pandemic is ongoing, and the equity discussion must continue as we advance the fight against this disease.”

As of June 2020, COVID-19 disproportionately affected communities of color for several reasons, including existing social, environmental and health inequities. Despite making up 22% of North Carolina’s population, Black residents accounted for 23% of confirmed COVID-19 cases and 30% of COVID-19 deaths in cases where race was known, according to October 2020 statistics from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. Similarly, Hispanics accounted for 32% of confirmed COVID-19 cases, in cases where race or ethnicity was known, despite only making up about 10% of the population in North Carolina. ◆
to connect Black and Latino people with resources like referrals for testing and educational materials.

We also set up centers where they were most needed. “Our clinic in west Charlotte that closed temporarily early in the pandemic became a respiratory assessment center for our underserved population,” said Michael Hoben, MD, senior physician executive, referring to Novant Health Michael Jordan Family Medical Clinic.

“We started to see a tale of two cities in our communities,” Oliver said. “Those who have access to quality healthcare, education, food, housing and transportation, and those who do not.”

Novant Health also established new digital health options available at NovantHealth.org/coronavirus. These include a 24/7 helpline available to anyone who had questions about the coronavirus, such as where or when they should be screened, and a free online assessment tool where people could get guidance on whether they should be seen for their symptoms or stay at home to recover.

Even under normal circumstances, delivering high-quality healthcare demands coordination and teamwork. And during a pandemic? Novant Health leaders have learned that every team — every player — must pull together to provide remarkable healthcare to all of our communities.

What is health equity?

Health equity is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people. — Healthy People, 2020

Our mission at Novant Health is to improve the health of communities, one person at a time — not just some communities. Our vision is to deliver a remarkable patient experience — not just for some patients, but for all. That’s why diversity and inclusion are part of our core values. To deliver on our mission, we have to customize care for our community and the patients we serve.

We are fulfilling our mission, and that means people’s lives and health are improved. This is why we are passionate about health equity.
This is a first-person account from Nora Toncel on why it is so important to speak the same language when treating patients.

**Connecting those in need with resources**

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I was reassigned from my normal job as a neighborhood engagement partner with community engagement at Novant Health to help at one of our new respiratory assessment centers (RAC) in Waughtown, North Carolina. My new office is located in the parking lot. These centers have been set up to provide patients with a safe place to go for drive-up COVID-19 testing, masks and other resources if they need it.

I work with a dedicated team of doctors, nurses and respiratory therapists. And while they’re busy with testing, my role is to interpret and provide assistance with social services. My goal is to connect low income residents with the help they need to stay healthy and thrive.

The majority of the patients we see are from the Latino/Hispanic community. And I’ve learned over the years that Hispanic and Latino families can be pretty shy and often unwilling to ask for help.

When patients pull up, I greet them like family. In many cases, they are nervous so I roam from car to car to say hello in their own language (Spanish) and to interpret for our medical providers.

Thanks to rapid testing, the patient only has to wait 15 minutes for their results. That’s when I really go to work. I do my best to connect them with community resources that can help them with needs like food or housing.

**Tools for success**

For those patients who are screened as presumptive positive, you can truly sense their concern.

I try to reassure them that most cases are mild and that the majority of people are able to recover at home. I then explain that they will receive a follow-up call within 48 hours from one of our Spanish-speaking medical providers.

My goal is and will always be the same: I want to empower others with the tools they need to help themselves. ✨
Leveraging community partnerships as a path to health equity

These connections help provide the health services residents need, where and when they need it

When we made it our mission to distribute 450,000 cloth masks to local residents who needed them most, the Novant Health community engagement team turned to people they know well for help: our longtime community partners. From grassroots organizations to local governments, houses of worship to universities, over 100 of our community partners stepped up — partnering with community engagement on mask distribution and providing COVID-19 education in multiple languages.

It’s an example of how our community engagement team cultivates local partnerships to bring better health to all.

“At Novant Health, the care of all people is our business and our promise,” said Jerome Williams Jr., MD, Novant Health senior vice president of consumer engagement.

“Pre-COVID-19 and throughout the pandemic, we’ve engaged in many partnerships at Novant Health to address deep and complex social factors that have long influenced health and wellness in our communities. These inequities affect healthcare outcomes. It’s really about connecting deeply with our communities, so healthcare, information and education can be delivered.”

Addressing food insecurity. ONE Charlotte Health Alliance — formed by Novant Health and Atrium Health in partnership with the Mecklenburg County Public Health Department — partnered with Loaves & Fishes to launch two mobile food pharmacies in January. When the pandemic hit, these food pharmacies served several hundred families who received prepackaged food boxes.

Bringing COVID-19-specific help to our communities. We opened respiratory assessment centers at our clinics and mobile screening sites to bring critical services to underserved areas. This included a collaboration with Winston-Salem State University’s mobile health clinic, which brought services to Novant Health Waughtown Pediatrics; a collaboration with the city of Winston-Salem and Boston-Thurmond United to bring testing to a historically underserved area of Winston-Salem; and deployment of mobile units to provide testing in east and west Charlotte.

Developing leaders. Novant Health launched a program in 2018 called the H: Drive Experience. It targets high-potential, younger leaders who may not have access to leadership development opportunities in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. Our second cohort graduated in June 2020. H: Drive includes shared group experiences designed to enhance participants’ effectiveness to lead and address issues around race and ethnicity, economic opportunity, inclusion and equity.

Investing in small businesses. In 2020, we expanded our Diverse Supplier Reinvestment Program partnership with M&F Bank to offer low-interest loans to Novant Health-certified and diverse-owned suppliers facing challenges due to the pandemic. Also, in Winston-Salem, Novant Health made a $100,000 commitment to support the Minority Business Enterprise grant fund, focused on improving business success for minority-owned businesses.
Racial justice: Our support for social equality
We are Novant Health.

We exist to save lives, all lives.

We believe Black lives matter.

In the midst of a pandemic, the epidemic of racism has once again shaken us all.

We call for empathy, compassion and zero tolerance of racism from all.

We heal bodies every day.

But we know only through social justice can we heal the soul of our community.

Because if society isn’t healthy, no one is healthy.

Building an inclusive workplace is good for our business and our communities

Consulting can help boost team engagement, patient satisfaction and other outcomes

“That nurse looks too young to help me. I prefer doctors who speak English. I don’t want a caregiver who is Asian — they might have the virus. Why does your organization support Black lives matter?”

When a patient expresses wishes for different caregivers or questions the organization’s stance on race, it’s critical to acknowledge the lingering effects of such comments on team members. These comments can make a workplace feel less inclusive, less safe and less welcoming.

That’s where the Novant Health office of diversity, inclusion and equity consulting team can help. The team — which consults with work groups both inside our organization and at other companies — facilitates sessions where people are encouraged to engage in authentic and courageous dialogue with each other to increase their understanding of experiences and cultural perspectives of others. Various methods are used, including videos, role-playing, as well as one-on-one and small group engagement.

The twin challenges of COVID-19 and racial injustice in 2020 moved the importance of this diversity, inclusion and equity consulting work to the forefront, according to Rich Robles, senior director for diversity and inclusion at Novant Health. Inside these sessions, facilitators foster a safe, confidential environment where groups can discuss topics such as systemic racism, religious differences, cultural customs and more.

Continued
These, of course, are the very topics many employees and employers today are not comfortable discussing. “These conversations may be uncomfortable. And that is normal,” said Robles. “It’s important to build a culture where these conversations are part of the DNA of a workplace and take place in an open and safe environment.”

‘Help people feel like they belong’
When one of our support services team members at a hospital observed an uncomfortable exchange between a team member and a patient, the team’s leadership reached out for consulting. Before starting the work, Robles said leaders had to think about what they wanted to accomplish through the consultation. The summary of key outcomes — including talking more openly about diversity and inclusion related topics, being more respectful to each other, listening and seeking to understand others’ perspectives — shaped the work that followed.

Leaders — both inside and outside Novant Health — who pursue diversity and inclusion consulting all share certain priorities, Robles said.

“They are looking out for their people: ‘How can we help people feel like they belong and feel valued here?’ We look at what the opportunities are to create an inclusive environment and provide you ways to get there.”
Team members talk it out in virtual forums in 2020

How does an organization start the conversation about inequities and a long legacy of racism in our communities? By diving right in.

That’s the approach here at Novant Health and Novant Health UVA Health System. In 2020, the health system took a stand against systemic racism and any other form of social injustices. We created Zoom chats for team members to have a safe and open space to share their feelings and thoughts about topics related to diversity, inclusion and equity and the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. In collaboration with work-life counselors with the employee assistance program, business resource group members, the spiritual care team and others, our office of diversity, inclusion and equity facilitated courageous conversations among team members throughout our entire footprint.

Al Pilong, senior vice president and CEO at Novant Health UVA Health System, drew inspiration from Novant Health’s “Healing the souls of our community” series and launched the health system’s own virtual “Listening to understand” courageous conversations.

“Our team really appreciated that we engaged in dialogue about the events and social injustice in a nonjudgmental manner,” said Karyn O’Brien-Flannagan, the health system’s diversity and inclusion leader and senior director of behavioral health.

“People who lived in this area their entire life were shocked their fellow colleagues who they work alongside with and people they knew encountered racial injustices locally,” she said.

Continued
Talking about race, courageously

O’Brien-Flannagan shared her own story during Novant Health’s first conversation, describing her experiences as a white woman married to a Black man profiled by police while driving in their neighborhood. She also shared insights as the parent of biracial twins: “There is a lot of unconscious bias and negative assumptions that get projected onto my son who has more physical African American characteristics, such as slightly browner skin and hair texture and looks more African American, than his twin brother.”

During the discussion, a Black team member acknowledged that while these conversations across racial lines are difficult, they are critical for healing: “I almost feel unseen and uncared for when people are having these conversations and not acknowledging that this is a very difficult time (for some).” Another team member, a leader with the Asian business resource group at Novant Health, shared that while the incidents of social injustices in 2020 weren’t new, “for the first time, I have come to realize how this impacts people’s lives, and how this is real.”

Creating a three-part teaching video series for team members was the result of a personal courageous conversation that Jamekisa “Jay” Flowers and Lukas Young, team members at Novant Health Huntersville Medical Center, shared. In the opening video, Young acknowledges how intimidating it is to talk about race issues at work.

“I’m white, you’re Black,” Young said. “Are you sure you want to talk about this?”

Flowers nodded her approval, ready to dive in: “Let’s try.”

The dialogue continues in Brunswick

Having courageous conversations isn’t only about a group coming together to solve a problem, plan a solution or get something done. It’s about authentic listening, too.

“Dialogue is the opportunity to have collective thinking, learning and interaction while exploring a particular topic — without being driven by a need to have an outcome,” said Tanya Blackmon, executive vice president and chief diversity, inclusion and equity officer, while co-hosting a “Healing the soul of our communities” Zoom chat forum for Novant Health Brunswick Medical Center with President Shelbourn Stevens.

This Zoom chat was facilitated to give team members a safe space to talk about their feelings related to recent events, including the deaths of George Floyd and other African Americans, the protests that followed and the lingering impact of COVID-19.

Team members came away from the discussion feeling reflective, optimistic and inspired — words and phrases they shared following the discussion.

Here are some of the other thoughts and ideas shared by team members during the forum.

“Thank you for the opportunity to hear the conversation and to know that it is an ongoing one that will produce the healing we are all striving for.”

“Thank you for doing this and for providing support options to those who may need it.”

“I love where I work. Thank you so much for this. We need this kind of compassion in this world.”
Resiliency program reaches team members during vulnerable times

Ensuring team members feel supported, renewed and reenergized — particularly during challenging times at work — is a top priority for members of the Novant Health spiritual care team. In 2020, with the pandemic weighing heavily on team members, patients and communities, our spiritual care team members adapted their work to the circumstances. Simply put, they came up with new ways to do what they do best.

Being flexible, they put a virtual spin on Code Lavender, our resiliency program that helps team members during their most vulnerable times at work. Typically, a Code Lavender event happens in person, where a team gathers to reflect on a challenging event at work, such as the death of a longtime patient on a unit or death of a fellow team member.

COVID-19 brought its own set of emotional challenges, as well as social distancing requirements that ended group gatherings. That’s why the spiritual care team conducted frequent, virtual sessions of Code Lavender. These featured a centering moment, closing blessing and questions that encouraged thoughts of gratitude, such as reflecting on what the coronavirus did not take away from you.

For the chaplains, it was all about making sure the team felt heard, safe and cared for, said Rebekah Ramsey, manager of chaplaincy services for Novant Health’s greater Charlotte market. Ramsey developed a team of professional chaplains who led and coordinated spiritual care responses across the Novant Health footprint during the pandemic.

It’s important to acknowledge the need for support, and this became particularly important during the pandemic, Ramsey said. “When a charge nurse who is a strong and independent person leading the team pulls us aside and has a vulnerable moment, that’s real. We wanted to make sure people had a safe space.”

When different medical groups shared with Ramsey that they missed the snacks, teas and diffusers that came with the group sessions, the spiritual team created goody bags.

The idea was to thank team members for all the work they were doing on the front lines of the pandemic, Ramsey said. It was also about providing a much-needed lift to the spirits. Nestled in the bags was an inspirational quote:

Things turn out the best for the people who make the best out of the way things turn out.
Ebony Parson, MD, and Sadhana Char, MD, brought the White Coats for Black Lives national campaign to Novant Health on Juneteenth to show our support for social justice.

This campaign works to dismantle racism in medicine and promote the health, well-being and self-determination of Black and Indigenous people as well as other people of color.
Our team members

Thank you for your service!
Taking care of those who give us hope

Financial struggles became a new reality for some team members when the pandemic hit. That’s why Novant Health set up the $11 million Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund. By mid-November, more than $8.89 million of funding had helped 10,059 team members. The fund included personal donations from every member of our executive team along with donations from team members, community residents and other companies.

One of those recipients was Danielle Burnside, RN, who works in Novant Health Forsyth Medical Center’s cardiac pre/post-procedure unit — one of a handful of units where patients with COVID-19 receive care. Here she shares her experience on the front lines of the pandemic and how the fund helped her focus on what mattered most to her — taking care of her patients and family.

**What is it like to work on a COVID-19 unit?**
It’s hard because a lot of these patients are afraid and without their families. You must be extra empathetic and spend more time talking to them because they are so alone. These patients are also very unstable and can turn quickly, so they require extra monitoring.

This situation has brought my team together. I’m really blessed to work with the people I do. Everyone is so positive, resilient and supportive of each other, including my manager.

**What has been the hardest part of this experience?**
I worry about bringing COVID-19 home to my family. I’m a single mom of twin girls, who are 7. The girls know when mommy gets home from work, they can’t go near me until I shower and sanitize everything.

It’s tough to balance homeschooling my kids and having a full-time job. I schedule myself on the weekends and one day during the week. My kids go to a crisis day care center opened for medical professionals, firefighters and police officers.

There’s also a lot of isolation with nurses where family members don’t want to be around them because they’re afraid of catching coronavirus. Fortunately, my mom, who lives with me, is a nurse and understands. Nursing isn’t just a job — it’s a lifestyle. In a way, it’s who you are. I really enjoy caring for others and being there for them on their worst day.

**How has the Novant Health team supported you through this?**
Because the census was low, my unit was closed for about a week and a half. I was worried about making my rent payment without my full paycheck. Receiving support from the Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund was incredibly helpful. It means a lot to me to work for a company that cares about its employees and does what they can to support those who need help due to loss of hours.
Help in the time of need

Following is the June 8 blog from Carl’s Corner, written by Novant Health President and CEO Carl S. Armato.

We believe that we must be world-class at taking care of our team members so that we can be world-class at taking care of our patients and the communities we serve. It’s who we are, and it’s the essence of our people credo.

It’s that belief that drives why we created the Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund, which is administered by the Novant Health Foundation. As the pandemic took hold in our communities, many of our team members were faced with new financial challenges.

A husband shouldn’t lose sleep at night worried how his family will pay bills while his wife waits for her unemployment to be approved. A grandmother who’s beaten cancer shouldn’t have to worry about possibly being exposed to the coronavirus when her daughter returns home from working the night shift at the hospital.

We believe that our team members deserve more. That’s why Novant Health launched this fund and dedicated $11 million to help our team members in need. During the first 72 hours, we received over 1,200 requests from team members requesting more than $1 million.

That help has taken many forms: housing, child care, groceries, utilities, transportation. For Latazia Harris, it paid for a hotel room. Harris, a critical care nurse at Novant Health Forsyth Medical Center, knew she couldn’t expose her family to COVID-19. Her son, Josiah, has a tracheostomy and is prone to respiratory issues.

“It was a huge burden to think about what I was going to do when I got home. This is my job — to take care of people — and especially during a pandemic, you can’t run from that. You have to face it head on,” Harris said. “But if I have to be at work and be worried and then go home and be worried, it’s not conducive to (peace of mind for) anybody involved.”

We heard Latazia’s concerns and responded. She received money to book a hotel room to avoid putting her son at risk. The funds allowed her to do her job without worrying about what she could be passing along to her family.

Through our Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund, we continue to provide financial assistance to team members in need, empowering them to continue doing their jobs with focus and peace of mind. ◆

How team members have used the funds

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Thriving Together and other team member support initiatives

**Emotional wellness**
- Led virtual sessions of Code Lavender and conducted virtual sessions on mindfulness, meditation and stress reduction
- Provided six months’ free access to the Ten Percent Happier app, which supports well-being through simple meditations

**Human connection**
- Started Novant Health Cares for You, providing meals and comfort baskets for team members recovering from COVID-19
- Launched support groups for team members who tested positive for COVID-19 and their loved ones
- Created an emotional health advocate training program for team members to support their immediate teammates

**Physical health**
- Distributed resources and tips for staying healthy during a pandemic, including healthy eating strategies, exercise challenges and daily virtual workouts via Zoom
- Delivered food for team members at testing sites and hospitals

**Financial and community resources**
- Initiated a partnership with Care.com to give eligible team members access to child, elder and pet care professionals at greatly discounted rates
- Provided free child care for essential team members at select YMCAs in the greater Charlotte and greater Winston-Salem markets, and summer child care financial assistance for team members unable to use the YMCA offering
- Launched financial assistance program for fall season child care assistance for essential team members with low to moderate income and high-risk children
- Provided lodging and transportation for front-line team members with at-risk dependents at home
- Created the Hope for Remarkable Team Aubergine Fund to provide assistance for team members who are experiencing financial hardships related to COVID-19
- Established the flexible PTO bank; team members meeting specific criteria may go into a negative balance of up to 80 hours of PTO after their existing PTO is exhausted
Members of our business resource groups (BRGs) show higher engagement scores on our systemwide survey. On a scale of 1 to 5, BRG members scored 4.38, compared to 4.22 for all team members. The national average was 4.1.

**Business resource groups: Our work during COVID-19**

- Provided meals for 65 nursing leaders
- Provided input into coronavirus race issues
- Held a Haiku contest
- Identified the need for patients and team members to have masks that allow them to read lips
- Worked with digital and product services to provide Zoom closed captioning
- Hosted the first virtual Code Lavender session for BRG leaders and diversity and inclusion facilitators
- Wrote article about honoring all spiritual traditions during COVID-19 crisis
- BRG member presented webinar on “How to protect you and your workers from COVID-19”
- Presented webinar to increase awareness of health disparities in the LGBTQ community
- Translated educational documents, videos, website and call center for COVID-19 patients
- Helped reschedule mammography screenings
- Presented the impact of COVID-19 on our Latino/Hispanic community
- Provided list of ideas for activities/hobbies during quarantine
- Presented webinar “Dollars and Sense: A Conversation on Economic Empowerment and Equity”
- Worked with marketing to celebrate Memorial Day with veterans
- Hosted how to be resilient and connected during a pandemic
- Hosted two Zoom Basics session open to team members and their families to offer education across multiple generations
- Presented the role of sleep in your overall well-being
- Co-sponsored “The Secret Ingredients of Career Success - Part 2” webinar
- Co-hosted a domestic violence panel
- Co-presented “Race Matters” to help people be more comfortable when having race conversations
- Prepared seminar on the impact of COVID-19 on Native Americans
- Co-sponsored seminar on domestic violence awareness
Organizational recognition and awards

Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion through the Disability Equality Index by Disability:IN (2020)

The Best Employers for Women by Forbes (2020)

The Best Employers for Diversity by Forbes (2018-2020)

Leaders in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality through the Healthcare Equality Index by the Human Rights Campaign (2017-2020)


Recognitions by the Association of ERGs and Councils:
- 7 BRGs have received Top 25 ERG Category (2016-2020)
- Health Equity Council received Top 10 Diversity Action Award (2020)
- Cross Cultural Communications Program received Top 10 Diversity Action Award (2020)

Mechanics and Farmers Bank Founders Award — for principles that include diversity (2015)

Best Overall Project by the Disparities Leadership Program faculty (2017)

CMS Inaugural Award for Health Equity (2017)

Board of Trustees awarded NACD NXT, No. 1 Diversity Innovator in America (2019)

Supplier Diversity Excellence Award from Vizient (2019)

North Carolina Vet Biz Corporate Supporter Award (2019)

Our path forward