

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Healthcare leaders join forces to reduce health disparities by 2024

Hagerstown, Md. – Meritus Health today announced a new regional initiative aimed to address health disparities among minority aging populations. The Leaders in Equity and Diversity (LEAD) Collaborative will include health care organizations across seven states committed to sharing best practices and implementing bold solutions that reduce disparities by 2024. The initiative is supported by AARP and will begin in Fall 2022. Recruitment is currently underway in Washington, D.C., Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

Maulik Joshi, President and CEO of Meritus Health states, “This convening and subsequent collaborative launch is only about producing meaningful results. We are grateful for AARP’s vision in ensuring the all means all in health care equity.”

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a glaring spotlight on the structural inequities and underlying challenges that impact people’s ability to live longer, healthier and more prosperous lives. Older adults, communities of color and residents living in rural and remote areas were disproportionately impacted with higher rates of infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

Now is the time to create and implement bold solutions and innovative interventions to address health disparities. If we do nothing, according to AARP Research, the annual economic cost to the U.S. GDP caused by racial disparities in life expectancy alone is expected to reach \$1.6 trillion in 2030 and could result in an annual loss of \$1.1 trillion in total consumer spending.

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Coupled with this backdrop and the desire to accelerate change through meaningful action, each member of the LEAD Collaborative will commit to setting measurable goals in at least one of three key areas: reduce health disparities in the community; address social determinants of health; and increase diversity in their organization's leadership. Organizations will share progress on their efforts and learn practices from other collaborative members.

“Every individual deserves equal opportunities in life, yet longstanding societal barriers contribute to poorer health – and in some cases, shorter life expectancy – for far too many Americans,” said Jean Accius, Senior Vice President of Global Thought Leadership at AARP. “Closing health disparities requires an unprecedented level of collaboration at the community level with innovative leaders from a range of sectors.”

For more information about the LEAD Collaborative or to join, please email Ethan Feldmiller at ethan.feldmiller@meritushealth.com.

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Meritus Health, western Maryland's largest health care provider, is located at the crossroads of western Maryland, southern Pennsylvania and the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. With over 3,000 employees, 500 medical staff members and 250 volunteers, Meritus Health serves over 200,000 residents of the tristate region. Meritus Medical Center has 327 beds and Meritus Medical group has over 160 providers. *More information can be found at www.MeritusHealth.com or visit our [Facebook page](#) or [LinkedIn page](#).*