

DEIA in Public Health

Impacts of federal actions on the work
of APHA members and Affiliates



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AN INITIATIVE OF THE
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We sought to learn more about how federal restrictions on DEIA are impacting the work of APHA members and Affiliates. Here we share a point in time snapshot of what we learned in the summer of 2025.

Research consistently demonstrates that diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) policies and practices create meaningful benefits for individuals, organizations and communities ([Rosa, J. M. \(2025\)](#)). Yet, despite this evidence, shifting policies and political sentiment have increasingly challenged the value and sustainability of these efforts. When combined with longstanding structural inequities and persistent underinvestment, these factors have made it more difficult for APHA members and Affiliates (state and regional public health associations) to carry forward their vital and impactful DEIA work. At the same time, this environment highlights the importance of resilience, collaboration and innovative strategies to ensure continued progress.

In June 2025, over 500 APHA members and Affiliate leaders participated in listening sessions and a survey which sought to understand the status of their DEIA work, what support they need and ways APHA can fill those needs.

For more information visit [APHA.org/DEIA](https://www.apha.org/DEIA)



Key Findings

Key themes that emerged from the data collection include:

- Members are feeling a sense of uncertainty, destabilization, distress and doom for many reasons including impacts on DEIA work and their own job security, having to conceal identities that might be under particular scrutiny and the impacts these changes are having and will have on structural inequities
- Many participants' organizations are continuing DEIA work in some form
- Funding cuts and pressure from federal, state and local governments have limited the ability of many people and organizations to continue DEIA work and altogether terminated some programs

50%

of respondents said their organization's *overall* and *public* support for DEIA has gone down over the last six months.

8 in 10

of respondents said their organization remains committed to improving the health of marginalized communities.

Top 4 pressures making DEIA work harder

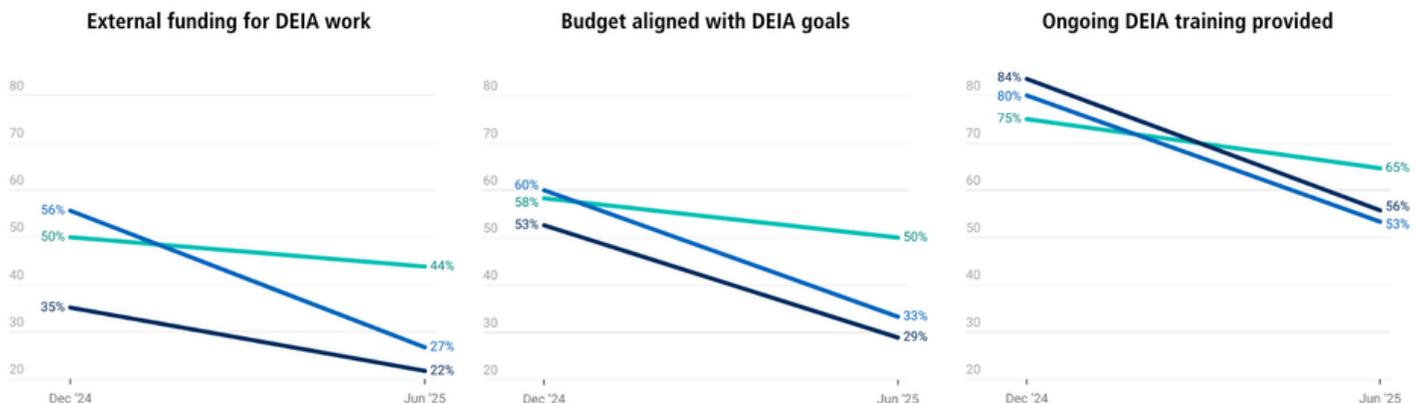


BRIGHT SPOT

94% of nonprofit respondents say they remain committed to improving the health of marginalized communities – along with 78% in universities and 73% in health departments.

Health departments and universities report the largest decline in DEIA support

Health dept./agency Nonprofit/association University/academia



Promising Practices

Our members and Affiliates shared key strategies that have helped to protect and sustain their work, as well as effective pivots that they are implementing given the current environment.

Embedding anti-racism & equity into institutional structures and organizations

Members and Affiliates who reported that their DEIA work is continuing and, in some cases, expanding or deepening, all acknowledged the importance of embedding equity and inclusive policies and practices into their work. Strategies cited for embedding DEIA principles are described below.

Finance and Funding Strategies

- Investing in internal learning opportunities and structural changes to embed equity more sustainably
- Expanding emphasis on flexible funding streams and developing partnerships that are less vulnerable to political interference

Organizational Structure

- Adopting and implementing declarations of racism as a public health crisis to build structure and internal capacity to do DEIA work
- Distributing DEIA responsibilities more broadly across departments and leadership

Embedding anti-racism & equity into institutional structures and organizations (cont'd)

Equity-Centered Leadership and Culture

- Fully integrating equity into the mission, governance and culture
- Reinforcing shared learning and accountability across leadership and staff
- Framing DEIA as a lens for all operations rather than a stand-alone initiative
- Prioritizing inclusive community engagement strategies
- Shifting the “DEIA” acronym to include belonging, making it “DEIAB” to signal deepened commitment taking DEIA one step further

Strategic Planning and Staff Accountability

- Weaving equity principles into the strategic plan
- Including equity metrics in staff evaluation so that staff and activities are evaluated through an equity lens
- Staff seeing themselves as key players so their commitment to equity remains even if funding or positions eliminated
- Using legal epidemiology to show the value of equity on public health outcomes
- Hosting regular networking events to combat collective fatigue

Prioritizing and pivoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility work given the current threats

We heard from many people who had made strategic shifts in their DEIA work in response to the current administration. While some folks discussed the need to make shifts in order to continue the work, we also heard from many people who did not yet feel the pressure to make those shifts.

Key themes included:

- Avoiding complying in advance
- Moving from compliance-driven approaches to values-driven work
- Renewing focus on embedding equity principles more informally through internal policies, staff training, or program design
- Focusing on advocacy and storytelling to turn collective frustration into actionable public health education
- Rebuilding with a newly diversified board and engaging partners on the margins of public health
- Prioritizing small, strategic actions such as modifying hiring practices, integrating equity into program evaluations and fostering community partnerships
- Finding alternative ways to center equity, including informal or extracurricular activities

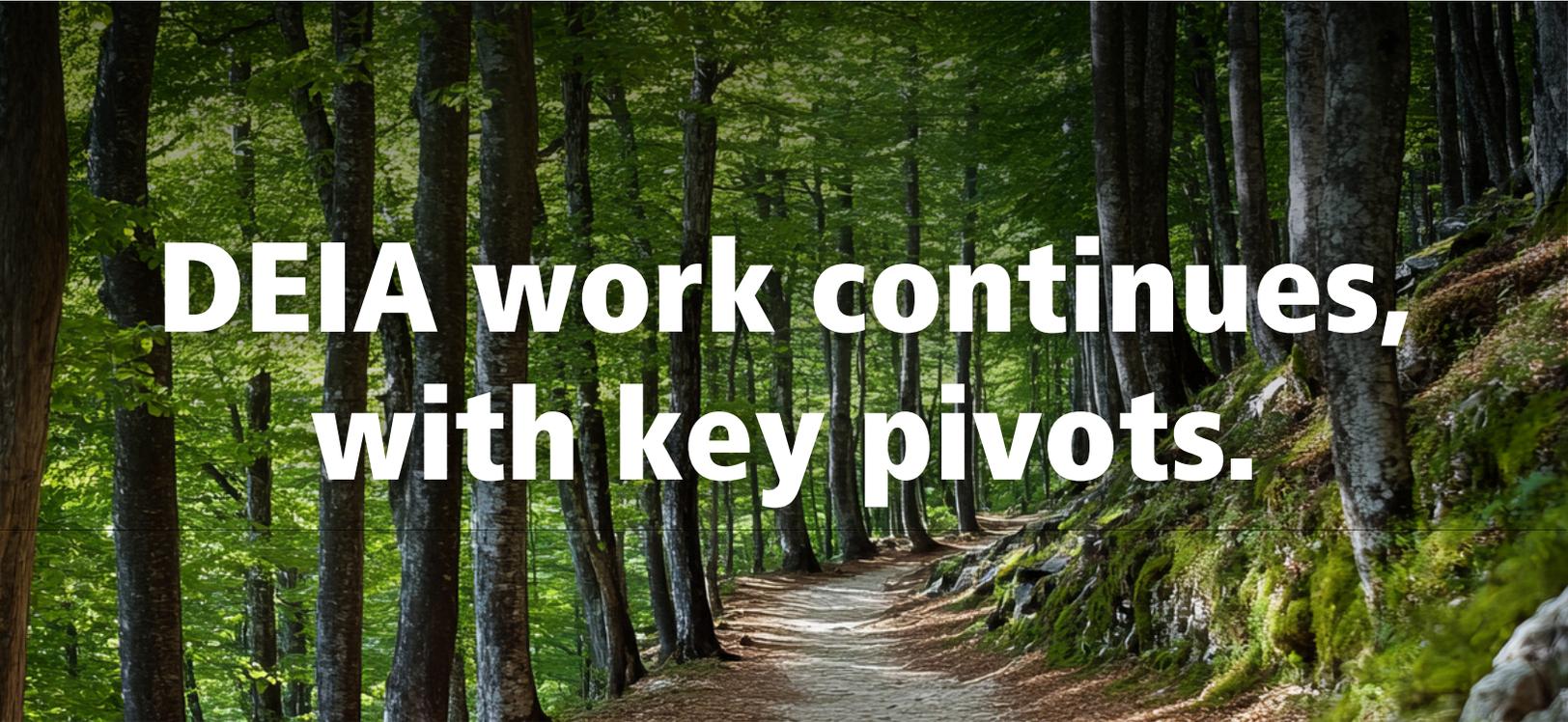
Alternative framing

- Using universal messaging strategies that emphasize community health benefits and shared values like dignity
- Using the framing of prevention
- Relying on data to drive decisions rather than fear
- Including other identities besides race when discussing equity

Prioritizing and pivoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility work given the current threats (cont'd)

Partnerships

- Forming partnerships beyond traditional public health, such as with grassroots and legal advocacy organizations, to enhance the reach and sustainability of equity efforts.
- Leaning into peer support, community networks and solidarity spaces in response to growing burnout and isolation. These spaces allow for mutual care, strategy sharing and moral reinforcement — helping individuals stay grounded and committed despite mounting pressures.



**DEIA work continues,
with key pivots.**

The listening sessions and survey yielded valuable insights and recommendations from APHA members and Affiliates. While each individual and organization shared their unique context, we hope this report sheds light on the ways DEIA work is continuing. If you are interested in more information please reach out to PHPolicyCenter@APHA.org or visit [APHA.org/DEIA](https://www.apha.org/DEIA).