

## Eradicate health disparities

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The editorial calling for the elimination of health disparities is timely and important. We, too, are appalled that people receive substandard care as a consequence of their race or economic status.

Yet, as the Times noted, there is ample evidence that this problem persists and we must take action to address it. Difficult as that will be, however, we must do more.

We will see only a limited reduction in health disparities if we focus on the health care system alone. This is because the conditions in which people live make them vulnerable to poor health long before they interact with the health care system.

Studies have shown that economically disadvantaged populations are increasingly concentrated in neighborhoods where stores specializing in alcohol, tobacco and fast foods outnumber grocery stores, recreational opportunities are limited, and residents are exposed to high levels of pollution and violence.

People cannot be healthy in unhealthy conditions. To eliminate health disparities we must address the policies that foster these environments. This is why a collaboration of public health leaders created the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative to address the social determinants of health.

To start, the initiative is working to make health a priority in land use and transportation decisions in the region. But this is just the beginning. We must all demand that health considerations become a priority in decision-making concerning education,

housing and economic development.

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