

# **Novartis pledges 10-year commitment with Morehouse School of Medicine, 26 Historically Black Colleges, Universities, Medical Schools and other leading organizations to co-create effective, measurable solutions for health equity**

Jul 20, 2021

- Novartis and the Novartis US Foundation to join forces with Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Morehouse School of Medicine, 26 other Historically Black Colleges, Universities and Medical Schools and others to address root causes of disparities in health and education
- This collaboration will create actionable solutions to target the systemic racism that drives inequitable health outcomes and work together for health equity progress through greater diversity, equity and inclusion across the research and development ecosystem
- Novartis US Foundation plans to invest approximately \$13.7 million to establish three digitally enabled research centers at Morehouse School of Medicine, including a clinical trial center of excellence that could be a model for possible expansion to other HBCU medical schools, to increase diversity among clinical trial investigators and participants
- Novartis US Foundation also plans to invest \$20 million to help prepare up to 1,200 Black and African American students to become the next generation of leaders in health, science, technology and business in collaboration with Thurgood Marshall College Fund

**EAST HANOVER, N.J., July 20, 2021** - Novartis and the Novartis US Foundation today announced a planned 10-year collaboration with Coursera, the National Medical Association, Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Morehouse School of Medicine and 26 additional Historically Black Colleges, Universities and Medical Schools (HBCUs) to co-create programs that address the root causes of systemic disparities in health outcomes and create greater diversity, equity and inclusion across the research and development ecosystem.

Leaders from these companies, organizations, and learning institutions have signed a pledge to co-develop programs focused on building trust in the health care system with communities of color and making measurable progress towards health equity. Working together with the communities they aim to impact, the collaboration will focus on improving access to high-quality education, technology, improved health outcomes, and promising jobs; increasing clinical trial and clinical trial investigator diversity; addressing inherent bias in the data standards used to diagnose and treat disease; and finding actionable solutions to environmental and climate issues that disproportionately affect health among communities of color.

"At Novartis, we envision a world with equity in health for all. Just as there are a multitude of factors and causes behind racial disparities in health and education, there is no single solution to this critical challenge. It will take the concerted, urgent action of diverse stakeholders across the public and private sectors," said Vas Narasimhan, MD, CEO of Novartis. "We are honored and humbled to work together with these organizations to build enduring solutions to some of the most pressing, deeply rooted, and historic challenges in the United States, and we invite other like-minded companies and organizations to join us in creating this paradigm shift

in health equity."

Over an initial period of ten years, the collaboration will focus on four key areas:

1. Enable the next generation of Black and African American leaders by creating equitable access to high quality education and professional development for future leaders, in health science, technology and business-related fields.
2. Support the establishment of Digitally Enabled Clinical Trial Centers of Excellence, managed and led by clinical researchers of color, to build trust, increase diversity and inclusivity in clinical trials, and contribute to improved health outcomes for people of color.
3. Research and validate existing data standards that drive diagnosis, clinical trial endpoints and population health policy to identify areas for increased inclusivity and ensure accurate data collection and unbiased treatment decisions.
4. Establish Digitally Enabled Research Centers on the impact of the environment and climate change on health to identify solutions to environmental and climate issues that disproportionately affect communities of color.

All parties will spend the next six months co-creating programs with the communities, including establishing the first clinical trial, data standards, and environment, climate and health research centers at Morehouse School of Medicine. Each organization will bring its own expertise and resources to design and implement enduring solutions in these areas.

"Health equity is not only accessible healthcare for patients, but developing educational and professional opportunities to create a diverse pipeline of educators, clinicians and other professionals, as well as ensuring all are included in clinical studies," said Valerie Montgomery Rice, MD, President and CEO, Morehouse School of Medicine. "This is a first of its kind collaboration and Morehouse School of Medicine is excited to work with Novartis and this coalition of medical schools, colleges, universities and other leading companies and organizations to create centers of excellence for clinical trials, data standards research, and environment and health research. We know that real change starts here, when work is done to make a significant impact on representation and inclusion."

Health disparities affecting minority groups are endemic in the US, most recently demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic by the disproportionate rates of hospitalization and death in minority groups.<sup>1</sup> Compared with non-Hispanic whites, the Black and African American community has a lower life expectancy, a higher mortality rate from cancer, a greater likelihood of diseases such as asthma, and significantly increased rates of maternal and infant mortality.<sup>2</sup> Some of these health disparities are further exacerbated by increased exposure to negative environmental factors such as air pollution, excessive heat, and poorer water quality in communities of color.<sup>3</sup>

Health inequity extends to Black and African American underrepresentation across medical systems – not just among clinical trial participants but also among medical school students, physicians, and clinical trial investigators. In 2019, Black and African Americans comprised 13.4% of the US population but only 6.2% of medical school graduates, 5% of practicing physicians, and an even smaller proportion of clinical trial investigators.<sup>4</sup>

"Black and African American people endured education and health disparities in the United States long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their exclusion from the research and development ecosystem has resulted in mistrust and a delayed uptake of life-saving innovative medicines and effective care models, further exacerbating racial disparities in care and outcomes," said Patrice Matchaba, MD, President of the Novartis US Foundation. "We are proud to come together to take our direction from Black and African American

community members and other minority groups on programs that will help achieve sustained change."

Enabling the next generation of Black and African American leaders

As an initial step, the Novartis US Foundation plans to invest \$20 million in scholarships, mentorships and research grants over the next 10 years to help create equitable access to high quality education and professional development for HBCU students in health-related fields.

Administered by Thurgood Marshall College Fund, the program will train and prepare up to 1,200 students:

- Scholarships: Three-year scholarships of \$10,000 a year for up to 360 students at select Historically Black Colleges, Universities and Medical Schools
- Mentorships: Novartis employee volunteers will mentor up to 400 HBCU students, including the scholarship recipients, for a period of three years each, for a total of up to 1,200 students. Students also will receive career readiness and leadership development training
- Internships: HBCU undergraduate and medical school students will be encouraged and supported to apply for the Novartis annual internship program
- Research grants: Competitive faculty research grant program offering up to ten grants of \$25,000 each year to HBCU faculty, focusing on actionable solutions to health equity issues

"We are pleased to work with Novartis to answer the calls for urgent action to address the role that systemic racism plays in health disparities among Black people," said Harry L. Williams, EdD, President and CEO, Thurgood Marshall College Fund. "This kind of investment in HBCUs is critical to ensuring that Black students have opportunities to pursue influential roles in health, science and technology by eliminating barriers and creating pathways through mentorship and training."

### **Participating Companies and Organizations**

Novartis	Novartis US Foundation
Thurgood Marshall College Fund	Coursera
National Medical Association	

### **Participating HBCUs and Medical Schools**

Alabama A&M University	Meharry Medical College
Bowie State University	Morehouse School of Medicine
Charles R Drew University of Medicine and Science	Morehouse College
Clark Atlanta University	Morgan State University
Delaware State University	North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University
Dillard University	Prairie View A&M University

## Participating HBCUs and Medical Schools

Southern University and A&M College

Florida A&M University

Spelman College

Hampton University

Tennessee State University

Howard University College of Medicine

Texas Southern University

Howard University

Tuskegee University

Jackson State University

University of Maryland Eastern Shore

LeMoyne Owen College

Xavier University of Louisiana

Lincoln University in Pennsylvania

## Novartis commitment to diversity in clinical trials

Diversity in clinical trials is integral to who we are at Novartis. Our purpose is to reimagine medicine to improve and extend the lives of all people – inclusive of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, location and socioeconomic status. Diverse, inclusive trials are critical to ensuring that we understand how those patients who are most likely to be treated for a disease or condition will respond to a medicine. Novartis is taking a proactive, science-driven approach to address barriers to clinical trial participation, such as identifying sites where diverse patients with a particular disease or condition may be located, identifying healthcare providers who treat underserved or underrepresented populations, and collaborating with researchers to address the goals of enrolling a diverse population in a clinical trial. To learn more about our Commitment to Diversity in Clinical Trials, please visit

<https://www.novartis.com/sites/www.novartis.com/files/commitment-for-diversity-in-clinical-trials.pdf>.

## About Novartis

Located in East Hanover, NJ Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation – an affiliate of Novartis – is reimagining medicine to improve and extend people's lives. As a leading global medicines company, we use innovative science and digital technologies to create transformative treatments in areas of great medical need. In our quest to find new medicines, we consistently rank among the world's top companies investing in research and development. Novartis employs nearly 16,000 people in the United States. For more information, please visit <https://www.novartis.us>.

## About the Novartis US Foundation

The Novartis US Foundation is a charitable organization established by Novartis to support philanthropic efforts in the United States. The mission of the Novartis US Foundation is to improve health in underserved communities in the US by creating innovative and sustainable solutions to expand access to healthcare and build trust within the healthcare system. We do this by supporting sustainable programs and partnerships that

strengthen health systems, eliminate barriers to quality health services, and enhance local communities.

Novartis and Novartis US is on Twitter. Sign up to follow @Novartis at <https://twitter.com/novartisnews> and @NovartisUS at <https://twitter.com/NovartisUS>.

For Novartis multimedia content, please visit <https://www.novartis.com/news/media-library>.

For questions about the site or required registration, please contact [media.relations@novartis.com](mailto:media.relations@novartis.com).

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