

PRESS RELEASE
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Aequitas Health Announces 2025-26 Grant and Award Recipients

Aequitas Health is pleased to announce the winners of its 2025-26 Chapter Project Grant, Fellow Project Grant, and Chapter Project of the Year Award, supporting innovative initiatives to advance health equity across the United States by medical students and local Aequitas Health chapters.

Chapter Project of the Year Award Winner:

Dr. Melissa Chen (Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University)

ICC Skin Equity Initiative

This award-winning project addresses dermatological health disparities through a radical "community-first" approach. The initiative was recognized for its innovative methodology of consulting local leaders and community partners before developing curriculum, ensuring the work is not just medically accurate but socially and culturally relevant. The project features strong partnerships with Mano a Mano (serving the immigrant community) and the North Chicago Think Tank, with a creative "safe harbor" format using home-accessible platforms like Facebook Live and podcast-style series to reach community members who may face barriers to leaving their homes.

Chapter Project Grant Winner:

Christian Henry (University of Arizona College of Medicine-Tucson)

COPE Medication Adherence Project - Medication Support Toolkit

This project received the highest score among all chapter submissions for its data-driven quality improvement approach addressing medication non-adherence within populations served by COPE Community Services in Southern Arizona. The initiative includes structured surveys to identify barriers such as transportation difficulties, financial constraints, and limited health literacy, followed by a concrete Medication Support Toolkit intervention featuring transportation assistance, bilingual medication explanation cards, pill sorting packets, and copay assistance. The project was also selected as a Chapter Project of the Year Award Finalist for its service to migrant and Indigenous populations, proven COPE partnership, and high scalability.

Fellow Project Grant Winner:

Javier Rincon (Larner College of Medicine, University of Vermont)

Menstrual Equity at Nuvance Health

This implementation-ready project addresses menstrual equity by providing free menstrual products in visitor and patient-facing bathrooms throughout the Nuvance Health system. The initiative was recognized for having already secured institutional permission for system-wide installation of menstrual pad dispensers in all women's bathrooms at the main hospital in Danbury, CT, as well as in outpatient community clinics. The project also aims to improve education on menstrual and reproductive health and reduce menstrual stigma, with a focus on low-income and minority populations.

Distinguished Chapter Project Grant Finalists:

Caroline Madigan (Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University) - ICC Vaccine/Screening Program Expansion

Aayush Gupta (Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University) - Chicago Street Medicine for Homeless Care

Hannah DeHoogh-Kliwer (University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine) - Winter Supply Drive for Midwest Street Medicine

Distinguished Fellow Project Grant Finalists:

Kayla Talebi (Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science) - Mini Medical School Take-Home Curriculum Expansion

Kristina Nguyen (Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University) - Chicago Street Medicine Chapter Development

Tommi Tsao & Aroosha Aamir (Chicago Medical School at Rosalind Franklin University) - Health Equity Course Community Member Research

Project summaries will be published in the Aequitas Health Journal, showcasing these innovative approaches to addressing healthcare disparities. *"These outstanding medical students represent the next generation of physician leaders in health equity,"* said Dr. Benson Hsu, President and Chair of Aequitas Health. *"What's particularly inspiring is how each project demonstrates a deep understanding of local community needs and creates sustainable solutions. From community-first approaches to dermatology education to addressing medication barriers for migrant and Indigenous populations to tackling period poverty in health systems, these future physicians are already making meaningful changes in their communities. Their work exemplifies how physician-leaders can be powerful catalysts for reducing health disparities at the local level while developing models that can be adapted nationwide."*

About Aequitas Health:

Aequitas Health is a national medical honor society founded in 2021 that recognizes and supports medical students dedicated to advancing health equity. Through its network of established chapters at medical schools across the United States, Aequitas Health works to foster future physician leaders committed to eliminating healthcare disparities and promoting equitable access to care.

The organization supports local chapter initiatives and individual fellow projects through grants, an annual virtual conference, and opportunities to publish in the Aequitas Health Journal. Chapters induct up to 10% of each graduating class, selecting fellows based on their demonstrated commitment to addressing health inequities while in medical school. Through mentorship, project funding, and a collaborative network of like-minded physicians-in-training, Aequitas Health works to build a healthcare workforce equipped to serve all members of society equitably.

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