

## Activating health equity: The vital role of Medical Affairs

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Health equity is the fair and just opportunity for everyone to fulfil their human potential in all aspects of health and wellbeing. Today, significant gaps in outcomes remain, including disparities in life expectancy within and across countries, lack of diversity in clinical trials, and over two million people globally with no access to essential medicines.<sup>i</sup> Achieving health equity requires life science and healthcare organisations to deliberately design and build systems that advance equity as a priority. Medical Affairs professionals are uniquely placed to lead and shape this agenda, by bringing insights into the organisation, galvanising medical leaders to address society's most pressing equity challenges, and shaping the wider ecosystem in which they operate. This blog presents the key takeaways from a roundtable Deloitte held with Medical Affairs experts discussing how their role in advancing health equity could evolve.

### Evolving Medical Affairs' role to advance health equity

Medical Affairs is a crucial – largely external facing – function within biopharma, consumer health, and MedTech that sits alongside Research and Development (R&D) and Commercial. They generate and communicate data that helps healthcare professionals (HCPs), payors, policymakers, and others make informed decisions that support the best use of products to benefit patients.<sup>ii</sup>

Consequently, they are uniquely placed to play a leading role in advancing health equity. Earlier this year we convened a roundtable with eight Medical Affairs experts from across the pharmaceutical and consumer health industry, where we discussed how Medical Affairs' responsibilities might evolve to advance health equity within their organisation, uncovering three important roles:

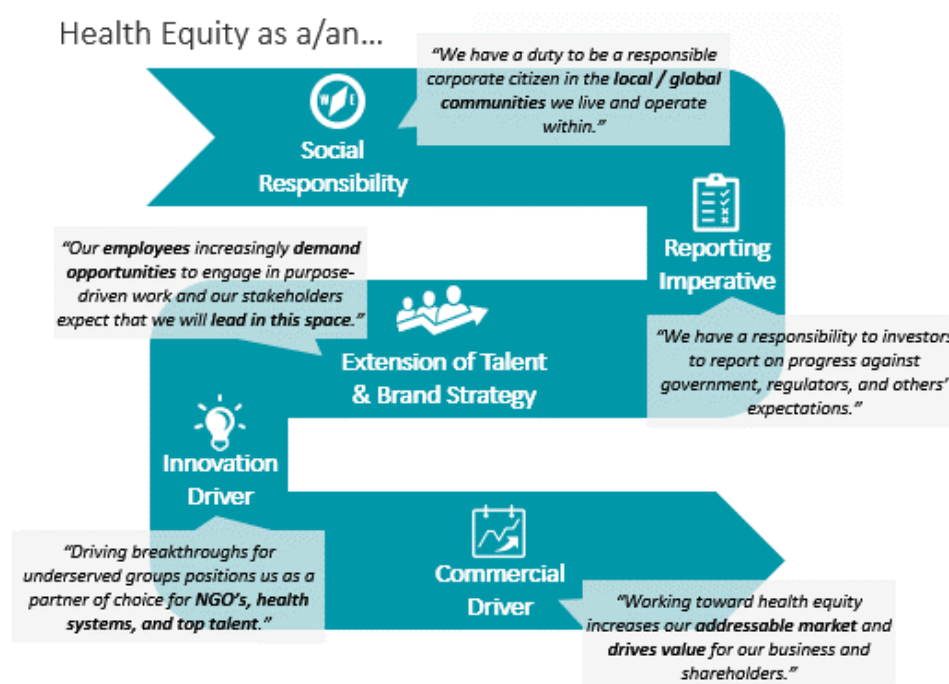
- **Catalyser**
- **Capabilities enhancer**
- **Cross-functional collaborator.**

#### Catalyser role

Medical Affairs can act as a catalyst, motivating the organisation to increase focus and resources dedicated to health equity by bringing in and communicating insights to the organisation on unmet needs and underserved populations; and influencing functional strategies to include health equity.

Our roundtable participants agreed overwhelmingly that a key starting point is to see health equity as a social imperative. Commercial considerations were also a critical driver, with a clear business case based on widening access to underserved markets, and in driving greater innovation and diversity in clinical trials. They also emphasised health equity’s importance in attracting talent and improving brand reputation, meeting expectations of both employees and customers (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Motivators for life science and health organisations to drive health equity and social impact strategies**

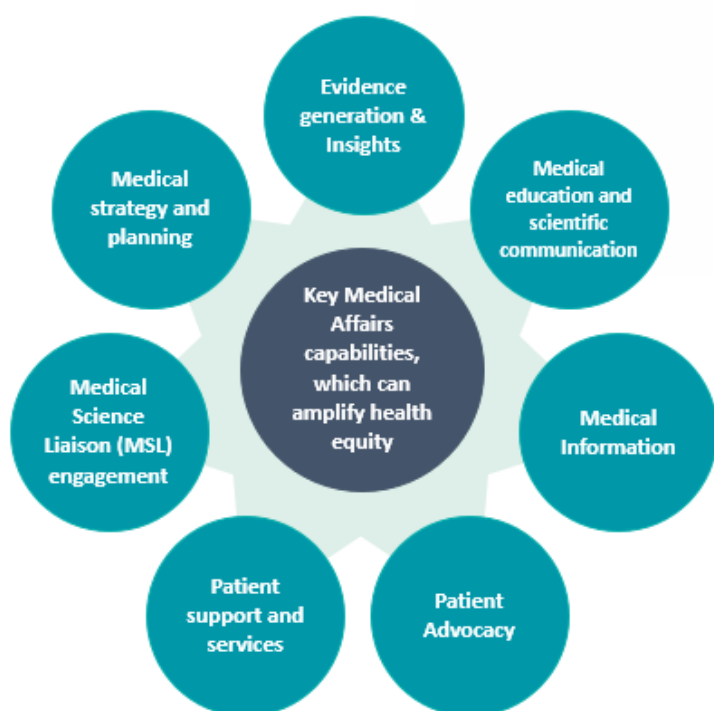


Source: Deloitte Health Equity Institute, presented to participants during the roundtable

### Capabilities enhancer role

Many of Medical Affairs’ capabilities are already targeted at education, and training and bringing scientific and medical value to patients and the health ecosystem (Figure 2). By including health equity considerations in all these activities its impact can be amplified.

**Figure 2. Medical Affairs capabilities, which can amplify health equity**



*Source: Deloitte European Health Equity Institute*

Specifically, Medical Affairs can use these core capabilities to emphasise the importance of health equity as follows:

- **medical strategy and planning** - review and set a medical strategy with health equity in mind and develop a tailored health equity strategy that flows into Medical Affairs activities and budgets
- **evidence generation and insights** - understand evidence gaps and gather insights on specific populations, feeding these insights into clinical development and integrated evidence collection plans, monitoring which strategies are working and where improvements are needed
- **medical education and scientific communication** - review how individual relationships with senior clinicians are prioritised, including going beyond traditional factors such as number of publications and presentations at congresses; and prioritise key opinion leaders (KOLs) in areas of unmet needs based on their ability to influence health equity
- **field medical and medical science liaison engagement** - build the capability for field medical professionals to have conversations about health equity with HCPs, KOLs and key stakeholders, and identify potential health equity gaps that needs addressing
- **patient advocacy and patient engagement** - leverage equity-centred design to embed a wide range of user, patient, clinician, and community voices in solutions
- **medical information** - be proactive in understanding interdependencies on health equity of data, and accessibility of current and future medical information solutions for both HCPs and patients; including addressing the implications of new AI or GenAI solutions.

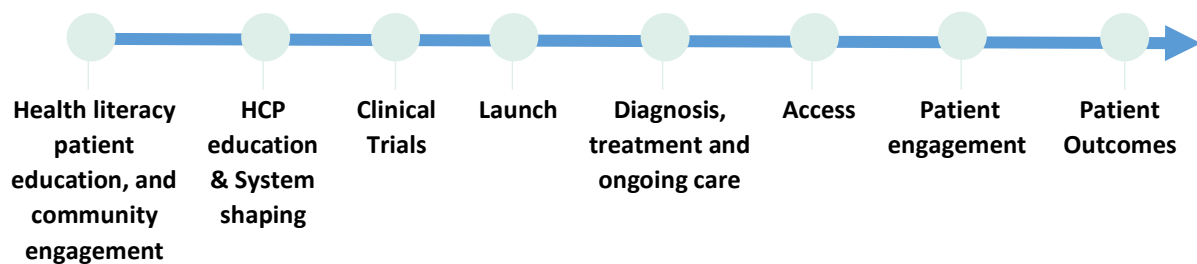
#### Cross-functional collaborator role

Medical Affairs can encourage leadership to increase the profile of health equity within their organisation and across the patient pathway, by influencing leaders across R&D, market access and corporate affairs to embed health equity within their functional strategies and engage in health equity initiatives.

More than 80 per cent of C-suite executives from life sciences and health care organisations see improved health equity as a top-10 goal for 2024<sup>iii</sup>. Where leaders are already driving health equity, separately, or linked to, broader Environmental Social Governance (ESG) strategies, Medical Affairs can assume the role of convener across functions. Both by working with corporate affairs on leadership and communication externally, and working with clinical R&D and market access colleagues to put in place initiatives e.g., to improve access or diversity in clinical trials.

Furthermore, embedding health equity measurement and reporting standards into the organisation can create a shared language and approach for business leaders to assess, measure and activate health equity across their activities (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Measuring the impact of Medical Affairs**



**Measurement of actions to tackle**

<b>Health literacy patient education, and community engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of targeted programmes</li> <li>• Percentage of people reached</li> </ul>
<b>HCP education &amp; system shaping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of clinics and grant programmes established</li> </ul>
<b>Clinical trials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation measures</li> <li>• Percentage of participants that match future patient population</li> <li>• Number of participants from underserved groups</li> </ul>
<b>Launch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of countries launched</li> <li>• Time to approval/reimbursement</li> </ul>
<b>Diagnosis, treatment and ongoing care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage getting a diagnosis and time to diagnosis/treatment by patient population</li> <li>• Number of ongoing care solutions tailored for different group needs</li> </ul>
<b>Access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of eligible population with access to innovations, stratified by geography or vulnerable population</li> <li>• Number of donated treatments</li> </ul>
<b>Patient engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of patients engaged in support programmes</li> <li>• Patient experience feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Patient Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs)</li> <li>• Mortality / morbidity statistics</li> </ul>

Source: Deloitte European Health Equity Institute

## Taking Action

There are immediate steps that Medical Affairs leaders can take to start advancing health equity in their team, as well as create momentum in the wider organisation:

Actions to start now within the team:

- set the agenda to drive a change in the level of insight on unmet needs and underserved populations
- train the team about health equity, its impact on patients, the health system and the organisation
- build the capability of field medical professionals to discuss health equity and bring insights into the organisation
- review gaps in your KOLs in underserved areas.

Actions to start now, with the wider organisation:

- start a health equity movement amongst cross-functional groups
  - review your global, regional or local disease area strategies with health equity in mind
  - create opportunities for system shaping and external market leadership.
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## Conclusion

Medical Affairs can play a vital role in activating health equity, by evolving its role and raising the profile of health equity, implementing actions to deliberately design an equitable system, creating a mindset shift which drives momentum in cross-functional teams, and by championing how health equity can become a differentiator for your wider organisation and health ecosystem.

To learn more about Deloitte's work to advance health equity visit our [European Deloitte Health Equity Institute](#) website.

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<sup>i</sup> Macmillan Cancer Support, "[Shaping the future healthcare experience for people with cancer](#)", January 2023.

<sup>ii</sup> [Medical Affairs: The Roles, Value and Practice of Medical Affairs in the Biopharmaceutical and Medical Technology Industries](#) BY Medical Affairs Professional Society, 2024

<sup>iii</sup> Deloitte, "[2024 Outlook for Health Equity](#)", December 2023.