

Health Equity in Connecticut: What's the Next Step?

What is health equity?

Health equity means that everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Health equity requires removing barriers to health such as poverty and discrimination and the consequences of these obstacles, such as inadequate education, housing, access to health insurance, transportation, and neighborhood environments (such as parks and sidewalks).



Why focus on race and ethnicity?

This document and our work focus on racial and ethnic health equity. Why? Opportunities vary dramatically for people of different races and ethnicities in Connecticut, and the opportunity to be as healthy as possible is no exception. Racial disparities in health persist even when other factors, such as income and education are equal. Further, racial disparities are often hidden when we look at statewide averages. For example, White residents of the state are roughly as healthy as residents of counties that have average levels of health for the state, while Black residents are less healthy than residents of the county with the lowest health ratings according to the 2018 County Health Rankings.

What causes racial and ethnic disparities in health in Connecticut?

Volumes of research show that racial and ethnic disparities in health persist regardless of income, education, or other factors. Why? A combination of historical and ongoing racism reduce the opportunities that people of color have to be healthy. For example, implicit bias among health care providers is associated with poorer health outcomes for people of color. Explicit bias causes ongoing, daily stress. Further, due to employment discrimination, our state's history of neighborhood redlining leading to housing and loan discrimination, an upside-down property tax system in which people of color pay higher rates, a segregated public-school system, and other manifestations of systemic racism, Connecticut's black and brown residents face barriers to health. All of this adds up to less access, inadequate or inappropriate treatment, and disparate health outcomes.



How does a focus on equity affect the whole population?

Addressing the underlying inequities in our state is not just the right thing to do. The consequences of people not having the opportunity to be as healthy as possible include underemployment, fewer participants in the workforce and the economy overall, and more costly and inappropriately located health care—which effect everyone in Connecticut. Progress towards health equity means that Connecticut’s population as a whole is healthier, wealthier, and experiences fewer barriers to quality of life and success in school or work.

How can we build a path to health equity for Connecticut’s families?

Policies and data to promote health equity:

- ✓ Identify disparities in opportunities and resources that impact health by collecting detailed race and ethnicity categories
- ✓ Hold programs and policymakers accountable; a focus on equity means evaluating progress towards equity
- ✓ Pass paid family leave legislation
- ✓ Promote the integration of community and clinical services
- ✓ Sustain Medicaid programs that track and target health equity
- ✓ Promote whole-person and whole-family models of care
- ✓ Expand the earned-income tax credit
- ✓ Equitably fund public education

Interventions to promote health equity:

- ✓ Diversify the workforce to increase access to mental health and culturally appropriate health services
- ✓ Expand the use of community health workers
- ✓ Expand early childhood home visiting programs
- ✓ Fully fund school-based health centers
- ✓ Screen for and address non-medical factors that influence health, such as housing and food security
- ✓ Utilize trauma-informed care
- ✓ Expand community-based care
- ✓ Increase access to quality, affordable childcare

For more options, see: www.countyhealthrankings.org. The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps project rates the evidence base supporting cross-sector interventions.

Health equity is a distant target and progress will be incremental; the ideas here are just a small set of examples. We look forward to working with you all to promote health equity through systems change.



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What is health equity?

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How does a focus on equity affect the whole population?

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