

Equity-Oriented Health Systems Improvement

A Policy Brief

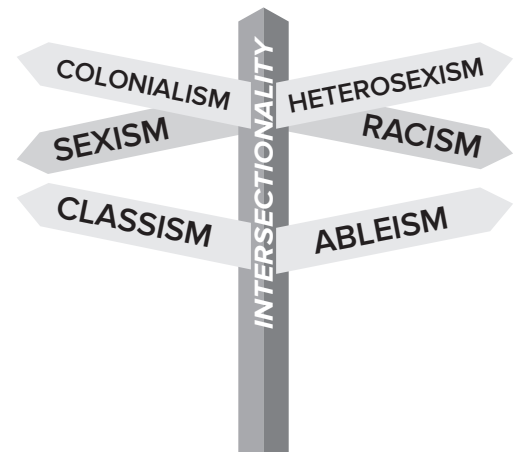
What is Health Equity & Why Does it Matter?

- Health equity is the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, ensuring that all people have full access to opportunities that enable them to lead healthy lives.¹
- At least 50% of our health outcomes are driven by the conditions of our lives, many of which are not under our control.²
- Because social and structural determinants of health are unevenly distributed, health inequities continue to grow – they cost Canada’s health care system \$6.2 billion per year, or 14% of our health care spending.³

HEALTH
INEQUITY
COSTS
CANADA
6.2
BILLION
DOLLARS
PER YEAR

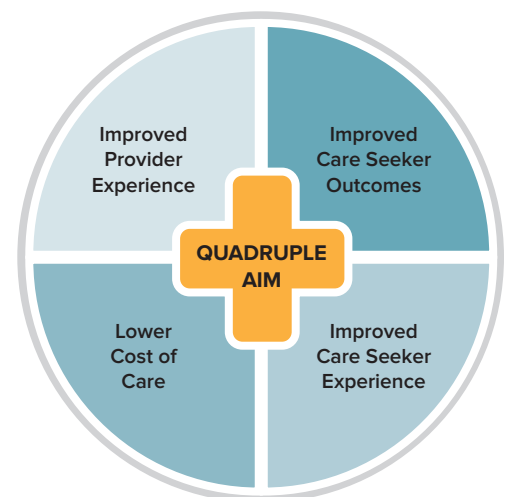
Life Circumstances that Influence the Health of Canadians²

- Income
- Childhood experiences
- Disability
- Access to education & literacy development
- Social inclusion & community belonging
- Gender
- Employment & working conditions
- Racism and other forms of discrimination
- Ongoing colonialism impacting Indigenous peoples
- Safe and nutritious food
- Access to housing
- Violence and abuse



The Problem: Aligning Health Equity with System Improvement

- Conventional approaches do not adequately address the social conditions affecting 50% of health outcomes for Canadians.
- Quality improvement approaches, including Lean-based systems, do not explicitly integrate equity considerations in core system components including data collection, training and incentives, care practices, and organizational culture.
- Evaluations of Lean-based quality improvement efforts in Canada show high implementation costs and low return on investment.
- While health systems strive to balance high quality care with cost efficiency, new ways of thinking based on the **quadruple aim** of health care improvement are needed.



¹EQUIP Health Care. (2017). What is Health Equity: A Tool for Health & Social Service Organizations and Providers. Vancouver, BC. [click [here](#)]

²Adapted from Canadian Medical Association [click [here](#)] and Public Health Agency of Canada: [click [here](#)]

³Public Health Agency of Canada. (2016). Summary: The Direct Economic Burden of Socio-Economic Health Inequalities in Canada [click [here](#)]

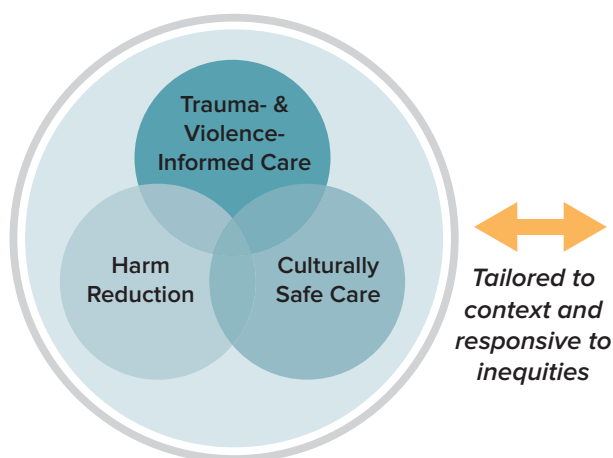
EQUIP: An Equity Solution

- EQUIP Health Care is a tested approach to restructuring organizations to deliver equity-oriented health care.
- EQUIP's key dimensions and tailored strategies aim to reduce the effects of structural inequities; the impacts of racism, discrimination and stigma; and the disparities between conventional care approaches and people's needs.



Equality ≠ Equity

Key Dimensions of Equity-Oriented Care



10 Strategies for Equity-Oriented System Improvement

1. Explicitly commit to equity
2. Develop supportive organizational structures, policies, and processes
3. Re-vision the use of time
4. Attend to power differentials
5. Tailor care, programs and services to local contexts
6. Actively counter racism and discrimination
7. Promote meaningful community and patient engagement
8. Tailor care to address inter-related forms of violence
9. Enhance access to the social determinants of health
10. Optimize use of place and space

Browne, A. J., Varcoe, C., Ford-Gilboe, M., Wathen, C. N., Smye, V., Jackson, B. E.,...Blanchet Garneau, A. (2018). Disruption as opportunity: Impacts of an organizational health equity intervention in primary care clinics. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 17(1), 154. [click [here](#)]

Policy Implications

- Embedding equity into Learning Health Systems means aligning equity-oriented data collection and use, incentives, cultures and best practices.
- EQUIP Health Care can support implementation of low-cost, high impact strategies to improve an organizations' capacity to promote health equity.
- Equity-oriented care is a win-win: patients experience better care, staff feel better about the care they provide, and this can contribute to a more effective health care system.
- To get started on equity-oriented health care, visit our free, online [Toolkit](#) and [Modules](#).

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