What is Health Equity?
A Tool for Health & Social Service Organizations and Providers

Defining Health Equity

Health equity is a social justice goal focused on pursuing the highest possible standard of health and healthcare for all people, paying special attention to those in the context of greater risk of poor health, and taking into account broad social, political, and economic influences and access to care.

It is defined as 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, such as:

Quality affordable healthcare	*Social support networks*
Education	*Public policies*
Safe housing	*Stable income & job security*
Environmental quality	*Food security*

However, evidence shows that people's daily experiences and their access to these services intersect in ways that are highly dependent on their sex/gender, ethno-cultural heritage, socioeconomic status or class, sexual orientation, religion, ability, nationality and other fluid intersections.
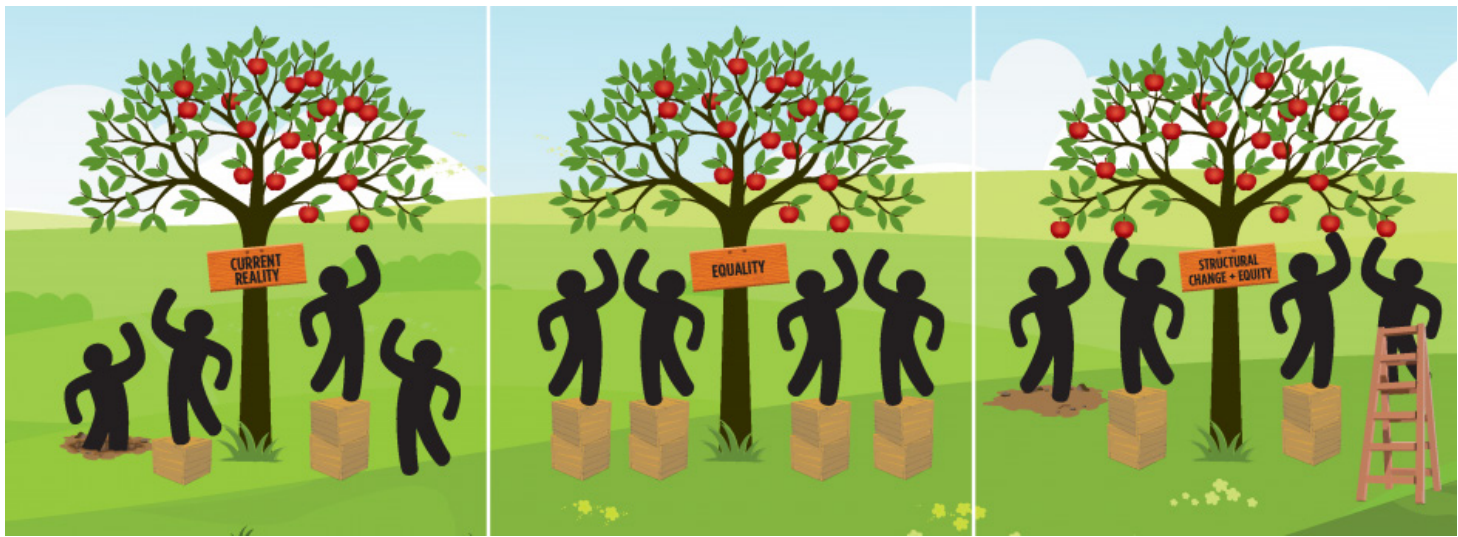
Health Inequities

Health inequities refer to socially constructed, unjust and avoidable differences in health and healthcare between and within groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. These can include differences due to socially and structurally modifiable barriers such as poverty, discrimination, cultural barriers to accessing healthcare, and poor governance. Interventions that aim to redress inequities typically **go beyond remedying a particular health inequality** and further attempt to empower individuals through systematic and structural changes.

Health Equity is NOT the same as Health Equality

Health equality aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, equality promotes fairness and justice, however, it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things.

Health equity focuses on ensuring and treating those who require care in ways that are appropriate to *what they need* to enjoy full, healthy lives. It aims to remove unjust and unnecessary differences, requiring us to consider the possibility of making different arrangements for resource allocation, or social institutions or policies.

Why is it important to attend to health equity?

CLOSE UNJUST GAPS IN HEALTH STATUS

Persistent and growing health and healthcare inequities continue to affect marginalized populations.

In Canada, increasing homelessness, and systemic discrimination toward Indigenous people and new immigrants are instances of systematic health and social inequities that can be addressed through equity-oriented care.

IMPROVE OUTCOMES
in a primary health care context

Equity-oriented processes of care lead to increases in patients' comfort and confidence in care.

This increases their confidence to manage and prevent health problems.

As a result, their quality of life increases, while their symptoms of depression, chronic pain, and PTSD go down.

REDUCE COSTS

People experiencing the greatest socio-economic inequities often have the poorest health.

Improving healthcare experiences and outcomes for this group will, therefore, result in the greatest gains, reducing costs to the system.

> **By removing avoidable, unjust differences in healthcare among groups of people (whether they are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically), all people can have full access to opportunities that will enable them to lead healthy lives.**

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