

Glossary of Health Equity Terms

From the HealthEquityGuide.org

Developing and using shared definitions is an important step to advance transformational approaches to health equity. We offer these definitions of key health equity terms as a starting point to support the key step of developing shared definitions.

Health Equity

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. To achieve this, we must remove obstacles to health — such as poverty, discrimination, and deep power imbalances — and their consequences, including lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

Source: This definition of Health Equity is slightly adapted from one developed by Paula Braveman and colleagues in the RWJF commissioned paper, ["What Is Health Equity? And What Difference Does a Definition Make?"](#)

Structural Racism

A system of advantage based on race

Source: [David T. Wellman, Portraits of White Racism, Second Edition](#)

A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on phenotype ("race"), that:

- unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities
- unfairly advantages other individuals and communities
- undermines realization of the full potential of the whole society through the waste of human resources.

Source: [Dr. Camara Jones, Confronting Institutionalized Racism. 2002.](#)

A fundamental cause of health inequity, associated with imbalances in political power throughout society. It functions to normalize and legitimize cultural, institutional, and personal hierarchies and inequity that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse health outcomes for people of color. Structural racism perpetuates residential segregation, concentrated poverty, disinvestment in neighborhoods, and targeting neighborhoods for toxic waste— all issues related to serious health outcomes

Source: [NACCHO. Health Inequity: A Charge for Public Health. 2016](#)

Community Organizing

A **community organizing** group may be defined as an organization that:

- Brings people who identify as being part of a community together to solve problems that they themselves identify
- Helps a community identify common problems, mobilize resources, and develop and implement strategies to reach their collective goals
- Works to develop civic agency among individuals and communities to take control over their lives and environments.
- Is committed to building a membership base and is accountable to that membership
- Builds collective power to bring about structural change

Source: Adapted from 1) Minkler M, [Community Organizing and Community Building for Health and Welfare](#), 3rd Edition and 2) Schaff K, et al. [Essential Elements of Health Equity Practice](#). NACCHO Exchange. 2016, v15, Issue 2.

Movement Building

Movement building is the effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches through a set of distinct stages over a long-term period of time. Through movement building, organizers can:

- Propose solutions to the root causes of social problems
- Enable people to exercise their collective power
- Humanize groups that have been denied basic human rights and improve conditions for the groups affected
- Create structural change by building something larger than a particular organization or campaign
- Promote visions and values for society based on fairness, justice and democracy

*Source: Definition from Racial Equity Tools Glossary, citing "Roots: Building the Power of Communities of Color to Challenge Structural Racism." Akonadi Foundation, 2010.
(Definition from the [Movement Strategy Center](#).)*

Other Glossaries of Related Terms

- [Glossary for Understanding the Dismantling Structural Racism/Promoting Racial Equity Analysis](#), compiled for the Aspen Institute
- [Living Glossary for Racial Justice, Equity & Inclusion](#), compiled by Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center and Racial Reconciliation and Healing

About the Health Equity Guide

[HealthEquityGuide.org](#) is a resource developed by Human Impact Partners with inspiring examples of how health departments have concretely advanced health equity — both internally within their departments and externally with communities and other government agencies. The Health Equity Guide was developed with an understanding that a wall-to-wall transformation of health department practice is needed in order to systematically address the roots of health inequities — power imbalances, racism, and other forms of oppression.

What's in HealthEquityGuide.org?

- 15 Strategic Practices to advance health equity in health departments
- Case studies that describe how health departments advanced each strategic practice, factors enabling the work, impacts, and advice for others
- 150+ resources from allied organizations and others