



## Background

At the Vermont Department of Health, our mission is to protect and promote the health of people living in Vermont. We know that not everyone has the same opportunities for health and that sometimes it can be challenging to know how to best talk about and address this.

This document was created to help Vermont Department of Health staff understand and use common terms when discussing [health equity](#), which exists “when all people have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy.” It provides definitions and resources to help learn more and move towards action. There are many excellent resources on all these topics, but these particular resources have been selected for their approachability and because they are helpful tools in creating dialogue.

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## Guiding Definitions

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| <b>Health Equity</b>      | Health equity exists when all people have a fair and just opportunity to be healthy, especially those who have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, historical injustice, and other avoidable systemic inequalities that are often associated with social categories of race, gender, ethnicity, social position, sexual orientation, and disability. (Vermont Department of Health)<br><br>Learn more: <a href="#">Health Equity</a> , American Public Health Association, 2018. |
| <b>Health Disparities</b> | Statistical differences in health that occur between groups of people. These could be from any cause. (Vermont Department of Health)<br><br>Learn more: <a href="#">Disparities</a> , Healthy People 2020, 2018.   |
| <b>Health Inequities</b>  | These exist when avoidable inequalities lead to an uneven distribution of the resources and opportunities for health and are differences in health that are avoidable, unfair, or stemming from injustice. (Vermont Department of Health)  |

## Key Definitions

A

**Ally**

Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and works in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. (from Center of the Study of Social Policy)

Learn more:

- [Want to Be an Ally to Women at Work? Here Are Five Things Men in the Tech Industry Are Doing](#), Slate, 2018.
- [How to Be A White Ally: Fighting Racism Is Your Responsibility – Start Now](#), Salon, 2016.
- [Allyship](#), The Anti-Oppression Network, 2015.

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**Determinants of Health, Social Determinants of Health**

The conditions in which people live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. These include social, economic, and physical conditions, as well as patterns of social engagement and sense of security and well-being. (adapted from CDC)

Learn more:

- [Get to Know Social Determinants of Health](#), Storify, American Public Health Association, 2018
- [A New Way to Talk About Social Determinants of Health](#), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2010
- [Addressing Social Determinants of Health and Development](#), Community Toolbox, 2018.

**Discrimination**

The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories.<sup>1</sup>

E

**Ethnicity or Ethnic Group**

A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership,

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Democratic Renewal and Project Change Anti-Racism Initiative. [A Community Builder's Tool Kit](#).

values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. (from Center for the Study of Social Policy)<sup>2</sup>

Learn more: [The Surprisingly Racist History of “Caucasian”](#), Decoded, MTV News, 2016.

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G

**Gender**

A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify someone as man, woman, a mixture of both, or neither. Gender is socially constructed. (adapted from PFLAG)

Learn more:

- [PFLAG National Glossary of Terms](#), PFLAG, 2018.
- [Gender Unicorn](#)

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**Implicit Bias**

Learned stereotypes and prejudices that operate automatically and unconsciously when interacting with others. Also referred to as **unconscious bias**. When a person’s actions or decisions are at odds with their intentions this is implicit bias (Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, based on John A. Powell)

Learn more:

- [Project Implicit’s Implicit Association Test](#), Project Implicit, 2011.
- [CSI’s Guide on Implicit Bias](#), Center for Solution Inclusion, 2013.
- [Health and Racial Equity in Turbulent Times: Implicit Bias Examined](#), Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, 2014.

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| <b>Institutional Racism</b> | Discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, and inequitable opportunities and impacts within organizations and institutions, based on race. (from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center)                   |
| <b>Internalized Racism</b>  | The set of private beliefs, prejudices, and ideas that individuals have about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of people of color. Among people of color, it manifests as internalized racial oppression. |

<sup>2</sup> Sullivan, T., Mwangi, W., Miller, B., Muhammed, D., and Harris, C. (2012). State of the Dream: The Emerging Majority. United for a Fair Economy.

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|                             | <p>Among whites, it manifests as internalized racial superiority. (from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center)</p> <p>Learn more: <a href="#">Allegories on Race and Racism</a>, Camara Jones TEDxEmory, 2014.</p>  |
| <b>Interpersonal Racism</b> | <p>The expression of racism between individuals. These are interactions occurring between individuals that often take place in the form of harassing, racial slurs, or telling of racial jokes. (from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center)</p> <p>Learn more: <a href="#">Allegories on Race and Racism</a>, Camara Jones TEDxEmory, 2014.</p>  |
| <b>Intersectionality</b>    | <p>An approach coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw that argues that classifications such as gender, race, class, and sexuality overlap and intersect in people’s identities, lives, in society, and in social systems and cannot be examined in isolation from each other. (based on Kimberlé Crenshaw and adapted from Racial Equity Tools)</p> <p>Though originally applied only to the way sexism and racism combine and overlap, the term has come to include other forms of discrimination as well, such as those based on class, sexuality, and ability. (<a href="http://www.merriam-webster.com">www.merriam-webster.com</a>)</p> <p>Learn more: <a href="#">The Urgency of Intersectionality</a>, TEDWomen, 2016.</p> |

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**Microaggression**

Everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. (from Psychology Today)

Learn more:

- [‘I Am Vermont Too’ Project Exposes Microaggressions](#), Melody Bodette & Mitch Wertlieb, 2017.
- [Microaggressions: More than Just Race](#), Psychology Today, 2010.

N

**Non-White**

A term previously used to describe **people of color**. This term should *not* be used as it centers race on whiteness and implies that those who are not white are ‘other.’

Learn more:

- [What exactly are microaggressions? Let these examples from Hollywood movies explain](#), Quartz, 2016.
- [Stop Calling People of Color ‘Minorities’](#), Splinter, 2017.
- [The End of Non-Whites](#), N. S. Burke, Medium, 2018.

O

**Oppression**

Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantages of certain populations in contrast to the privileged norm. It is woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. (adapted from Racial Equity Tools and Racial Equity Resource Guide)

P

**People of Color**

A political construct created to describe people who would generally not be categorized as white by people of color themselves (adapted from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center). For example, people who identify as African American, Latino/a/x, Asian American, mixed race, or Native American may also identify as people of color (sometimes abbreviated as POC). This term is often preferred over ‘minority’ or **non-white**.

Learn more:

- [The Journey from ‘Colored’ to ‘Minorities’ to ‘People of Color’](#), Code Switch: Race and Identity, Remixed, 2014.
- [The Origin of the Phrase “Women of Color”](#), Western States Center, 2011.

**Power**

Having the potential to shape our lives and the world around us. (from Grassroots Policy Project)

- [The Four Faces of Power](#), R. Healey and S. Hinson, Grassroots Policy Project, 2017.
- [If We Want to Advance Equity in Public Health Practice We Must Address Race and Power](#), J. Heller, The Pump Handle, 2016.

**Prejudice**

An unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason. (from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center)

**Privilege**

A special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual or group because of their class, caste,

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|  | gender, or racial/ethnic group. (from Center for the Study of Social Policy). See also <b>white privilege</b> .<br><br>Learn more: <a href="#">How Studying Privilege Systems Can Strengthen Compassion</a> , Peggy McIntosh, TEDxTimberlaneSchools, 2012.   |
| <b>Pronouns, Personal Pronouns, Preferred Pronouns, or Preferred Gender Pronouns</b> | Pronouns are a word used instead of a noun or a noun phrase; personal pronouns are a pronoun or set of pronouns that a person personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that person. Choice of pronouns is an individual decision and should not be assumed. Instead, people should be asked what pronoun they use. The most commonly used pronouns are she/her, he/him, and they/them. (adapted from PFLAG)<br><br>Learn more: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Gender-Neutral Pronouns</a>, Motto, 2016.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Gender Pronouns</a>, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, 2018.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Q</b>   |  |
| <b>R</b>   |  |
| <b>Race</b>  | A socially-constructed way of grouping people based on perceived skin color and other apparent physical differences. Race has no genetic or scientific basis. The concept was developed intentionally to justify social and economic oppression of people of color by whites. (adapted from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center and <i>Race: The Power of an Illusion</i> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Race: The Power of an Illusion</a>, California Newsreel, 2014.</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Problem with Race-Based Medicine</a>, Dorothy E. Roberts, TEDMED, 2015.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>S</b>   |  |
| <b>Sex</b>   | Anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that categorize people by their reproductive or perceived reproductive functions. (adapted from PFLAG and Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center)<br><br>Learn more: <a href="#">PFLAG National Glossary of Terms</a> , PFLAG, 2018.  |
| <b>Social Determinants of Health</b>   | See <b><i>Determinants of Health</i></b>   |

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| <b>Social Justice</b>                             | The absence of unfair, unjust advantage or privilege based on race, class, gender, or other forms of difference. (from Renee Canady)   |
| <b>Structural Inequity, Structural Oppression</b> | <p>Similar to <b>structural racism</b>, the normalization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional – that routinely reinforce and maintain a system that unfairly advantage one population and unfairly disadvantage other populations, whether intentionally or not. (adapted from Minnesota Department of Health’s Health Equity Definitions).</p> <p>Learn more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Challenging the Bootstrap Myth</a>, Antonio Valdés, TEDxPhiladelphia, 2016.</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Four ‘I’s of Oppression</a>, Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training, 2012.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Rags to Riches</a>, On the Media, 2016.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Structural Racism</b>                          | <p>Bias across institutions and society over time. Structural racism is the cumulative and compounded effects of factors including public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms and cultural beliefs that work in various, often reinforcing, ways to perpetuate racial inequity. This is not something we choose to practice; instead, it is part of the social, economic, and political systems in which we exist. (adapted from Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center and the Aspen Institute)</p> <p>Learn more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Allegories on Race and Racism</a>, Camara Jones TEDxEmory, 2014.</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Disturbing History of the Suburbs</a>, CollegeHumor, 2017.</li> <li>• <a href="#">How Voter ID Laws Explain Structural Racism</a>, Decoded, MTV News, 2016.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Unconscious Bias</b>                           | See <i>Implicit Bias</i>   |
| <b>White</b>                                      | A social and political, rather than biological, construct for a racial category used to describe people with light skin, generally of European descent. This contrasts with <b>people/person of color</b> .  |

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|                         | <p>Learn more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Surprisingly Racist History of “Caucasian”</a>, Decoded, MTV News, 2016.</li> <li>• <a href="#">What is Whiteness?</a>, N.I. Painter, The New York Times, 2015.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>White Privilege:</b> | <p>Unquestioned and unearned sets of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices that people have solely because they are white. Generally, white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it. (from Racial Equity Resource Guide)</p> <p>Learn more: <a href="#">Finding Myself in the Story of Race</a>, Debby Irving, TEDxFenway, 2015.</p>   |
| <b>White Supremacy</b>  | <p>A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and people of color by white people and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.<sup>3</sup> This differs from white supremacists, which refers to individuals, while this refers to systems.</p> <p>Learn more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">What is White Supremacy?</a>, E. Martinez, 2017.</li> <li>• <a href="#">White Bred</a>, The Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere – Los Angeles, 2017.</li> </ul> |

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<sup>3</sup> [Challenging White Supremacy Workshop](#), Sharon Martinas. Fourth Revision. 1995.  
Vermont Department of Health