Racial Justice and Health Equity

Office of Health Equity
Racial Justice

The creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for all people, regardless of race.
Health Equity

Health Equity is the opportunity for everyone to attain his or her full health potential. No one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of his or her social position (e.g., class, socioeconomic status) or socially assigned circumstance (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, geography).

This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, racism and other forms of discrimination, and resulting consequences, including lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.
Racism

A form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race that is used to the advantage of the dominant racial group (whites) and the disadvantage of non-dominant racial groups.
Socio-ecological model

The Socio-Ecological Model represents the way in which BPHC does public health work, as well as the way in which BPHC understands how racism works.

- Although many of us often think on the level of the individual, all these levels are constantly interacting with one another.
- The knowledge and attitudes held by an individual are often informed by those within their social networks on the interpersonal level, who in turn are informed by the surrounding cultural and institutional practices.
- Conversely, those who create and uphold the laws and practices on the institutional level are individuals themselves, and their individual decision making can influence multiple domains within the socio-ecological system.
- Each of us works within one or more of these domains. Identifying intersecting interventions that impact the overall structure will have the greatest impact on health equity.
Social Determinants of Health

The circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, learn, work, play, and age that influence access to resources and opportunities that promote health.

- The social determinants of health are social factors include housing, education, employment, environmental exposure, health care, public safety, food access, income, and health and social services.

- As public health advocates, educators, and leaders, we must encourage people to make healthy choices, but must also remember that people can only make healthy choices if they have healthy options. (Robert Wood Johnson Commission to Build a Healthier America)
Why Racism Matters

- In the United States, racism plays a significant role in creating and perpetuating health inequities. Social inequities, such as poverty, segregation, and lack of educational and employment opportunities have origins in discriminatory laws, policies, and practices that have historically denied people of color the right to earn income, own property, and accumulate wealth.

- Health promoting resources are distributed unevenly across the city of Boston and follow patterns of racial segregation and poverty concentration. As a result, on average, Boston residents who are White enjoy better health than many residents of color.

- These significant differences in health outcomes between residents of color and White residents are systemic, avoidable, unfair, and unjust.
Equity Opportunities or “Choice Points”

- Choice points are decision-making opportunities that influence outcomes.
- The **cumulative impacts** of many small choices can be as significant as the impacts of big decisions.
- When we’re conscious of choice points and the related impacts, we’re less likely to replicate implicit bias and the status quo, and we open new possibilities for equitable change.

Source: Race Forward
Implicit Bias

• Learned stereotypes and prejudices that operate automatically and unconsciously when interacting with others.
• When racial impacts are not consciously considered during the lawmakers/decision-making process or in interpersonal interactions, there is more likelihood that negative racial impacts will result.
• Negative racial impacts may or may not be intentional. Positive racial impacts often require intentionality. The root of addressing implicit bias is at the individual level.