

# Tackling Health Inequity in the US

## 01 Defining Health Equity

Every person has the right to health. The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Health equity is when everyone has a fair opportunity to get the best level of health possible. Equity is not about just giving everybody the same resources; that is defined as equality. Resources must be given to people based on their own needs to achieve health equity.

## 02 Disparities in Health Equity

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines health disparities as “preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations.” Racism and discrimination or inequality based on other identity factors, such as gender, can put minorities at more risk for poor health outcomes, casually or institutionally.

Achieving health equity means addressing health disparities and the social determinants of health. Unequal access to health care based on race, gender, etc., needs to be acknowledged and addressed as a threat to public health and the integrity of health practices. Changes need to be made to the systems and policies leading to such persistent injustices.

### Quick Facts

- African Americans have more than double national average infant mortality rates (2020)
- African American men have 20 percent higher death rate for all cancers than White men (2016-2020)
- 19 percent of Latinos in the US, under the age of 65, lack health insurance coverage (2021)
- 32 percent of Hispanic adults lack a primary care provider in the past 12 months (2022)
- Asian Americans are 60 percent more likely to die from liver cancer than Caucasians (2018)
- Women are about 22 percent more likely to be poor than men in the US (2019)

## 03 Public Insurance & Equity

Medicare and Medicaid are programs sponsored by the U.S. government to help certain high-risk or disadvantaged individuals cover their health costs. Medicare provides health care coverage to people 65 and older and certain people under 65 who have disabilities. Medicaid provides medical benefits to some individuals with limited income and resources.

Medicare eligibility being tied to age may cause some equity issues. Minority men and women have shorter life expectancies, which reduces the length of lifespan they are eligible for Medicare. A person's years in the workforce versus their life expectancy should also be taken into consideration for Medicare benefits since the number of years in the workforce is correlated with contribution to Medicare.

Medicaid eligibility tied to family structure and income can also elicit equity concerns. The working poor who don't have children or are not pregnant have limited access to Medicaid regardless of their needs for healthcare. Due to minimal private health insurance, their needs are not addressed through safety net hospitals either.



## 04 Equity & Policy Design

The purpose of a health policy is to serve the interests of the society and its sub-groups. With some degree of altruism, we cherish equitable access to essential resources for our survival and thriving, including medical resources. Therefore, we should maintain five steps in the design of a health policy to reduce health disparities.

1. Problem Definition: How are the actual allocations of health resources deviating from need-based distributions? Who is most affected by the disparities?
2. Policy Alternatives: What policy instruments should we use - taxes, regulation, etc?
3. Policy Evaluation: How is the policy responding to needs, maximizing returns, etc?
4. Expected Outcome: How likely will the policy achieve the desired results?
5. Outcome Evaluation: What are the benefits and costs of each possible outcome? Is any outcome attained at the expense of equity?



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Gary, L. C. (open online since 2021). The Intersection of Cultural Diversity, Health Policy Development and Policy Analysis. Tulane University.

<https://pace.tulane.edu/content/course-content-84>

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