

Why Health Equity Matters

Fact Sheet

Health Equity Initiative



FACT SHEET

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Overview on Health Disparities/Health Equity

- Health disparities continue to undermine opportunities for economic and social development of too many communities in the United States.
- Health disparities are “differences that ought not be²”
 - Diseases or health conditions that discriminate, and tend to be more common and/or more severe among vulnerable and underserved groups
 - Differences in health outcomes
 - Linked to diverse factors that are always likely to be community-specific, including socioeconomic conditions, race, ethnicity, culture, social status, friendliness of clinical settings, housing, access to services, and information, transportation, employment opportunities, etc.
- Health equity is a key goal to which we should all aspire

What is Health Equity?

Health Equity is providing every person with the same opportunity to stay healthy and/or effectively cope with disease or health-related emergencies – regardless of their race, gender, age, economic conditions, social status, environment, and other socially determined factors¹.

Why Health Equity Matters

Overall

- Health is a basic human right
- It is a key determinant of economic and social development
 - It has a positive impact on people’s life chances and opportunities
- Is influenced by, and influences individual (e.g. stages in one’s life) and social transitions (e.g. demographic and economic changes)

Health Disparities at-a-glance: A Few Examples – United States

- In the U.S. alone, combined costs (direct and indirect costs) of health inequities totaled \$1.24 trillion over a three-year period³
 - Between 2003 and 2006, 30.6 percent of direct medical care expenditures for African-Americans, Asians and Hispanics were excess costs due to health inequalities³
- United States:
 - Ranks last on almost all measures of equity because it has the greatest disparity in the quality of care based on socioeconomic status
 - Ranks no. 41 in infant mortality⁴, a key community development indicator- with death rates 2.4 times higher among African Americans than non-Hispanic whites⁵; in many communities (e.g., Bronx, NYC), infant mortality rates are also higher among Hispanics⁶
 - Is near the bottom among developed countries for healthy life expectancy at age 60⁷

- “Children from minority groups continue to suffer from direct biological consequences of health disparities since they are likely to experience developmental setbacks because they are sick, or their parents are sick⁸”
 - Impact on childhood education with long-term consequences on productivity, job security, etc.
 - With minority groups steadily becoming the majority of the US population (non-Hispanic whites projected to be only 47% of US population by 2050⁹), this has important implications for the US future

Health Disparities at-a-glance: A Few Examples – International

- 529,000 women a year die in childbirth worldwide, with almost 99 percent of these deaths occurring in developing countries, where a woman’s lifetime risk of dying from pregnancy-related complications is often 45 times higher than that of her counterparts in developed countries
- Several million people are killed by epidemics and disease outbreaks – especially within vulnerable communities
- Respiratory and diarrheal diseases together account for more than half of child deaths worldwide
- Malnutrition is an underlying cause of childhood deaths associated with infectious diseases in developing countries; 50% of malnutrition is associated with the environment

References: 1 Adapted from CDC, 2011; 2 Robinson, 2009; 3 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2009; 4 World Health Organization, 2011; 5 US DHHS Office of Minority Health, 2009; 6 NYC Department of Health, 2011; 7 Commonwealth Fund National Scorecard on U.S. Health System Performance, 2011; 8 Jennifer Ng’andu, National Council of La Raza; 9 Pew Research Center, 2008; World Health Organization, 2000, 2005, 2011, and 2012; UNICEF, 2012; Rice, Sacco, Hyder & Black, 2000.