

# What Can I Do to Advance Health Equity?

## PRACTICE USING A HEALTH EQUITY LENS!

### **Purpose**

Public health practitioners understand the importance of advancing health equity, but struggle to translate this work into tangible practices. One concrete way to start this work is for public health to look at their own decisions, programs, practices, processes and activities through a “health equity lens.”

### **State Community Health Services Advisory Committee (SCHSAC) Advancing Health Equity Work Group**

Researched tools and resources and found commonalities on how others are approaching this work:

- Organizational change, commitment, transformation
- Building staff capacity
- Using equity assessments/lens for programs, policies, services
- Accessing, using, sharing and reporting data on inequities
- Community partnerships

### **Six Local Health Department Practices to Advance Health Equity**

1. Build a shared understanding and commitment to health equity.
2. Develop organizational knowledge and skills to advance health equity.
3. Align programs and resources with an organizational commitment to health equity.
4. Work in true partnership across the community to advance health equity.
5. Improve data collection, analysis and use of data to advance health.
6. Work at the policy level to advance health equity.

These practices are grounded in the historical roots of public health and the *Ten Essential Public Health Services*, and are evident in the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Standards and Measures.

## Why Use a Health Equity Assessment/“Lens”?

- Structural inequities are often produced inadvertently
- These internal structures, policies, processes, etc. are so embedded into the organization that it may be difficult to “see” the inequities
- Every decision an organization makes has an impact on people – both inside the organization and externally
- Good ideas can play out in ways that inadvertently disadvantage or harm certain groups.
- Provides an objective means of ensuring that health equity is considered

## What is a Health Equity “Lens”?

*...brings to focus the impact policies and practices have on shaping the economic, social and built environments which can lead to health inequities. (MDH – Statewide Health Improvement Program Health Equity Implementation Guide FY2014-15)*

*...a tool for planning, decision-making and resource allocation that leads to more equitable policies, programs, and processes. Shifts the way we make decisions and think about our work. (Multnomah County Equity and Empowerment Lens)*

At its core, a health equity “lens” is a set of reflective questions leading to a different set of actions. While the questions differ slightly among the many health equity resources, some of the more common questions are:

- Who is affected/impacted?
- Have those affected helped to shape the/this \_\_\_\_\_?
- Who is included/excluded?
- Who benefits and who is harmed?
- What are the assumptions taking place?
- What does the data tell us?
- What data are missing?
- Who is/is not at the decision-making table?
- What values underlie the decision-making process?
- What revisions are needed/what could be done differently?

## Resources

Resource Library for Advancing Health Equity in Public Health –  
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/healthequity/resources/>

MDH Center for Health Equity – <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/che/>

SCHSAC Advancing Health Equity Work Group –  
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/opi/pm/schsac/wkgrp/2015/equity/>