



ADDRESSING HEALTH EQUITY IN EVALUATION EFFORTS

WITHOUT A FOCUS ON HEALTH EQUITY IN EVALUATION EFFORTS, THE EFFECTS OF AN INTERVENTION ON ADDRESSING HEALTH DISPARITIES AND INEQUITIES CAN GO UNNOTICED. FOR EXAMPLE, AN EVALUATION MAY REVEAL OVERALL IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH, BUT OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT HEALTH DISPARITIES OR INEQUITIES ARE WIDENING. HEALTH EQUITY-ORIENTED EVALUATIONS CAN BE DESIGNED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WORKS, FOR WHOM, UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS, AND REVEAL WHETHER HEALTH INEQUITIES HAVE DECREASED, INCREASED, OR REMAINED THE SAME. INTEGRATE HEALTH EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS THROUGHOUT EACH STEP OF AN EVALUATION TO MORE ACCURATELY INTERPRET FINDINGS AND EFFECTIVELY FOCUS INTERVENTIONS. CONSIDER THESE IDEAS TO INTEGRATE HEALTH EQUITY GOALS INTO YOUR EVALUATION EFFORTS.



Develop a Logic Model That Includes Health Equity Activities and Goals

Guide implementation and evaluation efforts by documenting your health equity-related process activities and outcome goals in your logic model. Include these goals and activities to provide clarity on your intended effects on health equity. Secure buy-in and participation by engaging diverse stakeholders, including community members experiencing health inequities, in the development of the logic model. Also include them in every other step of the evaluation process.

Incorporate Health Equity into Evaluation Questions and Design

Since evaluation questions guide the evaluation process, it is critical that your health equity goals are reflected in them. Such questions may help you determine what has worked for whom and under what conditions. Additionally, consider indicators of success at all stages of the logic model to assess whether an intervention reached the intended population, was implemented correctly, and had the intended outcome(s).

Identify Appropriate Variables to Track Populations Experiencing Inequities

Appropriate variables and strategic sampling plans are needed to assess differential effects of interventions across population groups or settings. Choose relevant variables (e.g., income, race, zip code) early in the process to ensure sufficient data on populations experiencing inequities will be gathered, tracked, and analyzed. In addition, carefully select sites/settings or participants that are to be included in the sampling frame.

Use Culturally Appropriate Tools and Methodologies

Evaluations may be planned and carried out by individuals with different educational backgrounds, primary languages, and cultural identities than the populations experiencing health inequities. Therefore, gather the best possible data by using culturally appropriate tools and methodologies that consider factors such as the population’s language needs, literacy levels, and facilitator preferences.

Use Multiple Approaches to Understand an Intervention’s Effect on Health Inequities

One approach may not sufficiently account for the complexities of health inequities or reflect issues and successes identified as important by the community. Consider multiple approaches (e.g., GIS analysis, focus groups, assessment of environmental improvements) to understanding an intervention’s effect to broaden the range of credible evidence, create new measurement models, and integrate new voices into the understanding of a strategy’s effects. Additionally, consider a long-term plan for data collection, as it takes time to change the underlying factors that contribute to health inequities.

Include Health Equity Indicators Into Performance Monitoring Systems

Performance monitoring systems may be revised or developed to track whether changes occur in places where they are most needed, as well as other efforts to advance equity. Such tracking provides an opportunity to monitor progress, identify necessary mid-course corrections in underserved communities, and answer questions that may emerge as the evaluation proceeds.



Use Process and Outcome Evaluations to Understand the Effect on Health Inequities

Use process evaluation to gather information about the planning, engagement, and implementation of a strategy. These data may later help explain successful (or unsuccessful) outcomes as they relate to health inequities. Outcome evaluations can be used to understand the effect of an initiative across different populations and indicate whether health inequities have decreased, increased, or remained the same. Incorporating health equity implications in both process and outcome components of an evaluation can help explain an intervention’s effect on health inequities.

Widely Disseminate the Results of Equity-Oriented Evaluations

Knowing what works, what does not work, and what may have promise is essential to expand the type of interventions being used to advance health equity. Contribute to the evidence-base by sharing findings, particularly if results identified disparate effects, such as an increase in health inequities. Additionally, build capacity and increase awareness among community members and stakeholders by sharing findings and providing the data they need to decide on next steps.

“UNLESS THERE IS A DELIBERATE INTENTION TO ADDRESS HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND TO BUILD UP EVALUATIONS THAT PURPOSEFULLY USE EQUITY AS A VALUE CRITERION, THE FIELD OF HEALTH PROMOTION MAY GO ASTRAY REGARDING ITS UNDERLYING COMMITMENTS TO EQUITY IN HEALTH.”²⁹

— Louise Potvin, *Université de Montréal*



Setting Up Systems to Understand Who Was Affected—Boston, MA

Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC)

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) worked to ensure their *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* (CPPW) efforts were effective in reaching the populations experiencing obesity and tobacco-related health inequities. BPHC implemented the following steps in developing their evaluation plan:

- Developed evaluation questions to gauge their impact on health inequities.
- Required partners to routinely collect data on race/ethnicity, age, gender, and zip code for all of their initiatives. The data documented how activities benefitted the community in general, as well as population groups/areas experiencing health inequities.
- Increased sample size for the *CPPW* Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System in order to ensure sufficient power to assess neighborhood-level changes over time.
- Designed an analysis plan to assess the overall effect of the selected strategies, as well as the effect(s) across population groups.
- Set up their performance monitoring to identify areas where additional efforts may be needed to enhance intervention effects in underserved communities.

This strategic evaluation design enabled BPHC to make mid-course adjustments and enhanced their ability to contribute to the evidence-base regarding the influence of their initiative on advancing health equity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: Addressing Health Equity in Evaluation Efforts

1. Where are we now?

- How are we currently assessing the effect(s) of our efforts to address health equity?

2. How do we start the evaluation process with health equity in mind?

- Do we have the expertise to develop, implement, and assess an equity-oriented evaluation plan?
- What process can we establish to routinely engage community stakeholders, including those experiencing health inequities, in all aspects of our evaluation efforts?
- What are our current health equity strategies, activities and goals?
- How can our logic model be modified to reflect our health equity activities and goals?

3. How can we consider health equity in evaluation questions and design?

- How can we reframe or create new evaluation questions to better understand our effect on health inequities?
- What are the key variables we should use to track the influence of our efforts on populations experiencing health inequities?
- How can our sampling plan be designed or modified to answer our health equity-oriented evaluation question(s)?

4. How can we integrate health equity principles in the data gathering process?

- What processes do we have in place to determine when culturally appropriate tools or methodologies are needed?
- If modifications are needed, how can we ensure our evaluation tools meet the needs of populations experiencing health inequities (e.g., language and literacy needs)?
- Are the data we are collecting reflective of the real experience of the populations experiencing inequities? Are other approaches needed?
- Does our performance monitoring system allow us to track and identify needs that may arise when implementing efforts in underserved communities?
- How can we structure our evaluation processes to understand the long-term effects of our efforts on health inequities?

5. How can we understand our effect on health equity through our analysis plan?

- Does our analysis plan allow us to answer the following:
 - What worked?
 - For whom?
 - Under what conditions?
 - Is there any differential impact?
 - Have inequities decreased, increased, or remained the same?
- If not, how can we modify the analysis plan to answer these questions?
- Does our outcome evaluation allow us to determine differential effects across population groups?
- Does our process evaluation allow us to understand the key factors that influenced the outcomes of our efforts in underserved communities?
- What actions do we need to take to improve or enhance our evaluation plan to understand our effects on health equity (e.g., have inequities decreased, increased, or remained the same)?

6. How can we share our evaluation efforts with diverse stakeholders?

- How and where do we typically disseminate our evaluation findings?
- What commitment can we develop to ensure we share findings, even if negative?
- How can we ensure we share our findings in plain and clear language that can be understood by stakeholders, partners, and community members?
- How can our findings be used to support more action in communities of greatest need?
- How can we revise the ways in which we share lessons learned to help others concerned with addressing health inequities?

7. What are our next steps?

- What can we do differently to improve or enhance our ability to conduct health equity-oriented evaluations?
- What is our plan of action to implement improvements in our evaluation efforts?