MAKING THE CASE FOR HEALTH EQUITY

THERE ARE VARYING IDEAS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO "ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY." EFFECTIVELY MAKING THE CASE FOR HEALTH EQUITY REQUIRES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND INTENDED AUDIENCES, AN APPROPRIATELY FRAMED MESSAGE THAT APPEALS TO CORE VALUES, AND INCREASED AWARENESS OF EXISTING HEALTH INEQUITIES AMONG STAKEHOLDERS. CONSIDER THESE IDEAS TO ENHANCE EFFORTS IN MAKING THE CASE FOR HEALTH EQUITY:

Assess the Community Context Before Developing Messaging Around Health Equity

Without a proper understanding of the community context, messages around health equity can go unnoticed or may lead to unfavorable actions. It is important to consider the needs, assets, and priority issues of both community members and key stakeholders. Also, consider their receptiveness to the concept of health equity before developing any messaging. Understanding these issues may provide insight into common values, competing demands, fiscal priorities, and related efforts, which may help in refining messages.

Leverage Opportunities to Advance Health Equity Efforts

Become aware of health equity-related work in your area and around the country. If health equity-oriented efforts are underway, connect with those efforts to heighten the visibility of your efforts and to reinforce your message. Additionally, identify partners or coalitions with complementary goals (e.g., community- and faith-based organizations) as they may be able to support your message.

Support the Case for Health Equity with Relevant Data

Use data on health inequities to complement your overall message and raise the awareness of key stakeholders. For example, visual and experiential data (e.g., mapping, digital storytelling) can provide vivid examples of the real experiences of communities affected by health equities. Cost data can also be used to reveal the significant financial implications of existing inequities (e.g., unnecessary health care costs, costs associated with premature death among populations experiencing inequities).

Highlight Solutions When Framing Your Messages Around Health Equity

Lengthy descriptions of the existence of health inequities may detract from actionable solutions. The description of the problem should not overshadow potential solutions. Establish which inequities exist in your community; however, ensure the message focuses on actions to address health inequities.

Ensure Health Equity Messages are Appropriately Disseminated

It is important that everyone from staff and community members to partners and stakeholders have a shared understanding of your health equity goals. Provide trainings to equip staff members with a clear understanding of health equity as they are the voices for advancing your organization's efforts. Create opportunities for dialogue among community members and stakeholders to share concerns and develop skills to advance health equity in their communities. Identify ways to connect your partners' broader networks to ensure diverse perspectives are contributing to solutions for health equity. Use a variety of communication methods (e.g., earned media, radio spots) to both broadly disseminate and appropriately tailor your messages.

Mapping Our Voices for Equality—Seattle and King County, WA

Public Health Seattle & King County (PHSKC) and Partners

Mapping our Voices for Equality (MOVE)[28] uses media to promote health equity in Seattle and King County. MOVE combines over 100 community-developed multilingual digital stories and features a local map showing both the impact of place on health and some place-based changes that will improve health in King County. To implement MOVE, Public Health Seattle & King County (PHSKC) with support of CDC's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* program, did the following:

- Engaged community members in dialogue about health equity issues and provided workshops on digital storytelling to gather stories, empower community members, and promote positive health changes in King County.
- Invited local stakeholders to community meetings and forums where community members could showcase their videos and have a discussion.
- Posted over 100 multilingual digital stories to a website with widespread reach, encouraging other community members to get involved.
- Created templates and worksheets to foster dialogue among key stakeholders and community groups when holding meetings and health equity discussions.
- Successfully contributed to multiple policy, systems, and environmental improvements including enhanced school nutrition policies, increased hours to a local community center, and increased access to healthy food in a local "food desert."

The MOVE media initiative is empowering community members to identify and raise awareness of the health inequities impacting them.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: Making the Case for Health Equity

1. Where are we now?

- How do we currently frame our efforts regarding health equity; what are our messages?

2. How can we assess the community context to develop our health equity messages?

- How receptive are our key stakeholders toward adopting a health equity approach?
- What are the views and perceptions of our key stakeholders as they relate to health inequities? How should we consider those views in our messaging?
- Are other activities and ongoing efforts occurring in our community that could support or inhibit a health equity-based approach? How can we build on these supportive activities and overcome challenges to implementing a health equity-based approach?
- How can we identify and connect with potential partners/coalitions currently engaged in health equity-focused work?

3. What type of data can we use to support the case for health equity?

- What are some creative ways to capture and highlight the lived experience of health inequities in our community?
- What combinations of data can we use to help make the case for health equity?

4. How can we share our message about health equity?

- How can we ensure our staff and partners have a common understanding of our work to advance health equity?
- What are the key messages needed to tell the health equity story in our community?
- How can we create a dialogue around health equity among community members and other key stakeholders?
- Which communication methods will be most effective to reach our intended audiences?
- How can we identify and communicate our health equity success stories?

5. What are our next steps?

- What can we do differently to improve or enhance our ability to make the case for health equity?
- What is our plan of action for implementing those changes?