Equity for Researchers

Healthy Eating Research

The resources in this document offer tools to help researchers understand and incorporate racial equity principles into their research in order to advance health equity. While this document is by no means a comprehensive guide, we hope it offers researchers some starting context.

Prioritizing Health Equity

Health is powerfully influenced by conditions in our environments, also called social determinants of health. These include education; employment opportunities; income; housing; access to health care; access to healthy foods; and social support networks. Systemic barriers including poverty, discrimination, and racism underlie these conditions and shape our environments.

> **RWJF's Definition of Health Equity**
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> Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

At Healthy Eating Research, we have a focus on advancing health equity in the areas of nutrition, weight and food security. Access to good nutrition, affordable healthy foods, and opportunities to make healthful choices are key to advancing health equity.

Addressing health inequities calls for an equity lens. Kumanyika (2019) characterizes an equity lens as understanding the social, political, and environmental contexts of a program, policy, or practice to evaluate and assess the unfair benefits and burdens in a society or population.[1] She writes that an equity lens also involves:

- familiarity with general equity principles and how to talk about them;
- knowledge about historical contexts for inequities and how they were and continue to be shaped by privilege for some and oppression of others;
- understanding policymaking and implementation; and
- a commitment to ongoing learning and unlearning.

Nutrition and food access inequities are linked with systemic and structural barriers like racism and poverty. Disparities in healthy eating and food access are often seen across racial and ethnic lines. Thus, to close gaps in nutrition equity and improve population health, it is critical for research to apply a specific racial equity focus.

> **Definition of Racial Equity**
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> Racial equity can be defined as both an outcome and a process. From Race Forward, "As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives."

Researchers can contribute to racial and ethnic equity in several key ways, including: intentionally integrating racial and ethnic equity into each stage of the research process; centering communities and serving as a bridge between impacted communities and those who make decisions; helping to build better data systems that address challenges such as insufficient disaggregation and siloed data sources; and advocating for change within research institutions to increase diversity and make racial and ethnic equity a standard focus.[2,3]

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[1] Kumanyika SK. A Framework for Increasing Equity Impact in Obesity Prevention. American Journal of Public Health 109, no. 10 (October 1, 2019): pp. 1350-1357.
[2] Andrews K, Parekh J, Peckoo S. How to Embed a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research: Practical Guidance for the Research Process. Child Trends; Bethesda, MD: 2019.
[3] "For Its Health Equity Agenda, The Biden Administration Needs Research That Focuses On Impacted Communities," Health Affairs Blog, July 13, 2021.

Embedding Equity in the Research Process

This section outlines some key principles for incorporating equity into the research process, and identifies resources that can provide practical guidance for researchers.

Key principles for incorporating equity into the research process include:

- Expand traditional research approaches to include more perspectives, ideas, and methodologies.
- Center communities in research. Consider equity at every stage of the research process.
- Lived experience is valuable. Diversifying who conducts research makes evidence stronger and helps us put that evidence into action.
- The language we use matters. When talking about people and health disparities use language that conveys respect and is free of bias and stereotypes.

Resources

How to Embed a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research: Practical Guidance for the Research Process (Child Trends, 2019)
This report includes five guiding principles for integrating racial and ethnic equity in research, and specific guidance for various stages of the research process (landscape assessment, study design and data collection, data analysis, and dissemination).

Making Racial Equity Real in Research (Greenlining Institute, 2020)
The report includes racial equity best practices, resources, exercises and recommendations for researchers. It aims to provide an anti-racist approach to conducting research by recognizing and reconciling inequitable research practices and flipping the power dynamics of traditional methods.

Urban Institute Guide for Racial Equity in the Research Process (Urban Institute, 2020)
This guide was developed to help shape and change research and communications processes to ensure that research is inclusive, respectful, and incorporates a racial equity lens. It includes key questions to consider at each stage of the research process to promote racial equity.

Three Ways to Advance Health Equity Through Research (RWJF, 2021)
RWJF calls for research on how to eliminate inequities in health outcomes by addressing structural racism, and expanding traditional research approaches to include more perspectives, ideas, and methodologies.

A Framework for Increasing Equity Impact in Obesity Prevention (Kumanyika, 2019)
This paper presents a framework for thinking through obesity-related policy, systems, and environmental strategies with an intentional focus on equity. It includes a tool for rating research proposals on sensitivity to health equity issues.

Reflections on Applying Principles of Equitable Evaluation (WestEd, 2019)
This report explores the concept of equitable evaluation, how it can be applied and how it differs from traditional evaluations, what the authors have learned about implementing equitable evaluation principles, and advice on designing future studies with equitable evaluation principles in mind.

Language Matters

It is important to use equity-centered, inclusive language that considers systemic and structural inequities, conveys respect to all people, acknowledges diversity, and is free of stereotypes and subtle discrimination.

Consider using these guides in your study materials, job descriptions, and as you are communicating and disseminating your research findings:

- CDC's Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication emphasize the importance of addressing all people inclusively and respectfully.
- The Sum of Us Progressive's Style Guide contains writing guides and additional resources for a variety of issue areas, including age, health, disability, gender/sex, and race/ethnicity.
- The Language of Health Guide has strategies to use and avoid when communicating to the public about health, nutrition, and weight.
- Your institution's office of diversity and inclusion may have additional helpful resources.