

MDCH 2014 Health Equity Report

Brief:

Understanding Health Equity



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"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhumane."

--Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

Background

- ❖ Health is determined by a number of factors including our behaviors; having access to quality health care; and living in optimal social, economic, and environmental conditions.²
- ❖ The important influence of social, economic, and environmental factors on health is widely acknowledged.³
- ❖ Racial and ethnic minority populations in Michigan continue to face pervasive and significant inequalities in social, economic and environmental conditions, important to good health.
- ❖ Achieving health improvement for racial and ethnic minorities in Michigan will require assuring access to opportunities needed for good health, such as **quality education; affordable, healthy food; safe places** to walk, bike, or play; adequate **housing or job opportunities**; and quality **health services, resources, and support**.²

Health Disparities, Inequities and Social Determinants

- ❖ **Health disparities** are measurable differences in the burden of disease among specific populations (e.g. racial/ethnic, persons with physical or mental disabilities) as compared to the general population.
- ❖ **Health inequities** are differences in health across population groups that are systemic, unnecessary and avoidable, and therefore unjust. Health inequities are largely the result of limited access to opportunities and resources needed to achieve optimal health.
- ❖ **Social determinants** are social, economic, and environmental factors that greatly influence the health of individuals and communities. Social

Inequities are GROWING in Michigan

Between 2000 and 2009, gaps between Non-White and White Michiganders INCREASED for:

- Self-reported fair/poor health
- Unhealthy physical days
- Percent without health insurance
- Household income
- Percent children living in poverty

Source: Michigan Health Equity Data Reference Tables, 2000-2009. MDCH.2011. Available at: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/MI_Health_Equity_Data_Tables_-_May_2011_361639_7.pdf

determinants include: living wage, language, race/ethnicity, discrimination, quality education, employment, safe and affordable housing, access to healthy foods and safe water, accessible transportation, etc.

Health Equity

- ❖ **Health equity** is the fair, just access to economic and social opportunities as well as community resources that allow people to reach their full health potential and optimal well-being.

Moving Health Equity Forward

- ❖ Strategies to improve the health of all Michiganders have failed to reduce or eliminate the disproportionate burden of poor health in Michigan's racial and ethnic minority populations.
- ❖ Achieving racial and ethnic health equity depends on our ability to improve the socio-economic factors that influence health such as housing, education, workplaces, recreational opportunities, transportation, the environment, and more.²
- ❖ This requires examining the structures and systems that have contributed to these unequal conditions and implementing policies, programs and practices that address the various social, economic, and environmental determinants of health.^{4,5}

*Social Policy is Health Policy.
Improved Social Policies will
Improve Health Equity in Michigan.
--Unnatural Causes Policy Guide, California
Nesreel 2008*

Health Equity Benefits Us All

- ❖ Health and social inequities impose a significant economic burden on our nation and our state.²
- ❖ Research shows that when inequities exist in employment, income, education, housing, and other social conditions, it is not only the health of disadvantaged groups that suffers,

THE COST OF INEQUITIES

- In the US, between 2003-2006 the estimated combined cost of racial and ethnic health disparities and premature death was \$1.24 trillion.^a
- Eliminating these health disparities would have reduced direct medical care expenditures in the US by \$229.4 billion for the same time period.^a

^a The Economic Burden of Health Inequalities in the United States, Joint Center, 2009.

but also the health of more advantaged groups.⁶

- ❖ Assuring that everyone has the opportunity to be healthy not only promotes health equity, but also improves the health of the larger society.^{4,6}
- ❖ Achieving health equity is necessary to ensure the long term health and prosperity of our state.

If health equity were achieved and all infants born in Michigan had the same chance of surviving beyond their first birthday, 235 babies who died in 2009 would be alive today—more than enough to fill a jumbo jet.

Health in All Policies: An Opportunity for Health Equity

It is widely known that factors other than behavior impact health including policies that increase or lessen access to healthy options. *Health in All Policies* is an approach to public policy that involves multiple sectors working to achieve population and community health improvement. *Health in All Policies* engages public health, education, transportation, health care, housing, environmental and other sectors in determining how policy and funding decisions affect health. It provides a process and tools (i.e. Health Impact Assessment) to assess the potential harmful or beneficial impact of decisions. This is particularly important for groups (racial and ethnic minorities, women, persons with disabilities, low income, etc.) who have historically and currently experience health inequities. *Health in All Policies* is an important resource for public health and health equity efforts.

For more information, please contact:

MDCH, Health Disparities Reduction and Minority Health Section

Phone: (313) 456-4355, colormehealthy@michigan.gov, www.michigan.gov/minorityhealth

¹ The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the Second Annual Convention of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, Chicago, March 25, 1966.

² National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities. *Toolkit for Community Action*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health, Retrieved from: http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/files/Plans/Toolkit/NPA_Toolkit.pdf (1/5/15).

³ World Health Organization, Commission on Social Determinants of Health. (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

⁴ Coalition of National Health Education Organizations. (2013). Health Equity Primer: Advancing Social Justice, Equal Opportunity & Community Well-being. Retrieved from: <http://healtheducationadvocate.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Health-Equity-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf> (1/5/15).

⁵ Minnesota Department of Health. (2014). Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: Report to the Legislature. Retrieved from: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/healthequity/> (1/5/15).

⁶ Wilkinson, R.G., and Pickett, K. (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. New York: Bloomsbury.