



A-Z OF HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF ONTARIO HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COALITION & BC HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SOCIETY

J - JUSTICE

A NOTE ABOUT EQUITY

Equity and justice are closely linked and often used interchangeably. Equity is the **fair distribution of power, opportunities, and resources** to meet the needs of all people, regardless of age, ability, gender, or background. When developing policies and programs, an equity lens should be applied to ensure no one will be disproportionately harmed.

Applying an equity lens means asking who will benefit from a policy, program, initiative or service, but also who may be excluded from the benefits and why? How might some population groups be unfairly burdened today or in the future? How can we be more inclusive and engage people in a meaningful way?

A commitment to social justice, equity, and environmental justice is at the root of healthy communities work. Justice is more than right versus wrong or following the law; it's about what is fair or equitable and ensuring everyone is afforded the same rights and opportunities.

Justice, equity, and a healthy natural environment are key characteristics of a healthy community; therefore, it is important that local governments integrate a commitment to social and environmental justice into their work. Local governments can develop just policies and programs through authentic community engagement—including all members of society in the development of policies and programs that will impact their health and well-being, especially those who are generally excluded from participating in civic life.

WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Public health is deeply rooted in the values of social justice.¹ Social justice refers to a society in which there is **equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities**.² We know the social determinants of health play a significant role in influencing the health and well-being of communities. But racism, discrimination and bias are also significant determinants of health.

It can be uncomfortable to reflect on how discriminatory policies and programs of both the past and present have influenced and perpetuated the health disparities in our communities, but it's important to understand that policies and programs made by governments of all levels, including local governments, do play a role in widening or closing the health equity gap.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

The same way policies and programs can perpetuate health inequities, vulnerable communities are often disproportionately burdened by the effects of pollution, contamination and unhealthy environments. Environmental justice is the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, [ethnicity], or [socioeconomic status] with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies”.³

Local governments, partners and public health professionals have a duty to include all members of the community in the development of policies and programs aimed at creating healthy natural environments and encouraging environmental protection and sustainability. By including all members of the community, local governments can work to ensure that no one is disproportionately burdened by unhealthy environmental conditions.

RESOURCES FOR APPLYING AN EQUITY LENS

City for All Women Initiative, [Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities](#) (2015)

BC Centre for Disease Control, [Fact Sheet: Supporting Health Equity Through the Built Environment](#) (2017)

Human Impact Partners, [Health Equity Guide](#) (n.d.)

REFERENCES

1 Edwards & Davidson. (2008). [Social justice and core competencies for public health: Improving the fit](#). *Canadian Journal of Public Health*.

2 National Association of Social Workers. As cited in Morgaine (2014). [Conceptualizing social justice in social work: Are social workers “too bogged down in the trees?”](#) *Journal of Social Justice*, p.4.

3 United States Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.) [Learn about environmental justice](#).



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Coalition des Communautés en santé de l'Ontario



BC Healthy Communities
People. Place. Potential.



OHCC enables communities to create and sustain positive change through equitable community engagement, intersectoral partnerships, political commitment, healthy public policy, and asset-based community development. **BC Healthy Communities** supports multi-sectoral groups to build their capacity to create healthy communities.