

Building a Foundation for Health Equity: How Your Team can Make Change

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About Healthcare Excellence Canada

Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) works with partners across the country to shape a future where everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. We bring together people, evidence and action to move Care Forward - spreading and scaling quality and safety improvements, strengthening capacity and collective leadership and catalyzing change in policy and practice.

At HEC, healthcare excellence means improving safety, quality and value for everyone. It means care grounded in what matters most to patients, caregivers, communities and people in the workforce. It also means care that respects and responds to First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and is culturally safe, equitable and supported by the appropriate use of technology. Together with our partners, we embed these foundations across the health system.

Our work also focuses on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community. This includes supporting people with primary health care needs and older adults with health and social needs.

HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

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Acknowledgements

This resource was co-developed with the insight, experience and generosity of many people. We are grateful to the team members, collaborators, patient and community partners and leaders across health and social systems who contributed their time, wisdom and lived expertise.

The ideas and approaches reflected here do not exist in isolation. They are rooted in and shaped by decades of scholarship, activism and lived experience from

equity-focused practitioners, community organizers, researchers and Knowledge Keepers (past and present) whose work has long been naming and challenging the systems that create inequities in health and care. We are grateful to stand on that foundation and commit to continuing to learn from it.

A full list of contributors involved in the development of these resources is available on [HEC's website](#).



About this resource

Advancing health equity is a shared effort that relies on collaboration, conversation and collective action. This resource supports teams to explore what's possible for advancing health equity work together. By reflecting on shared strengths, systemic barriers and opportunities for change – while also considering the realities of their organizational context – teams can identify where they are best positioned to take action on health equity.

This resource is part of a series of implementation guides that support application of the co-developed [HEC Health Equity Framework](#) to advance equity across health systems and services.

How to use this resource

- Bring this reflection tool to team pre-planning sessions for health equity work or strategy development, and use the questions below to inform dialogue and identify areas for growth and action.
- Use this resource with other implementation guides. The following resources from the HEC Health Equity Framework might be relevant:



Using your influence to support change: This resource helps identify actions you can take within your own sphere of influence.



Guiding commitments: This resource helps to align your work with team, partner and organization commitments to health equity.

Want to move ahead to implement the HEC Health Equity Framework?

The *How to Plan and Implement Priority Actions* resource can help you and your team tailor your efforts to community priorities, your organizational context, and the resources available.



Understanding your team's sphere of influence

As a team, you bring together different perspectives, roles and relationships that expand your ability to create change. Reflecting on your team's sphere of influence can help you identify where coordinated action on health equity is possible and how your organizational context shapes those opportunities.

Consider:

- **your team's collective sphere of influence** – the policies, processes, practices and decisions you can directly influence or change.
- **your organization's sphere of influence** – the reach, power and ability of your organization to address systemic barriers and shift institutional practices that enable equitable conditions of care.



Figure 1: Graphic re-created from The Institution of Structural Engineers.

Retrieved from <https://www.istructe.org/resources/blog/spheres-of-influence-and-diversity-and-inclusion/>

Figure 1 shows the different levels at which change can happen, from personal actions to broader system-level shifts. As a team, you may find that your collective influence spans more than one level and that different team members are in the best positions to act at different levels. Use the figure as a your team has the greatest reach and opportunity for health equity action.

This figure also appears in the *Using your influence to support change* resource, to support individual reflection on sphere of influence.



Meaningful engagement is an essential part of this work

Co-design, co-development and delivery in partnership with people, communities and other collaborators are essential to advancing health equity. Consider not just where you and your organization hold power, but also how you can redistribute power by building partnerships, encouraging dialogue and ensuring shared decision-making.

The voices of structurally marginalized people and communities are often missing from decision-making. In order to centre their voices, leadership and decision-making power, your team needs to work in partnership to identify what is needed to create change, define problems and identify solutions.



Worksheet: Explore your team’s path forward in health equity work

Use this worksheet to explore where your team fits within your organization’s current approach to health equity work. In the context of your specific work moving forward, what possibilities lie ahead? These prompts are designed to help you identify strengths, anticipate challenges and uncover opportunities to take meaningful action.

As you work through these questions, it might be helpful to keep your project or initiative in mind. Consider how your responses connect to the specific equity goals, relationships and changes you are working toward.

Table 1: Your team’s starting point for health equity action

Questions	Response	Opportunities for Action
Does your organization’s mission, vision or strategy include equity-related goals or commitments?		
If not, can you work toward building such goals and commitments? Are there external policies or mandates that support this?		
If so, how can you build on those goals and commitments in your equity work?		
Are they resourced sustainably?		
Do they go further to acknowledge and commit to addressing systemic inequities?		

Questions	Response	Opportunities for Action
What policies, practices or processes in your organization reinforce historical and current systems that result in inequities? Where does your team have power to change these?		
How simple or challenging will it be to seek support from other teams or areas in your organization? How might you raise awareness about health equity as a priority?		

Questions	Response	Opportunities for Action
What existing relationships, decision-making power or resources does your team have that could be leveraged to dismantle barriers or change inequitable systems? How can you build on those strengths? What knowledge or capacity can you develop?		
How can you build relationships across the organization or network?		

Questions	Response	Opportunities for Action
What challenges or organizational obstacles do you expect to face? What steps can you take to address those challenges? How will you navigate this?		

Consider what your responses reveal about opportunities for your team to take action on health equity. Reflect on what's possible within your organization, recognizing both limitations and areas of potential. Even small actions within your sphere of influence can create meaningful change and lay the groundwork for broader impact over time.

Next step

Good work! You have started to identify some opportunities for action within your team's sphere of influence. Now, take a moment and as a team, commit to one specific step to pursue the identified opportunity for action:

Our one step is:

We will do this by:

Our roles to achieve this are:

Resources to support learning



HEC's Long Term Success Tool. This self-assessment tool helps teams explore whether they have the resources needed to ensure their quality improvement efforts are successful and sustainable long term. The tool can also be used to assess a team's or organization's readiness to engage in a specific initiative arising from the HEC Health Equity Framework.



HEC's Patient Engagement Framework. This tool outlines the ways HEC embeds patient, caregiver and community perspectives into programming, activities and initiatives. The framework may be a helpful resource for other organizations considering how to approach patient engagement in their unique settings.



McMaster University's Supporting Equity-Centred Engagement. This tool was designed for people doing engagement work in health system and/or health policy contexts – particularly related to equity-centred engagement.



Tamarack Institute's Tool Index of Community Engagement Techniques. This resource is a comprehensive list of community engagement techniques that you select based on the level of engagement you are conducting.