

Equity Assessment Framework for Public Health Laws and Policies

The Equity Assessment Framework provides a way to assess the equity implications of existing or proposed laws or policies. It can assist in identifying issues in the drafting, design, or implementation of a law or policy that could have a disproportionate impact on different population groups. The framework is meant to guide a discussion around how equity is considered in both process and outcomes, and can help identify opportunities for improvement.

1. What is the issue and how does the law or policy address it?

Consider who is identifying the issue and the context behind it – what is the diversity of the people identifying, defining, and deciding on the issue? Are there opportunities to engage more diverse voices in the process? Ask what standard is being applied or whether data exist that define the nature and extent of the issue. Also question whether existing data are complete, reliable, and unbiased.

2. How are community voices included in identifying and defining the issue and deciding what law or policy approach to take?

Consider whether there are meaningful opportunities for feedback during the review and development of a law or policy from the groups most likely to be impacted. Have you engaged community leaders? Is the issue a priority to community members?

Any final decisions on changes to an existing law or policy or implementation of a new law or policy should be communicated clearly to all stakeholders in a way that is accessible and meaningful to them. If community feedback was solicited, it should be clear whether and how that feedback impacted the final decision. Community members should be engaged in implementation, where appropriate.

3. What is the historical context of the issue?

Establish why a particular issue exists. Connect data to context around health outcomes. Be explicit about the link between health outcomes for different population groups and the legal or policy issues that create those outcomes.

4. How does the law or policy impact different population groups?

Identify the benefits and burdens for vulnerable populations. This can include race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, disability status, and age. Identify individual and organizational stakeholders and assess public sentiment. Consider also whether the law or policy affects the distribution of resources to these groups.

5. What are the known or expected outcomes of a given law or policy?

Identify whether the law or policy will improve, worsen, or have no effect on health outcomes. Determine whether a law or policy has been implemented anywhere else. If so, are there data about the impact?

Did you...

1. Clearly define the issue?
2. Identify the relevant law or policy?
3. Engage community voices or impacted stakeholders?
4. Assess the historical context?
5. Identify the benefits and burdens on vulnerable populations?
6. Identify the outcomes?
7. Consider alternatives to achieve the same outcomes?
8. Plan for implementation, monitoring, and future review?

6. What other options can achieve the same or similar outcome?

Consider the best avenue to achieve a goal: through statute, regulation, ordinance, organizational policy, or policy guidance. More than one legal or policy intervention may be necessary to achieve the goal.

7. Can the solution be successfully sustained?

Consider whether the conditions necessary for long-term success are in place - human and financial resources, reasonable enforcement mechanisms, community engagement, leadership, political will, etc. Will changes be necessary in the future? How often do you plan to revisit and review existing laws or policies?

You may not be able to answer all questions in a way that you find satisfactory. There may not be opportunities for improvement or for engaging diverse voices, and you may not find a solution that everyone agrees on. No matter the outcome, it is important to document the decision and communicate the result and reasoning to impacted stakeholders.

You can also find other tools to engage in this work, including:

- Public Health Law Center, [*Focusing on Equity and Inclusion When We Work on Public Health Laws*](#)
- City of St. Paul, MN, [*Racial Equity Assessment Toolkit*](#)
- Changelab Solutions, [*Equitable Enforcement to Achieve Health Equity*](#)
- Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative, [*Racial Equity Toolkit*](#)

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