

# Talking about Health Equity



To solve the public health problems before us, we need to eliminate persistent inequities and prioritize the perspectives of people most affected by a problem.

Within public health circles, many use the term *health equity* to express such beliefs and commitments. But there are good reasons to take care when using this phrase more widely.

Different audiences have different levels of comfort and familiarity with the concept.

Among the general public, the term *equity* isn't widely understood. FrameWorks researchers have found that most people associate the term with financial topics, as in *home equity* or *equity* in a business. For communicators, this means that if you're using the term, it's vital to pair it with a clear explanation.

In some states, the term has been politicized and singled out in legislation as a word to avoid. This makes it important to be equipped to talk about the concept, even if you need to avoid the label.

Here are three sample definitions that use the phrases "fair and full" or "fair and just," which can complement or replace the word *equity*:

Equity means fairness and justice. It involves ensuring that every individual and group gets what they need to thrive and participate fully in society. Achieving equity often asks us to rethink uniform, one-size-fits-all treatment. It sometimes involves devoting more resources or different resources in communities that face injustice, to correct imbalances caused by unfair or unequal treatment.

Health equity means that all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Achieving health equity requires:

- Valuing every person and their health fairly
- Addressing unfair practices and unjust conditions that can harm the health of specific groups in society
- Working with different groups in specific, sensitive ways to address health issues that affect them.

We want to ensure that everyone has a fair and full opportunity to be as healthy as possible, which requires:

- Valuing every person and their health
- Improving social conditions that can harm people's health
- Working with different groups in specific, sensitive ways to address health issues that affect them.

Feel free to cut and paste the above definitions into your own communications, or adapt for your context and audience.

When crafting your own explanations, make sure you include two parts: the goal (everybody has what they need) and the way to get there (different supports to meet different needs).

**Pro Tip:** Keep in mind that for most purposes, it makes more sense to define *equity* on its own, rather than relying on a contrast with *equality*. Equality is a cherished cultural ideal, so we may confuse or lose people if we leave the impression that we think it's a bad thing. The distinction between *equity* and *equality* is important for program and policy design, but less important for external messaging. The important point to get across to the public is that uniform treatment may not always be the best or right way to reach a goal related to fairness.

For more guidance on navigating the challenges of framing racial equity issues, see [\*Talking About Racism in Child and Family Advocacy\*](#).