

Building Health Equity (BHE) Initiative

The Building Health Equity (BHE) Initiative strives to establish the building blocks for a sustainable culture of health equity practice in Iowa; promote continued curiosity, learning, and growth in topics around health equity; and advocate for health equity in day-to-day actions and decision-making processes at all levels of an organization and beyond.

The Initiative began in Fall 2022 with funding from the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services to advance health equity and social justice within public health departments in Iowa. The Initiative is led by faculty, staff, and students at the Midwestern Public Health Training Center – within the Institute for Public Practice, Research, and Policy – and the Prevention Research Center for Rural Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. It is a model that can be implemented across different states in government or non-governmental organizations. Key components of the Initiative are explained below.

Organizational Readiness Assessment: The Organizational Readiness Assessment is a tool to guide discussions about a health department's capacity to implement the Building Health Equity Training Program. It can be used during conversations between interested health department leadership and the BHE team leadership.

BHE Training Program: The Building Health Equity Training Program provides a peer-to-peer learning experience that deepens self-reflection and encourages brave conversations on historical and present structural racism and oppression, cultural humility, empathy, difficult interactions, and transactional vs. transformative change. It is intended to provide a foundation for integrating changes in practice, policies, and programs that impact the health of communities.

This training program is facilitated by health equity-oriented faculty, staff, students, and health department equity champions from their respective health departments. These facilitators can effectively guide conversations; open space for listening, hearing, and engaging with individuals at different starting points of the health equity lifelong-learning continuum; and invite participation, humility, and growth. The facilitation team has committed to centering voices of non-dominant identities.

Participants have reported increased knowledge of health equity principles and increased self-confidence in discussing health equity issues. They shared methods explaining how they plan to positively change their behaviors as a result of the training. Moreover, most participants reported satisfaction with the training overall.

BHE Learning Collaborative: The purpose of the Learning Collaborative is to provide a space for peers to share challenges and successes in building health equity in their health departments. The Learning Collaborative members decide the objectives and the process. They discuss practices that are necessary for health equity work at a local level, such as building relationships, connections, and trust; sharing uplifting lived experiences alongside evidence-based practice; and presenting a mindset of co-learning and humility.

BHE Webinar Series: The Building Health Equity Webinar Series is a supplemental learning opportunity geared toward local public health professionals but open to anyone interested in advancing health equity. Subject matter experts in a range of health equity topics are invited to be panelists for these monthly webinars. These experts foster open conversation and address questions from attendees.

BHE Podcast Series: The Building Health Equity Podcast Series is a partnership with the Midwestern Public Health Training Center's *Share Public Health* podcast. The recorded webinars are converted into podcasts to make the sessions more easily accessible and to engage a broader audience.

BHE Website (<https://iphprp.org/services/training/building-health-equity/>): The Building Health Equity website contains information about all aspects of the Initiative and includes a glossary of health equity-related terms. It is continuously updated with a comprehensive list of tools and resources on a range of health equity topics.