

Frequently Asked Questions

Just Societies: Health Equity and Dignified Lives – Recommendations from the PAHO Independent Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas
October 2019

What is the Pan American Health Organization Report?

The PAHO Independent Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas collected information on root causes of health inequalities in the region. The Report provides concrete recommendations to reduce or eliminate health equity gaps.

How HENA is involved with the Report?

HENA has worked with the Commission and the Institute for Health Equity at University College London by providing published evidence on health equity. In addition, HENA and its members will be actively involved in distributing information about the recommendations through local, state, regional, national and international networks.

Who are the Commissioners?

1. Chair – **Professor Sir Michael Marmot**, Institute for Health Equity at University College London, England
2. **Victor Abramovich**, Universidad Nacional de Lanus, Argentina
3. **Mabel Bianco**, FEIM, Argentina
4. **Cindy Blackstock**, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, Canada
5. **Jo Ivey Boufford**, New York University School of Medicine, US
6. **David Satcher**, Satcher Health Leadership Institute, US
7. **Nila Heredia**, Andean Regional Health Organization, Bolivia
8. **Pastor Murillo**, UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Colombia
9. **Tracy Robinson**, University of the West Indies, Jamaica
10. **Maria Paula Romo**, International University of Ecuador, Ecuador
11. **Paulo Buss**, FIOCRUZ, Brazil
12. **Cesar Victoria**, Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil

What are Structural Drivers?ⁱ

The report examines factors and life situations and organizes recommendations according to structural drivers and conditions of daily life. Structural drivers include political, social, cultural and economic structures; the natural environment; the way markets operate; the role of the public sector and economic inequalities

- **Land and climate change:** Climate change demands urgent change in the way societies function and the ways in which states cooperate. Such changes must respect equity and health equity. Damage to the natural environment is also a major threat to the land and its people, with significant adverse impacts on health equity. Redressing both of these threats must be done in a spirit of justice.
- **History and legacy, ongoing colonialism:** There are between 45 and 50 million Indigenous peoples living in Central America, South America and the Caribbean, who represent approximately 13% of the Americas. In the United States, approximately 5.2 million persons identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native and in Canada 1.4 million people identify as Indigenous.ⁱⁱ The continuing effects of colonialism contribute to the depth and scope of health inequities.
- **Structural racism:** There are approximately 200 million people of African descent in the Americas, including the United States and Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ Their history is characterized by slavery, colonialism, racism, and discrimination, the effects of which are active in the present day.^{iv}

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What are Conditions of Daily Life?^v

The domains that affect daily life including: early life and education; working life; older people; income and social protection; violence; environment and housing; health systems --- all influence health equity and are affected by the structural drivers.

What is Gender Equality?

Effective equality between men and women, that entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypical views, rigid gender roles, and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behavior, aspirations, and needs of women and men are considered, valued, and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.^{vi}

What is Gender Equity?

Fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.^{vii}

What is Health Equity?

Attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities. ⁷ Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.^{viii}

What is a Culture of Health?

Broadly defined as one in which good health and well-being flourish across geographic, demographic, and social sectors; fostering healthy equitable communities guides public and private decision making; and everyone has the opportunity to make choices that lead to healthy lifestyles.^{ix}

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ABOUT HENA

What is the Health Equity Network of the Americas (HENA)?

The Health Equity Network of the Americas (HENA) is a vibrant, intersectoral community that seeks to drive action for a healthy future. Its membership represents civil society, government, and academia from 26 nations in the Americas and the Caribbean.

What is HENA's Mission?

To promote knowledge sharing and intersectoral action for health equity and human rights as priority issues in the Americas.

What is HENA's Vision?

An intersectoral network dedicated to promoting health equity and equality in the Americas, especially for vulnerable populations.

What are HENA's Values?

We stand for and ensure each action we take is grounded in and infused by these potent and foundational values: Action, Human Rights, Diversity, Equity, Social Justice, Intersectoral, Horizontality, Inclusion, Commitment, Collaboration

What are HENA's Goals?

1. To identify, promote, and share health equity policies and practices based on a human rights approach
2. To encourage action on promoting health equity through policies and practices that consider social determinants of health and human rights
3. To monitor progress and impact of health-related policies

What are HENA's Policy Priority Areas?

1. Gender Equality
2. Racial/Ethnic, Indigenous, and Immigrant Populations
3. Universal Health Care

ⁱ Pan American Health Organization. Just Societies: Health Equity and Dignified Lives. Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission of the Pan American Health Organization on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2018.

ⁱⁱ UN. State of the World's Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous Peoples' Access to Health Services. New York: United Nations; 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ UN. International decade for People of African Descent 2015 - 2024. United Nations Human Rights. Last accessed August 21, 2019 from: <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/assets/pdf/PAD-final%20for%20NY.Pdf>

^{iv} ECLAC. Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016. Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; 2017.

^v Pan American Health Organization. Just Societies: Health Equity and Dignified Lives. Executive Summary of the Report of the Commission of the Pan American Health Organization on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas. Washington, D.C.: PAHO; 2018.

^{vi} International Labour Office. ABC of women worker's rights and gender equality (p. 48). Geneva: ILO. 2000.

^{vii} Michalos AC, ed. Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research. 2014. SpringerLink. Last accessed August 20, 2019 from https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-94-007-0753-5_1131

^{viii} Braveman P, Arkin E, Orleans T, Proctor D, Plough A. What Is Health Equity. 2017; May 1. Last accessed August 20, 2019 from <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/05/what-is-health-equity-.html>

^{ix} Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. What Is a Culture of Health? Last accessed August 20, 2019 from <https://www.evidenceforaction.org/what-culture-health>