

Health Equity: Ensuring Fair Access to Health for All

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Health equity is the pursuit of eliminating disparities in health outcomes and access to healthcare across different population groups. It involves providing individuals with the opportunities and resources they need to attain their highest level of health, recognizing that certain groups face systemic barriers due to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. Achieving health equity is essential for creating a just and inclusive healthcare system where no one is left behind.

Understanding health equity

Health equity differs from equality, which provides the same resources to everyone regardless of need. Instead, equity focuses on fairness, meaning that people receive the specific resources they need based on their circumstances. For example, a person in a low-income neighborhood with limited access to healthcare facilities may require additional support, such as transportation services or mobile health units, to receive the same level of care as someone in a more affluent area with better access to services.

Social determinants of health

The root causes of health inequities often lie in the social determinants of health, which include factors like education, employment, housing, and access to healthcare services. These determinants heavily influence an individual's ability to maintain good health. People in disadvantaged communities may experience limited access to nutritious food, clean water, safe housing, and healthcare facilities, leading to poor health outcomes.

Racial and ethnic disparities in health

Racial and ethnic minorities often experience significant health disparities in comparison to white populations. For example, African Americans and Hispanic populations in the United States have higher rates of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. The maternal mortality rate among African American women is significantly higher than that of white women, often due to unequal access to prenatal care and racial bias in healthcare settings. These disparities are not

the result of biological differences but rather of social, economic, and environmental factors that disadvantage certain groups.

Role of healthcare access

Access to quality healthcare is a critical component of health equity. However, many populations still face significant barriers to accessing healthcare services. These barriers can include a lack of insurance coverage, high out-of-pocket costs, transportation challenges, and a shortage of healthcare providers in rural areas.

In the United States, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) helped improve access to healthcare by expanding medicaid and offering subsidies for health insurance, particularly benefiting low-income individuals and racial minorities. However, millions remain uninsured or underinsured, highlighting the need for further reforms to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, quality care.

Gender disparities in health

Gender also plays a role in health equity. Women, especially those from marginalized groups, often face unique challenges in accessing healthcare services. For example, women may have more difficulty affording care due to lower average incomes, and they are more likely to take on caregiving responsibilities, which can limit their ability to prioritize their health. Gender-based violence, reproductive health, and maternal healthcare are additional areas where disparities exist.

Strategies for achieving health equity

To achieve health equity, a multifaceted approach is needed. Key strategies include:

Policy and structural reforms: Governments and institutions must implement policies that address the social determinants of health. This can include investing in affordable housing, improving access to education, and ensuring that all communities have access to quality healthcare facilities.

Community engagement: Engaging communities in health initiatives is important for understanding their unique needs and developing targeted interventions. Community health workers

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can play a vital role in closing the distance between healthcare providers and underserved populations.

Cultural competency in healthcare: Healthcare providers must be trained to recognize and address the cultural, racial, and socioeconomic factors that influence patient care. Culturally competent care helps build trust between patients and providers, leading to better health outcomes.

Expanding access to care: Efforts to expand healthcare access should focus on both geographic and economic barriers. Expanding insurance coverage, investing in telemedicine, and improving healthcare infrastructure in underserved areas are essential steps toward equitable healthcare access.