



Clarifying Health Equity

Health equity means that all people have a fair chance to reach their full health potential and are not disadvantaged by their race, gender, culture, socio-economic status and/or other socially determined conditions.ⁱ

Health inequities are differences in health associated with social and economic disadvantages that are determined to be.ⁱⁱ

- **Systematic:** Health differences that are not random, but patterned across the population. For example, every step of the way, people who have fewer resources are less healthy than those with more money or social status. This linear relationship is known as the **social gradient of health** as it occurs throughout society, not simply between the most and least healthy individuals;
- **Socially produced:** Health differences that are the product of how societies distribute resources and opportunities. They are neither natural nor inevitable like biological differences. For example, colonization, racism and social exclusion are associated with negative health outcomes. For that reason, they are considered avoidable and/or modifiable;
- **Unjust and unfair:** Health equity is a concept that implies a moral judgment by societies; a commitment to social justice and basic human rights such as clean water, food, education and quality health care, and a fair allocation of resources according to need, not based on an individual's power, prestige or wealth.

Figure 1: Three images representing equality, equity and inclusion, as explained below.



Equality: In this first image, three boys of different heights are standing on boxes of the same height to watch a baseball game on the other side of a solid fence. The shortest boy still can't see over the fence to see the game. It is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same supports. They are being treated **equally**.

Equity: In the centre image, the tallest boy has no box, the second tallest boy stands on one box and the shortest boy stands on two boxes. They can all see over the fence at the same height. They are given different supports to make it possible for them to have equal access to the game. They are being treated **equitably**.

Inclusion: In the third image, the fence has been changed to a see-through fence. All three boys can see the game without any supports or accommodations because the cause of the inequity was addressed. The systemic barrier was removed.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ National Collaborating Centre for the Determinants of Health [NCCDH]. (2014). *Glossary of essential health equity terms*. Retrieved on June 17, 2016, from http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/comments/Glossary_EN.pdf

ⁱⁱ NCCDH. (2013). *Let's talk: Health equity*. Retrieved June 17, 2016, from http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/Lets_Talk_Health_Equity_English.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ City for All Women Initiative. (2015). *Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities*. Retrieved September 25, 2016, from <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/advancing-equity-inclusion-web.pdf>