



Health Equity: Key Concepts and Terms

Health means physical and mental health status and well-being, distinguished from health care.

Opportunities to be healthy depend on the living and working conditions and other resources that enable people to be as healthy as possible. A group's opportunities to be healthy are measured by assessing the determinants of health — such as income or wealth, education, neighborhood characteristics, social inclusion, and medical care—that they experience. Individual responsibility is important, but too many people lack access to the conditions and resources that are needed to be healthier and to have healthy choices.

A fair and just opportunity to be healthy means that everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Being as healthy as possible refers to the highest level of health that reasonably could be within an individual's reach if society makes adequate efforts to provide opportunities.

Achieving health equity requires actions to increase opportunities to be as healthy as possible. That requires improving access to the conditions and resources that strongly influence health — good jobs with fair pay, high-quality education, safe housing, good physical and social environments, and high-quality health care — for those who lack access and have worse health.

Health equity and health disparities are closely related to each other. **Health equity is the ethical and human rights principle or value that motivates us to eliminate health disparities.** Disparities in health and in the key determinants of health are how we measure progress toward health equity.

For health care provider organizations (e.g. hospitals, medical clinics, home health agencies) health equity means “providing care that does not vary in quality because of personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status”, according to the Institute for Medicine.

Health equity can be viewed both as a process (the process of reducing disparities in health and its determinates) **and as an outcome** (the ultimate goal: the elimination of social disparities in health and its determinants.) **Progress toward health equity is assessed by measuring how these disparities change over time.**

Source: [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#). Author(s): [Braveman P](#), [Arkin E](#), [Orleans T](#), [Proctor D](#), and [Plough A](#). May 2017