

ISK CLIMATE CHANGE & HEALTH SERIES

EQUITY ISSUE

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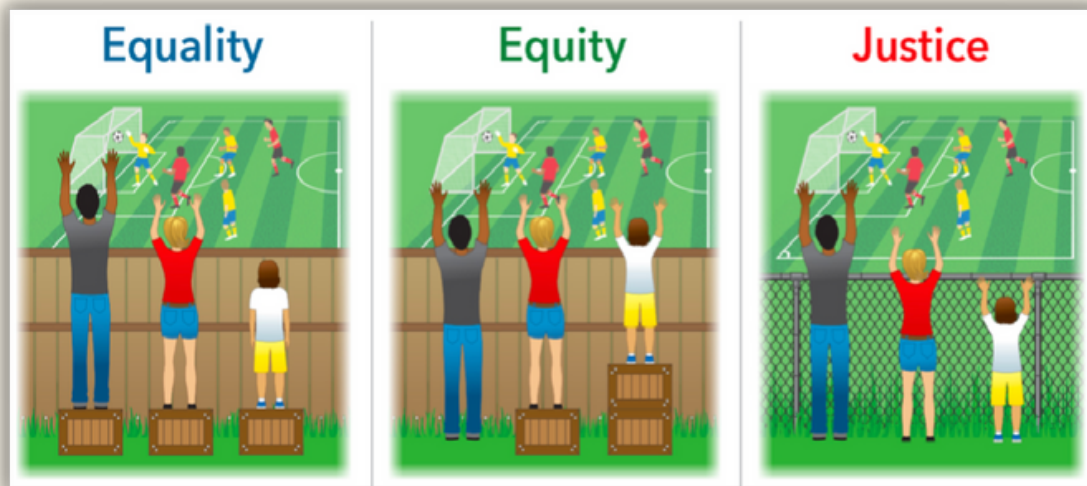


Equity: a quick review

At ISK, we are all pretty familiar with the concept of equity, especially when it comes to health and mental health. Even so, let's start with a quick review.

How does equity differ from equality?

Equality is all about inputs; equity is all about outcomes. Because each person starts from a different set of circumstances, giving everyone equal resources might not achieve equal results. But give each person what they need to achieve the same *outcome*, and we're getting somewhere. You might have seen this expressed in a version of the image below:



(Image source: Clean Air Partnership)

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)

At ISK, when we talk about "different circumstances," we're essentially talking about Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), which are the circumstances of an individual's environment that impact health and well-being outcomes. SDoH include everything from housing to food access to discrimination, and knowing an individual's SDoH can help us assess which resources can help them achieve their desired outcomes (if you want to learn more about how ISK addresses SDoH, chat with one of our Community Health Workers!). This is where climate change comes in, because SDoH can also determine an individual's risk of exposure to climate change hazards.

Health equity in climate change

In our last issue, we looked briefly at the ways climate change can impact health, mainly by worsening existing health risks and creating new ones. We also mentioned that some communities bear an unequal burden when it comes to climate change and its ensuing health impacts. So who are the people who bear the brunt?

Vulnerable Populations

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is confident that climate change impacts are felt more by communities who are already marginalized. Globally, this means people in developing countries, who are least responsible for the emissions that have caused climate change, face the worst impacts. Here in the US, several groups bear a disproportionate burden.

In our history of segregating people based on skin pigmentation, for example, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) have overwhelmingly ended up living on land with higher risk of environmental degradation, pollution, and damage from extreme weather events, as well as higher risk of exposure to climate-related health hazards. In addition, due to generations of socioeconomic disenfranchisement, these communities generally have a lower capacity to adapt to and/or recover from these impacts.

LGBTQ+ individuals also feel the effects of climate change more, as discrimination, violence, and disenfranchisement can often leave them vulnerable to socioeconomic hardship, homelessness, and mental health challenges. This affects their ability to respond and adapt to climate change challenges.

People with disabilities, both physical and mental, who are more likely to face

challenges with evacuations or other mobility-related responses to climate disasters, are also more at risk for climate-related illness due to existing health complications. Despite these concerns, people with disabilities are hardly ever included in climate change conversations.

There are also individuals who may be more vulnerable at different times in their lives. For example, young children, elderly individuals, and pregnant people have a higher risk of health complications from climate change impacts.

It's important to note that many of the individuals we've discussed are also facing more than one form of inequity. For example, many might sit at the intersection of social, health, environment, and climate change inequities and, because there is interplay between them, effects can compound.



(Image source: Institute of Social Ecology)

From these inequities has arisen a movement called **climate justice**, which aims to protect the rights of vulnerable individuals and share the burden of both good and bad impacts of climate change.

What can we do?

At ISK, we are perfectly poised to build equity around climate change and health because we already serve the most vulnerable in our communities. We can bring a climate justice approach to our work by continuing to address inequities on every level and by simply knowing the ways climate change can affect different people differently. Let's talk about some concrete ways of promoting equity for health and climate change resilience in our community.

10 ways to act

1. Help ensure safe and affordable housing
2. Connect clients to sources of nourishing foods when needed
3. Help improve health literacy
4. Help improve climate change literacy
5. Assess clients for climate change impact risks like exposure to flooding, high heat, vector-borne illnesses, chemical pollution, etc.
6. Study and share some strategies for coping with climate anxiety
7. Continue to educate yourself and each other about ways climate change impacts health in Kalamazoo.
8. Establish a back-up plan with clients for disaster days. For example, if they can't make it to the building due to flooding or extreme heat, how can we ensure they still receive services?
9. Utilize your Community Health Workers (CHWs)! They are here to address SDoH, including challenges within the environment, which is an excellent supplement to primary services.
10. Advocate for equity in our community by voting, volunteering, collaborating with other equity-minded agencies, or starting conversations around climate change and health.

Resources

Climate change amplifies every existing inequity on earth; for this reason, if we care about equity, we must care about climate change.

While this week's issue lays a foundation, it barely scratches the surface of this complex and important topic. If you'd like to learn more, check out these resources:

[Why is Climate Change a Racial Justice Issue?](#)

[The Climate Crisis is an LGBTQIA+ Issue](#)

[How climate change disproportionately impacts those with disabilities](#)

[Climate Change & Health Equity and Environmental Justice at HHS](#)

[Climate Change and Health: A Call to Social Workers](#)

...tune in next month, where we'll take a look at the ways climate change impacts risks of vector-borne illness.



This month, start a conversation about climate change & health equity with your colleagues:

- Can they think of any examples of climate change inequities in Kalamazoo?
- Have they had clients who express concerns about their ability to cope with climate change?
- What are some ways they plan to promote equity?
- Are there questions they have about how equity fits into climate change? How could those be answered?