Equity in Public Health: Provincial, National and International Document Review

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Background

- Development of public health standards

- Reducing health inequities a key priority of public health renewal in both BC and Ontario

- Occurring as health inequity gains recognition on the national and international agenda
Program of Research

A key aspect of the RePHS Project is to gain insight into how and to what extent equity is integrated into the two provincial renewal strategies, and how does this influences implementation and outcomes?
Objectives of Review

Examine how equity is understood in BC and Ontario public health documents

Critically examine conceptions of equity in relation to national and international public health documents and critical social justice

Deepen understanding of role of public health in addressing health inequities
Methodology

• Content analysis using constant comparative analysis
• Analyzed key provincial documents related to core public health functions in BC and Ontario
• Analyzed key national and international documents that influenced public health policy on equity
Provincial Analysis:

- Ontario:
  - A strong, principled commitment to reducing health inequity early in the documents
  - Emphasized as a theoretical goal, equivalent to improving overall population health
  - Linked to the social determinants of health
  - Implementation through identifying “priority populations”
Provincial Analysis:

- Ontario:
  - Key actions
    1. Surveillance
    2. Lowering barriers to services
    3. Collaboration
  - Specific limits on the role of public health
  - A focus on health inequities appears to be missing in several areas
British Columbia:

- An emphasis on reducing health inequities, supported by equity evidence review and implemented through use of an “Equity Lens” as part of core functions framework.
- Name specific groups to focus on in several Core Program Papers
- Focus on SDOH, including taking action and pushing beyond a traditional mandate
Provincial Analysis:

- British Columbia:
  - Action focused on advocacy on a variety of issues: housing, food policies, community services, urban design, transportation, etc
  - Emphasis on collaboration and empowering communities
  - Specific focus on Aboriginal communities
Reducing health inequity is important conceptually
Addressing the SDOH is key
Common actions: surveillance and collaboration
Drawing on a limited evidence base to support interventions
Lack of a political analysis or a deeper questioning about the roots of inequities
Differences

- BC is more explicit, Ontario is more implicit
- BC Core Programs cite a stronger evidence base
- Ontario developed within the history of MHSPG, and has not exceeded the concept of “minimum standards”
- BC strongly emphasizes health inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
Policy Directions: National and International

• Equity is an ethical imperative and a goal
• Equity conceived as a function of social processes highlighting the conditions that shape health beyond health care system.
• Varied social, political and economic factors identified that impact equity
• Key Activities: HIA, Intersectorial and Intersectional analysis and Public participation
Discussion

• Health equity moving to societal equity

• Discourse of equity (social conditions) and move to priority populations

• The combination of *targeted* and *universal* programs depends on the type of intervention
Lessons to inform action

• Public health can take a stance:
  – Make improving health equity an explicit goal
  – Identify actions that can be taken by PH to address health inequities

• Moving from “nice to do” to “need to do”

• Building in accountability to performance management, given intersectoral aspects of reducing health inequities
Lessons to inform action

• Address Health Inequities through key public health functions

• Next Steps in RePHS Project:
  – How does this inform the other aspects of RePHS?
  – In what ways do the similar and differing conceptualizations of equity in the BC and Ontario documents inform the implementation of each program?
Questions?