ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH EQUITY ACTION: ARE MPH GRADUATES PREPARED?

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**TODAY’S OBJECTIVES**

- Discuss organizational capacity for public health equity action, the potential role that MPH programs can play in strengthening that capacity, current Canadian MPH program guidelines; and summarize key findings of a MPH program scan, regarding equity content.

- Apply the OC-PHEA Framework to analyze how MPH programs currently provide necessary knowledge/skills for graduates to contribute to public health capacity to reduce health inequities in the Canadian public health setting.

- Develop recommendations for strengthening equity ‘lens’ in MPH programs.
Commendable PH efforts to promote health equity across the country, but PH action remains sporadic in nature rather than comprehensive and coordinated.
If PH implementation systems lack sustainable organizational capacity for equity action, even the best interventions may never achieve their goals.
Organizational Capacity for Public Health Equity Action (OC-PHEA)
Internal Context and Enabling Environment = OC-PHEA

Legend
- Health Equity Champions (HEC)
- Equity-seeking Groups
- Public Health Organization
- Community Engagement / Partnership / Shared Power
- Enabling External Environment

External Commitment and Will
Values
Enabling Infrastructure

PHEA
Skilled workforce that demonstrates competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) essential for equity action

- ability to frame, articulate and promote equity concepts in ways that resonate with various specific audiences
- skilled in education, awareness-raising and social marketing with the public and decision-makers about equity issues
- uses evidence-based advocacy for policy changes to support health equity
- possesses relational competencies to establish and manage intersectoral alliances and meaningful community engagement
- proficient in community development, including building capacity for social change
- employs a repertoire of evidence-based policy options and practice and program interventions to create equity within and outside the health system
- ability to use health equity assessment, audit, and program planning tools
MPH Programs Have a Role to Play in Strengthening OC-PHEA

Are MPH programs preparing graduates to be health equity champions?
CURRENT GUIDELINES FOR MPH PROGRAMS IN CANADA
(Pan-Canadian Public Health Network, 2007)

- Weak equity lens
- Programs “should be informed by” the Public Health core competencies (PHAC, 2007), which include references to:
  - Demonstrating knowledge about inequities in health
  - Recognizing how determinants of health influence the health and well-being of specific population groups
  - Advocacy for healthy public policies; often aims to reduce inequities in health status or access to health services
SCAN OF MPH PROGRAMS

“If I was searching for a MPH program with a strong focus on health equity, what would I find?”

- Searched web sites of all MPH programs in Canada
  - Excluded MSc/PhD

- Looked for equity focus/language in:
  - Mission statement or other description of the program
  - Course descriptions (*core, elective)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>MPH PROGRAM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATLANTIC [1]</td>
<td>Memorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONTARIO [6]</td>
<td>Lakehead, McMaster, Guelph, Toronto, Waterloo, Western (*starting Sept/15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MANITOBA [1]</td>
<td>Manitoba</td>
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<tr>
<td>SASKATCHEWAN [1]</td>
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<td>ALBERTA [1]</td>
<td>Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRITISH COLUMBIA [3]</td>
<td>Victoria, UBC, Simon Fraser</td>
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**TOTAL = 15**
**EQUITY-RELATED LANGUAGE IN PROGRAM DESCRIPTION/MISSION STATEMENT/OBJECTIVES**

**Found in only 6 programs:**

- “The program seeks to...reduce social inequalities in health...” (Montreal)

- “We believe in...community-based approaches with a social justice ethic” (UVic)

- “Our master of public health (MPH) program...is designed to train practitioners to identify and analyze the major personal, cultural, and socio-environmental determinants of health...” (UAlberta)

- “In particular, special attention is given to identifying, understanding and addressing the societal and personal determinant of health”; “Graduates will appreciate that health promotion primarily involves changing the social and physical conditions that produce illness and disease, or enhance health” (UToronto, Health Promotion stream)
EQUITY-RELATED LANGUAGE IN PROGRAM DESCRIPTION/MISSION STATEMENT/OBJECTIVES

1 program with more explicit, critical perspective:

“The ‘Social Inequities and Health’ Concentration provides MPH students with the opportunity for focused study on critical and reflexive research and practice that addresses health inequities related to poverty, racism, colonialism, sexism and other forms of structural violence. Upon completion of the concentration, learners will have a commitment and capacity to advance theory, research, and practice that explains why systemic social inequities persist and how best to reduce their effects on population health” (SFU)
The ‘gold standard’:

“VISION STATEMENT:

“We envision a world where health is within reach for each individual, supported by healthy and sustainable communities, and equitably achieved across human populations.... We believe this can be achieved by ... promoting health equity, addressing issues that marginalized members of society endure...”

“PROGRAM VALUES:

“Social Justice & Equity: We will, through our teaching, research and service play a significant role in improving equity and quality of life for communities locally, regionally and internationally.”

“OUTCOMES OF PROGRAM LEARNING:

“Demonstrate a special set of skills to better understand and assess health problems of communities, groups (particularly the marginalized) within communities and populations.”

“Synthesize appropriate knowledge for development of policy and planning, promoting and protecting health and health equity for sustaining health security of communities”

(Western University, program beginning Sept/15)
# EQUITY FOCUS OF ‘CORE’ COURSES

Only 5 programs where core/mandatory course descriptions had explicit equity-related focus

- **Core courses in Social Inequities and Health concentration (SFU):**
  - Researching Health Inequities
  - Theorizing Social Inequities and Health
  - Strategies for Reducing Health Inequities
- **Determinants of Health (UAlberta)**
- **Social Determinants of Health; Health Promotion 1 (UToronto-HP stream)**
- **Social Cultural Determinants of Health; Aboriginal Health; Healthy Policy, Law & Equity (Western)**
- **Issues in Public Health; Foundations in Global Health (UMontreal)**
EQUITY FOCUS: ELECTIVE COURSES

11 programs with elective course descriptions that had explicit equity-related focus:

- Globalization and Health Inequities; Social and Behavioural Contexts of Health and Disease; Special Topic – Indigenous Health in Canada; Health, Gender and Development (SFU)
- Social Determinants of Health; Social Determinants of Health Across the Life Course; Aboriginal People and Public Health: Ethics, Policy and Practice (UBC)
- Social Justice and Public Health Nursing; Social Determinants and Healthy Public Policy; Critical Perspectives in Social Policy and Public Health; Healthy Public Policy Strategies (UVic)
- Health Inequities (UAlberta)
- Community within the Context of Diversity and Vulnerability; Aboriginal Health Issues (USask)
- Critical Perspectives on Gender and Health; Health and Health Services of Inuit, Metis and Aboriginal People; Citizenship, Race and Sexuality in the Government of Healthy Populations (UManitoba)
ELECTIVE COURSES (cont’d)

- Diversity and Social Equity; Community Environmental Leadership (UGuelph)
- International Human Rights and Peace-Building; Gender and Health; Politics of Aboriginal Health; Social Determinants of Health in a Global Context; Promoting Empowerment: Working at the Margins (UToronto-HP stream)
- Selected Topics in Public Health – Social Justice; Health Economics and Public Health; Global Health (UWaterloo)
- Critical Theory in Health and Society; Theories of Social Justice in Health (Memorial U)
- Social Determinants of Health; Reproductive Health Seminar; Foundations of Global Health (UMontreal)
WHAT ABOUT ADVOCACY SKILLS?

Only two programs with specific public health advocacy courses:

- Advocacy and Communication (SFU: elective)
- Advocacy for Public Health (UAlberta: elective)
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- One program where health equity is at the core of the MPH program’s vision, values, learning outcomes
- One program with a specific concentration in social inequities and health
- One program with a specific concentration in health promotion that focuses on social-structural determinants of health and reducing health inequities
- Only five programs with at least one core/mandatory course with explicit equity-related focus
- Eleven programs with elective courses with explicit equity-related focus (only two courses focused on advocacy)

Conclusion: We could not find evidence of a strong, explicit equity focus in many MPH programs
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- The transformation of public health practice, research, and education in the interest of realizing health equity depends on rethinking basic assumptions about what is possible and necessary.

- Change will require re-imagining forms of public health practice, research, and education based on principles of social justice and collective responsibility for the public’s health, along with creation of an infrastructure and a network of support to sustain it.

[adapted from NACCHO, 2006-emphasis added]
SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Please select a worksheet recorder and large group presenter

Current MPH students
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity (as identified in the OC-PHEA Framework) have you received from your MPH program?
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity (as identified in the OC-PHEA Framework) have you not received from your MPH program?

Former MPH students
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity (as identified in the OC-PHEA Framework) have you used in your post-graduate work?
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity do you wish you have?

Those responsible for hiring, or who work with, MPH graduates
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity (as identified in the OC-PHEA Framework) would you expect in a MPH graduate?
- What knowledge/skills related to promoting health equity have you observed among MPH graduates?
Report back
“What recommendations do you have for strengthening the equity lens of current MPH programs?”

- Write 3 to 5 recommendations on the post-it notes
- We will then organize & theme them
FINAL THOUGHTS
For further information about the development of the OC-PHEA Framework see:


For a copy of the more detailed version of the Framework, contact Benita Cohen (see contact info on next slide)
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