



Converge3 Masterclass on Equity in the Context of Informing Health Policy: Concepts from Diverse Academic Disciplines

Background

Converge3 is a policy research centre based in the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto, that focuses on integrating health, economic and equity evidence to inform policy. The Centre is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and includes multiple partner organizations, including Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute at St. Michael's Hospital, McMaster University, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, ICES, Health Quality Ontario, and Public Health Ontario. Converge3 conducts masterclasses for Ontario health system stakeholders as part of its mandate to support capacity building in Ontario on topics relevant to its mandate.

Introduction

Equity is generally recognized as a universally accepted principle across the ideological spectrum. However, as with other such principles, like “fairness” or “justice”, there is no single definition of what constitutes equity in a pluralistic society. Indeed, while nearly all theories of justice incorporate the idea that a fair society is one with greater equality, the theories differ in what should be equal in a perfectly just society. For example, should an equitable health policy aim to give all people the same *ability* to access health care, say through removing unfair discrimination based on age or ethnicity at the point of health care delivery? Or should an equitable policy aim to provide the same *level* of health care access, such as by ensuring that services are equally available, such as in rural and urban areas or across all income levels? Or should an equitable policy aim to ensure that everyone achieves the same level of health *outcome*, such as by prioritizing services for people with poor health?

Academic health disciplines have approached this question in distinct ways. Many epidemiologists, for example, cite the World Health Organization's definition of equity as “the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically.” Much of the epidemiological literature, particularly from the US, has focused on disparities in use of health care between social groups. Public Health Ontario uses an approach that identifies priority populations and then targets services proportionate to needs and levels of disadvantage in a population. Some health economists endorse programs that address “vertical” equity, by preferentially targeting resources to groups that are worse off and have developed formulas to guide such allocation. Meanwhile, some ethicists argue that defining an equitable decision making process is the key to ensuring fairness given the complexities inherent in any other approach.



Meanwhile, health ministries need to consider whether their mandate is to advance equity within health or to contribute to social equity more broadly.

Objectives

At the end of this session, participants of the masterclass will:

1. Understand several academic conceptualizations of equity, including areas of overlap and areas of disagreement.
2. Recognize how these varying concepts of equity inform what gets measured and valued when assessing equity in health policies, with illustrations from how Converge3 can use such considerations in developing policy guidance.
3. Consider whether there is a meaningful distinction between health and social equity.
4. Appreciate the role of health impact assessment tools, equity-focused economic evaluations, and fair deliberative processes for informing equity considerations in health policy decisions.

Structure

The masterclass will take the form of a series of “conceptual bursts” – short didactic lectures in which conceptual issues will be presented and discussed. Each conceptual burst will be followed by practical exercises (some will be individual and some in groups) to further explore the ideas presented in the conceptual burst. Attendees will get the most out of the class if they actively participate in all activities.

Who should attend?

The masterclass is open to everyone interested in health policy and equity. No prior training, academic background, or work experience is necessary. The class will be taught at an introductory level. Space is limited so potential participants are encouraged to register early.

Registration

To register, please email: sharon.alexander@utoronto.ca