

Health Equity Tools: It's Not Just the Tool that Matters

Health equity tools are one strategy for promoting health equity within health systems. While there are a broad selection of tools available, selecting the right tool and effectively implementing it requires careful consideration. As part of our five year CIHR funded grant, [Equity Lens in Public Health](#), we provide guidelines for the assessment, selection and use of health equity tools.

What is a Health Equity Tool?

We define a health equity tool as a document or resource that clearly identifies improving health equity (HE) as a goal and provides a set of steps, questions, or a framework that people can follow to achieve this goal. By “tool” we mean a resource that assesses, measures or promotes the inclusion of HE considerations in policies or programs.

Getting the Tool Right

In our inventory of Health Equity [Tools 2.0](#), we identified 9 categories of HE tools for public health developed for a broad range of purposes, with different goals and target audiences. We concluded that within broad mandates to make HE a priority, the right tool is one that is fit for a specific purpose. Different tools will be relevant for different tasks and applicable within different parts of the health care system.

What Organizational Conditions are Required to Implement the Tool?

Important conditions for successful implementation of most HE tools include: 1) organizational leadership; 2) resource allocation and prioritization of HE; 3) opportunities for intersectoral collaboration, engagement and capacity building; and 4) meaningful participation of communities impacted by health inequities. Clearly, mandating a particular tool will facilitate use and, at a minimum, increase awareness of HE as a priority. However, when mandating a tool, it is essential to consider the goal and purpose of that tool, the appropriate use of the tool, and the required organizational resources and practitioner competencies necessary to support implementation.



Find our updated inventory of
HE Tools 2.0 [here](#)

Find a paper on the practical utility of
HE Tools [here](#)

What Practitioner Competencies are Necessary?

Although practitioners are looking for relevant and easy to apply HE tools, they are also keenly aware that they need specific skills to implement such tools. In an ELPH concept mapping exercise to identify the characteristics of a useful HE tool, practitioners highlighted that there are also important competencies required for the effective implementation of these tools. In particular, practitioners need a set of competencies related to understanding health inequity as determined by structural and systemic injustices that shape population health, and the positioning of groups within the population in relation to historical, social, political, and economic factors. We specifically stress the need for HE tools informed by post-colonial and Indigenous perspectives, and for practitioner competencies to address the structural and systemic conditions that have influenced the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada.



Is the Tool Practical?

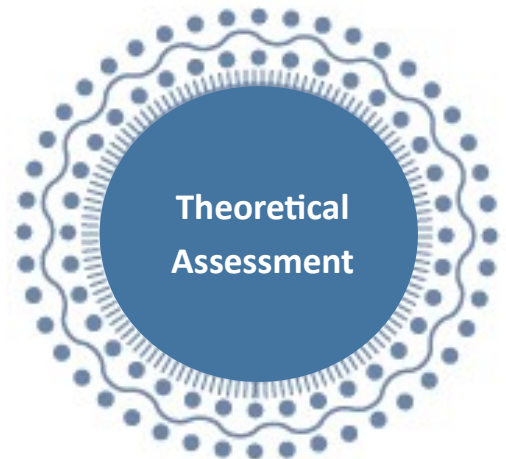
Based on the concept mapping exercise mentioned above, we developed a set of assessment criteria (Appendix A in [Tools 2.0](#)). To assess the practical utility of a tool, users should ask:

- Will the tool contribute to improvements in programs and/or policies?
- Will the tool contribute to the identification of specific actions to improve HE?
- Is there a step in the tool that engages or calls for participation of the community or people affected by health inequities?
- Is the tool easy to use and understand?
- Is there a clear set of steps that guide the use of the tool?

Is the Tool Theoretically Sound?

Tools are often selected based on individual preferences and understandings, rather than on a critical examination of the match between the theoretical perspective inherent in the tool and the goals of the program, policy or practice. To assess the theoretical relevance of a tool, users should ask:

- Is there a definition of health equity?
- Is there an explanation of how health equity can be promoted?
- Is there an explanation of how health inequities can be reduced?
- Are theoretical references provided with the tool?
- Is there a theory explicitly identified that the tool is based on?



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Where do I find...?

Criteria for Assessing HE Tools
On page 125 of the [HE Tools 2.0](#)

Who do I contact...?

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