

Message Guide

*A Blueprint for Changemakers:
Achieving Health Equity Through Law & Policy*



Core Messages

For far too long our laws and policies have been used to promote the health of some, but not all. Too many people are being left behind because they live in neighborhoods where they do not have the opportunity to be healthy. They face discrimination, struggle with poverty, and do not have access to good schools, good jobs or safe affordable housing.

These conditions didn't develop by chance. They are tied to intentional decisions and policies that have influenced where investment and opportunity are available and where they are not. In many parts of the country, people living in some neighborhoods can experience a 20-year life expectancy gap compared with others living just a few miles away.

A Blueprint for Changemakers is a guide for people who have seen what inequality looks like and are ready for a new approach that gives everyone a fair chance to live a healthy life.

It gives communities across the nation the practical tools they need to change their laws and policies to ensure everyone has the basics to be as healthy as possible. The unique principles in the guide are backed by decades of solid research and proven to help neighborhoods, cities, states and tribal governments transform their communities with lasting healthy changes.

When we work together, one community at a time, we can achieve a fairer, more equitable America where everyone has the opportunity to live a healthier life. We all benefit when everyone has a fair shot at access to good jobs with fair pay, good schools, quality medical care and safe neighborhoods where houses are affordable. Law and policy can be our path forward.

Background

The Challenge: Health Inequities

Where we live and the opportunities available to us have a big impact on our health and well-being. Communities of color, low-income communities and other marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by discriminatory practices and policies, which can lead to poor health.

For example, poorer neighborhoods generally have more crime, more pollution and more liquor stores than grocery stores. They often lack quality health care services, safe places to play and have limited transportation options that make it hard for people to get to work.

Too many people in America live with conditions like this—in communities that perpetuate poor health, where people face discrimination, struggle with poverty and do not have the opportunity to make healthy choices.

Policies and practices at every level have created these barriers to good health. We need to work together to alter the systems that keep inequity in place.

Working Toward a Solution: Law and Policy as Tools

Achieving health equity—ensuring we all have the basics to be as healthy as possible—can start with local policy change.

We need to work together to replace unjust laws with better policies and practices that purposefully lead to health and equity, especially for those with the fewest resources and greatest need.

By fostering new partnerships to advance a clear set of proven strategies, we can find innovative solutions that create new opportunities in under-resourced communities and close health gaps.

Achieving a fairer, more equitable America starts one community at a time, by making health for all a core part of everything we do—whether we're building schools, creating jobs, planning new housing or expanding transit.

What Can You Do?

A Blueprint for Changemakers is a guide for all of us. We can use it to start a conversation in our community about a new approach that gives everyone a fair chance to live a healthy life.

- It is our hope that policymakers will use this guide to work with their communities to replace unjust policies with policies that help everyone be healthier.
- And we hope people will use this guide to start a conversation with decision-makers in their community about the types of policies they want to see in their neighborhoods and towns.
- If you're struggling to find footing in the world of legal concepts, legislative jargon, and political battles, this guide is your blueprint for change.
- For more than two decades, ChangeLab Solutions has been helping communities translate complex legal issues into practical strategies that promote lasting healthy changes for all. This guide draws on lessons and tools from ChangeLab Solutions' extensive online library of model laws, policies and how-to guides that are proven to help states and localities implement their vision for fair, just, healthier communities.

Every community is different and we believe solutions must be home-grown by the residents who live there. This guide is a starting point for action.

Who Should Use This Resource?

We all have a role to play in achieving a fairer, more equitable America and we all benefit when our communities give everyone a fair shot at being as healthy as they can be. *A Blueprint for Changemakers* includes specific guidance for activists, policymakers and local organizations.

- **Advocates** can use the guide to educate leaders and decision-makers about the need to address inequities, the benefits of creating more equitable communities, and specific steps they can take to help children and families in their neighborhood.
- **Local governments, businesses and community organizations** will find practical, evidence-based policy tools for developing a local agenda to advance health equity. The guide provides strategies and specific policies for addressing a range of issues that impact our health and well-being, including housing, early childhood development and education, transportation, fair employment, income security, and health care.
- **Healthcare systems** can find information in this guide that will enhance their population health initiatives. The guide helps health systems build on traditional population health interventions by addressing the social determinants of health such as food insecurity, asthma, sub-standard housing, and community violence, through local and state policy change efforts.
- **Faith-based groups, universities and philanthropists** will find guiding principles for building health equity that can be used to urge leaders to action and evaluate ongoing efforts to address inequities and reduce health disparities.