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Assessing health equity impacts

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The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides federal resources to break down barriers to health from poverty, racism and segregation.

The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on communities across the country. Communities where many residents have low-incomes or large numbers of Black and brown members, however, have been more "impacted" or "disproportionately impacted"*due to the higher prevalence of underlying conditions associated with chronic poverty and racism. Considering this, the federal government directed state and local governments to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources to break down barriers to good health from poverty, racism and segregation and to promote an equitable recovery. Health equity assessment tools can help guide communities when making ARPA spending decisions.

What are health equity assessments?
Health equity impact assessments are an analytical tool designed to inform policymakers about the health and equity impacts of proposed legislation, administrative rules, budgets and other policy vehicles. They arm decision-makers with information on the potential impacts, before they make any final decisions.

In the case of ARPA spending requirements, health equity assessments can help guide state and local decision-makers toward the most effective course of action to break down the long-standing barriers to health that resulted in disproportionate harm to low-income communities and people of color from the pandemic, and to achieve an equitable recovery.

The Health Equity Network of Ohio, in close partnership with the Ohio Public Health Association, has developed a tool that can be used by state and local government administrative departments, agencies and legislative bodies such as the Ohio legislature, city councils and county commissioners.

You can find the health equity assessment tool **here**.

Overcoming roadblocks to health
Poverty is bad for one's health, and so is racism. The combination of chronic poverty and experiencing racism in daily life is toxic. As the pandemic exposed, reducing barriers to good health for low-income

families and people of color, and promoting a truly equitable economic recovery, will require measures designed to dislodge deeply rooted impacts on health from poverty and racism.

Health and equity assessments can help policymakers understand how a certain course of action may promote health for all communities, or how it may build barriers to health for some, based on their race, income, gender or ZIP code.

A vast field of existing research on the intersection of health equity and policy, as articulated in a report on *Overcoming barriers to health stemming from poverty, segregation and racism*, suggests three main policy levers for promoting an equitable recovery:

1. Break the cycle of poverty with public funding for quality child care, pre-kindergarten, education with wrap-around services and opportunities for young people.
2. Promote income stability for families by improving wages and benefits, through high-quality jobs, a higher minimum wage, and by increasing access to public benefits.
3. Target state and federal funding to areas of concentrated poverty, and maximize benefits through targeted hiring programs and first-source hiring systems, so the future of our workforce better reflects the diversity of our communities.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in recognition of the disproportionate toll it took on Black Ohioans, Gov. DeWine's administration released the Ohio Minority Health Strike Force Blueprint. Blueprint recommendations focus on the "cause of the causes" of the differing health outcomes between Black and white Ohioans. These recommendations can also serve as a guiding light for state and local ARPA recovery strategies.

The Network for Public Health Law provides free, basic legal technical assistance to support the use of law to promote public health and health equity. Contact Colleen Healy Boufides, Deputy Director for the Network's Mid-States Region.