Creating the conditions in which all people can thrive

Edward P. Ehlinger, MD, MSPH
Public Health Metaphysician
March 9, 2021
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Minnesota and Iowa – much in common
Commonwealth Fund Rankings on State and Local Health System Performance

Overall State Health System Performance: Scorecard Ranking, 2017

Overall Local Health System Performance: Scorecard Ranking, 2016

2020
Top 5 in Rank
Bottom 5 in Rank
Top 5 in Improvement
Bottom 5 in Improvement

1. HAWAII
   No change in ranking.

2. MASSACHUSETTS
   Rose 1 place in ranking.

3. MINNESOTA
   Fell 1 place in ranking.

4. IOWA
   Rose 2 places in ranking.

5. CONNECTICUT
   No change in ranking.
Infant Mortality by State

Number of infant deaths (before age 1 year) per 1,000 live births
Food Insecurity and Obesity in the U.S.
Minnesota! (Iowa!)
Where the women are strong,
The men are good looking,
And (almost) all of our health statistics
are above average —
Unless you are
a person of color or
an American Indian or GLBTQIA or
have a disability.
Infant Mortality Rates for White and Black Infants

Figure 2. Infant mortality rates for infants of non-Hispanic white women, by state: United States, 2013–2015

Significantly different from the U.S. rate.
NOTES: Rates ranged from 2.52 to 7.04 per 1,000 live births. Access data table for Figure 2 at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db295_table.pdf.

Figure 3. Infant mortality rates for infants of non-Hispanic black women, by state: United States, 2013–2015

Significantly different from the U.S. rate.
NOTES: Rates ranged from 8.27 to 14.26 per 1,000 live births. Access data table for Figure 3 at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db295_table.pdf.
Disparities in Infant Mortality Rates

Infant Mortality Rates per 1,000 births, 2007-2009

- Black Infant Mortality Rate
- U.S. Black Infant Mortality Rate
- Black / White Disparity Ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Infant Mortality Rate</th>
<th>U.S. Black Infant Mortality Rate</th>
<th>Black / White Disparity Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
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<td>IN</td>
<td>14.5</td>
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<td>PA</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>12.8</td>
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</table>

* U.S. Born Mothers

Big Ten States
Life Expectancy/Healthy Life Expectancy After age 65 - By Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Life Expectancy</th>
<th>Healthy Life Expectancy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7.6/1.1</td>
<td>13.1/1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35.8/1.8</td>
<td>8.0/1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8.0/1.1</td>
<td>20.5/1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15.3/1.2</td>
<td>23.51/1.4</td>
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<td>16.9/1.3</td>
<td>20.5/1.3</td>
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<td>9.2/1.1</td>
<td>15.3/1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16.9/1.3</td>
<td>20.5/1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White/Black disparity – difference in % / ratio
Black White Gap in Overall Poverty
Owner Occupied Housing

Owner Occupied Housing, 2012 ACS

- **Black**
- **US Black**
- **White/Black Disparity Ratio**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Owner Occupied Housing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>39.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN</td>
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<tr>
<td>IA</td>
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<td>WI</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of Owner Occupied Housing
What we are doing to advance health equity is not working. And may, in fact, be inhibiting progress.

US IMR, 1980-2016: White and Black Race

Survival Time-lag:

- White: 10.9
- Black: 11.42

Source: NCHS
What we are doing to advance educational equity is not working. And may, in fact, be inhibiting progress.

Figure 2: Percent Reading Scores at or above 250 for 4th, 8th, and 12th grades

Source: Educational Digest, NAEP 2010; Reading scores above 250 reflect ability to search for specific information while reading, interrelate ideas and make generalizations about literature, science, and social studies materials.
“The landmarks of political, economic and social history are the moments when some condition passed from the category of the given into the category of the intolerable. I believe that the history of public health might well be written as a record of successive re-definings of the unacceptable.”

Geoffrey Vickers
Why Should People Be Concerned About Equity?

It’s a math problem...

“The philosophy behind science is to discover truth.

The philosophy behind medicine is to use that truth for the benefit of your patient.

The philosophy behind public health is social justice.”

William Foege
CDC director
1977-1983
Why Should We Care About Equity?
We have vested interests in the outcomes.

“We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.”
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

“We all do better when we all do better.”
-Senator Paul Wellstone

“One cannot raise the bottom of society without benefitting everyone above.”
-Michael Harrington
Author of “The Other America.”
Why Should We Care About Equity?
We have vested interests in the outcomes.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. ... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

MLK, Jr, Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963
“Injustice anywhere... is a threat to justice everywhere.”


Infant Mortality Rates U.S. and OECD Countries 1960-2010

National Center for Health Statistics, Health United States, 2009 (updated)
“Injustice anywhere… ...is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Life Expectancy, by race: United States, 1970 - 2010

Life Expectancy at Birth US and OECD Countries by Gender 1960-2010

U.S. Ranked 49th in Maternal Mortality in 2008

Data from UNICEF, WHO, UN Population Fund, and World Bank with standardized methodology.
Equity and Social Justice are Existential Issues

Nuclear War

Climate Change

Pandemic

Inequities
“Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.”
One more thing Minnesota and Iowa have in common
Norman Borlaug

- Collegiate National Wrestling Hall of Fame,
- Introduced High School Wrestling to Minnesota and Little League Baseball to Mexico.
- Nobel Peace Prize,
- Presidential Medal of Freedom,
- Congressional Gold Medal,
- National Medal of Science.
- Established the World Food Prize
- Only scientist in National Statuary Hall in Washington DC.
- “The father of the Green Revolution“ - credited with saving over a billion people from starvation
“...A bad solution solves for a single purpose or goal, such as increased production. And it is typical of such solutions that they achieve stupendous increase in production at exorbitant biological and social costs... **Good solutions recognize that they are part of a larger whole.** They solve more than one problem and don’t create new problems. A **good solution should not enrich one person by the distress of impoverishment of another.**”

Wendell Berry  Iowa Review
“...I have worked with the production of more and better wheat for feeding the hungry people, but wheat is merely a catalyst, a part of the picture. I am interested in the total development of human beings. Only by attacking the whole problem can we raise the standard of living for all people in all communities, so that they will be able to live decent lives. This is something we want for all people on this planet.”
Why haven’t we focused on “attacking the whole problem (and) the total development of human beings”?

**Predominant U. S. Worldview**

- Health is a private matter
- Small Government
- Mistrust of Science
- I know what’s best for me and my family
- Medical care will cure me if I get sick

**Boot Straps Individualism Virtue of Work**

- Health is an individual responsibility
- Decreased investment in the “commons” and the disadvantaged
- Increased competition & polarization
- Blaming individuals
- Over investment in biomedical model

**Dominant Contemporary Health Narrative**

- Free Market Solutions
- Competition and consumer choice
- Education is for job training
- Healthcare should run like a business
- Anyone can choose to be healthy
- Structural Discrimination is a thing of the Past
- Reliance on technology/specialization
Life expectancy vs health expenditures - U.S. and OECD Countries 1970 - 2014
In OECD countries, for every $1 spent on health care, about $2 is spent on public health and social services.

In the U.S., for every $1 spent on health care, about 55 cents is spent on public health and social services.
“Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which (all) people can be healthy.”

The Future of Public Health
Institute of Medicine, 1988
Living Conditions Impact Health

**Communities of Opportunity**
- Social/economic inclusion
- Thriving small businesses and entrepreneurs
- Grocery stores
- Parks & trails
- Sufficient healthy housing
- Good transportation options and infrastructure
- Financial institutions
- Home ownership
- Better performing schools
- IT connectivity
- Strong local governance

**Low-Opportunity Community Communities**
- Social/economic exclusion
- Few small businesses
- Fast food restaurants
- Unsafe/limited parks
- Rental housing/foreclosure
- Poor and limited housing stock
- Few transportation options
- Payday lenders
- Poor performing schools
- Pollution/contaminated drinking water
- Limited IT connections
- Weak local governance

Contributes to health disparities:
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Cancer
- Injury

Living Conditions Impact Health
Diseases of Disconnection and Despair

Diseases of Disconnection and Despair

Adverse Childhood Experiences

- DIVORCE/SEPARATION
- ALCOHOL ABUSE
- DRUG USE
- INCARCERATION
- MENTAL ILLNESS
- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
- ABUSE (PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, VERBAL, EMOTIONAL)

Adverse Societal Conditions

- INEFFECTIVE SCHOOLS
- INCOME INEQUALITY
- CRIME
- POVERTY
- SOCIAL EXCLUSION
- RACISM
- SEXISM
- UNEMPLOYMENT
- SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS
- HOMOPHOBIA
- FOOD INSECURITY
- LACK OF HOPE
- ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION
- DISRUPTED FAMILIES
- HISTORICAL TRAUMA
- CLIMATE VULNERABILITY
- VIOLENT NEIGHBORHOODS
- HOUSING INSECURITY
- POOR ACCESS TO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
- REDLINING

- MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES
- OBESITY
- HOMICIDES
- PTSD
- ANXIETY
- DEPRESSION
- DEMENTIA
- STDS
- SUICIDES
- MENTAL HEALTH CRISSES
- INJURIES
- HIV
- HEPATITIS C
- CIRRHOSIS
- UNWANTED PREGNANCIES
- DIABETES
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE (ATOD)
- ADDICTIONS (ALCOHOL, DRUGS, FOOD, SEX, GAMBLING, SCREENS)
Estimated Annual Deaths Caused by Selected Social Factors

- High School Graduation: 245,000
- Racial Segregation: 176,000
- Low Social Support: 162,000
- Individual Poverty: 133,000
- Income Inequality: 119,000

Changing the Conditions that Affect Health Requires the Capacity to Act
Structure work to achieve our overall aim: Create/Strengthen our “Capacity to Act”

Organize:

**Resources**: Identify/shift the way resources, systems and processes are structured.

**People**: Directly impact decision makers, develop relationships, align interests.

**Narrative**: Align the narrative to build public understanding and public will.
To Advance Health Equity and Optimal Health for All we need to influence policies and change living conditions.

Triple Aim of Health Equity:

1. Implement Health in All Policies
2. Strengthen Community Capacity
3. Expand Understanding of Health

- Implement a Health in All Policies Approach With Health Equity as the Goal
- Expand Our Understanding of What Creates Health
- Strengthen the Capacity of Communities to Create Their Own Healthy Future
Expand the Understanding of What Creates Health

Vital conditions for health (WHO)
- Peace
- Shelter
- Education
- Food
- Income
- Stable eco-system
- Sustainable resources
- Social justice and equity
- IT connectivity
- Mobility

Determinants of Health

Genes and Biology
Physical Environment
Clinical Care
Health Behaviors

Social and Economic Factors


Conditions and circumstances in which people are born, live, work, and age
Is the healthy choice a possible choice?

Each year in the United States:
- $15.3 Billion is spent marketing tobacco
- $6 Billion is spent marketing alcohol
- $2.9 Billion is spent marketing soda (by just 1 company)

The real reason dinosaurs became extinct
Ehlinger’s beliefs about the contributions to health determinants

Social Determinants of Health
(Vital Conditions for Community Well-being)

- Shaped by the distribution of money, power, social policies, & politics that are beyond the control of the individual.
- Disproportionately affect People of Color and American Indians
- Structural racism

Expand the Understanding of What Creates Health
“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

- Abraham Lincoln
Expand the understanding about what creates health. Contrasting/Alternative Worldviews
Alternative Health Narrative

Health is a collective/community responsibility

Government protects the public good (PSE)

Health in all policies

Well-being is the goal (not economic success)

Health is a right and a community good

Balanced investment in Public Health & Medical Care
Esp. Primary Care

Health Equity is the challenge of the present
Historical trauma is a factor

Investment in community resilience and equity
Implement a Health in All Policies and Sectors Approach with Health Equity as the Goal

- Minimum Wage
- Paid Leave
- Criminal justice
- Energy
- Transportation
- Broadband connectivity
- E-Health
- Housing/Homelessness
- Air/Water quality
- Ag Buffer strips
- Food Charter
- Marriage Equity
- Payday Lending
- Freedom to Breathe
- Health Care Reform
- Climate Change

At local, state, and national levels in both public and private sectors.
19th Amendment to the US Constitution (1920)
Greatest Public Health Achievement of the 20th Century (arguably)


FIGURE 1. Infant mortality rate,* by year — United States, 1915–1997

*Per 100,000 live births.

*Per 1000 live births.
War on Poverty Components
1965-1967 - 89th Congress

- Title V – C & Y, MIC, FP Projects
- Head Start
- Medicare and Medicaid
- School lunch program
- Neighborhood health centers
- Food stamps
- Elementary & Higher Education Act
- Education of the Handicapped Act
- Housing & Urban Development Act
- Voting Rights Act
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Job Corps
- VISTA
- Peace Corps

- Older Americans Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Cigarette labeling and advertising act
- Public Works & Economic Development Act
- National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act
- Immigration and Nationality Act
- Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act,
- Highway Beautification Act,
- National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act
- National Historic Preservation Act,
- National Wildlife Refuge System Act,
- Department of Transportation Act,
- Etc.
Obesity rates in Minnesota and neighboring states

Figure 3. BRFSS obesity rates 2009-2018: Minnesota and neighboring states
Strengthen the Capacity of Communities to Create Their Own Healthy Future

- Vulnerable Population
  - Becoming afflicted
  - Traditional Public Health
  - Primary Prevention

- Afflicted without Complications
  - Developing complications
  - Primary Care
  - Secondary Prevention

- Afflicted with Complications
  - Dying from Complications
  - Specialty Care
  - Hospitals
  - Tertiary Prevention

Strengthen the Capacity of Communities to Create Their Own Healthy Future

World of Providing...
- Health education
- Screening tests
- Disease management
- Charity

- Pharmaceuticals
- Clinical services
- Physical and financial access
- Insurance
- Etc…

MANAGEMENT OF RISKS & DISEASES

Charity
Strengthen the Capacity of Communities to Create Their Own Healthy Future

Strengthen the Capacity of Communities to Create Their Own Healthy Future

…the community in the fullest sense is the smallest unit of health...to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms.”

Wendell Berry

World of Transfomring…
- Deprivation
- Dependency
- Violence

• Environmental decay
• Stress
• Insecurity
• Etc...

By Strengthening…
- Democracy
- Food Security and Food Sovereignty
- Mutual accountability
- Leaders and institutions
- Plurality
- Freedom
- Foresight and precaution
- The meaning of work
- Etc…

“The greatest epidemic today is not TB, HIV or leprosy, it is being unwanted. Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty, than the person who has nothing to eat.”

Mother Teresa
Saint Teresa of Calcutta
• A community ethic that works toward the well-being of and embraces a responsibility for all community members, fights exclusion and marginalization, promotes trust, and creates a sense of belonging.

• Elements of social cohesion are:
  
  • **social capital** – the resources that result from people working together toward a common goal,

  • **social mobility** – the ability to move up in social or economic status,

  • **social inclusion** – having connection to, ownership of, and responsibility for community goals; having a sense of belonging – being wanted & needed.
Health is in relationships – Health is in community

“A proper community is a commonwealth: It answers the needs, practical as well as social and spiritual, of its members - among them the need to need one another.” - The Art of the Commonplace

Wendell Berry

Health is in belonging
Asking the Right Questions Can Advance Health Equity
http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/healthequity/

**Expand Understanding**
• What values underlie decision-making process?
• What is assumed to be true about the world and the role of the institution in the world?

**Health in All Policies**
• What are the health and equity implications of the policy/program?
• Who is benefiting and who is left out? Are you creating partnerships?

**Support Community Capacity**
• Who is at the decision-making table, and who is not? Who set the table?
• Who is being held accountable and to whom? Who has the power?

**Build Social Cohesion/Belonging/Social Justice**
• Are relationships being created and strengthened?
• Is it inclusive? Do people feel like they belong?
• Are we building social capital?
• Does everyone have the opportunity to thrive?
What would it look like if equity was the starting point for decision-making? Our work would be different.
It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die every day for lack of what is found there.
What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?
Don’t Defer Your Dreams
Keep Your Eyes on the Prize  2013

We can’t defer our dreams, or be deterred by other schemes
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

We must embrace our dream with health equity as the theme
Keep your eyes on the prize hold on.

Hold on, hold on, Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on .

We help everyone to cope when we nurture seeds of hope
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

The seeds we plant today, promise all a better day
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Hold on, hold on. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.
Everyone can be healthy when we have food sovereignty. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

That’s why we’re here today to help find a better way. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Hold on, hold on. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

We all must take a stand, when there’s inequity in our land. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Social justice is our goal for the community as a whole. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Hold on, hold on. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.
“In dreams begins responsibility.”

William Butler Yeats
Bambelela, bambelela,
O bambelela, bambelela
Bamba, bamba, bamba, bamba, bamba, bamba,
bamba, bamba, bambelela
Never give up, never give up,
O never give up, never give up,
Never, never, never, never, never,
never, never, never give up.

Nurture your dreams, nurture your dreams.
O nurture your dreams, nurture your dreams,
Always, always, always, always, always,
always, always, always nurture your dreams.
We all belong, we all belong,
O we all belong, we all belong
Always, always, always, always, always, always,
Always know we belong.
“Live not for Battles Won.
Live not for The-End-of-the-Song.
Live in the along.”
so much depends upon
a red wheel barrow
glazed with rain water
beside the white chickens.

so much depends upon
a public health perspective
glazed with belonging & social justice
beside the world’s needs.
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BAMBELELA – NEVER GIVE UP