TAKING EQUITY SERIOUSLY

Dr Kwame McKenzie
The pandemic exacerbated existing health inequities
There were avoidable differences in health that we allowed to persist.

We set up a pandemic response that widened existing health disparities.
Medicare will need to deal with inequities caused by the pandemic and inequities linked to its own inability to deliver equitable care
Reasons for optimism

Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan

The Community Health Equity Builders program is now open to non-profit organizations, networks and individuals who support the goals and vision of the Alliance for Healthier Communities, endorsed the Health Equity Charter, and are committed to improving the health and well-being of people and communities facing barriers to health and wellbeing. Alliance Builders Program participants can operate, work and/or live anywhere in the world. Organizations that qualify for Alliance membership are not eligible for the Community Health Equity Builders program.
What changes are needed for us to take equity seriously?
One joke and two stories...
The joke
Community driven, data-based improvements to the pandemic response in Toronto
Black populations in Ontario

• 5% of Ontario’s population
• More exposure to social determinants of health
• Higher risk of chronic illness, such as diabetes, hypertension, and sickle cell
• Persistent inequities in access to screening, care and supports
• Worse health outcomes
Black Health Equity Working Group

• March 2020 high rates of covid-19 in UK and USA Black populations
• Rise of Black Lives Matter
• Birth of Black Health Equity Working Group
• Alignment of community, academics, service providers and government to decrease inequity
Black Health Equity Working Group

• Data driven quantification for identification of disparities, monitoring and transparency
• Evidence informed, community driven, public health and policy solutions
Data helped build population based equity focused initiatives such as...

• Community multilingual public health campaign
• Community testing and pop-up testing sites
• Masks, sanitizer etc
• Free voluntary isolation site
• Eviction prevention advocacy
• Food security
• Emergency child-care
• Digital access
• Culturally-appropriate, multilingual counselling
Toronto covid-19 community and data driven response decreased inequity

McKenzie 2021

Rate ratios of covid-19 for racialized groups vs white group; Toronto, June – December 2020

Rate ratios of covid-19 for racialized groups vs white group; Toronto, June – December 2020
The disparities were inequities, they were mainly avoidable.
Despite this success inequities increased during vaccination.

How do we create a system that hardwires progress towards equity and ensures it endures?
Improving health equity by legislative reform
Stephen Lawrence
Some of the duties of public bodies under the UK’s Race Relations Amendment Act

• Promote race equality

• Have a demonstrable plan for promoting and achieving race equality

• Monitor their impact on race equality
We are lucky in Canada
Models for health equity

• Action on differential risk
  – Health equity in all policies
  – Specific social determinants policies

• Improving health services
  – Building staff capacity
  – Building equitable interventions
  – Building equitable health systems
More flexibility in Medicare funding may be needed to better meet the needs of different population groups.
Medicare reform: some ideas for discussion

- Do we need legislation that ensures that we do not have gross inequities in health access and outcomes?

- Should there be more strings attached to Federal funding of health or targeting to ensure equity?

- Should the adoption of new health technologies and social policy be linked to promotion of health equity?
Thank you...

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