

Laying the Groundwork for a Movement to Reduce Health Disparities

By Prevention Institute

Though there is increasing attention to health disparities, there is not widespread public understanding about the issue, its origins, its solutions, or sufficient political will for change. The majority of activity and resources are currently aimed at healthcare inequalities. While this is an important element of reducing disparities, by itself, this strategy will not be able to make a significant impact.

The current landscape of health disparities activities

Tends to focus mainly on treatments which limit what disparity reducing work is able to accomplish, as it only addresses health disparities **after** a person is already sick or injured. Poor minority populations not only have difficulty accessing the care they need, but tend to more often experience illness and injury with greater severity. In order to create a synergistic, strategic approach to disparity reduction, **attention and resources** to addressing the issue need to be broadened beyond healthcare and academic research. Therefore, improving access to care must be coupled with a community approach to prevention.

Lack of coordination and coherent leadership

This is still prevalent despite the rising momentum to address health disparities among academic and public health centers. Additionally, there is an underdevelopment of primary prevention strategies addressing the community conditions for health. A coordinated **strategy** with defined leadership is essential to successfully reducing health disparities. A conceptual approach focused on community resilience factors needs to be established and political will must be cemented.

Elements of successful social movements

Because health disparities in the US are rooted in such factors as socioeconomics and racism, creating a coordinated strategy with defined leadership focused on community approaches to disparity reduction may not be enough. A social movement that can mobilize a broad base of people to demand the required attention, resources, leadership and policy is needed to make a difference. Some key elements of an effective movement include establishment of **clearly articulated goals**, **effective framing** of the issue, **mobilization** of resources and people and **political opportunity**.

Next Steps

A high impact, long-term effort to substantially reduce health disparities will need strong political will, a refined conceptual approach, a strategy or roadmap, engaged sectors with defined roles and leadership and coordination.

Prevention Institute proposes that the logical next step is to hold a small, intensive national design meeting to begin to answer key questions about what is needed in terms of strategy and political will and how to get there (movement building).

The design meeting would be used to set a broad agenda for a sustained, coordinated disparities reduction movement. The full report is available at:

http://www.altfutures.com/DRA/Prevention_Institute_Report_2_Web_Verision.pdf

"The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it."

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