Caring for Colorado FOUNDATION
Promoting Health

Youth Health and Well-Being Glossary of Terms

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Agency

Youth perceive and have the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes (Positive Youth Development Framework, n.d.).

Belonging

A feeling of being secure, valued, and connected with others (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023).

Community voice

Knowledge and appreciation of the values, beliefs, perceptions, and backgrounds of the people and communities being served, and the degree to which that insight is sought, listened to, and acted upon when important decisions are being made.

Cultural competence

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, n.d.).

Cultural responsiveness

An approach that views culture and identity as assets, including a person's race, ethnicity, or linguistic assets, among other characteristics. Cultural responsiveness is the ability to recognize, understand, and respect diverse cultural contexts combined with the ability to adapt practices, communication, and policies in ways that truly meet cultural needs across various settings (Cultural responsiveness – Definition and Explanation, n.d.).

Disability

Any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them (Disability and Health Overview, 2025).

Discrimination

A socially structured action that is unfair or unjustified and harms individuals and groups. Discrimination can be attributed to social interactions that occur to protect more powerful and privileged groups at the detriment of other groups. Stressful experiences related to discrimination can negatively impact health (Healthy People 2030, n.d.). Discrimination has been based on a wide range of characteristics, including not only racial or ethnic group but also low income, disability, religion, 2SLGBTQ+ status, gender, and other characteristics that have been associated with social exclusion or marginalization (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Economic inequality

Disparities among individuals' incomes and wealth. The essence of economic equality is how much money the least well-off make compared to the most well-off—and how wealth is distributed in a society (Fontinelle, 2024).
While this term has a widely adopted definition, we prefer the use of the term and definition of economic injustice.

Economic injustice

Systemic inequalities and unfairness within economic systems that prevent certain individuals or groups from fully participating or thriving. It can manifest in various forms, including unequal access to opportunities, resources, and basic needs such as food, housing, education, and healthcare. Economic injustice can arise from factors such as discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, as well as unequal distribution of wealth and power. It can lead to persistent poverty, unemployment, inadequate living standards, and limited social mobility for marginalized communities.

Economic justice

Everyone has opportunities to participate and thrive in the economy, including those who are marginalized by our current economic systems. It is a set of moral and ethical principles for building economic institutions, where the goal is to shape the fundamental conditions that allow people to live fulfilling, sustainable lives free from concerns about meeting basic needs, or about falling into poor health (Hayes, 2023).

Equity

The state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair. Equity denotes fairness and justice in process and in results (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021).

Ethnicity or ethnic group

Belonging to a group of people who share a common culture (beliefs, values, or practices such as modes of dress, diet, or language). This usually involves sharing common ancestry in a particular region of the world. Some people use the term ethnicity or ethnic group to encompass both racial and ethnic group, based on recognition that race is fundamentally a social rather than biological construct (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Excluded or marginalized groups

Those who have often suffered discrimination or been excluded or marginalized from society and the health-promoting resources it has to offer. They have been pushed to society's margins, with inadequate access to key opportunities. They are economically and/or socially disadvantaged. Examples of historically excluded/marginalized or disadvantaged groups include—but are not limited to—people of color; people living in poverty, particularly across generations; religious minorities; people with physical or mental disabilities; 2SLGBTQIA+ persons; and women.

Health

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2021).

Health disparity and health inequality

Health disparity and health inequality are synonyms; disparity is used more often in the United States, while other countries use inequality. For over 25 years in the fields of public health and medicine, they have referred to *plausibly avoidable, systematic health differences adversely affecting economically or socially disadvantaged groups.* This definition does not require establishing that the disparities/inequalities were caused by social disadvantage; it requires only observing worse health in socially (including economically) disadvantaged groups. Health disparities/inequalities are ethically concerning even if we are not certain of the causes because they affect groups already at underlying economic or social disadvantage, and further disadvantage them with respect to their health; this seems especially unjust since good health is needed to escape social disadvantage.

Health disparities/inequalities are how we measure progress toward health equity. Health equity is the underlying principle that motivates action to eliminate health disparities/inequalities (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Health equity

Health equity is the absence of avoidable differences in health outcomes among groups of people. Health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and healthcare. For the purposes of measurement, health equity means reducing and ultimately eliminating disparities in health and its determinants that adversely affect excluded or marginalized groups (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017)

Health inequity

A particular kind of health disparity (see above) that is caused by poverty, racism, lack of access, or other social or economic injustice. These differences are considered unjust because they make it harder for people already experiencing significant barriers to achieving health and escape social disadvantages.

There will be different views of what constitutes adequate evidence of health inequity. Some will argue that to call a disparity an inequity, it is essential to know its causes and demonstrate that they are unjust. Others would maintain that regardless of the causes of a health disparity, it is unjust *not* to take concerted action to eliminate it, because it puts an already socially disadvantaged group at further disadvantage on health, and good health is needed to escape social disadvantage. Where there is reasonable (but not necessarily definitive) evidence that underlying inequities in opportunities and resources to be healthier have produced a health disparity, that disparity can be called a health inequity; it needs to be addressed through efforts to eliminate inequities in the opportunities and resources required for good health. Inequity is a powerful word; its power may be diminished if it is used carelessly, needlessly exposing health equity efforts to potentially harmful challenges. It should be used thoughtfully (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Identity

A person's sense of self, which is made up of their values, experiences, characteristics, and social roles.

Opportunity

Access to goods, services, and the benefits of participating in society. There are many kinds of obstacles to access in addition to financial barriers and geographic distance; obstacles can include past discrimination, fear, mistrust, and lack of awareness, as well as transportation difficulties and family caregiving responsibilities. Because of past and ongoing racial discrimination in housing, lending, and hiring policies and practices, there is great variation in the quality of the places where people of different racial or ethnic groups live, work, learn, and play; these differences in places often correspond to very different opportunities to be as healthy as possible (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Positive health behaviors

Actions that people take that affect their physical, mental, and social well-being. Health behaviors are health-related practices, such as diet and exercise, that can improve or damage the health of individuals or community members. Health behaviors are determined by the choices available in the places where people live, learn, work, and play. Not everyone has the money, access, and privilege needed to make healthy choices (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, n.d.).

Primary prevention

Actions taken prior to the onset of illness and injury that reduce the likelihood of that illness or injury ever occurring.

Protective factors

Characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact. Protective factors may be seen as positive countering events (Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center, n.d.).

Purpose

A personal desire to accomplish something meaningful, along with a commitment to take action to make it happen.

Race or racial group

Belonging to a group of people who share a common ancestry from a particular region of the globe. Common ancestry is often accompanied by superficial secondary physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Given the extensive racial mixing that has occurred historically, these superficial differences in physical appearance are very unlikely to be associated with fundamental, widespread, underlying differences in biology. This does not rule out the possibility of there being some highly specific genetic differences associated with ancestry that could affect susceptibility to particular diseases (for example, sickle cell disease, other hemoglobinopathies, Tay-Sachs disease) or treatments. These highly specific differences, however, are not fundamental and do not define biologically distinct racial groups; they generally occur in multiple racial groups, only at different frequencies. The primary drivers of health inequities are inequitable differences in opportunities to be healthier. Scientists, including geneticists, concur that race is primarily a social—not a biological—concept (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Racism

Prejudicial treatment based on racial or ethnic groups and the societal institutions or structures that perpetuate this unfair treatment. Racism can be expressed on interpersonal, structural/institutional, or internalized levels. Interpersonal racism is race-based unfair treatment of a person or group by individuals; examples include hate crimes, name-calling, or denying individuals a job, promotion, equal pay, or access to renting or buying a home based on race.

Internalized racism occurs when victims of racism internalize the race-based prejudicial attitudes toward themselves and their racial or ethnic group, resulting in a loss of self-esteem and potentially in prejudicial treatment of members of their own racial or ethnic group.

Structural or institutional racism is race-based unfair treatment built into policies, laws, and practices. It often is rooted in intentional discrimination that occurred historically, but it can exert its effects even when no individual currently intends to discriminate. Racial residential segregation is an excellent example; it has tracked people of color into residential areas where opportunities to be healthier and to escape from poverty are limited (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Risk factor

Characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes (Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center, n.d.).

Social determinants of health

Nonmedical factors such as employment, income, housing, transportation, childcare, education, discrimination, and the quality of the places where people live, work, learn, and play, which influence health. They are "social" in the sense that they are shaped by social policies. The World Health Organization Commission on the Social Determinants of Health chose to include medical care among the social determinants, presumably because the provision of medical care is the responsibility of social policy (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Social exclusion or marginalization

Barring or deterring particular social groups–based for example, on skin color, national origin, religion, wealth, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender—from full participation in society and from sharing the benefits of participation. Socially excluded or marginalized groups have less power and prestige and generally less wealth. Because of that, the places where they are able to live often have health-damaging and/or non-health-promoting conditions, such as pollution, lack of access to jobs and services, and inadequate schools (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Well-Being

A positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic, and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life, as well as the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world in accordance with a sense of meaning and purpose. Focusing on well-being supports the tracking of the equitable distribution of resources, overall thriving, and sustainability. A society's well-being can be observed by the extent to which they are resilient, build capacity for action, and are prepared to transcend challenges (World Health Organization, 2021).

Social well-being refers to the strength of a person's relationships and social networks. It is strongly linked to social inclusion and a sense of belonging. People living in socially connected communities are more likely to thrive because they feel safe, welcome, and trust each other and their government. Trusting and meaningful relationships enhance our mental, physical, and emotional health and well-being. In fact, strong social connections and networks can boost a person's lifespan by 50 percent (Braveman, Arkin, Proctor, & Plough, 2017).

Youth voice

An expression of youth ideas, thoughts, and beliefs through equitable opportunities in which youth expressions are respected and heard. Creating lasting change requires a robust understanding of current challenges and opportunities, which can only be fully achieved through ongoing input, collaboration, and investment in the people closest to the issues. Communities know their own experiences and needs better than any academic, government official, funder, or policymaker. When young people and their families are recognized as experts in their experiences and partners in solving complex problems, the solutions they generate are more likely to serve the unique needs of the community and demonstrate a longer-term impact. (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2022)

We Want to Hear From You!

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