

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

Advancing Health Equity: VA's Approach to Enhancing Awareness of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) in Health Care among Social Workers

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define and give examples of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), equity and health disparities.
- Describe the impact of SDOH outcomes.
- Understand the importance of achieving health equity by assessing for SDOH.



VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)


*VHA operates the **nation's largest** integrated health care system and is one of the largest health care employers in the world.*

371,000+ Total VHA Employees



Four Statutory Missions:

- Care Delivery
- Education
- Research
- Emergency Response



18,000+
VA Social
Workers



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SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (SDOH)

- Social, economic and physical conditions in the environments where people live, work and play.
- Social and economic disadvantages can result in poor health outcomes and disparities.



HEALTH EQUITY | HEALTH DISPARITY

Health Equity is...

The attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices and the elimination of health and health care disparities.

Health Disparities are...

A particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater social and/or economic obstacles to health and/or a clean environment based on: Racial or ethnic group; Gender; Age; Geographic location; Religion; Socio-economic status; Sexual orientation; Mental health; Military era; Cognitive / sensory / physical disability; Other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion

Source: Healthy People 2030 <https://health.gov/healthypeople>
<https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/HP2030-HealthEquityEnvironmentalScan.pdf>



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HEALTH EQUITY | HEALTH DISPARITY

Social and Economic Factors Drive Health Outcomes

Economic Stability	Neighborhood and Physical Environment	Education	Food	Community and Social Context	Health Care System
Racism and Discrimination					
Employment	Housing	Literacy	Food security	Social integration	Health coverage
Income	Transportation	Language	Access to healthy options	Support systems	Provider availability
Expenses	Safety	Early childhood education		Community engagement	Provider linguistic and cultural competency
Debt	Parks	Vocational training		Stress	
Medical bills	Playgrounds	Higher education		Exposure to violence/trauma	Quality of care
Support	Walkability				
	Zip code / geography				

Health Outcomes: Mortality, Morbidity, Life Expectancy, Health Care Expenditures, Health Status, Functional Limitations



Source: <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/health-disparities-symptom-broader-social-economic-inequities/>

LET'S BREAK IT DOWN

- Male Vietnam Veteran, Married
- In their 60s
- Fixed Income, Suburban Area
- Diagnosis: Diabetes Mellitus, Type II

Economic Stability

- Inability to afford transportation, healthy food, join a gym

Neighborhood and Built Environment



PUTTING IT BACK TOGETHER

Outcomes:

- Spoke to the provider about the Veteran's concerns
 - Adjustment to recommendations – Collaborative treatment plan
 - Walk up and down the stairs
 - Visit the VA Farmers Market 1x a week
 - Veteran and spouse referred to Diabetes University and Support Group at the VA Medical Center
 - Church support for clean water
-

Lessons Learned:

- Go beyond what you see
 - Understand your client's community and background
- Learn how social factors influence health and wellness
- Assess client needs
- Empower the interprofessional team
- Connect clients with resources to address SDOH challenges
- Confront implicit bias in your practice



HELPING SOCIAL WORKERS ADDRESS IMPLICIT BIAS IN HEALTH CARE TOOL



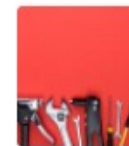
Implicit Bias: Glossary



Implicit Bias: Cross Cultural Knowledge and Sensitivity



Implicit Bias: Veteran Stories



Implicit Bias: Tools for Social Workers



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LANGUAGE FOR PROMOTING HEALTH EQUITY

- Avoid use of adjectives such as “vulnerable” and “high-risk”
 - Instead of: At-risk groups
 - Try: Groups with higher risk of (outcome)
- Avoid dehumanizing language. Use person-first language
 - Instead of: Morbidly Obese
 - Try: People experiencing (health outcome of life circumstance)
- Remember that there are many types of subpopulations
 - Instead of: Minorities
 - Try: Specify the type of subpopulation – (People from) racial and ethnic groups
- Avoid saying “target,” “tackle,” “combat” or other terms with violent connotation when referring to people, groups or communities
 - Instead of: Aimed at communities
 - Try: Intended audience
- Avoid unintentional blaming
 - Instead of: People who refuse (specific behavior)
 - Try: People with limited access to (service/resource)

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Key_Principles.html



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MYTH BUSTERS

Providers who do not live in their clients' communities cannot understand the SDOH that influence their client's health outcomes.

MYTH

Implicit bias may affect how providers and other clinicians interact with patients in terms of communication, treatment protocols or recommended treatment options, or options for pain management.

TRUTH

Living in unsafe or unsuitable housing conditions may contribute to health inequities and be a factor in health problems, such as chronic diseases.

MYTH

Health disparities only affect people who lack resources.

MYTH

Health equity work requires a consideration of our language and the narratives that shape our thinking.

TRUTH



VHA OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY

- Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA health care mission.
- Champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans.
- Supports the VHA's vision to provide appropriate individualized health care to each Veteran in a way that eliminates disparate health outcomes and assures health equity.
- Partners with VA Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D) on the Focus on Health Equity and Action Cyberseminars.
- Works closely with internal and external partners to ensure that Veterans receive appropriate individualized health care in a way that eliminates disparate health outcomes and assures health equity.

Source: <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/index.asp>

VHA OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY

**LEAVE NO
VETERAN
BEHIND.**



Veterans Health Equity Podcast

AVAILABLE IN ITUNES, SPOTIFY, GOOGLE PODCASTS & STITCHER

- Addressing Veterans' Sociocultural Determinants of Health
- COVID-19, Vaccination and Women Veterans
- Discrimination and Health Outcomes
- Implicit Bias and its Effects on Health in Veterans
- Health Equity and Medical Legal Partnerships
- How VA Partnerships Promote Health Equity
- PRIDE and TelePride
- Reducing VA COVID-19 Disparities
- Social Determinants of Health
- Social Justice, Ethics and Equity
- Using Arts to Heal

Source: <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/Podcast/index.asp>



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VA RESOURCES

- Reference Manual: Building ACORN Resource Guides
https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/docs/Building_ACORN_Resource_Guides_Manual.pdf
- Rural Health Information Hub
<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-equity/4/population-considerations/veterans>
- VHA Social Workers Provide Relief to Veterans and Address Implicit Bias
<https://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/updates/impact/03042022.asp>
- VHA Office of Health Equity
<https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>
- Women Veterans Health Care – Materials and Resources
<https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/materials-and-resources/index.asp>



EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- American Psychological Association Bias - Free Language
<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>
- American Psychological Association Inclusive Language Guidelines
<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>
- Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication | Gateway to Health Communication | CDC
https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/Health_Equity.html
- Rural Health Information Hub
<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-equity/4/population-considerations/veterans>
- Think Cultural Health - U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
<https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov>



Be a voice; Be an advocate; Be the change and see the change in our health systems, communities and society.

*thank
you*

