Promoting the Health of the Public Using an Equity Frame

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Health Officers Association of California
“Perhaps the only way we can assimilate new information is by fitting it into the framework of something we already know.”

~ William Raspberry
Washington Post
The Hypotheses of Frames

- People are not blank slates
- Communications is interactive
- Communications resonates with deeply held values and views
- When communications is inadequate, people default to the “pictures in their heads” or existing frames
- When effective, people see issue from a different perspective, or alternate frame
Individuality
Competition
Hope
Personal Responsibility
Fairness
Challenges Communicating “Equity”

- Misunderstood word
- Emotionally charged
- Demands time to explain
- Fairness of “Community” resonates; fairness of “Groups” does not
- Avoid pitfall of personal responsibility and individuality
Equity: A Process and an Outcome

- Not enough to report numbers
- What are the Policy and Institutional Practices that drive inequity?
- Acknowledge where the greatest disparities are
- Offer solutions
Targeted Universalism

When we come up with systems that address the most vulnerable, we get to strategies that benefit the broadest swath of the community.

Targeted Universalism recognizes that problems faced by particular segments of American society are problems that could spill over into the lives of everyone.

*John A. Powell,*
*University of California,*
*Berkeley Initiative for Mindfulness in Law*
Universal Frame

“We’re all in this together.”
Addressing Equity in Communications

1. Give people an EXPLANATION

2. Then give them something to do — the SOLUTION
- **SHORT TERM**: Solution (fix the problem)
- **LONG TERM**: Address the nature of the problem (racism, inequality, prejudices, etc.)
Addressing Equity in Fast-Pace Media Cycle

- **Goal**: Address what’s causing the disparity and propose a solution
  - Okay to do shortcuts: Solution
  - Hold on to the long-game of discussing cause of disparities

- **Opportunity**: When people ask: *Why are things like this?*
Be Pragmatic

• Think about where you want to be

• Be realistic within the existing situation

• Look for the opportunity (time and space) to address the underlying cause

• Prepare to be uncomfortable
Messages

- Contained within the broader frame
- Specific, topical Information
- Usually tied to emerging, evolving issue or topic
- Deliberately concise and limited in scope
Real World Scenario: Prediabetes Report

- March 10: county-by-county estimates of prediabetes
- Breakdowns by ethnicity, age
- FRAME: Health Equity – Community Benefit
- MESSAGE: ?
EXAMPLE: Personal Responsibility Frame

**WHAT:** 46 percent of our county residents have prediabetes, with the highest incidence among Latinos and African American populations.

**WHY:** As a precursor to diabetes, if these numbers are not treated, we can expect significant impact on health care costs and the budget of our county.

**ACTION:** Our residents need to reduce their caloric intake, especially of high sugar and fatty foods, and increase their physical activity.
Embracing Shared Fates

- “We” and “Community” vs. “Them” and “Groups”
- Not a race discussion but a fairness discussion
- Speak to the community’s problem
- Avoid trap of jumping to racial breakouts
- Frame solutions in terms of broader community benefit – universal
- Ethnic breakdowns are a tool to devise targeted strategies, not communications messages
Messaging Inside an Equity Framework

**WHAT:** What are the numbers and what do they mean?

**WHY:** What’s causing this? What are the implications for our community?

**ACTION:** What is an equitable community-based solution (Policy or Institutional Practice)?
WHAT: (Essential Piece of Information)

• Our county is looking at a potential diabetes health crisis according to a new statewide report that shows nearly half of all adults in our county suffer from prediabetes – a hidden precursor to type 2 diabetes.
WHY: (Implications, Cause, Concern)

• Through lifestyle and diet changes, prediabetes is reversible. Given the grave consequences of prediabetes, we need to invest to make sure that every resident of our county can easily adopt those changes and improve the health of our community.
• What is a single community action or investment that could have a sustainable impact on addressing high prediabetes numbers?
  – What would that look like for communities of color?
  – What would that look like for low-income communities?
Be Patient

• Equity work is measured in decades not days
• Change is incremental
• Don’t shy away from the conversation
• This will be uncomfortable
• Words, frames and messages matter
THANK YOU

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