

Executive Summary

Cooperative Extension's Framework for Health Equity and Well-Being

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Every day, people make choices that impact their health. Those choices have been the focus of health professionals for years. Generations of time, energy, and resources have been dedicated to informing and influencing the choices of individuals through direct education, guidance, and policies. As a result, our public discourse around health has been framed as a personal responsibility where good health is seen as a personal success, ill health a personal failing.

We know now that linking a person's health outcomes to their individual choices alone tells an incomplete story. Those choices exist within a system of contextual factors that together are more powerful than any one choice an individual can make. Collectively, these factors are referred to as the **social determinants of health**.

When an individual or community is negatively impacted by the social determinants of health, they are said to be experiencing **health inequities**. The data currently show that the populations experiencing the greatest health inequities are black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) and those who live in rural areas. This reality was laid bare as the COVID-19 pandemic differentially impacted many of these with pre-existing health conditions and as a result devastated many BIPOC and rural communities. In this context, the need for a refreshed roadmap to guide Cooperative Extension's health related work has never been greater.

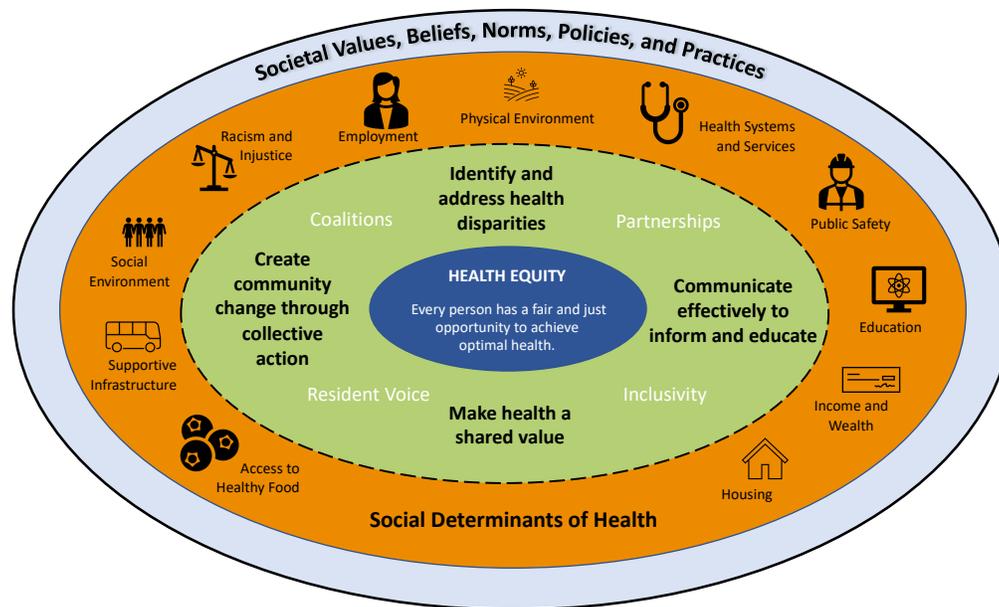
Cooperative Extension's Framework for Health Equity and Well-Being, an updated version of the original framework approved by ECOP in 2014, is that roadmap. It is informed by the events both internal and external to Cooperative Extension that have occurred over the past seven years and is shaped by a review of contemporary literature related to health equity, racism, systems theory, and public health practice.

Core Themes

The updated framework emphasizes three core themes.

1. **Health Equity** - Centering on health equity involves driving resources to those communities and groups that are experiencing the most significant barriers to achieving optimal health. This contrasts with one-size-fits-all approaches that often lack the specificity needed to close gaps in health outcomes.
2. **Social Determinants of Health** – Health-related work should include consideration of those factors beyond the influence of an individual such as broadband availability, transportation, food insecurity, and access to healthcare that ultimately influence individual and community health. Individual work remains important, but changing the context in which people live, learn, work, and play is more sustainable and far-reaching.
3. **Partnerships and Coalitions** – These are the mechanisms by which the resources of multiple entities are focus common objectives. There are many roles that Cooperative Extension can play in collective work to advance health equity and well-being.

The Framework



Light Blue – Societal context for health

Orange – Conditions that influence health

Green – Extension actions to improve health

Navy – Desired health outcome

The graphic above illustrates how an emphasis on the core themes can help ensure that every person has a fair and just opportunity to experience optimal health. The green ring represents what Extension does with and through others to make **health a shared value, identify and address health disparities, create community change through collective action, and effectively inform and educate**. The work of Cooperative Extension is nested within the powerful influence of societal values, beliefs, norms, policies, and practices as well as the social determinants of health.

High-Level Recommendations

The framework advances five overarching recommendations for Cooperative Extension.

1. **Establish health equity as a core system wide value** to ensure that all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as they can be.
2. **Utilize data-driven approaches and community needs assessment to identify and address health inequities** through a combination of tailored evidence-based strategies and community-engaged processes that influence the social determinants of health.
3. **Invest in the success and visibility** of Extension's health-related professionals, programs, and initiatives.
4. **Position health and well-being as an Extension-wide initiative** which engages Extension personnel from all program areas and multiple disciplines.
5. **Apply a community development model** to Extension's work in health equity and well-being to advance coalition building and collective action.