

**Mayah's
Legacy**

Equity in Maternity Care

Redesigning Maternity Care:

**Bridging the Gap for an
Inclusive Future'**

THIS GUIDE IS
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DESIGNING FOR EQUITY



Why equity, instead of equality? Although our society values equality, I prefer to emphasize equity. Let's first distinguish between these two concepts. Figure 1, originally created by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The concept has been modified by Mayah's Legacy to show the inequities that pregnant women face. I could do it in words, but images can often convey intricate ideas more effectively. Figure 1, vividly illustrates the difference between equality and equity. Equality is when everyone possesses the same resources (e.g., the same bicycle). In contrast, equity ensures everyone has what they need to thrive and participate fully (e.g., bicycles appropriate for their body size or physical challenges). The objective of equity is to design a world where differences are valued. That begins with embracing differences in personal values, so long as none of them dehumanize or oppress others.

Consider this scenario: A physician attends to three patients. The first is an older English-speaking individual with excellent hearing, the second is a senior English-speaking patient with hearing impairment, and the third is a young patient who doesn't speak English. If the physician uses English as the sole means of communication, delivering care with the same tone and volume to each patient, only the first patient will fully benefit from the interaction. The second patient with hearing impairment may require sound-amplifying headphones or written instructions for effective communication, while the non-English-speaking patient may necessitate the assistance of an interpreter to ensure proper understanding and care.

Equitable systems are designed with the intention of being sustainable. Equitable design asserts the core principle that design ought to not merely ensure accessibility but also foster inclusivity for every individual, irrespective of the barriers posed by human differences.

Equality



Equity



Figure 1. Equality versus equity.

When it comes to designing more equitable organizations, an understanding of power is vital. Equity doesn't penalize individuals for their differences; rather, it embraces diversity and leverages it. In essence, equitable cultures, systems, and organizations are structured to provide everyone with an equal opportunity to flourish. That means everyone has an equal opportunity to pursue fulfilling work, live authentically, and contribute their strengths to the community, organization, or culture they are part of. Equity is more about strategic planning and systemic arrangements. These concepts may seem daunting, but inclusion without equity lacks substance. Organizations that neglect equity end up discussing how to enhance people's sense of inclusion without implementing the necessary systemic changes that lead to more diverse leadership teams, and other indicators of equal access to opportunity and support.

Strengthen leadership and accountability.

Fostering institutions where everyone thrives begins with engaged leaders. Engaged leaders are willing to use their power and influence to design a more equitable system in which everyone has equal access to opportunities. Equitable leadership often requires

going against established "best practices", taking time to listen to others, and relentlessly questioning assumptions and beliefs. Equitable leaders must become comfortable with differences and see unity in diversity. They must be aware of their gatekeeping privilege and encourage everyone to play to their strengths instead of insecurely asking everyone to fit into the mould of the "ideal" employee or service user. Creating equity involves crafting a sustainable framework, culture, or institution which recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. Equity acknowledges our interdependence and harnesses our collective power to establish an environment where we all can thrive and contribute our strengths. Furthermore, equity frees us from the arduous task of constantly battling against the system by creating a system that facilitates inclusive and equitable behaviours. For instance, instead of searching for women to promote, equity constructs a system that centres around women's needs, making the presence of women in leadership positions a logical and natural outcome.

EQUITY IN MATERNITY CARE

Equity is an integral component of maternity care that extends beyond mere medical interventions. It reflects a complex web of social and health disparities and promotes the health of mothers and babies. The essence of fairness lies in achieving outcomes for every mother and child, irrespective of their individual health and social constraints. The equity imperative becomes evident as maternity and neonatal services navigate through a landscape of growing health disparities that require robust support systems. To tackle health disparities, the healthcare system must offer tailored and responsive care. It can be argued that achieving equity in maternity services requires a fundamental change in how healthcare systems operate, ensuring safety and personalization for all, irrespective of their socio-economic background or demographic characteristics. Implementing strategies to foster equitable practices and ensuring their consistent integration across all departments. The practices deeply embedded in the organizational culture form a vital part of the process.

Equity in maternity care is crucial because of its transformative potential to bridge existing health gaps and foster quality and personalized care. Social factors play an important part in health outcomes. To guarantee that each patient has a fair chance of accessing the highest quality care, resource allocation may need to be tailored accordingly. Ensuring equity remains a cornerstone of healthcare, there is a critical imperative for universally accessible maternity and postnatal care tailored to tackle individual health concerns and social environments. By examining the relationship between socioeconomic circumstances and health disparities, we shed light on the vital role equity plays in dismantling barriers to optimal maternal health. In the long run, achieving equity promotes a holistic approach to maternity care.



ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND SAFETY FRAMEWORK WITH AN EQUITY LENS



When looking at health equity, organizations should consistently focus on these pillars of quality which includes providing care that is safe, timely, efficient, effective, patient-focused, and equitable. Once these are integrated into practice, everyone gets engaged and it becomes part of the culture and practice of the organization. A key strategy for health care systems to enhance equity efforts is by integrating them with existing quality and safety frameworks, making equity an essential component of how health systems evaluate risk. This implies that when an adverse event occurs, part of the quality and safety exploration will involve pinpointing any existing inequities that might have played a role in the event. This method instils a systematic practice of recognizing inequities whenever reviewing a near miss or an adverse event.

Challenges in Maternity Care

The move towards prioritizing safety and personalization in maternity care represents a significant shift in healthcare practices. There is a need for consistent quality improvement. Maternity and postnatal care must be responsive and adaptable to meet the needs of diverse service users. This adaptation involves understanding the link between social determinants of health inequities and escalating health disparities. As inequities

continue to rise, there is a growing emphasis on the significance of personalized, holistic, and person-centred care.

Structural barriers within healthcare systems are also major impediments that create disparities in access to and quality of care. For example, discrimination and bias among healthcare workers can marginalise pregnant women in healthcare settings and profoundly influence their experience. Socioeconomic factors are pivotal: disparities in health outcomes and access to care are strongly correlated with economic disparities. These multiple adversities can create a complex landscape and make the pursuit of equity an uphill battle.

Healthcare providers face the challenge of having adequate human resources to deliver and customize health practices for specific situations. Nevertheless, systemic changes are essential to address structural barriers and eliminate discrimination. Socioeconomic factors should also be targeted to level the playing field and ensure that everyone has access to comprehensive and quality maternity care, regardless of their financial means. However, addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that tackles systemic and societal aspects influencing maternity care equitably.

SHARING BEST PRACTICE

The sharing of best practices and effective interventions offer promising prospects for achieving equity in maternity care. Case studies of successful interventions provide valuable strategies for addressing disparities. These interventions frequently encompass proactive strategies in healthcare policy, community engagement, and specialized support networks. The success stories demonstrate the practical application of these principles. Evaluating the impact of these interventions provides critical insight into their suitability and replicability for implementation across different healthcare settings. These approaches often bridge access gaps, reduce disparities, and enhance overall performance for mothers and newborns. Highlighting positive examples of equitable care can promote the

implementation and customisation of viable interventions as a primary prerequisite for developing equitable maternity care practices on a large scale.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING EQUITY IN MATERNITY FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Achieving greater equity in maternity care necessitates a multifaceted approach. Advocating for policy reform is a crucial strategy to address the systemic issues that contribute to inequity. Policies should prioritise inclusivity, vigorously eliminate systemic barriers in healthcare systems, and promote anti-discrimination practices. Additionally, both the public and healthcare professionals require more education on maternity care equity. Community engagement initiatives can enhance understanding and acceptance of equitable practices. Achieving such significant change requires collaboration among advocacy groups, regulators, and healthcare providers. Moreover, investing in research to identify emerging challenges and appropriate solutions is essential for making informed decisions. In the long run, a systematic plan that integrates policy reforms with education, community engagement, and continuous research is crucial to the advancement of equity in maternity care.






A RENEWED CALL TO ACTION

Equity is a big ask. It requires us to examine our fundamental assumptions about the world. Achieving equity in maternity care requires a profound overhaul of healthcare institutions and policies, along with public support. Emphasising equity compels us to think hard about the role of systems and structures in our lives, communities, and society and to find a way to make the invisible visible.

In maternal care, it requires us to dig deep into our internal desire for fairness and summon the courage to do the hard things, like redesigning our institutions and organisations. Equitable maternity care underscores the need for patient-centred care to eliminate health inequalities. We are all designers and when we intentionally design equitable systems, we can address systemic challenges and socioeconomic issues. The long-term outcome will be demonstrated through successful models that show that positive change is attainable. It is important to highlight the importance of civic participation, shared decision making, personalised care, educational programs, and policy reforms. Progress is possible through collaboration and ongoing research that informs evidence-based strategies. Together, we can tackle these challenges and create a world where all mothers and newborns, regardless of their circumstances, receive safe, quality maternity care.

Alone, we cannot measurably affect the health inequities that pregnant people face. The root causes of disparities must be addressed systemically and across a woman's lifespan—not just while she is pregnant. We're calling upon leaders in the public and private sectors to design equitable systems from policies to delivery and execution.





Key strategies to promote maternal equity through perinatal quality include:

- Communicating equity as a priority through leadership.
 - Promoting personalisation and choice in maternal care
 - leveraging data
 - Strategic oversight and leadership for perinatal safety
 - Engaging in strategic partnerships
 - Engaging community
 - Educating clinicians, and implementing practice recommendations through collaboration.
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