



**Date:** September 18, 2024

**To:** Members of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities

**From:** Jessica Zinda and Victor Rodriguez, Council Redesign Leads

**Subject:** Presentations on Health Justice and Targeted Universalism

## Background

In January 2024, the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities (Council) published an [update to the State Action Plan for Eliminating Health Disparities](#). The updated plan states (page 3):

*A resilient, thriving Washington state requires dedicated, sustained efforts to eliminate health inequities and advance health justice and equity. **Health equity** only exists when we all have the opportunity to reach our full potential. **Health justice** provides a framework to achieve lasting health equity goals and includes<sup>1</sup>:*

- *Collaboration across areas of study and work*
- *Upstream interventions that address root causes of inequities*
- *Racial justice*
- *Adaptability*
- *Advocacy for systems change*
- *Community-based strategies*

One of the Action Plan's main recommendations is to pass state legislation to update the Council's authorizing statute (RCW [43.20.270](#), [43.20.275](#), and [43.20.280<sup>2</sup>](#)). Among other recommended changes to statute, the Council recommends:

- Updating the Council's name to "Governor's Council for Health Justice and Equity";
- Directing the Council to create a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being;
- Directing the Council to create policy recommendations to move Washington toward achieving its vision and goals; and
- Directing the Council to engage communities, so people who are disproportionately affected by inequities have meaningful opportunity and power to shape narratives, priorities, and policy recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> These six principles are borrowed from Wiley, L.F., Yearby, R., Clark, B.R., Mohapatra, S. (2023). Introduction: What is Health Justice? *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 50, 636-640.

<sup>2</sup> The previous memo version had a typo. This reference was updated to the correct RCW on 9/15/24.

These recommendations were formed during the Council's [redesign project](#), which began in late 2022, and incorporate principles related to health equity, health justice, and targeted universalism.

Several years ago, the Council had some opportunities to hear about targeted universalism and its application to policy. In September 2017, the Office of Equity and Social Justice within the Office of the King County Executive presented on their Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan. The plan's key concepts included targeted universalism, dismantling systems of injustice, focusing on people and places with the greatest needs, and process equity. Some Council members shared that they referred to these concepts to inform their own work at state agencies.

In December 2019, Council members watched a [video presentation](#) by John A. Powell called *Building Bridges in a Time of Othering*. John A. Powell developed the targeted universalism framework and is the Director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. Council members' reflections and discussion included the following themes:

- How increasing diversity can bring about anxiety and fear.
- Strategies to increase belonging and how we can hold those in power accountable to enacting belonging.
- How to ensure that when we work toward inclusion, we don't unintentionally 'other' by asking people to give up parts of their identity to be at the table.
- The connections between equity and social justice and ethics.
- How leadership and culture influence our stories and world views. For example, the narrative around limited resources and how it pits groups against one another in competition for those resources.
- How equitable inclusion is really about co-creation rather than inviting people into a space that already exists.

## Summary

At today's meeting, Council members will receive a staff briefing on the concepts of **health justice** and **targeted universalism**. This information is meant to provide a re-grounding and help Council members engage in discussion on possibly creating a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being. Additionally, information could help meeting participants brainstorm ideas for the Ecosystem Mapping activity, which is an opportunity to begin identifying actors, priorities, resources, etc. that the Council could incorporate in a project to create a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being.

## Recommended Council Action

These presentations are informational and no formal action (e.g., vote) is being requested or recommended today.

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