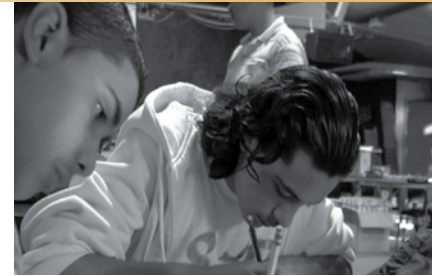


Before you Begin: Three Steps

UNNATURAL CAUSES and its accompanying materials are simply tools to spark exploration, discussion, and action. Their real power lies in your ability to incorporate them into a larger health equity strategy.

Before planning public events, it's important to take these preliminary steps:

- 1. Take the time to build internal consensus and capacity** and to make sure that your organization as a whole (leadership and staff) is committed to health equity and has the proper knowledge and training to be an effective advocate.
- 2. Develop clear goals and objectives** specific to your organization's vision and existing scope of work that outline how you will use UNNATURAL CAUSES as a tool to educate, organize, or advocate for health equity.
- 3. Define your audience and opportunities for action** so that you can tailor your event to your participants and foster appropriate levels of involvement.



It's also important to keep in mind the following:

The documentary covers a lot, but don't expect it to cover everything.

Your job will be to provide context and information so your audience can relate what's on screen back to the local landscape. For example, how do life expectancy and disease rates in neighboring areas compare to each other? What conditions and policies are driving those differences? What organizations and agencies are working on those issues? What are the major decision bodies and power brokers in your city?

Communicate the big picture and take the conversation beyond health care. In the broadest sense, advancing health equity means envisioning a society that works for everyone. For health outcomes to improve, we must broaden our thinking and change the conditions – labor, housing, education, income, transportation, food security – that impact health. While this may feel overwhelming, remember that even small steps matter and we all want what's best for our families.

Include ways your audience can get involved and take action.

Offering concrete, appropriate ways for people to take action is as critical as presenting commanding speakers and powerful facts. This helps people feel empowered and puts the focus and energy on working toward collaborative actions that promote health and well-being.

Step I: Build Internal Consensus and Capacity

Whether we are direct service providers, elected officials, religious groups, research institutions, or philanthropic entities, we each bring unique perspectives and resources to this work. Since inequities occur across communities, across sectors, and at different levels in society – local, state, national – we need many types of interventions and solutions to change the conditions that structure health. The more we value each other’s strengths and knit our work together, the greater the sum of our efforts.

Before bringing people together, it’s important to make sure your own “house” is in order. Use the following questions to assess and increase the level of commitment and expertise within your organization and/or planning committee:

1. How do health equity and social justice fit into the mission of your organization(s)? How do these translate into practice?
2. How knowledgeable, skillful and committed to health equity are leadership, staff, or your constituents? Does everyone know how to move the conversation beyond disparities in care to the ways in which social conditions impact wellbeing? Where are the areas of resistance?
3. How inclusive is your membership or your staff and leadership? How can you reach a wider audience and/or share power, particularly with the groups who are most impacted by your work? Whose voices are being included and heard?
4. How do your existing programs, policies and partnerships advance health equity? What will it take to re-align them?
5. What’s happening outside your organization that is advancing or hindering health equity initiatives? How might you tap into the momentum and resources that other groups bring to this issue?
6. Whose backing would help you champion this conversation across sectors, across impacted communities and to other levels of your organization?
7. Who within your group(s) has the time, resources and capacity to develop a action plan, guide understanding and oversee follow-up activities? Do they have the backing and full support of the leadership and members?

These questions will help you determine if you first need to start with internal screenings and discussions to lay the groundwork for effective partnership building and outside advocacy.

Step II: Develop Clear Goals and Objectives

How would you like to use UNNATURAL CAUSES to promote health equity? Whether you want to win buy-in for a specific policy, build alliances across sectors, or begin a community dialogue, consider how a screening will advance your mission and work.

The key to planning a screening that is focused, relevant and inspiring is setting clear **goals** (what you want to accomplish) and **objectives** (concrete outcomes you can use to measure success and gauge learning among participants). Setting goals and objectives will help you choose an episode to screen, structure your event, select appropriate speakers, and identify actions and next steps you want to generate.

Use the following suggestions as a starting place to develop your own goals and objectives, specific to your organization and scope of work:

1. Take a leadership role in valuing health equity

- Use your “bully pulpit” to draw organizational, policy maker, and public attention to health inequities, their sources and possible solutions: give talks, write op-eds, conduct seminars, hold conferences.
- Ensure the effective expression of community voices; support the efforts of affected populations to be involved fully in democratic decision-making.
- Discuss and identify ways to improve your organization’s practices and culture to increase socio-economic and racial equity; provide avenues for action.
- Be mindful of sensibilities and attitudes toward social determinants of health in your hiring, training, and retention.
- Build solidarity by speaking out: work with committed groups but don’t preach to the choir; give voice to those fearful of expressing their concerns.

2. Reframe the debate

- Rupture the discourse of individual behavior and risk with a new emphasis on social policies and institutional practices that help or harm population health.
- Build a shared knowledge and language with staff, leaders, partners, and power brokers on the differences between disparities and inequities, and on a framework that goes beyond issues of access and treatment in medical care. Infuse this understanding into your program development.
- Pose additional questions that challenge assumptions. For example:

Conventional Question: What populations are vulnerable?

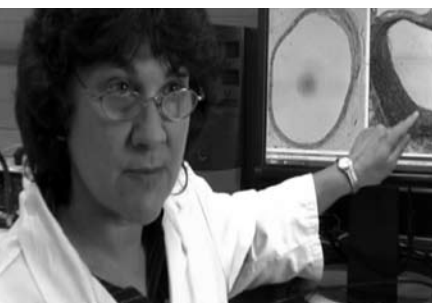
Health Equity Question: What causes the unequal distribution of health-promoting and health-harming conditions?

Conventional: How can we promote healthy behavior?

Health Equity: How can we target dangerous conditions, reorganize land use and create transportation policies to ensure healthy spaces and places?

Conventional: How can individuals protect themselves against health threats?

Health Equity: How can community organizing and alliance building help bring about policies that protect the public good?



3. Research and investigate

- Monitor your community for conditions that create health inequities; devise a health equity audit tool; involve community members at every stage.
- Evaluate the health consequences of private developments and government policies; conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA).
- Examine public and private decision-making processes that shape the social conditions that affect health (land use, labor market policy, fair trade).
- Conduct a “power analysis” in your locale: Who contributes to political campaigns or lobbies government bodies? Who are your potential allies? How can you leverage your influence?

4. Build strategic alliances with a broad array of groups

- Reach out to “non-health” organizations – labor, business, housing, racial justice, child development – and share knowledge about the health consequences of their work.
- Determine what different stakeholders share in common; use public health impacts to connect seemingly disparate policy areas – from educational and income opportunity, to segregation and environmental justice – and build a broader base of support for wide-reaching equity initiatives.

5. Develop coherent policy menus and strategies

- Work in concert with other organizations, especially those addressing land use, family supports, wages and working conditions, affordable housing, neighborhood and school segregation, tax structure, or child development to press for specific targets such as policies that:
 - can shorten the ladder of inequality
 - buffer those lower on the ladder from health threats
 - address structural racism and promote social inclusion
 - promote civic participation and deepen democracy

6. Demand greater participation and democratic accountability

- Challenge government and corporate policies that adversely affect health, for example, placement of landfills or toxic waste, location of housing developments, outsourcing of jobs, code enforcement, sick leave, and family supports.
- Require transparency in decision processes that affect population health.
- Work for a more open and participatory government budgeting process.
- Support organizing projects and democratic neighborhood councils that empower communities.

7. Mobilize constituencies and communities to advocate for healthy social policies and draw attention to local problems and innovative solutions.

8. Engage in dialogue with journalists and bloggers on coverage of health issues and encourage reporters to focus more broadly on social conditions, historical context, corporate actions, and government policies rather than just how individuals can change behaviors or protect themselves.

9. Inject consideration of health impacts into debate over social policies, for example, by insisting on the use of Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) to evaluate development and land use projects, for budgeting, transportation, labor and other initiatives.

Your organization may choose any combination of these or other strategies. What matters is using a critical lens and creating a plan that reflects your organization's mission and work.

Please see the Sample Agendas at the end of this toolkit for examples of goals and objectives.



Step III: Define Your Audience and Opportunities for Action

Advancing health equity is not just about uncovering causes, it's also about working towards change. Knowing ahead of time who your audience is, what understanding they bring, and the level at which they operate (as well as the level of the discussion you are trying to initiate with them) will help you plan an event that is relevant and engages participants in appropriate actions.

First, some key questions:

- Will you be working internally or externally? With agency leadership or staff? Within one organization or with representatives from different groups? With health workers or non-health people? With government officials and the policy community? With the general public, students, journalists, bloggers, community-based organizations, or the faith community?
- Who are your natural audiences: groups you've worked with in the past or communities affected by the issues? How can you expand your audience across sectors to include new organizations or groups you're bringing into the conversation for the first time? Does your planning committee reflect the audience(s) you're trying to reach?
- Who **should** attend? What organizations can you engage to co-sponsor the event and help ensure attendance and the right audience mix? Are they involved because health equity is also "their" issue and they want to mobilize constituents, or is this new to them?
- Will you invite media to cover your event? Who will be your message point person for follow-up questions and quotes?

Next, consider how you will tailor the event to your audience and supply additional information for everyone to get the most out of the material:

- How knowledgeable is your audience about health inequities? Do they focus mostly on access to care or do they already address how our social and economic environment shapes health chances? **Identify local resources you can draw upon to deepen or shift their understanding.**
- To what extent do audience members view health inequities as something that affects them personally? Professionally? As an urgent national issue? **Provide examples to make the issues more concrete and more pressing for everyone.**
- Ultimately, what do you want audience members to take away from this experience? **Framing, discussion and engagement activities should all reinforce each other.**

Finally, based on your goals and objectives, define action opportunities that will inspire participants and resonate with their interest and capacity. For example:

- Identify and connect people interested in the root causes of health inequities.
- Organize a “brown bag” screening to discuss how social conditions – where we are born, live, work and play – impact health.
- Form a committee to identify assets, programs, or initiatives within your organization where you can use the series to educate, organize, or advocate for health equity.
- Screen and discuss the series with PTAs, book clubs, neighborhood associations, churches, tenants groups, racial justice groups, and trade unions.
- Identify three existing struggles in your community that can improve health equity, e.g., land use, a living wage, paid sick leave, affordable housing mandates, toxic clean-ups, and lead paint removal. How can you become a partner?
- Conduct an audit of health threats and health promoters in your neighborhood.
- Identify and build strategic partnerships with community-based organizations and organizations in other sectors; link health outcomes to housing, education, employment, political power and other arenas.
- Form a community-wide health equity coalition.
- Ask your public health department to conduct Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) on proposed development projects and government initiatives and ordinances.
- Provide local media with facts and resources so they can incorporate a health equity lens in their reporting; help them identify a message point person to provide quotes, analysis, and additional information.
- Broaden the discussion: look for opportunities to submit op ed articles, letters to the editor, call in to radio talk shows, and form discussion groups.
- Organize a policy forum to brief officials in government agencies about the social determinants of health inequities.

Keep in mind that we all want better outcomes, but we may not agree on how to achieve them. For some people, a health equity framework may involve a significant paradigm shift – this can be threatening and destabilizing. Too much information with too little opportunity to process and engage can be counterproductive, triggering defensiveness and resistance. Remember to invite change; don't demand it. Set realistic goals, based on people's understanding, commitment and experience.