

A Health Equity Assessment Tool (HEAT)

There is considerable evidence, both internationally and in New Zealand, of significant inequalities in health between socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, people living in different geographical regions and males and females (Acheson 1998, Howden-Chapman and Tobias 2000). Research indicates that the poorer you are, the worse your health. In colonised countries, such as New Zealand, indigenous people have poorer health than others. Reducing inequalities is Treaty of Waitangi obligation and a priority for the government. The New Zealand Health Strategy acknowledges the need to address health inequalities as a 'major priority requiring ongoing commitment across the sector' (Minister of Health 2000).

Inequalities in health are unfair and unjust. They are also not natural; they are the result of social and economic policy and practices. Therefore inequalities in health are avoidable (Woodward and Kawachi 2000).

The following set of questions has been developed to assist you to consider how particular inequalities in health have come about, and where the effective intervention points are to tackle them. They should be used in conjunction with the Ministry of Health's Intervention Framework (Ministry of Health 2002).¹

1. What health issue is the policy/programme trying to address?
2. What inequalities exist in this health area?
3. Who is most advantaged and how?
4. How did the inequality occur? (What are the mechanisms, by which this inequality was created, is maintained or increased?)
5. What are the determinants of this inequality?
6. How will you address the Treaty of Waitangi?
7. Where/how will you intervene to tackle this issue? Use the Ministry of Health Intervention Framework to guide your thinking.
8. How could this intervention affect health inequalities?
9. Who will benefit most?
10. What might the unintended consequences be?
11. What will you do to make sure it does reduce/eliminate inequalities (to manage the consequences)?
12. How will you know if inequalities have been reduced/eliminated?

(Adapted from Bro Taf Authority 2000)

Source: Ministry of Health et al. 2002. (Note that this document has been revised since the workshops).

References

- Acheson D. 1998. *Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health*. London. The Stationery Office.
- Howden Chapman P, Tobias M (eds). 2000. *Social Inequalities in Health: New Zealand 1999*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
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¹ (2004) *Tackling Inequalities: Moving theory into action; Appendix 2: A Health Equity Assessment Tool*, pg 35. Ministry of Health (Manatu Hauora), New Zealand