

Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Susan Laird] Hello and welcome to Gateway to Health Communication, a podcast for health communicators by health communicators. If you are working in public health at a federal, state, or local level, in the private sector, or with a non-profit, this show is for you. I'm your host, Susan Laird.

[Susan Laird] Joining us today is Michelle Bonds, director of CDC's Division of Public Affairs. We will be discussing CDC's newly launched Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication. Welcome to the program, Michelle.

[Michelle Bonds] Thank you for having me, Susan.

[Susan Laird] Before we talk about the new guiding principles, can you explain what health equity is, what it means?

[Michelle Bonds] Sure. Health equity is an opportunity for everyone, all members of our society to achieve the best health outcomes -- factors people can't control, such as lack of resources, discrimination -- it all gets in the way of achieving best health. Health equity is the priority at CDC and these principles are critical for everyone.

[Susan Laird] Now that we have a better understanding of what health equity is, the big question is why? Why did CDC create this guide? Who is the audience?

[Michelle Bonds] We consider this guide to be an essential service, a foundation of public health services. CDC's Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication emphasizes the importance of addressing all people inclusively and respectfully. These principles are intended to help public health professionals, particularly health communicators, within and outside of CDC, to make sure that their communication products and strategies adapt to specific cultural, linguistic environmental and historical situations of each population and audience that you're focusing on. It is a living document, which means that it will continue to change as cultural norms and language change. It's not a style guide, it's not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive in its examples but rather to provide principles, resources, specific suggestions on a variety of topics to help inform inclusive approaches to public health communication. These guiding principles reflect the best practices as we know them at this time.

[Susan Laird] You've made it clear that it is not a style guide but rather a resource -- a tool -- with suggestions to guide a way to approach inclusive communication. Can you tell us how our listeners can best use this resource?

[Michelle Bonds] Sure, our listeners should consider key health equity concepts when framing health disparities and discussing public health implications. Consider how racism and other forms of discrimination unfairly disadvantage people and lead to social and health inequities. Language that intentionally or unintentionally hurts, singles out, makes fun of, is never OK. Use this guide to craft language that is inclusive and mindful and not hurtful. So, if we're going to build a healthier America for everyone we're going to have to confront these systems and policies that resulted in generations of injustice, those injustices that have given rise to health inequities and poor health outcomes, and that includes being mindful of our language in how we speak and how we write. We at CDC want to lead this effort both in the work that we do on behalf of the nation's health and the work that we do internally as part of our organization.

[Susan Laird] We are learning a lot today. You said this was a tool for health communicators. Who else can use this guide?

[Michelle Bonds] Virtually anyone who communicates in writing or verbally can use it. Health care professionals, students, people outside of public health. It is intended to be inclusive, and I don't know anyone that doesn't want to be inclusive in their communication.

[Susan Laird] How has the Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication been received?

[Michelle Bonds] Generally, I think we've received mostly positive feedback overall. Changes are going to take time, getting broad acceptance is going to take time. We hope to continue to increase awareness and more people will use the guide as it's intended.

[Susan Laird] Was there any pushback on the guide?

[Michelle Bonds] Well, I think the one thing that we heard the most was we should stay in our lane and it's important to understand that this guide is in our lane. CDC strives to apply best public health practices in everything that we do. This includes using inclusive, accurate, accessible language intended to show respect for all audiences and communities we serve. So, this approach is based on the understanding that everyone doesn't have the same frame of reference. Communicating with people in the way that they prefer is essential to public health interventions and to the health of our nation.

[Susan Laird] So what does success look like? How will we know that it's helping?

[Michelle Bonds] That's a really good question, Susan. One thing I know is it's going to take time, but I think that the audiences will let us know in a variety of ways that we are making progress. For example, responding to the messages that we put out, being engaged in public health and our activities, and strengthening our relationships with the communities that we serve, will probably be a few key indicators that we're making progress.

[Susan Laird] Thank you so much Michelle. I'm sure we'll be discussing the health equity guiding principles again. Listeners you can find it on CDC's Gateway to Health Communication website. Thanks for listening to Gateway, a podcast for health communicators. If you have a

topic idea for our show or question or would like to be featured on the show, email us at gateway@cdc.gov.

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