

# Public Health Advocacy: Harnessing the Power of Media to Shape Public Discourse and Improve Community Health

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Inland Desert Training and Resource Center

San Diego, CA

**media**  
berkeley studies group

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- Research on news coverage of public health issues
- Media advocacy training and strategic consultation for community groups and public health advocates
- Professional education for journalists

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# What is Health Equity?

Health Equity is the “attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities.”

*Source: U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services*

<http://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/templates/browse.aspx?&lvl=2&lvlid=34>



# How would you describe health equity?

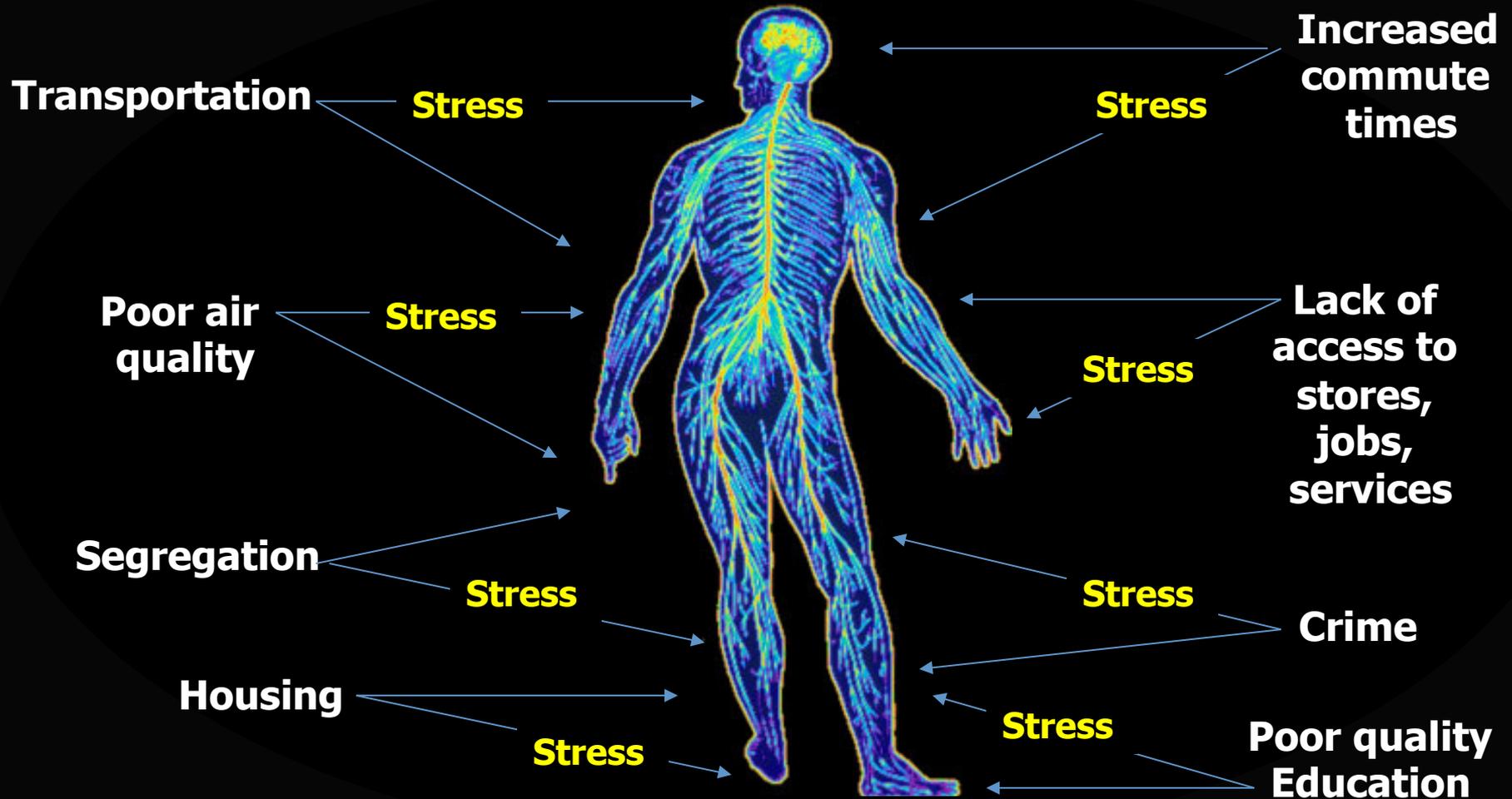
- “Equal opportunity for all to thrive and live a healthy life.”
- “Developing an infrastructure to ensure that all population groups have ideal opportunities to live healthier lifestyles.”
- “Where differences in health and education, outcomes cease to exist”

From July 17 BMSG Webinar, Communicating about Health Equity: Showing the Bigger Picture to Build Healthier Communities



# When the External Becomes Internal: How Health Inequities Get Inside the Body

Source: Alameda County Department of Public Health



# Inequity is Structural



Opportunities are  
“produced and regulated  
by institutions, institutional  
interactions and  
individuals” together.

--Andrew Grant-Thomas &  
john powell

# What to do?

- Highlight practical steps.
- Link the issue to all of us.
- Talk about the harms of inequity as they affect the entire community.
- Explain how the causes are linked to systems and structures.
- Tell stories with words and pictures that help audiences connect and see.

# Layers of Strategy

- Overall strategy
  - Media strategy
    - Message strategy
      - Access strategy

# Developing Strategy

- What is the problem or issue?
- What is the solution or policy?
- Who has the power to make the necessary change?
- Who must be mobilized to apply the necessary pressure?
- What do the targets need to hear?

# Message Strategy

- Message: what we say
- Messenger: who says it
- Target: who we want to hear it

Just a few cues...

**HEALTH EQUITY**



...might surprise you

**HFAJ TH FOUJTV**

# Affecting Our Health

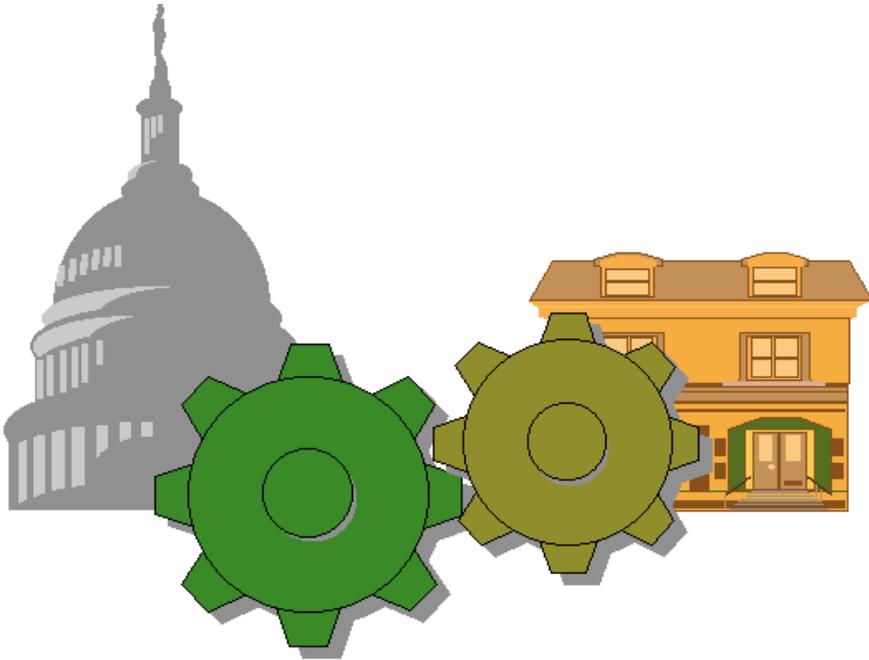
How can individuals take personal responsibility for their health?

What are some factors outside an individual's control that contribute to poor health outcomes?

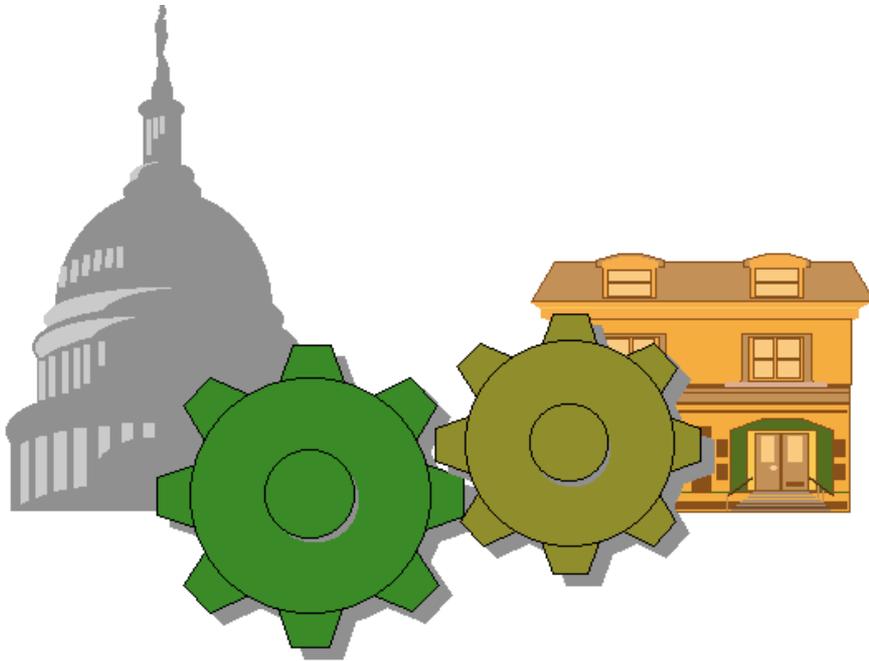
# The Need to Reframe



# Framing Government



# Framing Government



## The Nanny

*You only thought you lived in the land of the free.*



**Bye Bye Venti**  
*Nanny Bloomberg has taken his strange obsession with what you eat one step further. He now wants to make it illegal to serve "sugary drinks" bigger than 16 oz. What's next? Limits on the width of a pizza slice, size of a hamburger or amount of cream cheese on your bagel?*



**New Yorkers need a Mayor, not a Nanny.**  
Find out more at [ConsumerFreedom.com](http://ConsumerFreedom.com)

# What's on the slate?

## Competing Values

### Market Justice

Personal responsibility

You're on your own

Duty to your family

Government interferes

### Social Justice

Shared responsibility

We're in this together

Duty to the collective good

Government protects

# Competing Stories of Childhood Obesity

## You Are What You Eat

Poor parenting

Bad habits & personal choices

Overactive thumbs, underactive legs

Exercise, and exercise willpower

## What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

Junk food marketing

Neighborhood connectivity & safety (transportation, recreation)

No time for physical activity in school

Local, state, & federal policy (tax, advertising, zoning, etc.)

# Talking About Health Inequity

What happens when you talk about inequity?

**You say:** People who live in neighborhood X are three times as likely to have diabetes.

**They hear:** People living in neighborhood X have made bad choices. Why don't they eat better?



*Source:* <http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.cupa/files/seofinequity.pdf>

# What to do?

- Explain why inequities exist
- Say why it matters
- What are you proposing could fix it?

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The answer will be small and specific,  
but thoughtful and strategic.

# Values Brainstorm

Why do young people get involved in social change?  
How can we connect those values to those of decision makers?



*Equity*  
*Honesty*  
*Health*  
*Safety*

What others values can  
you think of?

# Lakoff's Conceptual Levels

- Level 1: overarching **values** like fairness, responsibility
- Level 2: **issues** like housing, children's health, food, living wage
- Level 3: specific **strategies** like tax breaks for developers, health insurance for kids & families, setting nutritional standards for foods in school

# Components of a Message

- Problem statement  
*What's wrong?*
- Policy objective  
*What should be done?*
- Values dimension  
*Why does it matter?*

# Why Authentic Voices Matter

People who have personal experience with a health problem or issue can be important voices in identifying problems in a community and helping to come up with the solutions.

A variety of voices need to be heard from the very first conversations in order to have their ideas and priorities included among the possible solutions.

Then they become some of the best spokespersons to promote change in the community – because they've both envisioned it and will benefit from it.

# Communications Tips

## Develop strategy:

- Message is never first or foremost.
- Know what you want & how to get it.
- Not news for news' sake.

## Frame the debate:

- Illustrate the landscape.
- Connect your values to solutions.

# Thank You

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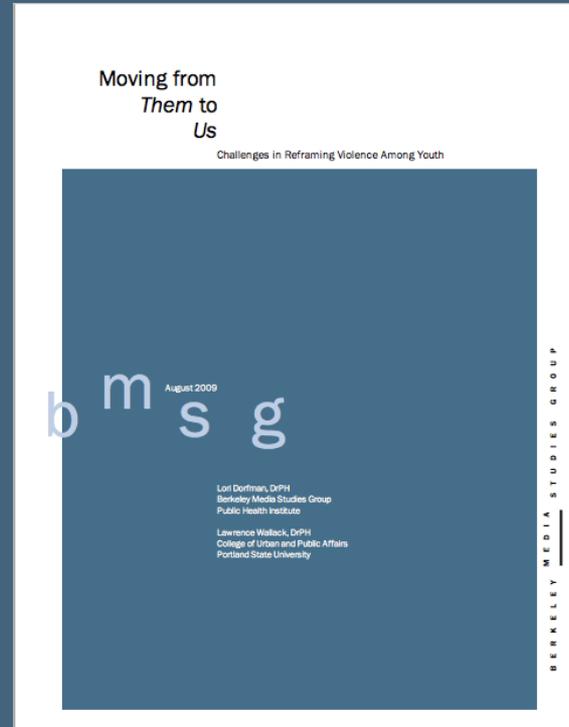
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