

Income and health

NARRATIVES AND HEALTH EQUITY: EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

Income is more than a necessary source of obtaining basic goods; it is also a means of participating in community and civic life. Focusing only on the poverty of individuals misses the important implications of income distribution across whole communities. The emerging narrative helps lift up the connections between income and the health of individuals, families, and communities. The emerging narrative helped with efforts to expand legislative policy conversations on minimum wage at the Minnesota legislature.

1. A living wage is important for health. Raising low wages will increase people's opportunity to be healthy by increasing their access to the basic necessities of life.
2. People and communities forced to live on low wages live with increased stress and that negatively impacts their health. Low wages are making people sick. Increasing those wages will help decrease stress for people and help turn community energy towards creating physical and mental health.
3. Populations of color and American Indians are disproportionately represented among low wage workers. Raising the wages will have a positive impact on the health of these populations and reduce health inequities.
4. Health inequities are not inevitable. We are creating substandard health status for people by accepting low wages as a given. We can choose to make people's lives healthier and create greater health for all by raising wages.
5. Poverty wages lead to people and communities having less control over their health because they make decisions based on ability to pay rather than choosing what they already know will make them healthier. Paying living wages increases the health of both people and communities.
6. We are all interconnected—our opportunities to be healthy are linked. Raising wages will improve the health of those individuals, along with their families, and the health of all people living in Minnesota.
7. Raising the wages will help more children of color be healthy—all children deserve a healthy start. We should not condemn some children to ill health for economic reasons.
8. Income and wealth is one important predictor of health outcomes. When we systemically allow people to be paid poverty wages, we are accepting not just the economic impact on those people's lives, but the health impacts as well. We can change the systems that make us sick. We all value, and benefit from, health in our communities. Addressing the impact of low wages is not something individuals can do on their own. Acting together to enact policies that assure wages that can support health is one example of a corrective action we can take together.

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