

Planning your Event

Now that you've assessed your organizational capacity, set goals and objectives, and defined your audience, it's time to plan your event!

In this section you'll find guidance on how to:

1. Choose the **type of screening(s)** that best fits your audience and objectives and pick the **most appropriate episode** or clip to screen;
2. Use **messaging components** to develop a new story, one in which health and well-being are tied to improving social conditions;
3. **Highlight examples of promising policies and initiatives** to illustrate the connections between health and social justice and show that change is possible.

Please refer to the **Sample Agendas at the end of this toolkit for helpful suggestions and ideas. See the Practical Tools section for detailed practical and logistical information.**



1. Types of Screenings

Do you have a particular policy target in mind? Is this a public or private screening? What promising policies and initiatives do you want to highlight? How can people get involved and take action?

There are many possible ways to use UNNATURAL CAUSES to further your work. In fact, the best approach is a multi-pronged one. The following examples are by no means exhaustive or exclusive, but they illustrate a range of ways to work with different audiences to educate, organize and advocate for health equity.

Educate

1. **Internal screening with staff, students, or department heads:** Develop a shared understanding of the distinction between health and health equity as well as the root causes of inequity, and examine the health equity consequences of existing programs and policies.
2. **Staff training or workshop for members/constituents:** Promote discussion of how the issues depicted in the film reflect inequities impacting your organization or community – what information do we have, what do we need? Do we need to develop/renew an organizational commitment to promoting health equity?
3. **Dialogue with partners and allies:** Take a leadership role in educating partners about how the health equity framework applies to your combined efforts and can advance their work; create a shared foundation and common language for discussing health inequities and aligning your priorities.



Organize

- 1. Mobilize partners.** Work with existing allies and partners to build capacity and secure commitments to address a particular issue or set of issues that affect health equity. Use the series to underscore the importance of this work.
- 2. Build new alliances.** Demonstrate to potential partners in different sectors (labor, economic development, education, etc) how your work is intertwined and how these linkages represent a mutual opportunity; use the series to inform and validate new and unconventional coalitions.
- 3. Town Hall meetings and public dialogues.** Convene public officials, health advocates and workers, community-based organizations, the press and other stakeholders to draw local attention to existing health inequities, to build support for specific social reforms and promising initiatives, and to generate an eagerness for change.

Advocate

- 1. Policy Briefings.** Use one or two strategic clips in a forum for government officials and policy makers. Bring in “non-health” issues – policies that can shorten the socioeconomic ladder and protect those lower on the ladder from health threats. Discuss the distribution of power: who should be seated at the table and how can you make that happen?
- 2. Support a specific policy target.** Use the series to build public will and support for a policy or initiative at the local, regional, state or federal level that advances health equity (e.g., a living wage law, extended bus routes, or a community benefit agreement). A screening can also help raise the visibility of other news: a promising initiative, report, research agenda or innovative partnership.
- 3. Engage the media.** Encourage the media to use a health equity framework to report on health issues, to cover innovative local solutions, and to expose social and economic policies in the United States that constrain individual choices and limit health.

Some important ideas to consider as you think about your event:

- **Use the series broadly.** Although some program episodes spotlight particular ethnic/racial communities, they raise issues that are applicable to many groups and situations; for example, how racism affects health, the impact of the built environment, the legacy of past social and economic policies, or the importance of social connections and solidarity. Avoid taking a literal approach in matching the series to your audience. Instead, consider which other programs might offer a fresh perspective and invite a deeper, more productive examination.
- **Create an active viewing experience.** A film screening doesn't have to be a passive experience! Provide opportunities for viewers to be engaged, either through pre- and post-screening discussion or small group work. Careful planning and good facilitation will enable viewers to watch critically, reflect on preconceptions, and examine how the issues relate to their work and community.
- **Recognize and accept your advantages and constraints (and those of others).** Social inequities impact each of us in different ways. Although we may all be working towards the same goal – better health, increased opportunity – we bring different experiences, assumptions and resources to the task. Skin color, wealth, job status, language, race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation all affect how we view and are viewed by others. Ask yourself: who is included (or left out) in decision making? What am I taking for granted? How am I moving beyond my comfort zone?
- **Look for opportunities and allies.** Consider the larger political and economic climate: what's happening outside your organization or field that can bolster your agenda or improve your efforts? How can we tap into momentum and success in other sectors, such as a promising initiative or new report? Where can we find allies to help us overcome obstacles and increase our power, or use our visibility to help someone else? If a public event, bring in a broad range of co-sponsors. Be sure to give them credit and provide a table so they can distribute literature.
- **Follow through / Follow up:** Bringing people together is a first step; the “real” work often begins after the screening. How will you engage and continue your commitment over the long term? How will you handle conflict and criticism? Be prepared to “practice what you preach,” and take an honest look at how your organization can improve. Having a larger plan in place before your event will help you maintain momentum and action after the excitement generated by the film and your new partnerships fades.

Episode Descriptions

Unless you're planning a series of screenings, most likely you will only have time to show a single program episode and/or clips from several episodes. Think creatively about selecting content that will help your audience think about health inequities from a fresh perspective. Also, consider which episode best complements the local context, resources and knowledge you will bring to the event.

NOTE: the DVD contains a 5-minute intro clip that is similar but not identical to the beginning of "In Sickness and In Wealth." If you choose to screen one of the shorter episodes, you may also want to show this clip to establish a frame that focuses attention on "upstream" solutions



Episode One: In Sickness and In Wealth – 56 mins

The opening episode lays out the big picture: who gets sick and why? Set in Louisville, Kentucky, it shows how health and longevity are correlated with class status, how racism imposes an additional risk burden, and how solutions lie in making inequality an urgent public policy matter.



Episode Two: When the Bough Breaks – 29 mins

African American infant mortality rates remain twice as high as for white Americans. African American mothers with graduate degrees deliver more low birth-weight babies than white women who haven't finished high school. How might the chronic stress of racism over the life-course become embedded in our bodies and increase risks?



Episode Three: Becoming American – 29 mins

Recent Mexican immigrants, though often poorer, tend to be healthier than the average American. But the longer they're here, the worse their relative health becomes. How do social inclusion, community ties and economic mobility play a role in maintaining health?



Episode Four: Bad Sugar – 29 mins

O’odham Indians living on reservations in southern Arizona, have perhaps the highest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world. Increasingly, researchers are reconceptualizing chronic diseases like diabetes as a bodily response to poverty, oppression and futurelessness. A new approach suggests that regaining control over a collective future is vital to reversing this epidemic.



Episode Five: Place Matters – 29 mins

Why are your zip code and street address such a good predictor of population health? What policies and investment decisions create radically different living environments - some that are harmful and others that are protective of health? What actions can make a difference, particularly in low-income communities?



Episode Six: Collateral Damage – 29 mins

In the Marshall Islands, local populations have been displaced from a traditional way of life by the American military presence. Now that both their social and immune systems have been eroded, they contend with the worst of the “developing” and industrialized worlds: infectious diseases such as tuberculosis due to crowded living conditions and extreme poverty and chronic disease stemming from the stress of dislocation and loss.



Episode Seven: Not Just a Paycheck – 30 mins

How do unemployment and job insecurity affect health? Residents of western Michigan struggle against depression, domestic violence, and heart disease after the largest refrigerator factory in the country shuts down. Ironically, the plant is owned by a company in Sweden, where mass layoffs – far from devastating lives – are relatively benign, because of government policies that protect workers.

For more complete episode descriptions, program transcripts, and a discussion guide with pre- and post-viewing activities and questions for each episode, please visit www.unnaturalcauses.org.

Messaging: A New Story

The messages you communicate at your event, in your publicity, and in your follow-up will help promote a new health “story,” one that upends the conventional bio-medical approach and instead ties our collective desire for better health to social justice.

Be prepared to encounter resistance, confusion and misconceptions from the media, the public, and policy makers, who are used to explaining health outcomes in terms of medicines, behaviors and genes. Note how the conventional understandings reinforce a sense of inevitability:

- 1. People have poor health because they’ve made unhealthy choices. It’s a question of individual responsibility.**
- 2. Health disparities (to the extent they are acknowledged) may be unfortunate but not necessarily unfair.**
- 3. There’s little that can be done.**

To shift to a new conception, one in which wellbeing is tied to improving social conditions, consider these suggestions for developing your core message framework:

- Appeal to a broad audience; promote “all of us,” not “us vs. them.” Communicate what we all have to gain from addressing health inequities.
- Convey a sense of urgency (but not daunting crisis).
- Demonstrate how conditions outside the body are as vital to health and survival as those inside the body.
- Show how health-promoting and health-damaging conditions don’t have to be distributed unequally; yet, as unnecessary and preventable, they are unjust.
- Demonstrate that we all have a part to play: the policies that impact health are too large for individuals to tackle on their own. We need to work together and hold government accountable for making sure everyone has the fundamental resources and opportunities to prosper.
- Inspire (don’t compel) community response and action.
- Be hopeful; communicate solutions and possibilities, not just health threats.

As global health expert Bill Foege points out, health equity advocates need a vision for “the last mile” as well as practical steps for the first. In other words, communicating a meaningful message about where we’re going is as important as outlining immediate policies that will make a difference.

Highlighting Promising Policies and Initiatives

Be sure to spotlight success stories that not only provide concrete ideas but promote greater involvement and demonstrate that change really is possible.

Your examples can be drawn from any arena or level: health, housing, labor, an ethnic community, national, or local. What's important is finding the stories that are most relevant to your community and illustrate a connection between social justice, democracy and health.

When choosing a policy arena, be sure also to consider whether there is already movement and activity around any of these issues in your community.

- **Improve income and reduce wealth inequalities:** Raise the minimum wage to a livable level; improve protections against layoffs; strengthen on-the-job learning opportunities; improve income supports, training for the unemployed, and other social assistance benefits; support collective bargaining rights; restore a progressive income tax and inheritance taxes.
- **Improve social inclusion:** Decrease social inequality; struggle against discrimination and segregation; encourage democratic decision-making; strengthen participation in community organizations and local governance.
- **Promote racial justice:** Strengthen existing anti-discrimination laws and their enforcement; desegregate schools and equalize funding; build diverse neighborhoods; provide resources for jobs and educational access and retention.
- **Promote better working conditions:** Decrease job strain; increase job autonomy and worker participation; provide flexible work hours and job security; give incentives to businesses that hire locally; strengthen and enforce occupational safety laws; demand paid sick leave and vacations.
- **Improve conditions for children:** Increase social supports for families such as child support payments, paid family leave, low-cost or free universal pre-school and day-care, earned income credit, quality schools, and safe places to play.
- **Improve the physical environment:** Create more quality low-cost housing; reduce pollution; create more parks and green spaces; promote farmers' markets and fresh produce in local stores; ensure safe sidewalks and streets; provide reliable and low-cost public transit; encourage "green" development and pedestrian-oriented planning.
- **Improve schools:** Require smaller class sizes; equalize school spending; increase teacher pay, training, and prep time; reform educational policies based on high stakes testing; create partnerships with families; keep facilities open in the evenings for community use.

Ultimately, improving the public's health means transforming the major social and economic structures and institutions that produce inequality.

A health equity framework must work towards what Richard Hofrichter calls "the equitable distribution of advantages across society" so that everyone has the opportunity to fulfill his or her capabilities. This might seem like a daunting task, but we can readily see examples of how society has shifted in ways that once seemed impossible: the end of slavery, the eight-hour workday, women's suffrage and civil rights. These accomplishments resulted from many small acts by ordinary citizens who took our democratic ideals seriously and legitimized a new and different way of thinking.