

New Zealand: HEAT – a checklist for assessing health equity

New Zealand makes an effort to advance equity in public health interventions. A Health Equity Assessment Tool (HEAT) introduced in 2004 provides a clear incentive to focus on interventions with the potential to reduce health inequalities. In 2008 the Ministry of Health published a User's Guide to raise awareness and understanding of HEAT.

What is HEAT?

Health inequalities – avoidable and unjust differences in health – particularly between Maori and other New Zealanders have become a major policy concern in New Zealand. HEAT consists of a set of 10 questions which build on each other. It is a tool to

- assess new public health policies, programs and services for their current or future impact on health inequalities,
- allocate resources and funding towards interventions that contribute to reducing health inequalities,
- make informed decisions about how to build and strengthen public health interventions.

HEAT USER'S GUIDE

What to do?

Questions one to three ask the user to define the health inequalities to be tackled:

1. What inequalities exist in relation to the health issue under consideration?
2. Who is most advantaged and how?
3. How did the inequalities occur? What are the mechanisms by which the inequalities were created, maintained or increased?

To facilitate this process and to increase understanding of health inequalities, the User's Guide provides an introduction to the concept of health and to the causes of health inequalities.

How to do it?

The next two questions ask how the intervention can reduce these inequalities, with a special focus on Maori health.

4. Where/how will you intervene to tackle this issue?

5. How will you improve Maori health outcomes and reduce health inequalities experienced by Maori?

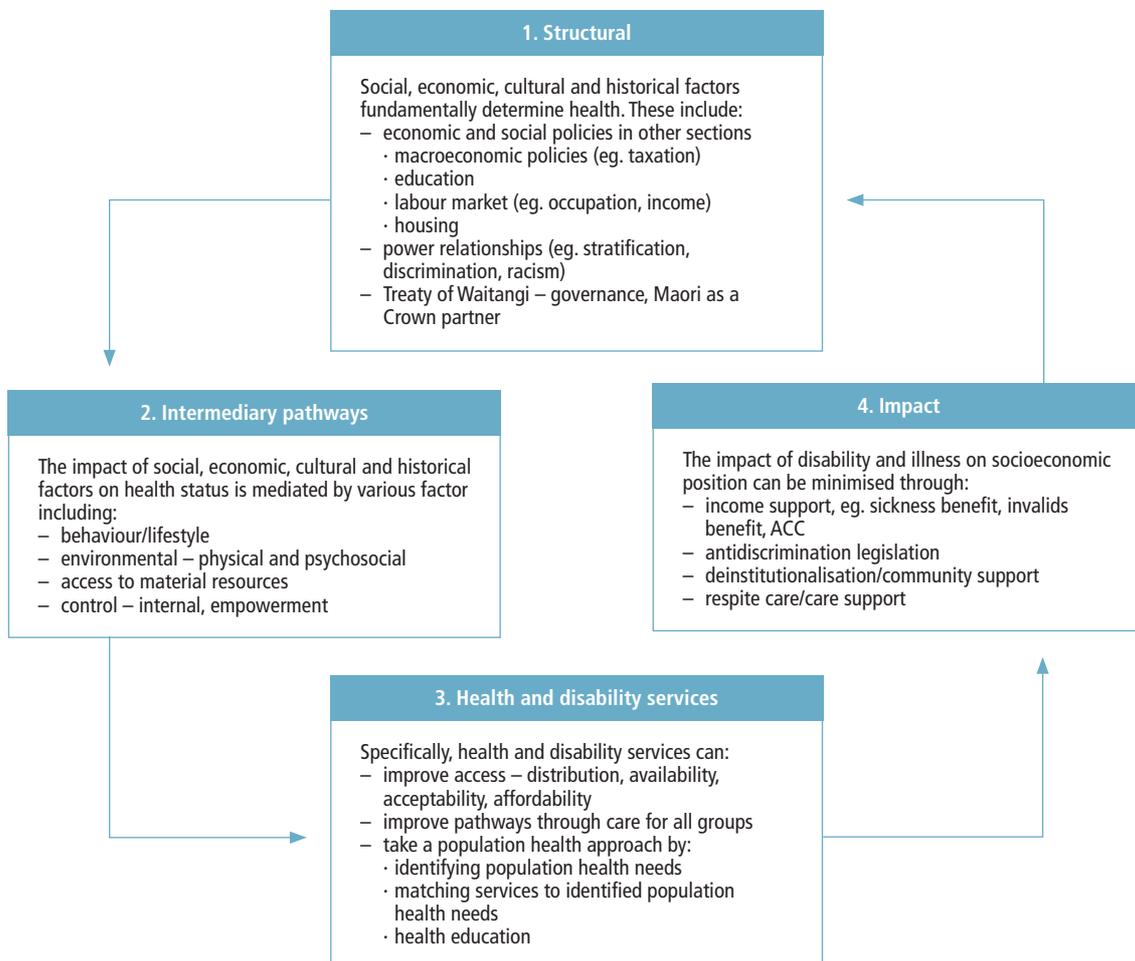
Based on an Intervention Framework (see figure), the User's Guide suggests four levels of intervention. Starting from structural determinants of health, the framework describes mediating factors to health such as lifestyle, the roles of health services and of legislation and support mechanisms for reducing health inequalities.

Anticipating and measuring results

The final questions ask the user to evaluate the impact of the intervention:

6. How could this intervention affect health inequalities?
7. Who will benefit most?
8. What might the unintended consequences be?
9. What will you do to make sure the intervention does reduce inequalities?
10. How will you know if inequalities have been reduced?

HEAT – Intervention Framework to Reduce Inequalities



Source: Ministry of Health (2002). Reducing Inequalities in Health, Wellington: Ministry of Health

HEAT success factors

- **public policy support:** Since the publication of the New Zealand Health Strategy in 2000, the health sector has accepted a leadership role for reducing health inequalities.
- **inclusion in policy process:** HEAT is part of the standard reporting procedures for new projects and is a decision criterion for District Health Boards to distribute money.
- **communication of the tool:** The User's Guide is designed to encourage local government authorities, private providers and community groups to apply HEAT.
- **flexibility of the tool:** The HEAT questions can easily be adapted to other countries. HEAT itself is based on the Health Inequalities Impact Assessment developed in the UK.

Full report:

Cram, Fiona and Toni Ashton. „The Health Equity Assessment Tool“. HealthPolicyMonitor, October 2008. Available at www.hpm.org/survey/nz/a12/4

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