FOCUSING ON EQUITY AND HEALTH: AN INEQUALITY SCREENING TOOL FOR POLICY AND OTHER TYPES OF PROPOSAL

Reducing inequalities is a priority for partnerships across Belfast. This one-page tool, comprising seven questions, is designed to help explore the potential effects of policy and other types of proposals on the health and socio-economic inequalities in local communities and neighbourhoods of the city of Belfast. As such, it helps to "proof" policies, strategies, plans and commissioning frameworks against the potential effects of the inequalities and inequities to which individuals in communities may be exposed, affecting not only their lives but also the sustainability of the city and its services.

Who is the tool for and why use it?
This tool is designed for people in the public, private, community and voluntary sectors who are responsible for developing policy and other types of proposals and for commissioning services and assessing whether the services the community receives are addressing inequalities. It can help to identify whether the policy or other type of proposal:

- supports people with pre-existing inequalities, and does not worsen them;
- does not give rise to the unintended consequence of introducing inequalities where previously there were none.

When should I use it?
The tool can be used:

- at the start of the process of developing policy or other types of proposal, including specifications for commissioning, to make explicit the need to address inequalities and ensure equity;
- towards the end of the process, when checking the policy or other proposal to ensure there are no unintended consequences, such as worsening pre-existing inequalities or the introduction of a new set of inequalities.

How should I use it?
The tool can be used in two main ways: (i) as an individual when drafting a proposal or commissioning a service or when checking for unintended consequences; (ii) with a group of people internally, or with external involvement, when drafting a proposal or commissioning a service or when checking for unintended consequences.

> **What is the difference between this tool and Northern Ireland's Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)?**
>
> EqIA is a tool to help assess a proposal's impacts on *equality of opportunity* for people in population groups with protected characteristics (as enshrined in law), and its impacts on good relations. EqIA is limited in scope when compared with an appraisal of equity and the effects on inequalities because inequalities arise for many different reasons, not simply from differences in opportunity. An appraisal focusing on equity considers a wide variety of factors that give rise to inequality, and ascertains the effects on a range of population groups, not only those with protected characteristics. Thus, an appraisal of inequalities brings greater breadth and depth to the analysis, highlighting many more potentially beneficial and adverse effects.

Focus of the questions

The first two questions ask you to identify whether various components of health equity will be *increased* for vulnerable groups, who have pre-existing inequalities, and for the general population. Depending on your answers, you will need to consider whether the potential outcomes are likely to reduce, increase or make no change to inequalities overall. The third question asks you to consider whether there are ways to change the proposal to help reduce inequalities, and the fourth question is designed to help you identify which vulnerable groups might benefit in this way.

The fifth question is important because it asks you to consider whether the proposal will introduce an inequality/inequalities to a group or groups who were not previously experiencing them. If there is the possibility inequalities will be introduced, this outcome needs to be avoided, reduced in effect or counteracted.

The sixth question asks you to make a judgement about whether the proposal needs to be investigated further due to its effects on inequalities, whether pre-existing or newly introduced.

The seventh question asks you to outline the next step or steps for work on the proposal.

A Glossary on pages 4-5 briefly describes some of the terms used in this tool.

Instructions and interpretation

Questions 1-4: Fill in the columns showing whether components of equity might increase for (i) vulnerable groups and (ii) for the general population (Question 1; NB: answers are not mutually exclusive), then assess the balance between the two columns to answer Question 2. If there are more positive outcomes for vulnerable groups, go to 2a); if there are more positive outcomes for the general population, go to 2b); if there is an even balance between the two, go to 2c).

If your answer is "No" to 2a), or "Yes" to either 2b) or 2c), it is important to complete Question 3, and then identify the groups who might benefit in Question 4. In the meantime, you need to consider in the light of these outcomes whether the proposal needs more detailed assessment (see Question 6) or whether you think your suggestions will address the issue appropriately and effectively if they are implemented.

Question 5: It is *always* important to consider Question 5: if your answer is "Yes", and the proposal is likely to introduce inequalities, you need to consider whether the proposal needs more detailed assessment (Question 6) or whether you think your suggestions will address the issue appropriately and effectively if they are implemented.

Question 6: If you decide the proposal needs more detailed assessment, identify who needs to be informed of that decision, who should undertake the assessment and how, and who should take action on the final outputs.

Question 7: Outline what you think are the most appropriate next steps for work on the proposal.

An inequality screening tool for policies and other types of proposals

1. Does the proposal **increase** any of the following components of equity in the provision of a service, facility or infrastructure?	*For vulnerable groups with pre-existing inequalities*	*For the general population*
• Availability		
• Accessibility		
• Quality		
• Acceptability		
• Affordability		
• Safety		
• Responsiveness to people's needs		

2. Looking at the balance of your answers above, answer parts a), b) and c) below		
a) If the proposal has positive effects mainly for vulnerable groups, is it likely to reduce inequalities?	Yes	No
b) If the proposal has positive effects mainly for the general population, is it likely to increase inequalities?	Yes	No
c) If the proposal has positive effects on both vulnerable groups and the general population, is it likely to have an effect on inequalities but is unlikely to reduce the inequalities gap?	Yes	No

Please explain your choice of a), b) or c):

3. Could the proposal be changed to reduce inequalities?	Yes	No

If "Yes", please state how this could be achieved.

4. Which vulnerable groups could be helped by this proposal if amended?

Children/young people or older people	People with a disability (physical or learning)	People with low educational attainment
Low-income groups	Cultural/faith groups	Black & minority ethnic groups
Socially excluded groups	Refugees/asylum seekers	People with poor health status
Traveller groups	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups	Other (please specify):

5. Is the proposal likely to ***introduce*** inequalities for some groups?	Yes	No

If "Yes", please state which groups and why.

Can anything be done to offset this effect? Please describe the action(s).

6. Should the proposal be assessed in more detail?	Yes	No

If "Yes", please give your reason(s) why:

7. Please outline the next step(s) for work on this proposal:

Glossary
Key concepts

Inequality	Equity
Inequalities impact on all aspects of life. **Socio-economic inequalities** are where some groups have more money, opportunities, and power than others due to different social and economic positions or status within a population or society. **Health inequalities** arise as a result of the circumstances in which people live, work and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are, in turn, shaped by political, social and economic forces. [1]	Fairness or justice in the way people are treated in society.

Acceptability	Acceptability is when a resource – service, facility, infrastructure – is provided in a culturally appropriate way, and recognises the requirements of people who use the service, facility or infrastructure. An "acceptable" resource provides a good "fit" with people's requirements in terms of age, sex, culture/faith, state of health, educational attainment, level of literacy/health literacy and other factors.
Accessibility	Accessibility is when people are able to gain access to a resource – service, facility, infrastructure – that is being provided. Whether people can gain access depends on several factors, including: • proximity/geographical location; • the provision of appropriate physical adaptations to enable access for everyone irrespective of degree of impairment or level of mobility; • the provision of social/cultural support, such as a translator for people who are not fluent in the official language of the country; • the provision of information/educational support to enable the best use of a resource for people with low levels of educational attainment, for instance, taking action to increase health literacy.
Affordability	Affordability is when the cost associated with the use of a resource – service, facility, infrastructure – enables people on a low income to access it through low or no costs or subsidised/concessionary costs.
Availability	Availability is the opportunity for people to obtain a resource – service, facility, infrastructure – because it is being provided. Provision of service can reflect the amount of investment. Some resources may not be provided at all, some resources may not be provided to all people, and some resources may be cut.
Quality	Quality is the degree to which a resource – service, facility, infrastructure – meets a set standard. The resource may not be provided according to the standard, or it may not be provided at the same level of quality to all people.
Responsiveness to people's needs	There are several aspects of responsiveness to people's needs, including: • flexibility; • pro-active engagement of users; • feedback system for users; • regular review by providers of the resource.
Safety	Safety is the avoidance, prevention or reduction of harm, and the risk of harm, arising from use of a resource (service, facility, infrastructure).

Tool Development	
Development of the tool was led by Belfast Healthy Cities and the Belfast Strategic Partnership. The tool's structure, presentation and content were developed over a series of workshops and pilot sessions by people providing public, private and community and voluntary sector services in Belfast and other areas of Northern Ireland.	

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Healthy Cities 21st Century

Belfast
A World Health Organization
Healthy City

[1] Adapted from *Not Just Health: A strategy for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to address inequalities in health*