

Are Community Coalitions a Better Mechanism to Advance Health Equity? A Narrative Review

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Background/Objective: Despite increasing emphasis on health equity in policy, leadership, and program development, meaningful advancement in health equity remains a challenge. A comprehensive review of community health coalition efforts to improve health equity has not been conducted. In this narrative review, we examine what evidence exists that community health coalitions can advance health equity, and whether coalitions are a preferred approach to address health equity.

Methods: PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Web of Science were searched for peer-reviewed, English articles with no date restrictions. In total, 1256 records were screened, of which 1163 were excluded for duplicate publications, no coalition or coalition-based intervention, no relevant outcomes, no emphasis on health equity or disparities, not primary literature, or unavailable full text. The remaining 93 articles are presented as a table of interventions based on outcomes. Further, evaluations of coalition effectiveness with controls are reviewed.

Results: Populations of interest were racial and ethnic minorities, women and girls, low socioeconomic status communities, rural and urban areas, older adults, and LGBTQ groups. The most commonly reported results were changes in health outcomes or behaviors and community or organizational policy. Few studies were randomized, double-blinded, or controlled trials. This is not unexpected given the difficult nature of evaluating community interventions. Very few studies evaluated the effectiveness of a coalition-based intervention as compared to organizational interventions.

Conclusion, Impact, & Implications: Available literature suggests that health coalitions influence health outcomes, policies, and important social determinants of health in populations affected by health inequity. However, community intervention studies pose a unique challenge for high quality evaluation. While health coalitions have a positive influence on health equity, more research is needed to determine the advantages of health coalition interventions versus organizational interventions.