

Safety for All:

Emerging Principles for a Health Equity Approach to Intimate Partner Violence Prevention

- A working document created in 2017-

With generous support from the Blue Shield of California Foundation, Prevention Institute's SAFE (Sectors Acting For Equity) project is convening leaders in California to implement multisector, health equity strategies to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV). While IPV occurs in all communities, the issue disproportionately affects young women, women with low household incomes, women of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals, among others. The project recognizes that to prevent IPV across communities and achieve significant reductions across the State, these inequities in rates of IPV must be understood and addressed. The SAFE project recognizes that structural drivers of inequity (i.e., the inequitable distribution of power, opportunity, and resources through racism, sexism, disenfranchisement, etc.) create inequitable community environments and contribute to inequities in rates of IPV. Our work focuses on creating equitable access to community conditions that promote safe relationships. (For more information about the SAFE framework's analysis of the drivers and contributors to IPV and inequities in IPV, please read *A health equity and multisector approach to preventing domestic violence* at www.preventioninstitute.org/projects/safe.)

This working document, *Safety for All*, summarizes dialogue that took place during a meeting in August 2017, when California practitioners and advocates gathered at Prevention Institute's offices in Oakland, California. The practitioners and advocates represented public health, domestic violence services, and the housing/community development sectors, as well as other sectors working in local communities and at the state level. Prevention Institute shaped the meeting agenda and process to reflect our commitment to the values of humility, respect, and transparency. One of the meeting's discussions sought to build shared understanding of what it means to work for safety for all in a climate of escalating structural violence. This discussion resulted in the identification of four key principles to inform a health equity approach to IPV prevention. This document summarizes the key principles, and will be used to 1) engage partners in further articulating and promoting these principles; and 2) inform the SAFE project moving forward.

During the discussion, Prevention Institute shared the term structural violence, to describe the harm that individuals, families and communities experience from structurally produced inequities, e.g., the inability to meet basic needs. The work to prevent IPV is occurring in the context of escalating structural violence (e.g., anti-immigration policies, attacks on the Affordable Care Act, cuts to federal programs to promote housing and economic security, etc.). Recognizing this, the group engaged in dialogue to build shared understanding of what it means to work for safety for all in a climate of escalating structural violence, and explored implications for the SAFE project. Prevention Institute offered guiding definitions of structural violence and health equity:

- **Structural violence** is the harm that individuals, families, and communities experience from economic and social structures, social institutions, relations of power, privilege and inequality and inequity that may harm people and communities by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence, including historical and present-day transgressions and injustices on the part of the government and the private sector, has perpetuated a system of diminished opportunity for certain populations and created the conditions in some communities in which IPV is more likely to occur.¹

- **Health equity** means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and healthcare. For the purposes of measurement, health equity means reducing and ultimately eliminating disparities in health and its determinants that adversely affect excluded or marginalized groups.ⁱⁱ

Participants discussed their understanding of health equity and structural violence and implications for advancing a health equity approach to IPV prevention. A commitment to four key principles emerged from the discussion:

1. **Address the structural drivers (e.g., racism, sexism, disenfranchisement, etc.) that contribute to IPV and inequities in rates of IPV.** To fundamentally promote positive health and safety outcomes and equity in those outcomes we must promote structural empowerment and enfranchisement, and the equitable distribution of power and resources. Our work is about promoting equitable access to the conditions that promote safety.
2. **Ensure that communities most impacted by IPV have the power, opportunity, and resources to drive solutions and priorities.** A part of shifting the inequitable distribution of power, opportunity, and resources toward greater equity lies in moving the “margin to the center,” so that communities most impacted by IPV have the power, opportunity, and resources to determine solutions and priorities, and to lead the work.
3. **Promote holistic solutions that reduce future violence while supporting healing from the harms of current and past violence.** Healing and prevention are interrelated processes. A part of building resilience and preventing future incidents of IPV must involve holistic solutions that address the harms of current or past violence, and support the healing and success of survivors.
4. **Support individual, relationship, and community empowerment and determination.** Promoting safe relationships is not about judging other people’s relationships or imposing standards on individuals or communities through a top-down, power-over approach. People do not have equitable access to the conditions that promote safety, and therefore have different day-to-day experiences, and needs for options and choice. The goal is for everyone to be able to express their experiences and needs and to ensure that everyone has access to the conditions that support their safety and self-determination.

The SAFE (Sectors Acting For Equity) project

With generous support from the Blue Shield of California Foundation, the Sectors Acting For Equity (SAFE) project partners with communities that are engaging residents and building partnerships across sectors and social movements to promote community environments that support safe relationships and help to prevent partner violence. To learn more, visit www.preventioninstitute.org, and to get involved, contact safe@preventioninstitute.org.

ⁱ Burtle, A. What is Structural Violence? [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.structuralviolence.org/structural-violence/>.

ⁱⁱ Braveman, P, et al. (2017.) *What is health equity? And what difference does a definition make?* San Francisco, CA: University of California San Francisco and Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.