

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Health logo

## 

**Beyond Bubbles and Blocks**

Information for EI Home Visitors

**Why does racial equity matter in early intervention systems?**

Historically, marginalized communities and underserved populations have had poor health outcomes due to systemic racism that has roots throughout many systems of care. These systems of care are supported historically through public policies, institutional practices, and social marginalization that has pervasive and unmistakably harmful outcomes to individuals from diverse backgrounds, most acutely to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Early intervention is critical in dismantling these oppressive systems by eliminating existing inequities that impact infants, toddlers, and families and by providing equitable and culturally competent care to families navigating the system in search of services for a child with developmental delays (Ryan, 2021).

To understand what racial and health equity means, we must have ongoing discussions with colleagues and external stakeholders, engaging community-based organizations to help improve our work and bridge the gaps to increase access to early intervention services for all children. We must determine where these inequities and barriers are most prominent.

**What is the difference between health equity and racial equity?**

According to the CDC, health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain optimal health. Differences in average life expectancy, quality of life, illness, disability, mortality rates, disease severity, and access to treatment all represent health inequities. To achieve health equity, barriers to quality health must be removed, such as poverty, discrimination, and social injustices, to overcome economic, social, and language barriers to eliminate preventable health disparities. Health equity cannot be achieved without addressing racism that uniquely impacts racial and ethnic diverse groups.



Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted how one fares (*Glossary | Racial Equity Tools*, 2015). It is the deliberate and ongoing process of altering policies, practices, institutions, and systems to achieve meaningful change in the lives of people of color.

**How do we work to achieve increasing equity in early intervention?**

The struggle to determine the extent of racial and ethnic disparities has been complicated by limited data collection from early intervention services. However, studies have revealed that BIPOC children are less likely to be referred to and receive services than White children (ECTA, 2023). Several underlying factors may contribute to the high persistent statistics of children of color who frequently lack access to appropriate early intervention services**. We intend to focus our efforts on the following practices to achieve equitable outcomes for children of color receiving early intervention services:**

* Acknowledging implicit bias: Implicit biases have been demonstrated in various studies to be a mechanism for generating negative impacts for infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services, which is considered a systemic barrier that persists for BIPOC children throughout their academic journey (Ryan, 2021). We advocate for the ongoing usage of [***Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)***](https://www.mass.gov/culturally-and-linguistically-appropriate-services-clas-initiative) in addition to adopting innovative strategies in the field of early intervention, such as implementing equity-empowered frameworks that enhance procedures and are culturally competent to advance equity.
* Putting the [Massachusetts Early Intervention Core Values and Key Principles](https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-early-intervention-mission-and-key-principles/download) into practice.
* Applying Massachusetts [“[Strengthening Partnerships” guiding principles as a framework for family engagement with ALL families](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/family-engagement-framework.pdf)
* Practicing the core value of life-long learning to stay current with the research on racial equity. [Advancing Racial Equity in Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education](https://ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/racialequity/factsheet-racialequity-2023.pdf)

**References**

ECTA. (2023). *Fact Sheet: Advancing Racial Equity in Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education.* [*https://ectacenter.org/topics/racialequity/factsheet-racialequity-2023.asp*](https://ectacenter.org/topics/racialequity/factsheet-racialequity-2023.asp)

*Glossary | Racial Equity Tools*. (2015). Racial Equity Tools. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

Ryan, J. (2021). *Confronting Racism and Bias Within Early Intervention: The Responsibility of Systems and Individuals to Influence Change and Advance Equity - Sheresa Boone Blanchard, Jennifer Ryan Newton, Katherine W. Didericksen, Michael Daniels, Kia Glosson, 2021*. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0271121421992470#bibr4-0271121421992470>