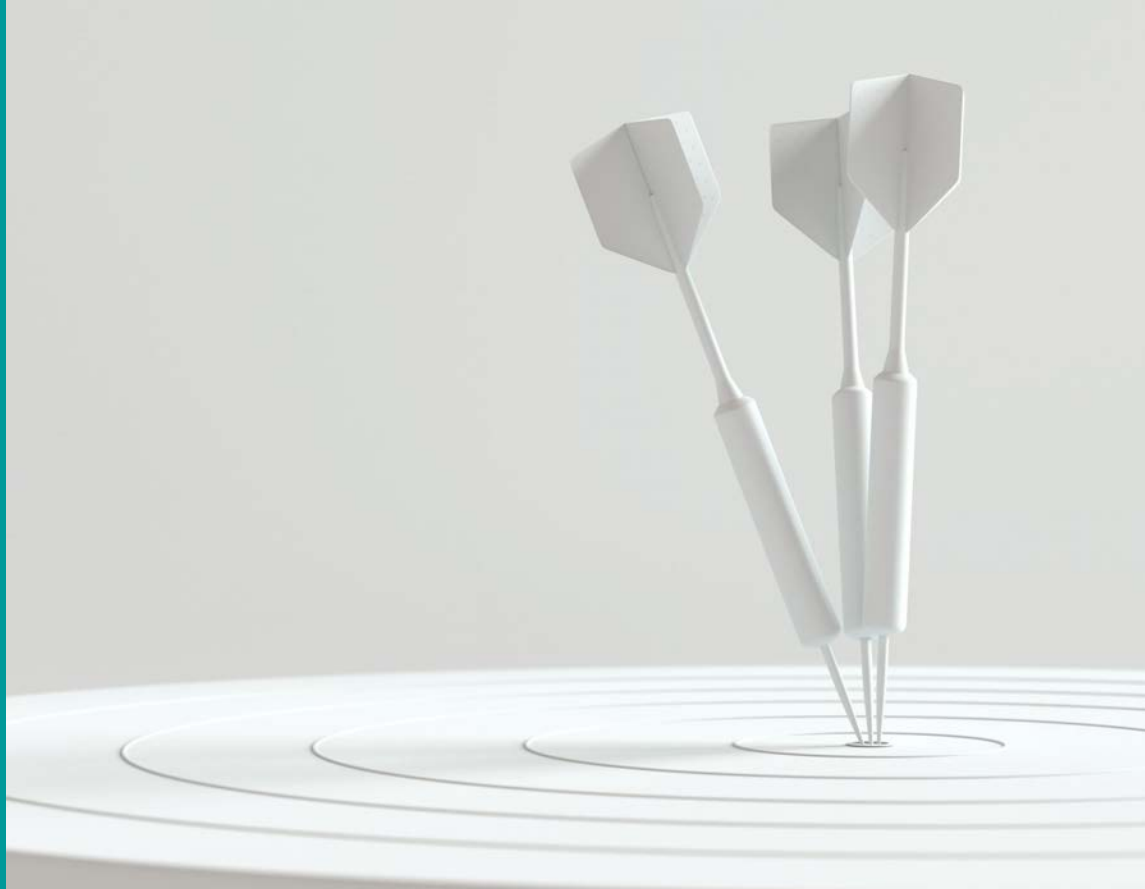


*Strategies in  
Public Health*

# Using Law to Advance Health Equity

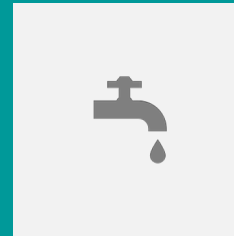
Public Health Law Conference  
September 22, 2021





# Session Objectives

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## Introduction

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Case Study



## Racism & Other Inequities

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Racism as a public health threat

Public health efforts to advance equity



## Law & Public Health

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Law as a tool for advancing equity

# CDC Disclaimer

These course materials are for instructional use only and are not intended as a substitute for professional legal or other advice. While every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of these materials, legal authorities and requirements may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Always seek the advice of an attorney or other qualified professional with any questions you may have regarding a legal matter.

The contents of this presentation have not been formally disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and should not be construed to represent any agency determination or policy.





# **Introduction – A Case Study**

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**What can the role of public health be  
when faced with a community's  
fundamental needs?**



An aerial photograph of a small town nestled in a valley, surrounded by forested mountains. The town features a mix of residential houses, commercial buildings, and a large industrial or warehouse complex. A winding road is visible in the lower left, and a large green field, possibly a sports field, is in the upper center. The foreground is dominated by the dark, silhouetted branches of trees, suggesting the viewer is looking down from a high vantage point.

*Imagine . . .*

**that you live in an unincorporated  
community just outside a small city in  
the Appalachia region.**





**Your home lacks running water.**

And if you try to retrieve water from your well, **it looks like this.**



## *To get by, you and your neighbors :*

- ❑ Collect rainwater and melted snow from your rooftops in buckets and cisterns that frequently get filled with vermin
- ❑ Save your used dishwater for use after multiple meals
- ❑ Purchase water from a nearby water treatment plan, spending up to 10 times more than those people in your area who have access to public water.



**One of your neighbors reports that he only does laundry when it rains.**

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Others have reported physical ailments and illnesses as a result of having poor water access.





**For almost 50 years . . .**

you and your neighbors have lobbied city  
and county officials for access to public  
water *to no avail.*





**In the past, when your neighbors sought help from local public officials, they were told:**

“ [You won’t see running water] until President Bush *drops spiral bombs* . . . and they hit good water.”

“ Your great grandchildren *will be lucky* to have running water.”

“ *Dig a well.* ”

Of course, you and your neighbors shouldn't have to dig a well.

Your community is *surrounded* by water lines.

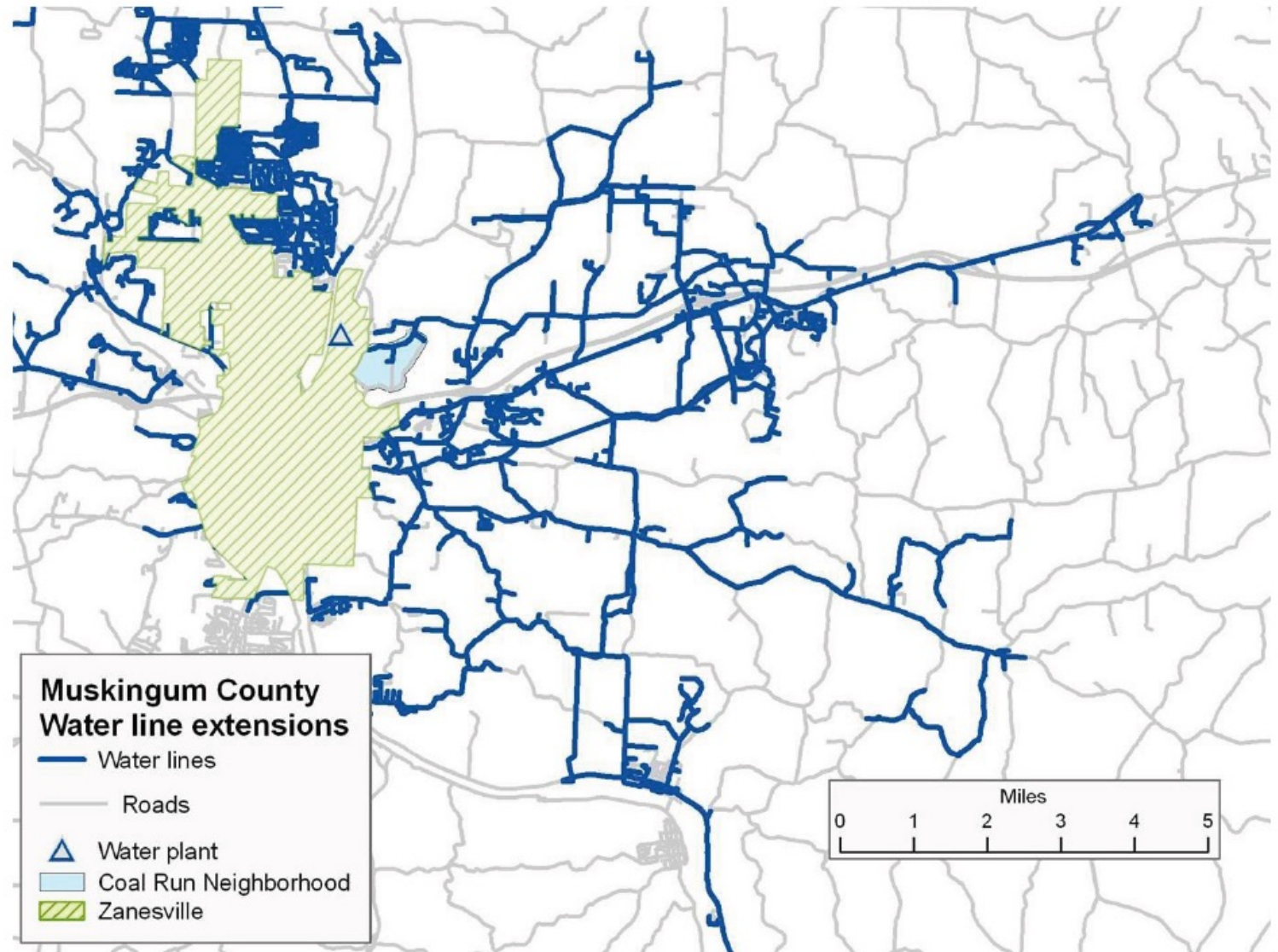
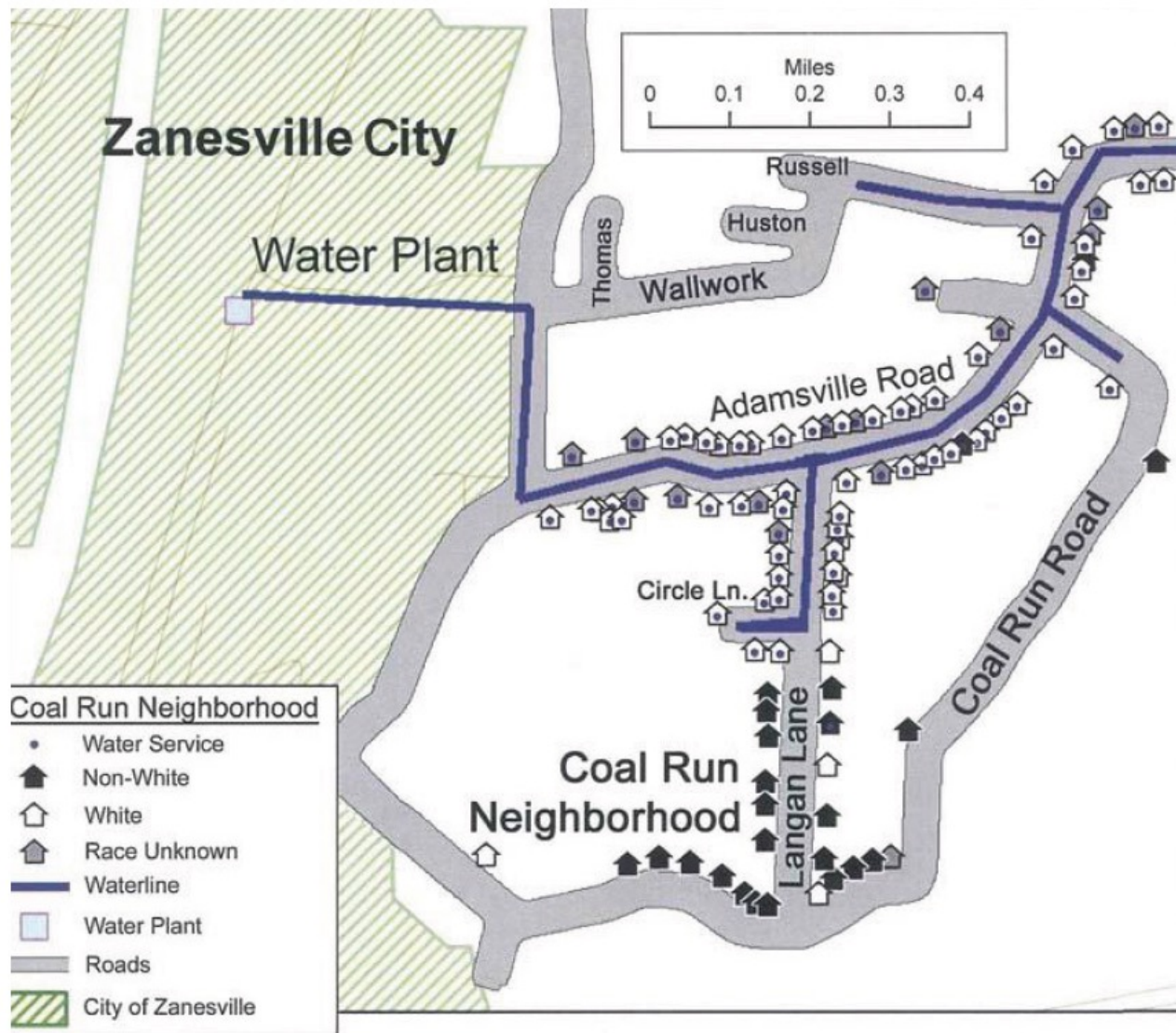


Figure 1: Map of Water Line Extensions in Muskingum County<sup>3</sup>





**Indeed, the waterlines  
stop where your  
community begins.**

Figure 2: Map of Water Line Extensions in Muskingum County with GIS layers<sup>21</sup>

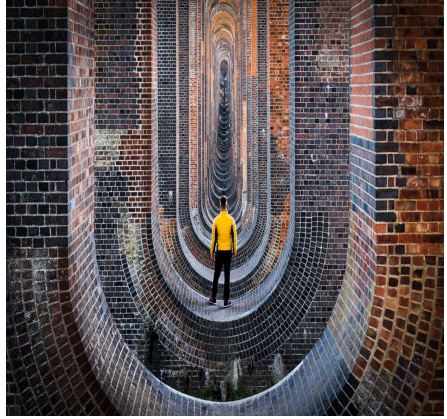
A 3D rendering of a red puzzle piece standing out from a grey puzzle piece background. The red piece is in the center, slightly raised, and has a glossy finish. The grey pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern around it, with some pieces missing, creating a sense of a larger puzzle. The lighting is soft, casting gentle shadows.

# Confronting Structural Inequities

**What does our case study tell us about  
the relationship among racism and  
other inequities, public health, and law?**



# The story of this community is about many themes critical to today's public health practice.



## Racism

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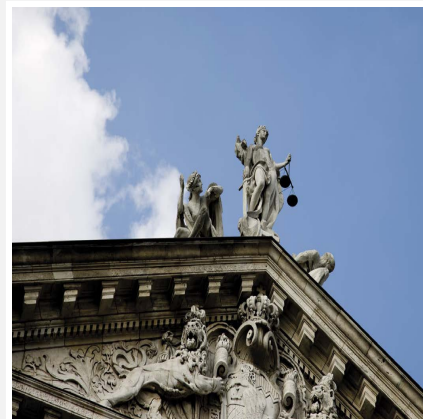
The waterlines stop where this majority black community begins.



## Intersectionality and Other Forms of Disadvantage

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It is likely that many people in the county experienced disadvantage because of where they lived.



## Law

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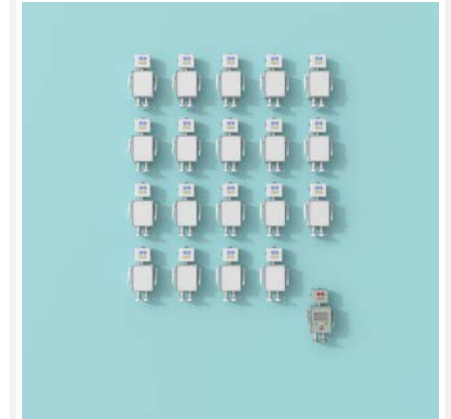
The law plays a complex and nuanced role in this matter.



## Expanding Public Health Practice

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The case asks us to imagine how a public health intervention might have looked different.



## Equity & Justice

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It asks us to imagine how public health and law can advance equity and justice.

Promisingly, we are moving toward identifying racism as a “system of structures, practices, policies, and norms.” (Jones 2003)



## **Racism is a system.**

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It is not just about individual hostility or grievance.



# Racism is a Public Health Threat



Our society—and public health practice—are having a much-needed public conversation about racism, what it means, and how to address it.

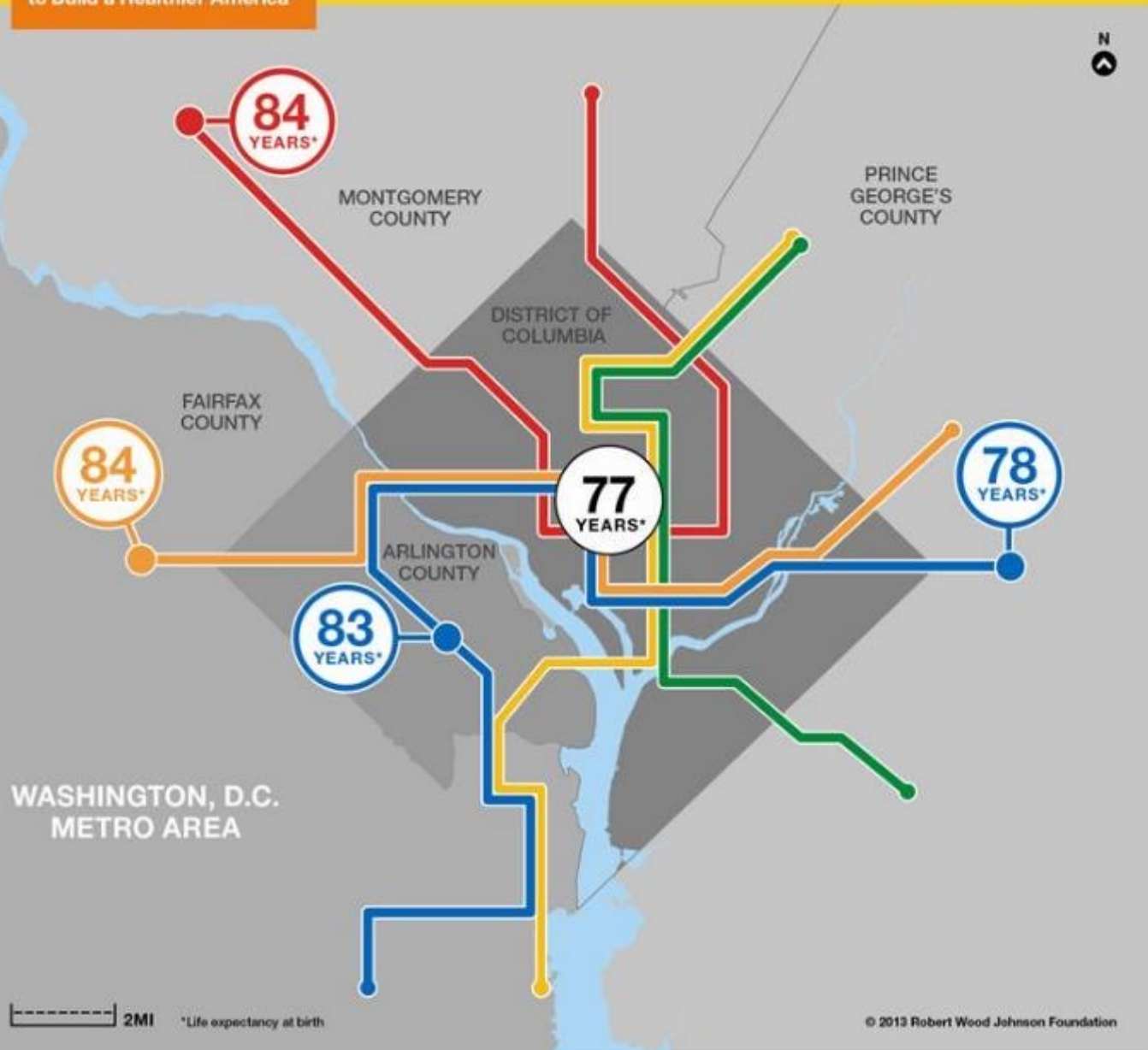


**Other forms of  
disadvantage are  
systemic too.**

---

These conversations about racism invite us to address other forms of structural discrimination and systemic disadvantage – that are connected to but also distinct from racism.





## Social Determinants of Health

- Geographic Location
- Economic status
- Civic Participation & Voice
- Resource availability
- Healthcare access
- Public safety
- Social support
- Natural environment
- Worksites and schools
- Physical barriers

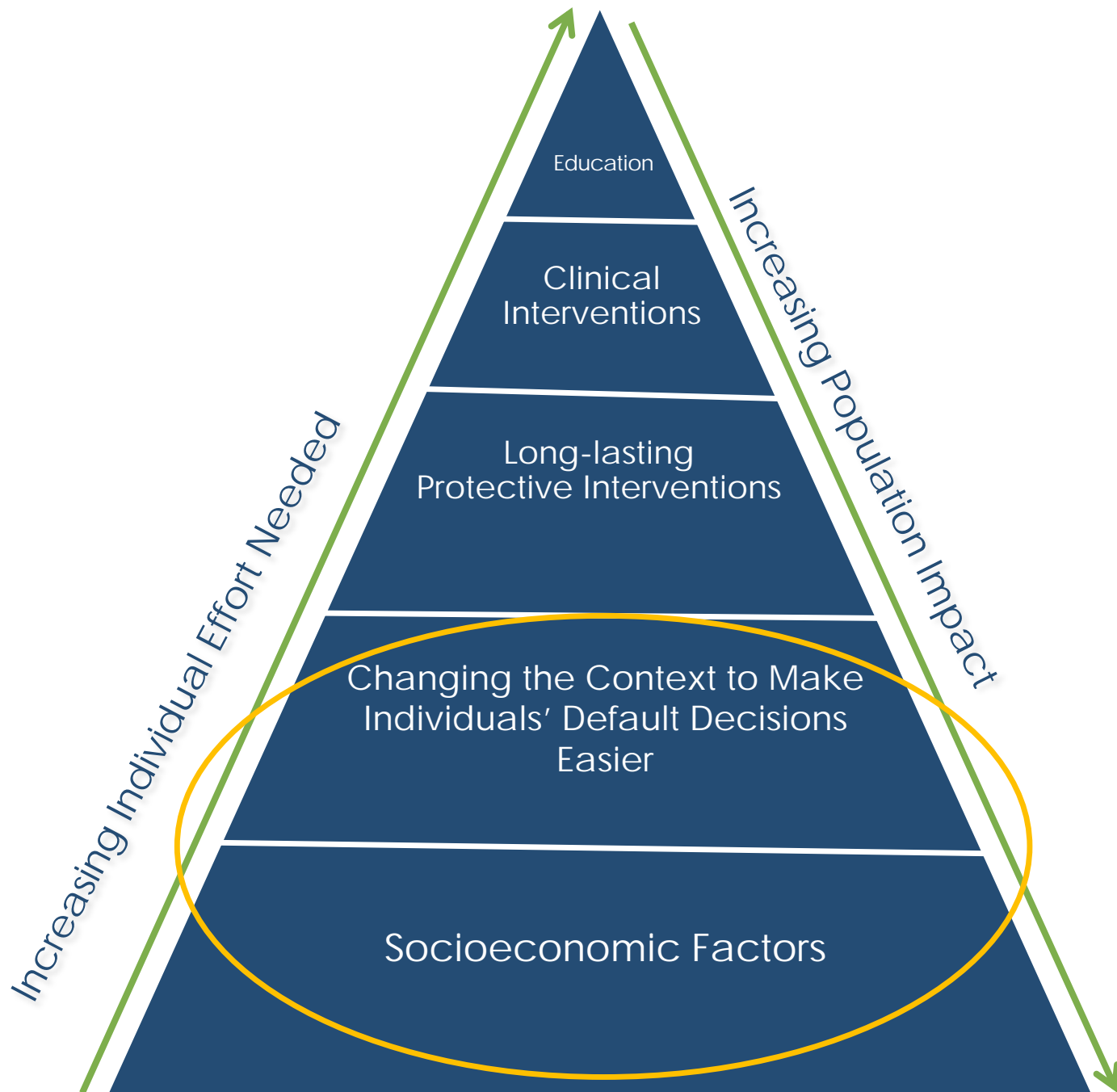
**Racism and other sources of systemic disadvantage** can be invisible or difficult to identify because they are often *embedded* in law.



**Law**

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## Health Impact Pyramid

Legal tools, methods, and interventions can play a key role in addressing the social determinants and advancing health equity.



## Expanding Public Health Practice

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A focus on health equity may entail “venturing beyond our boundaries [in public health practice] to matters intimately linked to health disparities such as housing, labor market or employment conditions, civic participation, and forms of discrimination.”  
(Liburd et al., 2020)



“Health equity is achieved when **every person** has the opportunity to ‘**attain his or her full health potential**’ and **no one is ‘disadvantaged**’ from achieving this potential because of **social position or other socially determined circumstances.**’ Health inequities are reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment.”



## Equity and Justice.

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A 3D rendering of a puzzle. Most pieces are grey and lie flat on a dark grey surface. One piece, in the center, is red and is propped up on its side, casting a shadow. The puzzle pieces have a glossy finish.

# **A Pathway for Law in Public Health Practice**

**Leveraging law in public health efforts  
to address inequities**





At CDC, we are developing frameworks and strategies to better understand how inequities harm health.





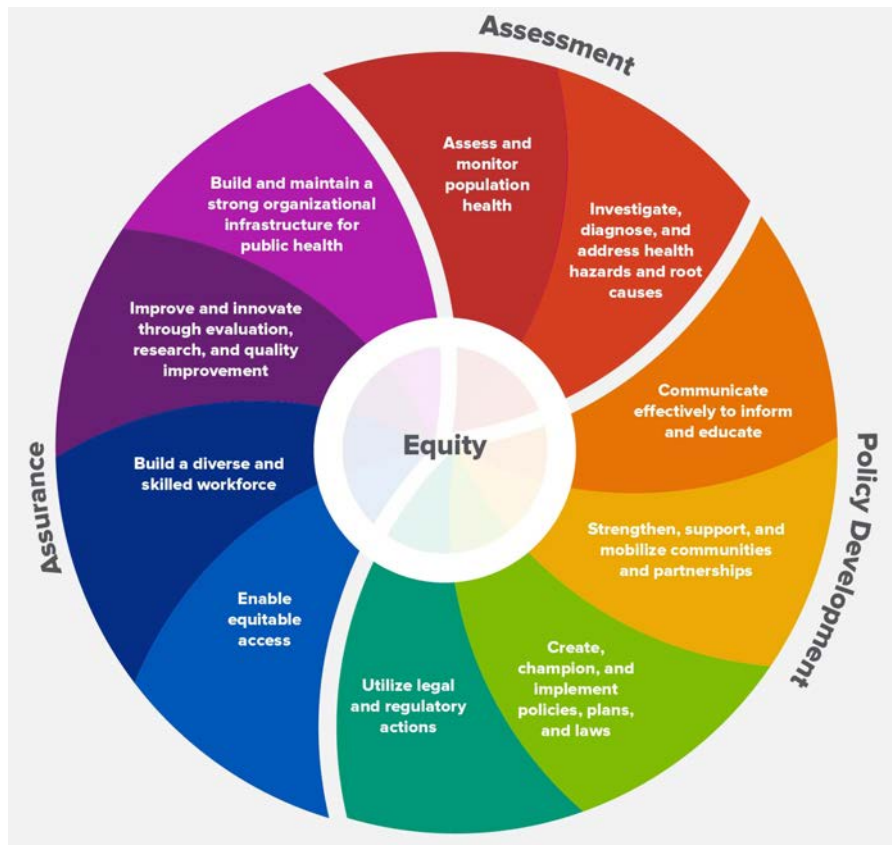
## These frameworks and strategies seek to:

- Go beyond documenting disparities
- Identify and focus on key interventions
- Facilitate collaboration across disciplines and areas of expertise
- Identify policy solutions rooted in science, and . . .



**. . . leverage existing approaches to public health practice that center health equity.**

## 10 Essential Public Health Services (2020)



## Healthy People 2030

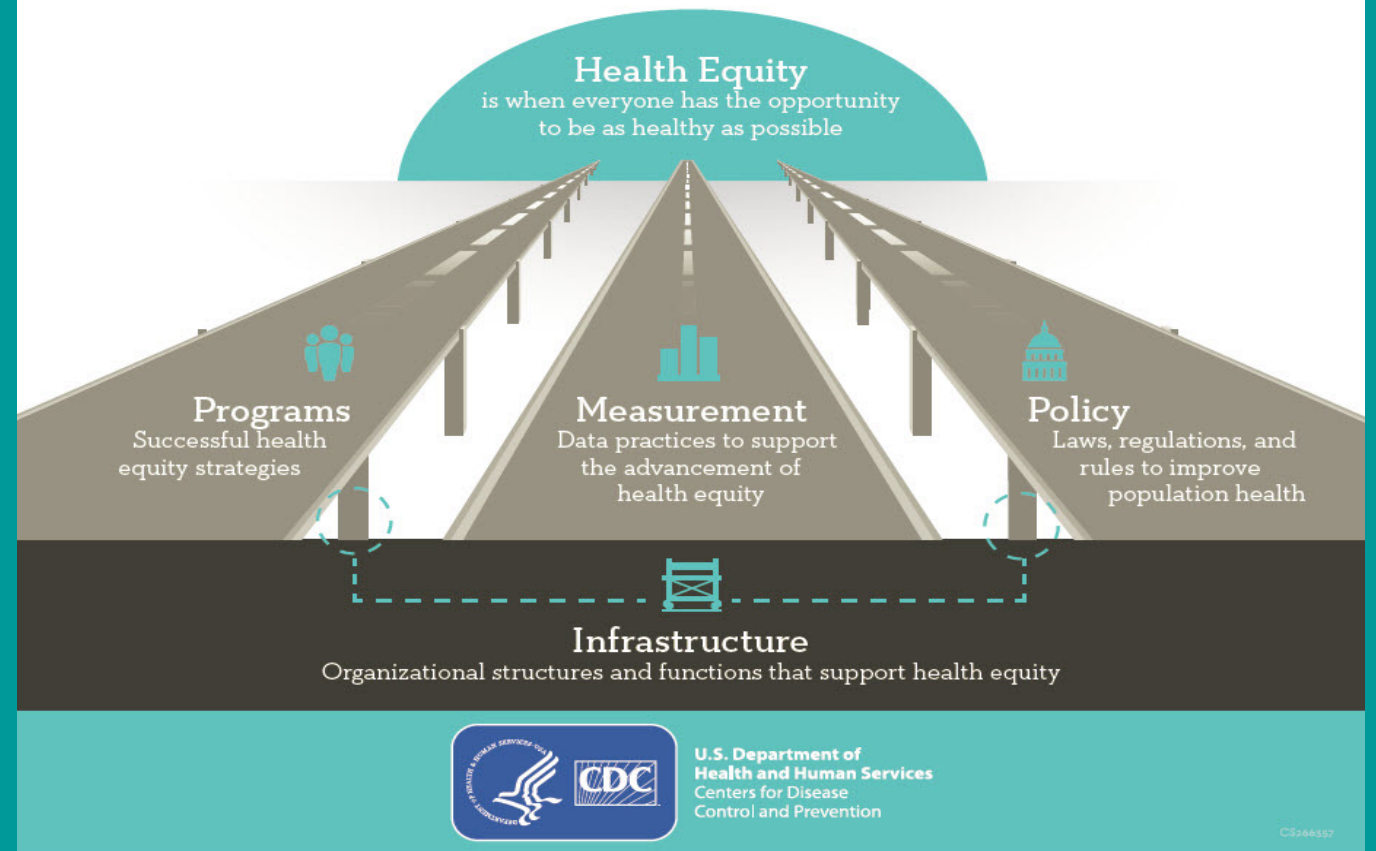


Social Determinants of Health  
Copyright-free

Healthy People 2030

These frameworks recognize that law is a critical component of the infrastructure that forms public health efforts to address health equity.

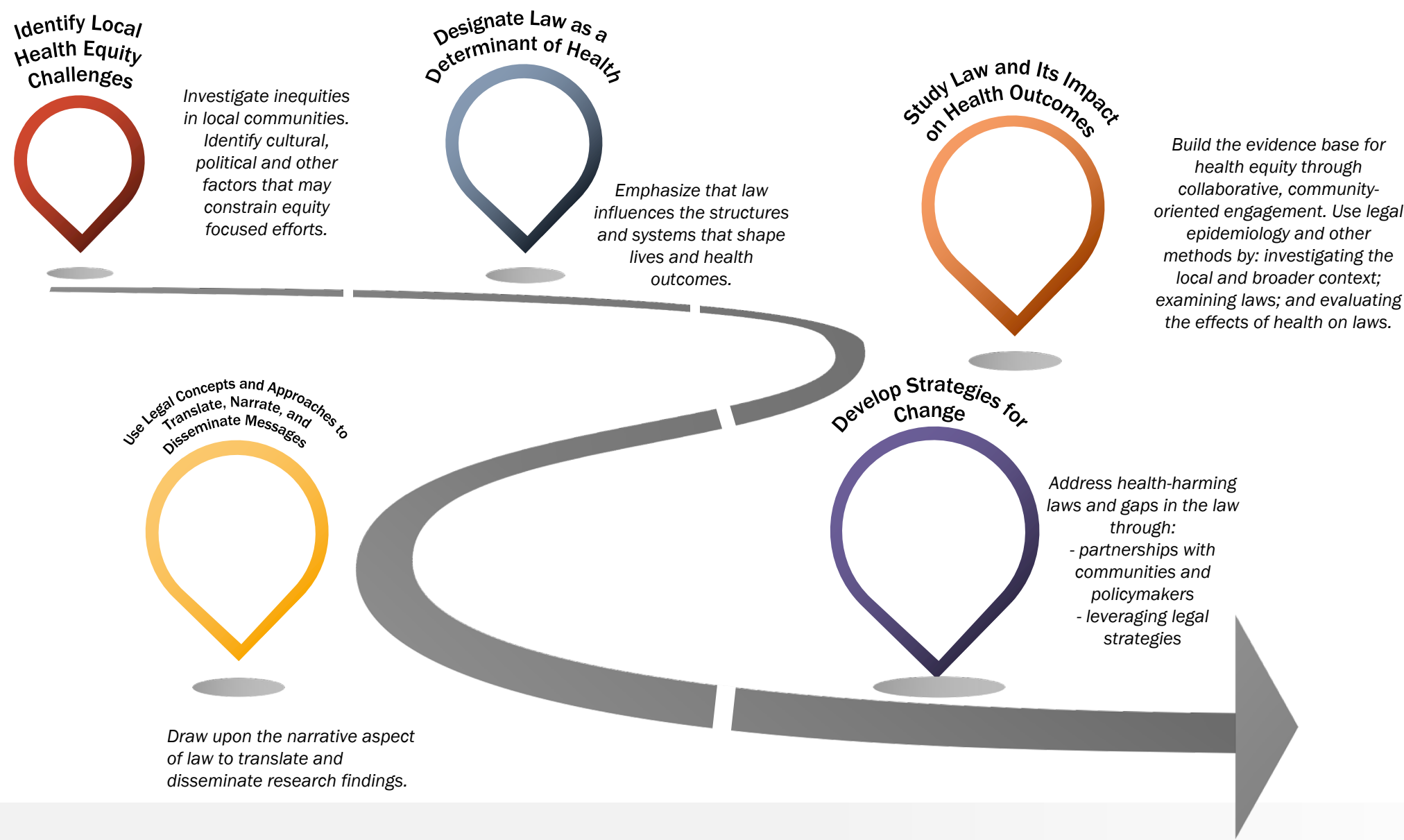
# PAVING THE ROAD TO HEALTH EQUITY



Summary tagline or sub-headline



# A Pathway for Public Health, Law, and Health Equity





**Laws and Policies *can be studied* through a public health lens to:**

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- Trace the relationship between racism (whether express or in effect), laws, and health outcomes
- Better identify root causes of inequitable health outcomes
- Provide greater context for findings in disparities research



Law can be leveraged to narrate and translate the relationship between systemic and structural inequities and health. It can also be critical to identifying and mobilizing policy interventions.

# Promoting Health Equity

*A Resource to Help Communities Address  
Social Determinants of Health*



**Research is not enough.**

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Health Analyst

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and Territorial Support

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TTY: 1-888-232-6348 [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

# THANK YOU

