

# Advocacy and Activism in Health Equity

## Webinar Summary and Call to Action



### Webinar Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity Collaborative hosted the webinar, *Advocacy and Activism in Health Equity* on February 20, 2024. Panelists engaged in discussions about advocacy and activism for health equity, highlighting their important roles and ways to engage in both to improve health outcomes for all. This report provides a synthesis of key takeaways, solutions, and action steps identified from the webinar.

### Webinar Voices

- › **Caryn Bell**, Associate Director, P4HE, [Tulane School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine](#)
- › **Adam C. Alexander**, Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine, [University of Oklahoma Health Science Center](#)
- › **Denise Hyater-Lindenmuth**, Executive Director, [National Women's Health Network](#)

### Key Resources

- [Advocacy and Health Equity](#)
- [Utilizing Lived Experience in Health Equity Advocacy and Activism](#)
- [Tools for Building Cross-Sector Collaborations](#)

### Your Voice

P4HE values collaboration. If there is a resource on this topic that you would like to share with us, provide it [here](#).

### Key Takeaways

Advocates and activists play a crucial role in the advancement of health equity as they inspire movements and contribute directly to initiatives that seek to address health issues in their communities and across the country. It is important to understand the [difference between advocacy and activism](#) and how to leverage these efforts together in health equity work. Engaging in community-centered advocacy and activism across sectors can create sustainable change to improve health outcomes.



Webinar participants described what activism looks like to them, including: **political engagement, collaboration, speaking up for a cause, being on the front line, disruption, and amplifying voices of underserved populations.** Participants used similar ideas to describe what advocacy looks like to them: **speaking up for populations that cannot advocate for themselves, educating stakeholders, engaging with decision-makers, facing resistance and pushback, and changing policies and systems.** Activism and advocacy are closely aligned to make change.

### Call To Action



*“Remember that [with] advocacy and activism – it’s a movement, not a moment. If you follow your passion, you’re going to be able to support that for a long time.”* Denise Hyater-Lindenmuth, Executive Director, National Women’s Health Network

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Below, we've summarized immediate action steps shared by the panelists and identified by webinar participants to be taken to advance health equity.

### › Understand the roles of advocacy and activism in health equity work.

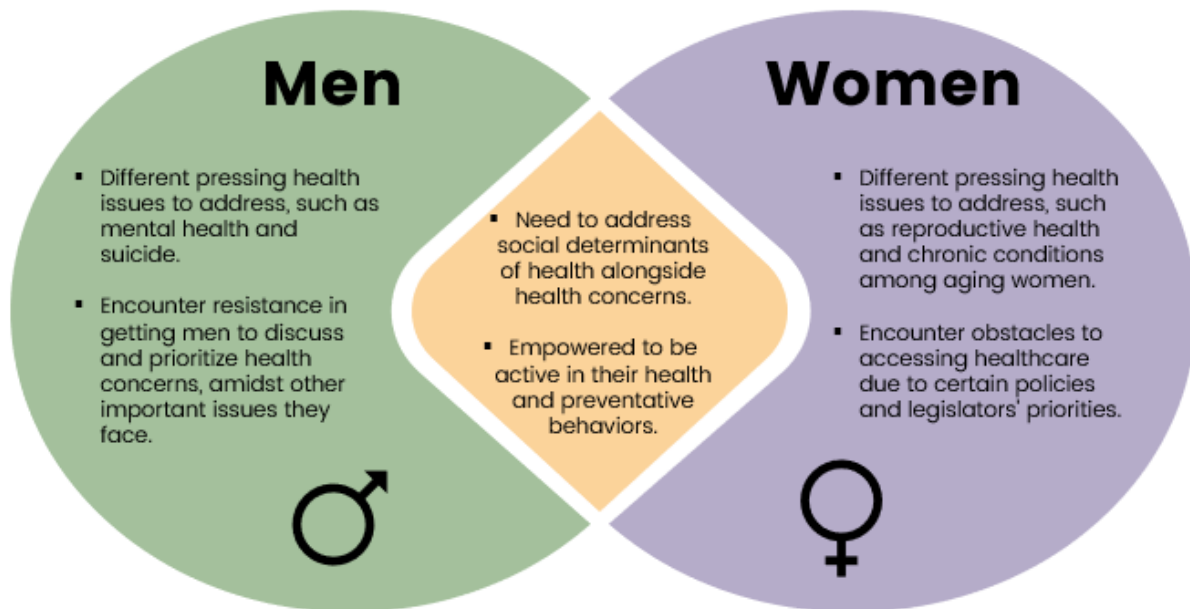


*"I think [advocacy and activism] both help to effect important social, political, and cultural changes. Advocacy, to me, is about education - educating your stakeholders...whereas activism is really putting boots on the ground."* Denise Hyater-Lindenmuth, Executive Director, National Women's

Health Network

Advocacy and activism offer useful strategies to help strengthen initiatives aimed to achieve health equity. In order to integrate advocacy and activism into cross-sector collaborations for health equity, partner organizations must understand the roles of advocacy and activism in such efforts, and each other's perspective on these activities in their respective work. Generally, advocacy is viewed as opportunities to educate the public and key partners to incite change, while activism is about taking action and mobilizing communities to create change. Advocacy can involve elevating the voices of the voiceless and their health concerns and [informing decision-makers of the health issues](#) that need to be addressed for marginalized communities. Meanwhile, activism is the boots-on-the-ground work that may involve participating in [political engagements, protests, and larger social movements](#) to push for change. Both approaches are essential to improving health outcomes as they go together to reshape society's knowledge of health issues and inequities and, to transform the policies and systems that enforce such inequities. With these roles in mind, consider how different partners can help to collectively progress advocacy and activism initiatives from their space within the larger social ecosystem. Examine examples of advocacy and activism at the local community level, such as [Dr. Alexander's work in Oklahoma for prostate cancer among Black men](#), and at the state and federal level, like [Ms. Hyater-Lindenmuth's organization's policy agendas to improve women's health](#). Engage directly with advocates and activists that have experience in this work to learn about the resources they need from outside organizations to build on their missions. Pursuing advocacy and activism to advance health equity requires a shared understanding of what these activities entail, of the importance and necessity to support and amplify such efforts, and of the contributions that partners from various sectors can make to further enhance movements toward improving health outcomes. The graphic below notes key differences and similarities in the focus and work of health equity advocacy and activism for men's and women's health.

## Comparison of Health Equity Advocacy and Activism by Gender



### > Engage with communities to conduct informed, community-centered advocacy and activism for health equity.



*"You don't need a big idea to get started to make a change in the community. I think just going to a community event [or] a listening session - just to hear people talk about their lives and lived experience - that's where it starts. From there, you identify where you can help."* Adam C. Alexander, Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Preventive

Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Science Center

As mentioned in past [P4HE webinars](#), [community engagement](#) is a fundamental step in developing cross-sector collaborations for the advancement of health equity. If we do not take time to learn from communities about the most pressing health challenges they face, any initiatives we pursue will not truly and completely serve these communities. This is also true for conducting advocacy and activism to improve health outcomes. Efforts to educate others on health issues and address them

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must involve the communities directly impacted by such health inequities. Individuals that have faced long histories of oppression and marginalization that have contributed to their negative health outcomes offer [lived experience](#) that will inform the necessary focus areas for advocacy and activism. Be patient, humble, and an attentive listener to gain valuable insight from communities on their perspectives, experiences, and needs. During the webinar, Dr. Alexander detailed his experience as an advocate in communities to discuss the alarming rates of prostate cancer among Black men. He noted that community members were reluctant to speak about cancer as there are other urgent health matters among Black men, including [mental health and suicide](#). He advised that advocates should not lead with preconceived ideas about the health concerns that are most critical; allow communities to speak for themselves. It is also important to acknowledge the [social determinants of health](#) that marginalized populations endure and to identify ways for [advocacy and activism efforts can tackle these root causes of health inequities](#) as well. Communities possess the most knowledge of their health issues, the underlying factors that produce disparities, and the changes needed to address them, so their priorities must [be at the forefront](#) when educating key players and taking action to make policy and systemic changes. Partners from various sectors can collaborate to uplift community voices in health advocacy and activism by [facilitating local community discussions on health](#), providing resources and funding, and including community members at decision-making tables. Building cross-sector coalitions that engage and center community voices in advocacy and activism will empower communities to take an active role in their health and the health of others, promoting prosperity for all.

### > Leverage resources from cross-sector partners to promote advocacy and activism for health equity.



*“If you want people to invest time in what you’re passionate about, you have to invest time in them as well. We go in with a lot of expectations of our partners, but they have expectations of us as well.”* Adam C. Alexander, Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Preventive Medicine,

University of Oklahoma Health Science Center

Advocates and activists seeking to advance health equity need help from various organizations and institutions in order to effect the most change. When advocates are educating key partners and engaging with decision-makers about pressing health issues, and when activists are participating in protests and mobilizing movements for justice and equity, their shared goal is to transform attitudes, behaviors, policies, and systems for the betterment of disadvantaged communities. [Cross-sector partners](#) must evaluate and coordinate how they can collaborate to contribute advocacy and activism to improve health outcomes. To start, interact with and [learn from the local grassroots advocacy groups and community organizers](#) that are already involved in efforts to better

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understand how to build on their work. These individuals are often closest to the communities suffering from difficult health challenges and can lead collaborations with outside partners. For example, community advocates and activists should [engage local government agencies and representatives](#) that can offer resources, funding, networks, and eventually, even formal programs and policies to address health inequities. While it may require time and persuasion for local governments to join health coalitions, continuous engagement with them can foster these officials as champions for health equity in the community. This same approach can apply as advocates and activists aim to make change at the [state and federal levels](#). Another important partnership is with [healthcare providers](#) and public health experts who are knowledgeable on health issues and practices and can enhance the credibility of health advocacy and activism efforts. Incorporate the expertise of [researchers](#) who can use evidence-based research and data to inform advocacy on desired health policy changes and can assess similar advocacy and activism work happening across the country to develop and improve local strategies. Leverage funding and resources from [philanthropies](#) and private sector businesses who want to invest in community health initiatives. To properly bring in these partners, all parties must recognize their place within the larger ecosystem and ensure understanding and balance of each other's roles and needs in the collaborative. Forming cross-sector partnerships among organizations and institutions that share a common passion and mission for improving health outcomes will strengthen the capacity of advocacy and activism efforts to make real, lasting change.

### Core Values for Health Equity Advocacy and Activism



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### › Demonstrate passion and long-term commitment to advancing health equity through advocacy and activism.



*“If you want to engage in advocacy or activism, follow your passion, decide what works for you, and stick to it because nothing happens overnight.”* Denise Hyater-Lindenmuth, Executive Director, National Women’s Health Network

Participating in advocacy and activism in pursuit of advancing health equity requires individuals’ passion and continued dedication to the cause they seek to change. Many people become advocates and activists for health issues that have either impacted themselves personally, a loved one, or a community they care about. The [ability to channel these experiences and emotions](#) into activities to speak up for vulnerable populations, educate communities and decision-makers, and take action is a powerful tool within the larger movement toward health equity. Being passionate about improving health is an essential part of participating in advocacy and activism for health equity, but this will not sustain or further the work alone. Advocates and activists have to [be committed to the work for the long haul](#) as it is impossible to make systemic change overnight. With that, pursuing widespread systemic change should not be the starting point in advocacy and activism for health equity. Start with small, attainable goals to enhance local health equity efforts and build upon these wins while striving to achieve bigger goals. Exhibit preparedness, resilience, and perseverance in the face of the inevitable setbacks and detours that will come, such as restrictive policies. An example of a restrictive policy discussed during the webinar was the [bans of diversity, equity, and inclusion \(DEI\) programs](#) at public colleges as these programs contribute to advocacy of the needs of marginalized groups and can help to improve their well-being. These are points where collaborations with cross-sector organizations can benefit advocacy and activism as these partners can provide resources and supports needed to build and advance health initiatives, despite these roadblocks. If the obstacles are too obstructive and completely inhibiting progress, advocates and activists, alongside their supporting partners, need to be willing to have difficult conversations with people in power. Outside partners can leverage their vantage point to identify strategies for advocates and activists to use to [maintain momentum](#). Given the need for long-term commitment in the fight to reduce health disparities, consider and support the mental health and burnout of advocates and activists, particularly those with lived experience with health inequities. Collective passion and persistent dedication, within collaborations of individuals and organizations from various sectors, to advancing health equity is key to inspiring movements, inciting systemic change, and ensuring sustainability of efforts to improve health outcomes.

## Deeper Dive

### **Perceptions of Mental Health and Exploring the Role of Social Activism Among African Americans Exposed to Media Coverage of Police Brutality and Protests**

Webinar speaker Dr. Adam Alexander, along with other researchers, conducted a [study](#) to explore the effects of exposure to media coverage of police brutality and protests and its association with social activism on mental health among African American people. The researchers administered an online survey to a sample of 304 African American people to measure their exposure to police brutality and protests in the media, such as the frequency of viewing such media coverage, their emotional distress from viewing these events, their participation in social activism and political activities, such as calling their representative, and their perceptions of their mental health. Using this data, experiencing greater emotional distress due to viewing media coverage of police brutality and protests was associated with worse perceptions of mental health for sample members that had low social activism participation. In a another model examined by the researchers, increased exposure to police brutality and protests in the media and increased emotional distress due to such exposure was associated with better perceptions of mental health for sample members that had higher social activism participation. However, Dr. Alexander also mentioned the possibility that frequent engagement in social activism could have a higher likelihood of exposure to violent incidents with opposing protestors and police officers, contributing to [further exposure to trauma and thus, poor mental health](#). As demonstrated in this study, it is crucial for activists and supporting partner organizations to consider the mental health of those that have lived experience with injustice and inequity and of those engaging in social activism to push for change.

### **Men's Health Awareness Summit in Oklahoma City**

Webinar speaker Dr. Adam Alexander's work has involved conducting community-based research about prostate cancer among Black men. During the webinar, he noted that this is the [second leading cause of death for men in Oklahoma](#) in which Black men in the state experience the greatest disparities relative to the rest of the country. Dr. Alexander has met with various groups in his community, including pastors, community organizers, and prostate cancer survivors to learn about their health concerns. These discussions led to the creation of the [Men's Health Awareness Summit](#) in 2021 in Oklahoma City where members of the community can discuss screening and treating prostate cancer, the importance of preventative care, and available resources. The summit is hosted by the [OU Health Stephenson Cancer Center](#), alongside community partners, and the [latest summit in 2023](#) included a one-mile walk with other attendees, panels with experts and prostate cancer survivors, breakout sessions on different health and wellness topics, information on screenings, and exhibit tables. Dr. Alexander's engagement in the community and development of the Men's Health

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Summit is a great example of educating and advocating to improve health outcomes and advance health equity for marginalized populations.

### The National Women's Health Network's 2024 Policy Agenda

Webinar speaker Denise Hyater-Lindenmuth is the Executive Director of the [National Women's Health Network](#), a not-for-profit organization that engages in state and federal advocacy for a wide range of women's health outcomes and priorities. In January, the National Women's Health Network released their [2024 policy agenda](#) that is shaped by their [twelve policy pillars](#) and outlines the focuses of their upcoming work in the following areas of women's health: sexual and reproductive health, maternal health, mid-life and aging women, and diversity in biomedical research. For each of these four areas, the policy agenda details the Network's priorities for supporting initiatives and policy enactments or changes that will expand access to healthcare, advance research, reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health, and improve health outcomes for all women. In contrast to Dr. Alexander's work in his local communities, Ms. Hyater-Lindenmuth's work with the National Women's Health Network illustrates the importance of conducting in health advocacy at the state and federal level in order to make systemic change through policies aimed to improve health outcomes.

## About P4HE

The P4HE Collaborative harmonizes goals, advances learning, and facilitates collaboration to improve health equity. It is led by the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and is part of the Tulane Institute for Innovations in Health Equity. Support for this program is provided by ICF. Funding is provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



### Foster

the co-creation and spread of knowledge.



### Sharpen

our research tools to focus on solutions; facts and stories.



### Disrupt

traditional research approaches.



### Harmonize

our voices.



### Challenge

the status quo.



### Shine

light on practices that are indefensible, irrational and inconsistent.

To learn more about these issues, or Partners for Health Equity's calls to action, a resource library including a full recording of this, and all previous P4HE Webinars, can be found on the P4HE [website](#).