Health Equity Messaging During COVID-19

Overall Guidance for Effective Communication

Speak plainly. Avoid jargon wherever possible. If you’re not sure you’re using jargon, have someone outside your field review your message to be sure what you are saying makes sense to them. If you need to use terms your audience may be unfamiliar with, define them.

Use active language. The passive voice hides who is taking action to solve a problem or perpetuate it. Use language that clarifies who has the power to make changes that will put your solutions in place.

Acknowledge people’s discomfort and fear. Because COVID-19 is new and there is a lot of fear and uncertainty around what will happen next, we need to acknowledge our audiences’ unease in a way that doesn’t overwhelm them to the point that they shut down. Simply acknowledging someone’s fears establishes a connection with our audience and develops the trust needed to get their support for the actions we want to take.

Transformative Health Equity Narrative
Statements as Developed by the Wisconsin Healthiest State Initiative Narrative Workgroup
These statements should be utilized as a guiding framework for developing messaging. They are not meant to be the messages themselves, but rather a common foundation to create consistency across health equity messaging in Wisconsin.

- All people have inherent dignity and autonomy.
  - Our inherent worth comes from being alive — regardless of our origins or attributes.

- Everyone deserves a just opportunity to thrive.
  - The social, environmental, and economic policies and systems we make have the greatest influence on our ability to thrive. We are called to transform our social fabric for health equity — so physical, mental, and social health and well-being are possible for everyone.

- In Wisconsin, we take care of each other.
  - Our well-being is bound to each other, and we refuse to leave anyone behind. It is our collective responsibility to cultivate strong, healthy communities.

- We believe in meaningful inclusion in decision-making that affects our own lives.
  - Everyone brings knowledge that should guide public decision making. Authentic inclusion leads to better decisions — and people thrive when we see ourselves as valued members of our communities.

- We know achieving a better Wisconsin for all is both a process and an outcome.
  - We’re committed, hopeful, honest, and brave about the risks, transformation, and time it will require of each of us.

- We have what it takes to transform Wisconsin so that everyone is better off.
  - We understand the complexity of the issues we face, from a personal and a systems perspective. We believe we have the knowledge, resources, and the power to change our communities and our state so that we can all thrive.

---

1 Adapted from Berkeley Media Studies Group resource.
Messaging Examples for a Just Response

Some Narrative statements are used below to develop short talking points relevant to health equity during COVID-19. These bulleted talking points are examples of wording to include in your messages; they require more context for the specific issue you are addressing.

Everyone deserves a just opportunity to thrive.

- Every Wisconsinite should have what they need to be healthy and safe.
- The crisis has spotlighted the problems in our state that prevent the opportunity to be healthy, particularly for communities of color or lower-income households across rural and urban settings.
- Past and present discriminatory policies and practices—such as disinvestment in rural economies, repression of indigenous communities, and systemic housing discrimination of African Americans—have segregated communities from opportunity, including access to living-wage jobs, safe and affordable housing, or quality clinical care. Therefore, lower-income households and families of color in communities across Wisconsin have been cut off from opportunity and have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic.
- But communities that were already marginalized and underserved—particularly communities of color or those with struggling economies—will feel the pain more than others.
- For these communities, COVID-19 comes on top of existing unfair gaps in economic, health, and civic participation that has shaped their everyday lives. For example, low-income households and people of color are overrepresented among low-wage workers, those without insurance and paid sick leave, and professionals in lines of work that require interaction with other people, such as caregivers, retail, or restaurant workers.
- Black folks in Wisconsin experience particularly inequitable conditions, including lacking access to living wage jobs, safe housing, and quality health care, which is deeply linked to their higher rates of infection and death due to COVID-19.
- Everyone deserves a just opportunity to be physically, financially, and emotionally healthy, but our current systems and structures deny that opportunity to communities of color and low-income families.
- No pandemic affects groups of people in exactly the same way, so our prevention and intervention strategies should not rely on a one-size-fits-all mindset. Rather, they should directly address the needs and concerns of those who are most impacted.

In Wisconsin, we take care of each other.

- COVID-19 knows no boundaries. We are a stronger Wisconsin when everyone has what they need to be safe and well.
- In Wisconsin, we take care of each other and support our neighbors. This moment makes it clear that every person’s health is intertwined with those of our community members and fellow Wisconsinites. We all do better when we all do better.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being and security of our family, friends, and neighbors and on our economy, health care, social services, and beyond has moved from abstractness to a harsh reality. We have all been touched in increasingly serious ways.
- We are all only as safe as those members of our community who are most at risk. This means working together towards short- and long-term strategies. There is no time for us vs. them. We are all in this together.
- Responding to this pandemic is not a zero-sum game between health and the economy. We can’t have one without the other. When we take care of each other, we thrive together.

Developed by the Community Resilience and Response Task Force / Updated 5.12.2020

To learn more about health equity narrative development in Wisconsin, see the Wisconsin Healthiest State Initiative.
We have what it takes to transform Wisconsin so that everyone is better off.

- Wisconsin can provide everyone with a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. To achieve this, we must remove risks to our health—such as poverty, discrimination, and deep power imbalances—and their consequences, including lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.
- The small ways we act now can have big, positive outcomes for our future.

Messaging Examples for a Just Recovery

Some Narrative statements are used below to develop short talking points relevant to health equity during COVID-19. These bulleted talking points are examples of wording to include in your messages; they require more context for the specific issue you are addressing.

Everyone deserves a just opportunity to thrive.

- While our attention now is focused on how to address critical needs rising from this global pandemic, it is just as important to act thoughtfully and ensure that our recovery solutions can work for those most impacted.
- Every policy and funding decision should lead us to the future we want: a fair and just society—a resilient Wisconsin—where every one of us can thrive.
- The resources we allocate now must align with our vision for a just recovery and a resilient Wisconsin.
- Our response will only be effective if it includes the places and the people left out by our current systems.
- To get this right, everything we do now must address the issues that communities were facing before the pandemic.
- The work to break down long-standing and unfair barriers to opportunities and fostering relationships in our communities must continue to be front and center in our recovery.

In Wisconsin, we take care of each other.

- As we move through this moment of acute crisis, we lift up our shared values and use them as a guide for what comes next. In Wisconsin, we take care of each other. Now is the time to choose to get this right.
- COVID-19 has made it clearer than ever how intertwined our health is with that of our fellow community members. We know that we all do better when we all do better. When we act for the safety and well-being of our neighbors, it benefits our entire community.

We have what it takes to transform Wisconsin so that everyone is better off.

- Together, and in partnership across public and private sectors, we can work towards a future of hope and resilience for all of us.
- There is no question that this pandemic has changed us, and we can choose to be changed for the better. Let’s not focus on returning to normal, but rather use this moment to create an even stronger Wisconsin where everyone has a just opportunity to thrive.
- This pandemic has shown us that no matter where you live in Wisconsin, our struggles are interconnected. Still, without fundamental system and structural changes, harms will inequitably fall on communities of color and low-income families. We can stand together in support of solutions that will improve everyone’s health and well-being.

Developed by the Community Resilience and Response Task Force / Updated 5.12.2020

To learn more about health equity narrative development in Wisconsin, see the Wisconsin Healthiest State Initiative
COVID-19 has spotlighted inequities—such as access to good jobs with fair pay, quality housing, and health care—that we have the power to change so that everyone is better off.

This pandemic has not only reminded us of how much we need each other, but also how much we can accomplish together.

**Resources for Health Equity Communications and Messaging**

To learn more about health equity narrative development in Wisconsin, visit the Health Equity Priority Workgroups tab of the Wisconsin Healthiest State Initiative webpage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Crisis Communications Checklist for COVID-19</strong></td>
<td>This resource is from M+R (a grassroots organizing firm that uses online marketing, PR, and social media “to engage the masses and raise money + raise hell for causes we believe in”)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mrss.com/lab/a-crisis-communications-checklist-for-covid-19/">https://www.mrss.com/lab/a-crisis-communications-checklist-for-covid-19/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Collaborative for Health Equity COVID-19</strong></td>
<td>This resource has a collection of pieces on the current pandemic and health equity that can offer examples of framing and messaging</td>
<td><a href="https://www.nationalcollaborative.org/covid-19/">https://www.nationalcollaborative.org/covid-19/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National COVID-19 Messaging Document</strong></td>
<td>The Race and Class Narrative Project provides messaging examples for COVID-19</td>
<td><a href="https://asocommunications.com/research-1">https://asocommunications.com/research-1</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>