



Employing an Inclusion, Anti-Stigma and/or Poverty Lens:

A POLICY, ENGAGEMENT & DECISION MAKING TOOLKIT

Overview & Purpose

The purpose of this brief is to serve as a toolkit, checklist and ongoing resource for how to incorporate different 'lenses' into daily work- as well as into all planning, engagement and research. While there are so many lenses that could be deployed, **in this brief we focus on three:**

- 1 EQUITY & INCLUSIVITY (AND ACCESSIBILITY)
- 2 ANTI-STIGMA (HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS)
- 3 ANTI-POVERTY

Frames & Framing

The concept of frames and lenses has its roots in critical sociological research.

Broadly speaking, a "social lens" refers to how we view a situation, others and the world around us. Such lenses can be extremely powerful as they can organize and dictate our belief systems. Given their connection to categories created and maintained by society, being conscious of the process of re-framing and employing different lenses to see the world in different ways works towards a more empathetic, understanding and just society.

Acknowledging, practicing and including new lenses in our planning, communications and project roll out can be challenging because of:

- Privilege
- Individual perspectives
- Our own lived experiences &
- Our existing frames of reference

Even the most well meaning person can say the wrong thing, have inaccurate assumptions, and believe things that cause others to be stigmatized. It is imperative that we make the effort to consider inclusivity, anti-stigma and perspectives of poverty when developing plans, policies and events.

Asking Questions

If we are looking for a starting place, it all begins with asking questions.

If you are someone who is developing policies, programs, events that impact your community, or you are someone who works directly with people experiencing stigma, we have to consider how we create inclusive spaces free of stigma. Inclusion is about creating an environment where everyone feels like they belong, where everyone is able to work and live to their full potential and participate freely with **respect, dignity and freedom**¹.

We need to explore how our work & language affects people & *how it can contribute to creating inclusion, acceptance and de-stigmatization.*

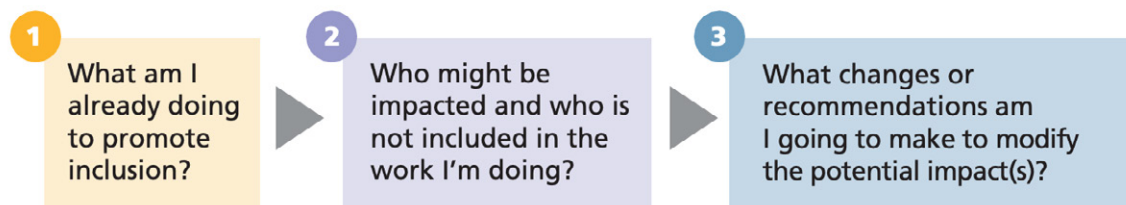
An inclusion lens requires participation free from barriers.

An inclusion lens means being reflective.

An inclusion lens means trying to answer questions and using those answers to refine and reimagine processes, plans and projects.

An inclusion lens will not tell you what action to take. Rather, the lens helps you discuss and reflect on the action itself and the decision-making process seen from a new vantage point.

Figure 1



How to Apply Such a Lens

IDENTIFY	ANSWER	IMPLEMENT
Identify a program, service, policy or project. Remember it can be new or already implemented.	Answer the three questions above. They will help you determine the potential direct or indirect impacts and whether your initiative encourages inclusion.	Jot down ideas and implement outcomes from the lens.

¹ <https://www.oakville.ca/getmedia/e3e67c18-c4e1-4bd4-9d20-341789059ba0/oakville-inclusion-lens-guide.pdf>

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EQUITY & INCLUSION QUESTIONS AND CHECKLIST

When we consider our own diversity, check our assumptions, ask about inclusion and apply our insights to our work, we can create change. The end result is that we become an ally and take action².

The following checklist (figure 2) helps us walk through this process.

Figure 2



² https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/ei_lens_hb_en.pdf

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ANTI-STIGMA QUESTIONS AND CHECKLIST

Mental health problems and illnesses are common in Canada:

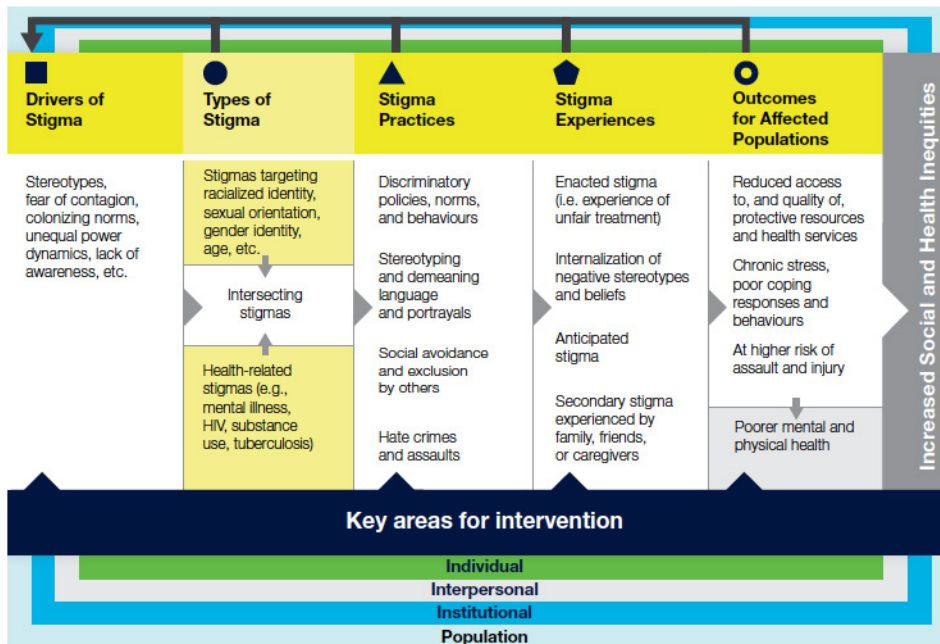
- 1 in 5 people experience a mental health problem or illness each year.
- By age 40, half of us will have had a mental health concern.

Yet...

- About 40% of parents say they wouldn't tell anyone (including a family doctor) if their child was experiencing a mental health problem.
- 60% of people with a mental health problem or illness won't seek help for fear of being labeled³.

Some people are exposed to multiple stigmas (gender, race, age, disability, health status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status) that prevent them from attaining the resources they need, such as education, employment, housing, and health services, to achieve optimal health⁴. For people living with addiction or mental illness, stigma often stops them from seeking treatment because of the fear that they will not be treated with respect or dignity.

Stigma Pathways⁵



Stigma also deters the public from wanting to pay for treatment, reducing access to resources and opportunities for treatment and social services.

³ <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/anti-stigma/>

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/addressing-stigma-what-we-heard/stigma-eng.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/addressing-stigma-what-we-heard.html>

Do I Stigmatize Others?

Stigmas are created, spread, amplified, or reduced through communication. Even the most well meaning person can say the wrong thing, have inaccurate assumptions, and believe things that cause others to be stigmatized because of their addiction or mental illness. Without even realizing it, we may have beliefs, attitudes, assumptions or thoughts, or use words that contribute to the stigmatization of others.

Challenging the stigma associated with mental illness, including substance use disorders, takes understanding, education and a closer look at our own attitudes toward health.

The following checklist outlines ways that you and your organization can make changes to end stigma:

Know the facts. [Educate](#) yourself about mental illness including substance use disorders.

Be aware of your attitudes and behavior. Examine your own judgmental thinking, reinforced by upbringing and society.

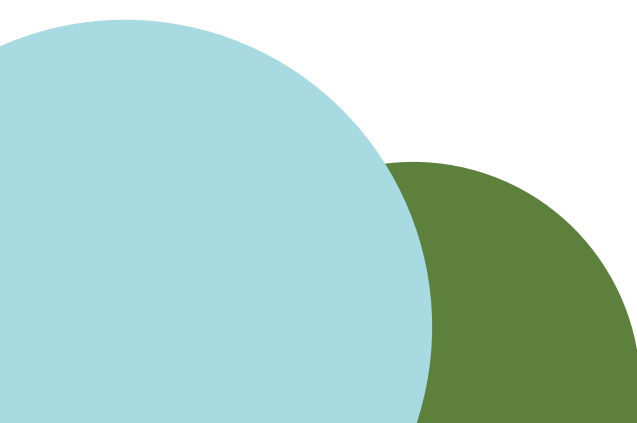
Bring this awareness to your organization and friends. [Pass on facts](#) and positive attitudes; challenge myths and stereotypes.

Avoid stigmatizing and [discriminatory language](#). Replace terms such as drug abuser or addict with neutral terms such as individuals who use substances.

Think about the whole person. Mental illness, including addictions, are only part of anyone's larger picture.

Support people. Treat everyone with dignity and respect; offer support and encouragement.

Include everyone. Access resources available to employers and policy makers that provide practical ways to remove barriers, such as stigma, that prevent people with mental illness or addiction from participating. The Mental Health Commission of Canada has developed a practical [toolkit](#) to help employers build an inclusive work environment.



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POVERTY REDUCTION QUESTIONS AND CHECKLIST

According to Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Poverty means restricted opportunity.

Poverty can be hidden or visible. It can be challenging to recognize poverty and the systemic conditions that create/sustain it. But its impacts are very real.

Poverty means lacking the resources, means, choices and power necessary to acquire and maintain a basic living standard and to participate equitably in society. Poverty can also have major impacts on people's options and opportunities whether those be in education, employment, housing, health services.

Policy or Project Questions

Who will benefit from this policy or project?
Who might be excluded from benefiting?

Have important decisions been made with the direct input of those who will be most affected?

Will it benefit low income and other marginalized people? Who might be harmed?

From whose perspective will the policy/project be evaluated?

How does it contribute to equity for all?

Have those most affected been involved in setting evaluation criteria?

Does it recognize the dignity and potential contributions of every person?

Will the policy or project unfairly burden some groups now or in the future?

Event Questions

Does the admission/registration fee encourage low-income and other marginalized people to participate?

Is the venue easily accessed via public transportation?

Is the venue physically accessible?

How will you accommodate various disabilities?

Does the event provide child care (service or funding) for participants?

If online, does it presume universal access to a computer and internet link? To a printer?

How will you include and support those without access? If online, does your program incorporate accommodations for those with disabilities?

Six Step Process for Reflection

Another way to think about these questions (and this process) is by walking through where you might reflect and in what ways:

Design Process: Foundational Considerations

Are you taking a trauma-informed approach to the work?

Participation: Consider Supports and Recognition

Who might need support to participate and in what way (i.e. transportation, childcare)?

Are we valuing people's participation, experiences, and expertise by providing an honorarium?

Are we building in opportunities for public learning/education and/or opportunities for capacity building?

Are locations accessible and comfortable for anyone to attend?

Ethics: Consider purpose and Involvement

What is the purpose of this activity and the use of any information gathered?

What does informed consent look like?

Communications: Consider Language and Messaging

Are communications at an appropriate reading level for anyone to consume?

Are communications available in several different languages?

Are communications available for those with literacy/reading limitations?

Reporting: Consider Purpose and accessibility

What is the purpose of this report? How have we used the information collected for this report?

Is all the information listed in this report collected with informed consent (i.e. the understanding that

it might be shared publicly)? Are all reports written with an appropriate reading level for anyone to

consume? Are all reports available in several different languages? Are presentations hosted in locations

accessible and comfortable for anyone to attend?

Concluding Thoughts

Utilizing a particular lens—whether that is anti-stigma, equity and inclusion or poverty reduction—and going through a checklist means you take that extra step and time... to evaluate and re-evaluate how any given message or initiative impacts those experiencing stigma and *how we can refine and recreate in the interest of inclusiveness and accessibility.*

Multi-component campaigns to support and champion inclusivity at a broad level involve:

- Community organizing
- Information Sharing
- Media Advocacy

Go Deeper: Reference Materials

Appendix B: Poverty Reduction Lens

<https://resourcecentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Strategic-Framework-for-Poverty-Reduction-Poverty-Lens-Appendix.pdf>

Inclusion Lens- Oakville

<https://www.oakville.ca/getmedia/e3e67c18-c4e1-4bd4-9d20-341789059ba0/oakville-inclusion-lens-guide.pdf>

A guide to incorporating a poverty lens into research and engagement

<https://www.ualberta.ca/community-university-partnership/resources/poverty-engagement.pdf>

A guide to reducing addiction related stigma

<https://attcnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Anti-Stigma%20Toolkit.pdf>

Equity and Inclusion lens Handbook

https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/ei_lens_hb_en.pdf

Addressing Stigma: Towards a More Inclusive Health System

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/addressing-stigma-toward-more-inclusive-health-system.html>

Checklist for Workplace Policies on Substance Use Stigma

<https://www.ccsa.ca/checklist-workplace-policies-substance-use-stigma>

Anti-Stigma Toolkit: A Guide to Reducing Addiction-Related Stigma

<https://attcnetwork.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Anti-Stigma%20Toolkit.pdf>

Anti-Stigma: Mental Health Commission of Canada

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/anti-stigma/>

Addressing Stigma: CAMH

<https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/addressing-stigma>

Poverty: Applying a Trauma Informed Lens

<https://www.ticservicesltd.com/2023/03/01/poverty-applying-a-trauma-informed-lens/>

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