

Assessing and Promoting Equity in VA Health Care

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Veterans' Access to Health Care Services: A Workshop
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Disclosures

- No competing conflicts of interest
- The views expressed are my own, and do not necessarily represent the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or of the U.S. government

Special Patient Populations in VA

- Health Disparity – Type of health difference that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage*
- Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater social or economic obstacles to health based on:
 - Race/Ethnicity ➤ Sex ➤ Socio-economic status
 - Gender identity ➤ Sexual orientation
 - Age ➤ Geographic location
 - Religion ➤ Military era
 - Mental Health ➤ Cognitive / sensory / physical disability
 - Other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion

*VHA Office of Health Equity: https://www.va.gov/HEALTHEQUITY/Facts_About_OHE.asp



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Access to Care

- Health care access barriers that systematically and negatively impact less advantaged groups contribute to health disparities

Why not address health care
access barriers by treating
everyone in the same way?



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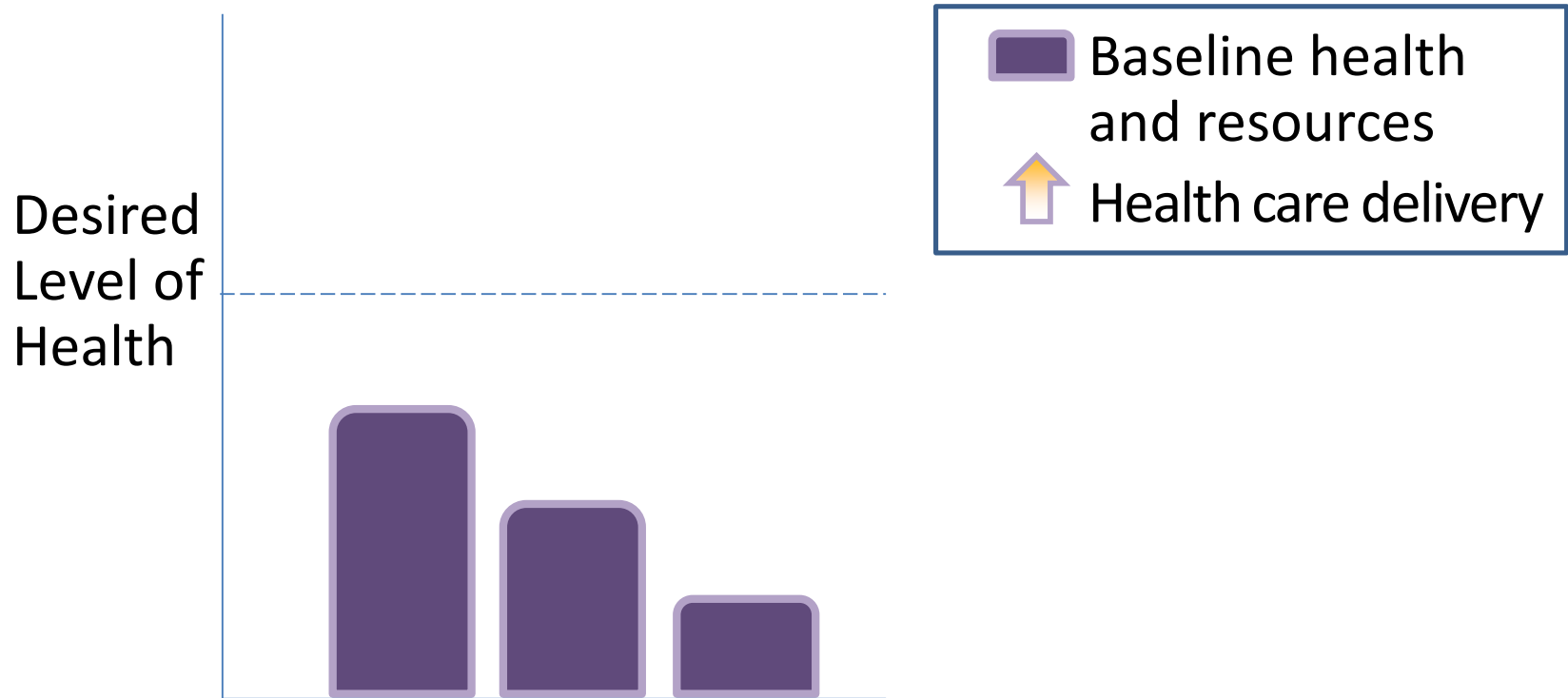


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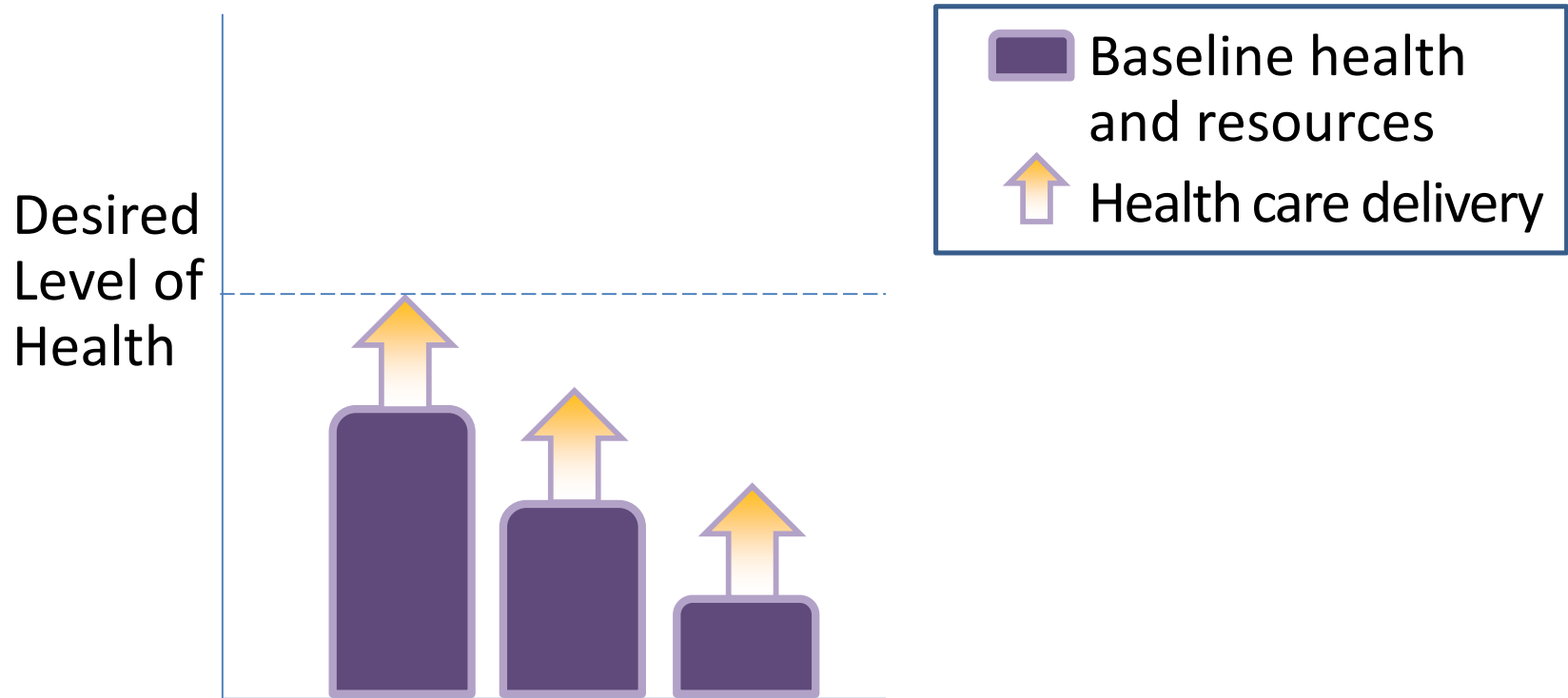


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Health Equity

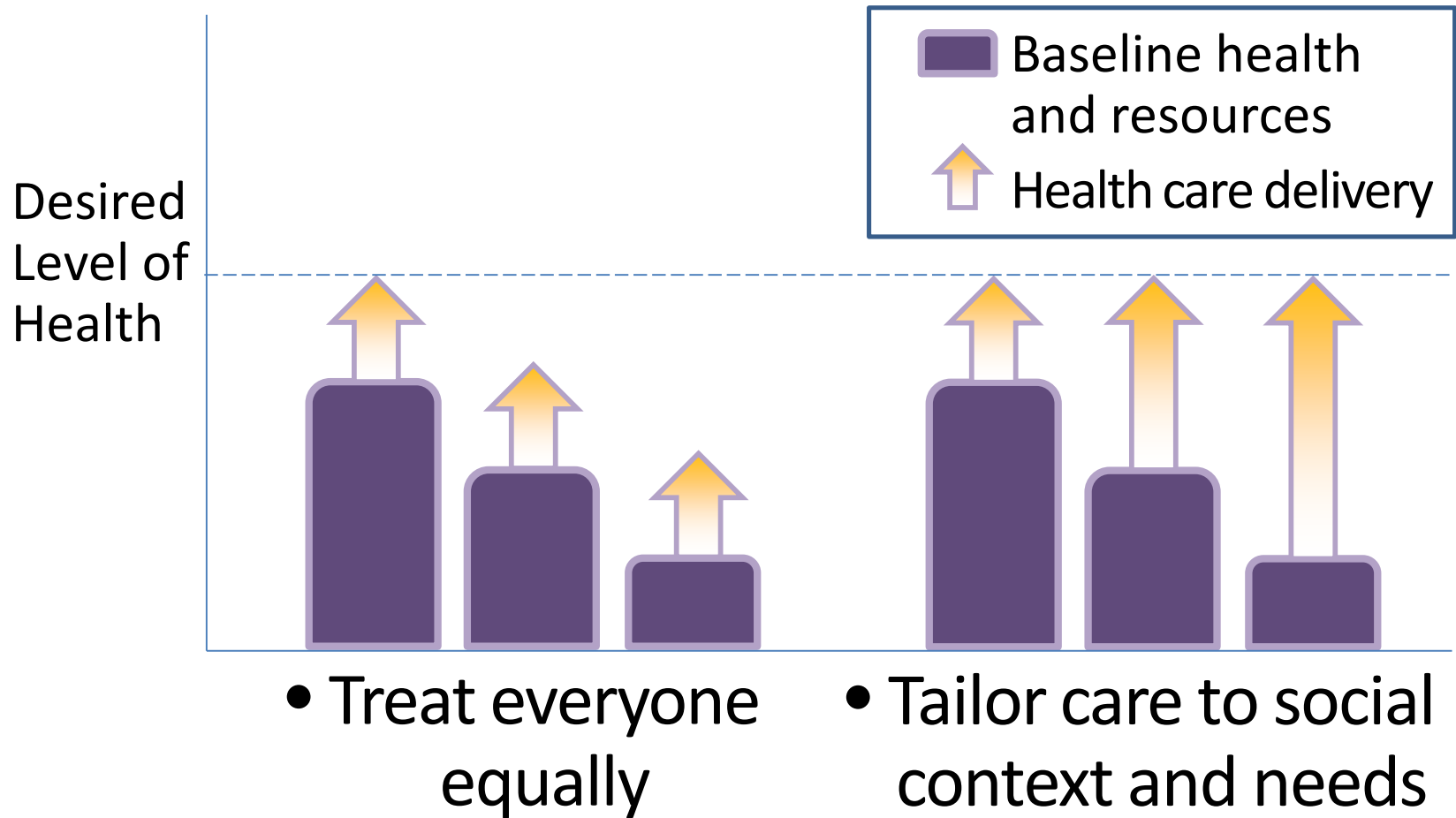


Health Equity



- Treat everyone equally

Health Equity



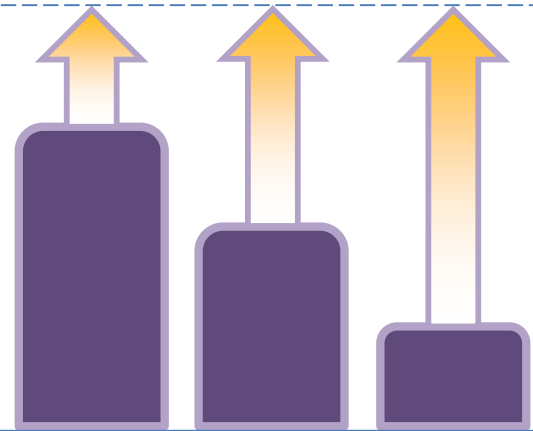
Health Equity

Desired
Level of
Health

“Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible.”

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

■ Baseline health and resources
↑ Health care delivery



Tailor care to social context and needs

Elements of Access

Penchansky's* concept of fit between patient's needs and system's ability to meet those needs

- Availability: Demand compared to supply
- Accessibility: Location, travel resources
- Accommodation: Organization of care
- Affordability: Income compared to price
- Acceptability: Attitudes and culture

*Penchansky R, Thomas JW. Med Care 1981; 19:127-40.

VA Health Care Availability

*Volume of healthcare provider & other services*¹⁻³

- On-site services, Tele-health, Community care
- Racial/ethnic concordant health care providers – medical, mental health
- Gender-concordant mental health providers
- Specialty services in rural areas or at smaller VA sites – services are not necessarily available in the community
 - ex. Indian Health Service; specialized GYN

VA Health Care Accessibility

Spatial or geographic relationship between health care providers and users ^{2,4}

- Rural areas – distance to services (+ weather barriers)
- Urban areas – public transportation – racial/ethnic minorities; low income
- Digital divide (internet highway) – racial/ethnic minorities; elderly

VA Health Care Accommodation

Organization and content of the healthcare system as it relates to the ease with which people can use care ⁵⁻⁹

- VA Survey of Health care Experiences of Patients measures perceptions of clinic hours, and waiting times for and at appointment
- Lower ratings for several vulnerable groups: racial/ethnic minorities; younger age groups; serious mental illness; substance use disorder
- Caregiver burden for women is access barrier

Affordability of VA Health Care

Financial ability of population to use care provided and patient perception of value ¹⁰⁻¹²

- Financial barriers to care are a greater issue outside of VA
- Lower income associated with
 - Greater VA than non-VA use
 - Delayed care and unmet need, particularly for those with mental health disorders
- Patient perception of value ?

Acceptability of VA Health Care

Attitudes of healthcare users toward providers, and vice versa ^{5,7,10}

- Environment of care – women; gender and sexual minorities; racial/ethnic minorities
- Patient-provider communication
- Medical mistrust

Promoting Equity in VA Health Care Access

Availability / Accessibility

- Assure diversity in the clinician workforce reflective of the population served
- Expand the digital divide program and assess other barriers to telehealth
- Expand after-hours access to primary and preventive care

Promoting Equity in VA Health Care Access

Accommodation

- Address social determinants of health
- Expand use of patient navigators to facilitate access to and coordination with available services

Promoting Equity in VA Health Care Access

Acceptability

- For measures of trust in VA healthcare and providers, systematically assess and report by special population characteristics
- Monitor perceptions of VA environment of care by special population characteristics

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