

# Asthma: Public Health Response

Health Equity Council

## Executive statement

Interventions for reducing asthma require multi-sectoral approaches that address structural and social determinants of health. Social and environmental factors due to structural racism are drivers of disparities. Interventions targeting disparities must address social, economic, and environmental inequities. A Health in All Policies approach is recommended.

## Background

Asthma is debilitating, difficult to manage and cannot be cured or prevented. Direct and indirect costs to the individual and community add extra burden. Asthma is characterized by symptoms of coughing, wheezing, dyspnea, and breathing discomfort. Biological vulnerability to asthma is associated with exposure to adverse psycho, social and physical living conditions experienced throughout the course of one's life – such as childhood poverty, community violence, chronic stress, housing conditions, green spaces, etc. Socioeconomic and environmental inequities drive the disparities across race, gender and sexuality. Reducing asthma prevalence, reducing disparities, and increasing effective management of asthma require multi-level interventions.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1: Health in All Policies

Multi-sectoral collaboration to systematically assess the health and health-equity impacts of all policies, “integrating considerations of health, well-being and equity during the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and services.” Policies must address the underlying sources of inequities with all levels of intervention.

### Recommendation 2: Address Structural and Social Determinants of Health

Biologic factors are shaped by social determinants of health, which are determined by structural determinants formed by socioeconomic and political contexts. Reducing risks of asthma must include upstream interventions.

### Recommendation 3: Poverty

Poverty is strongly associated with developing asthma, access to care, poor outcomes, symptom burden and management, and stress.

### Recommendation 4: Quality Housing

Quality housing reduces the risk of asthma symptoms. Interventions should address ventilation, pest control, indoor smoking and weatherization.

### Recommendation 5: Green Spaces

Access to green spaces is associated with improved local air quality, reduced psychological stress, increased physical activity, and decrease in the risk of immune dysfunction, inflammation, and allergic conditions.

### Recommendation 6: Quality Food

Childhood food security and diversity are associated with decrease in asthma prevalence.

### Recommendation 7: Individual and Community Resilience

Community services to increase access to resources, education and stress management for individuals, families and communities. Increase access to therapy, peer support, stress and resilience training, and other healing modalities for individuals, caretakers and community to improve coping.