



St. Michael's
Inspired Care.
Inspiring Science.

Health Justice Initiative - St. Michael's Hospital Legal Services Program

Mission Statement

Working together, we aim to address the overlapping health and justice needs of our community. Recognizing systemic inequalities in our society and unfairness experienced by individuals living in poverty, we believe that the intertwined nature of health and justice issues affects the basic human rights of individuals with low income. Our work is framed by an understanding of the social determinants of health, health equity, and the rooting of equality and social rights as the foundation of access to justice needs. We take collaborative action to address both individual threats and structural inadequacies. In partnership with our patients, clients and community groups, we engage in direct service, legal education and law reform activities to fulfill our mission.

Definitions

We define the **social determinants of health** as the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age. These circumstances include experiences of discrimination based on grounds such as race, ethnicity, family status, disability, gender, creed, and sex. People and communities experiencing social exclusion, unstable housing, low income, food insecurity, unemployment and poor working conditions, weak social safety nets and lack of access to health, social and legal services are shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics.¹ We define **health inequities** as differences in health which are unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are also considered unfair and unjust.²

Our Initiative defines **access to justice** as an underlying Constitutional right tied to the rule of law, equality, and the right to life, liberty and security of the person. Access to justice means being treated without discrimination, being treated fairly, and having the ability to name, blame, and claim justice.³ Special attention will be paid to how we access the formal doorways of justice and whether the pathways provide adequate accommodation and accessibility to those seeking justice.

¹ World Health Organization, "A Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health" 2010.

² (Whitehead 1992)

³ Mosher, Janet E. "Lessons in Access to Justice: Racialized Youths in Ontario's Safe Schools." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 46.4 (2008) : 807-851.