



Public Health Awakened: Transforming the Narrative on Taxes

Introduction

In the fall of 2017, Public Health Awakened members formed the Taxes Narrative Workgroup to start the long-term process of shifting the dominant public narrative about taxes in the US. Our goal is to shine a light on how our journey to health and equity is hastened when we pool our resources together for collective good.

What are public narratives? Public narratives are shared stories about how and why the world operates that shape public consciousness, including our collective values and senses of responsibility and possibility. Public narratives inform what policy change is possible.

The current public narratives depict us in a world of scarcity, where we don't have enough resources to achieve what we want, where the government is considered corrupt or inefficient, and where "the middle class" is used as code to protect resources for White communities. These threads pit us against each other instead of uniting us to fully uphold health equity.

Elements of a Transformative Public Health Narrative about Taxes

A just and fair society provides everyone with an opportunity to live a long, healthy life. By building an inclusive society, we improve *everyone's* health and ability to thrive along the way. The public health data are clear: we all do better when we all do better.

Our tax structure is a critical component of building an inclusive, healthy society. The tax system and our budgets are moral documents. The decisions we make about taxes make concrete what we value — they reflect who we are and who we want to be as a society.

High-quality public goods must be equally accessible to everyone. Taxes fight fires. Taxes educate our kids and prepare us for jobs. Taxes build our roads and bridges. Taxes sent us to the moon. Taxes protect our food and our water. Taxes heal our poor and elderly. When they are properly allocated, taxes build healthy communities.

We *can* move to a fair and inclusive society with a social compact that supports everyone's health. We have the knowledge and resources to achieve this, but right now our collective resources are not shared appropriately.

We need to reimagine, reinvent, and transform our systems to create a *better* lot for future generations. This includes realigning the gross imbalance of wealth and ensuring all our policies and systems support everyone's opportunity to thrive.

We have the knowledge, resources, and the power to change our tax system so that we all can all thrive. We need to get better at demanding policies that move us forward and, at the same time, correct structural inequities enshrined in past policy decisions.