

# Achieving Health Equity: Seizing Our Crucible Moment

CT Medical-Legal Partnership Convening

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# Our Crucible moment

A situation of severe trial, or in which different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new

# COVID-19 is undeniably changing life as we know it, “attacking societies at their core”

MATT SIMON

SCIENCE 03.31.2020 07:00 AM

## Why Life During a Pandemic Feels So Surreal

The study of the surreal has mostly concerned Dali's paintings and Kafka's writings. But there are psychological reasons why every day seems so otherworldly.

Global Agenda | COVID-19 | Global Health | Global Risks

## The COVID-19 pandemic could last for 2 years, according to US experts

Everyone Included: Social Impact of COVID-19



We are facing a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations — one that is killing people, spreading human suffering, and upending people's lives. But this is much more than a health crisis. It is a human, economic and social crisis. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), is attacking societies at their core.

MARCH 30, 2020



## Most Americans Say Coronavirus Outbreak Has Impacted Their Lives

HISTORY | CORONAVIRUS COVERAGE

## Coronavirus is spreading panic. Here's the science behind why.

From prehistoric predator encounters to frantic toilet paper runs, our anxious brains can short-circuit when faced with the scary unknown.

# Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How.

A crisis on this scale can reorder society in dramatic ways, for better or worse. Here are 34 big thinkers' predictions for what's to come.

Sources: <https://www.wired.com/story/why-life-during-a-pandemic-feels-so-surreal/>; <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/reference/modern-history/why-we-evolved-to-feel-panic-anxiety/>; <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/coronavirus-pandemic-last-2-years/>; <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-covid-19.html>; <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/03/30/most-americans-say-coronavirus-outbreak-has-impacted-their-lives/>; <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/19/coronavirus-effect-economy-life-society-analysis-covid-135579>

# The crisis is also **revealing** and **exacerbating structural flaws** embedded in our systems...

## **Coronavirus is exposing all of the weaknesses in the US health system**

High health care costs and low medical capacity made the US uniquely vulnerable to the coronavirus.

By Dylan Scott | @dylaniscott | dylan.scott@vox.com | Mar 16, 2020, 7:30am EDT

## **It's time to move past employer-based health insurance**

The coronavirus shows tying health insurance to jobs is a disaster. Let's fix it.

By Ezra Klein | @ezra Klein | Apr 9, 2020, 8:30am EDT

## *As Coronavirus Deepens Inequality, Inequality Worsens Its Spread*

The pandemic is widening social and economic divisions that also make the virus deadlier, a self-reinforcing cycle that experts warn could have consequences for years to come.

## **Coronavirus crisis shows why homelessness urgently needs to become a thing of the past**

March 23, 2020 11:27am EDT

### **EMPLOYMENT**

## **States overwhelmed by previously unimaginable layoff numbers**

The state-by-state systems for getting benefits into the hands of the unemployed are stressed, inefficient and not sending money quickly enough to the people who need it.

### **Politics & Government**

## **Wisconsin tried to prepare for voting by mail. Here's why it was still chaotic**

By Daniel C. Vock - May 4, 2020

Sources: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/16/21173766/coronavirus-covid-19-us-cases-health-care-system>;  
<https://www.vox.com/2020/4/9/21210353/coronavirus-health-insurance-biden-sanders-medicare-for-all>;  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html>; <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-crisis-shows-why-homelessness-urgently-needs-to-become-a-thing-of-the-past-133302>; <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/01/unemployed-workers-benefits-coronavirus-159192>;  
<https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2020/05/04/wisconsin-tried-to-prepare-for-voting-by-mail-heres-why-it-was-still-chaotic/>;

# ...resulting in a **disproportionate impact** on historically marginalized communities

## **Covid-19 is disproportionately taking black lives**

Hundreds of years of racism has delivered poor health and economic outcomes for black people, making them more vulnerable in the pandemic.

HEALTH NEWS ✓ Fact Checked

## **Rural America Could Be the Region Hardest Hit by the COVID-19 Outbreak**

## **Who is most at risk in the coronavirus crisis: 24 million of the lowest-income workers**

Cashiers, nursing assistants, paramedics: These people are at highest risk of exposure to coronavirus — and make a median wage of less than \$35,000 a year

## **Navajo Nation Is Behind Only New York and New Jersey in Rates of COVID-19 Infection. What Happened?**

*"Tribes have been chronically neglected and underfunded for decades and decades."*

04-15-20 | CORONAVIRUS

## **The coronavirus is a ticking time bomb for the world's displaced people**

"If it really breaks out in one of the larger, more crowded refugee camps or some urban areas where there's significant numbers of displaced populations residing, we expect that this would be really devastating and really hard to control."

## ***For Black Men, Fear That Masks Will Invite Racial Profiling***

African-American men worry that following the C.D.C. recommendation to cover their faces in public could expose them to harassment from the police.

## **Singapore's migrant workers are suffering the brunt of the country's coronavirus outbreak**

By **Jessie Yeung, Joshua Berlinger, Sandi Sidhu, Manisha Tank and Isaac Yee, CNN**

Updated 10:13 PM ET, Fri April 24, 2020

## **The Disability Community Fights Deadly Discrimination Amid The COVID-19 Pandemic**

Sources: <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/7/21211849/coronavirus-black-americans>; <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/rural-america-hardest-hit-by-covid-19-outbreak>; <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/05/navajo-nation-covid-outbreak-deaths/>; <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2020/coronavirus-impact-on-low-income-jobs-by-occupation-chart/>; <https://www.fastcompany.com/90489909/the-coronavirus-is-a-ticking-time-bomb-for-the-worlds-displaced-people>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/coronavirus-masks-racism-african-americans.html>; <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/24/asia/singapore-coronavirus-foreign-workers-intl-hnk/index.html>; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulang/2020/04/14/the-disability-community-fights-deadly-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic/#2374bbec309c>

# This is our “crucible moment”: an **opportunity to reconstruct** rather than return to the status quo

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Opinion

## After the Pandemic, the Big Reset

Some of the greatest advances in American history were birthed by disaster.

## No silver lining to coronavirus, but a golden opportunity

Published on 01/05/2020, 10:35am

**Comment:** Rebuilding after the pandemic should be a moment to reset international governance, deepen global cooperation and restructure societies away from fossil fuels

## We can do better than go back to ‘normal’

I do not want to go back to “normal.” I want this pandemic to upset society to the point that things change for the better exponentially. Let it radicalize you.

By Letters to the Editor | Apr 15, 2020, 1:27pm CDT

## *Why Liberal Californians Don’t Want to Go Back to Normal*

California has let thousands of people out of prisons and found shelter for many who had been living on the streets, but how far the progressive wing can push the state remains a question.

## The Big Reset: Making Sense of the Coronavirus Crisis

Sources: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/opinion/coronavirus-political-reform.html>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/us/coronavirus-california-liberals.html>; <https://chicago.suntimes.com/2020/4/15/21222419/pandemic-normal-covid-19-sun-times-letters-trump-stimulus-checks-coronavirus-homelessness>; <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2020/03/24/the-big-reset-making-sense-of-the-coronavirus-crisis/#1aeff7384e1c>; <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/05/01/no-silver-lining-golden-opportunity-build-back-better/>

# Who is responsible for health?



Source: Braveman et al (AJPH, 2011)

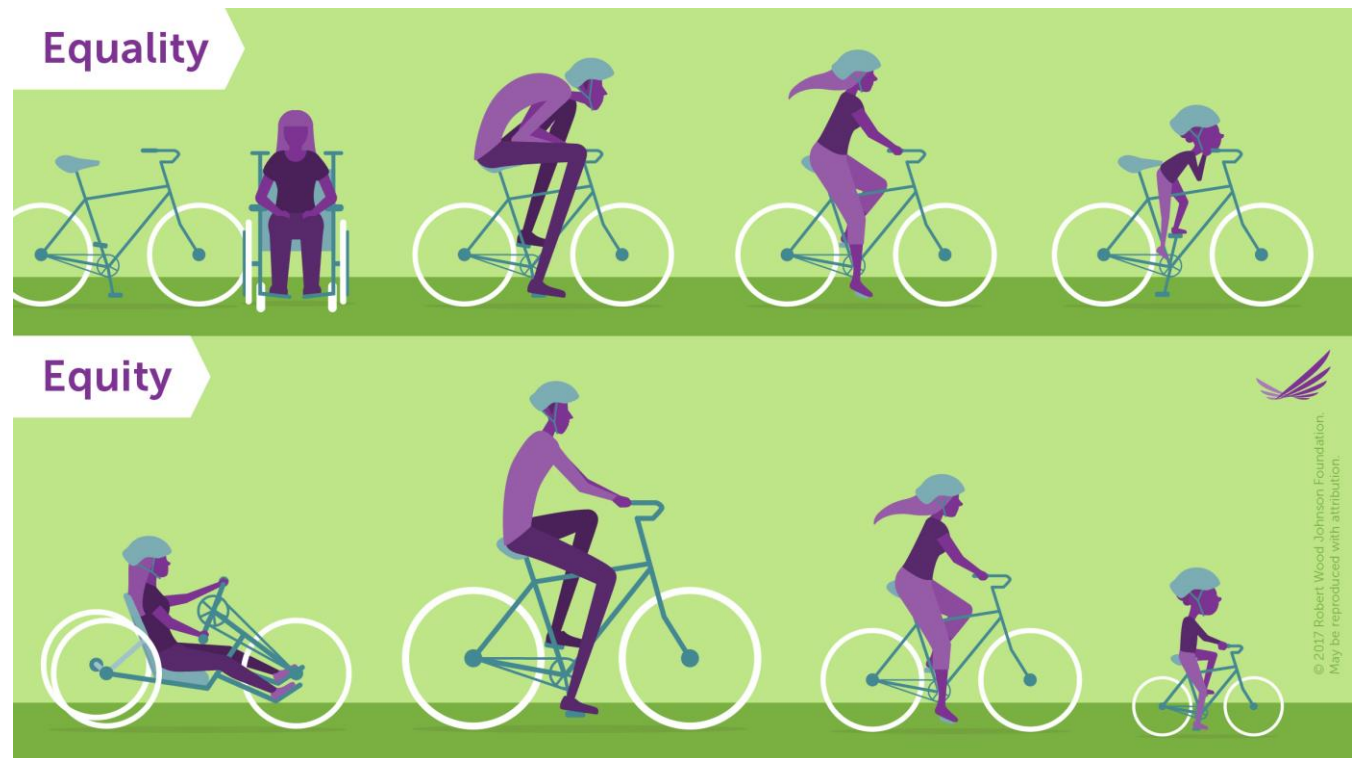
“Health is something we create as a society and as communities, not something an individual can purchase or produce alone”

# Defining Health Equity

CDC's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) defines health

equity as  
“the state in which *everyone* has a **fair** and **just** opportunity to attain their **highest level of health**...”

... Achieving this requires focused and ongoing **societal efforts** to address **historical and contemporary injustices**; overcome economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare; and eliminate preventable health disparities.”



Sources: RWJF, <https://medium.com/@healthycitiesMN/organizing-the-narrative-for-healthy-equity-2d444ec84cc0>



# How Inequity Gets Built Into America's Vaccination System

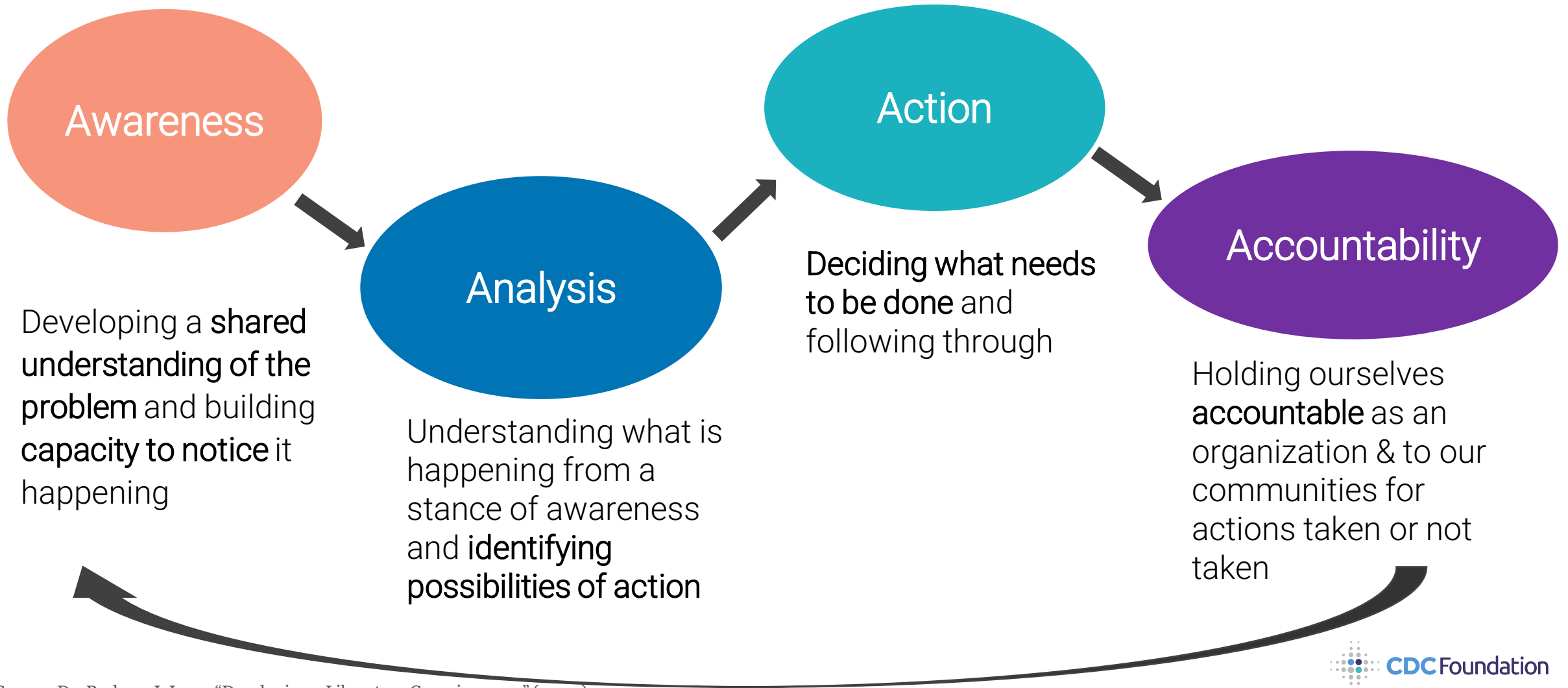
People eligible for the coronavirus vaccine tell us they are running up against barriers that are designed into the very systems meant to serve those most at risk of dying of the disease. We plan to continue tracking these roadblocks.

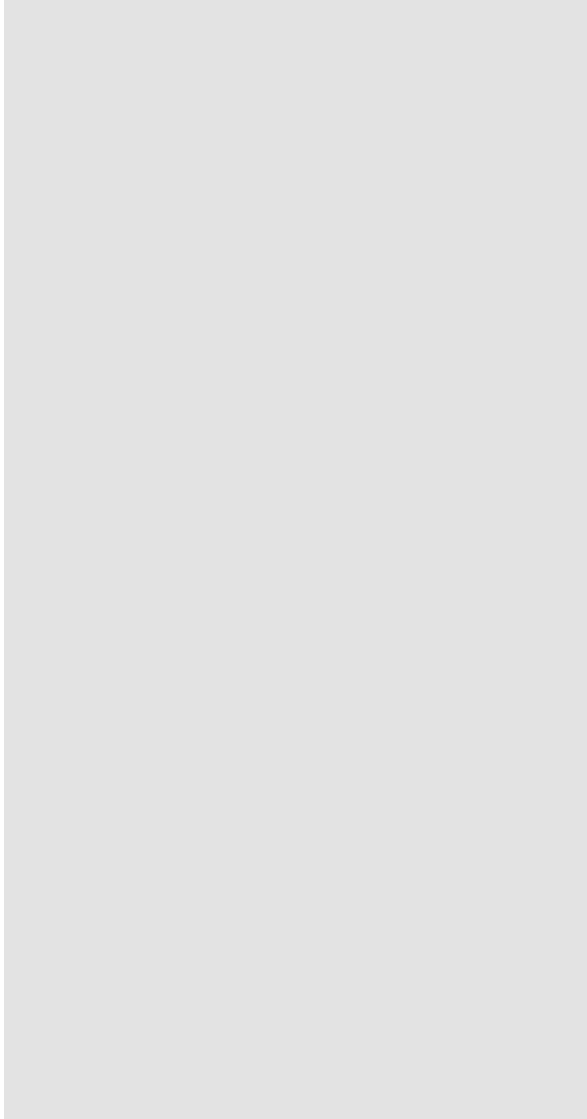

by **Maryam Jameel** and **Caroline Chen**

March 1, 5 a.m. E

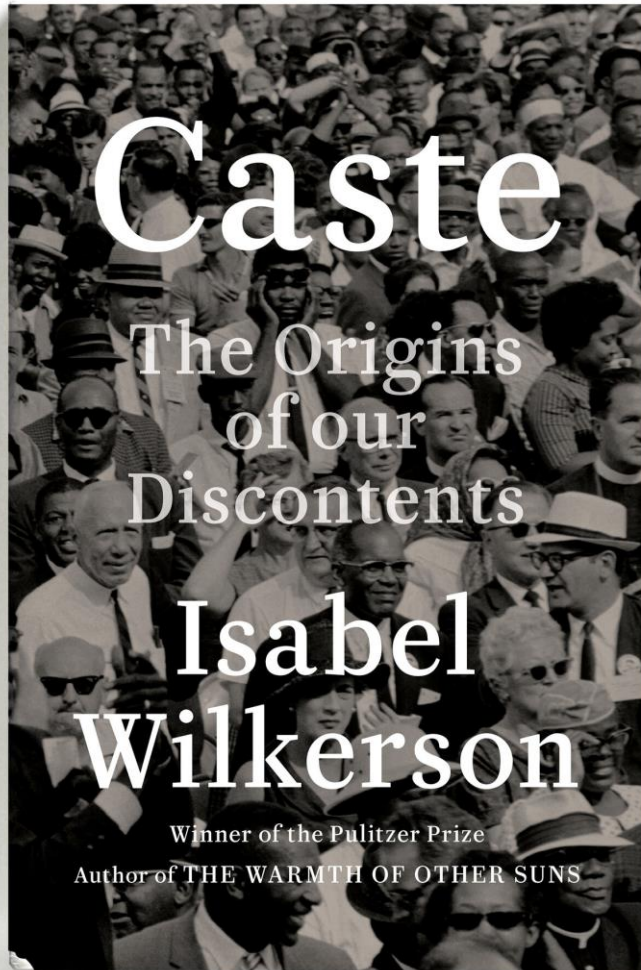
In many regions of the U.S., it's much more difficult to schedule a vaccine appointment if you do not have access to the internet. In some areas, drive-through vaccinations are the only option, excluding those who do not have cars or someone who can give them a ride. In other places, people who do not speak English are having trouble getting information from government hotlines and websites. One state is even flat-out refusing to allow undocumented workers with high-risk jobs to get prioritized for vaccination.

# Working toward health equity is a journey





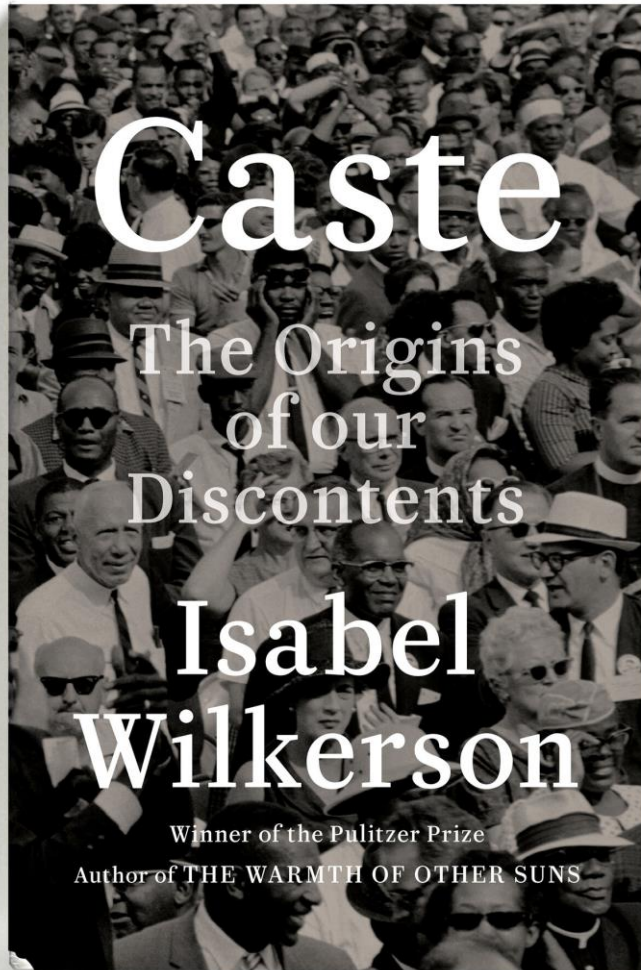
Racism:  
insidious & invisible



## Race, racism and caste

“**Race is fluid and superficial**, subject to periodic redefinition to meet the needs of the dominant caste in what is now the United States.

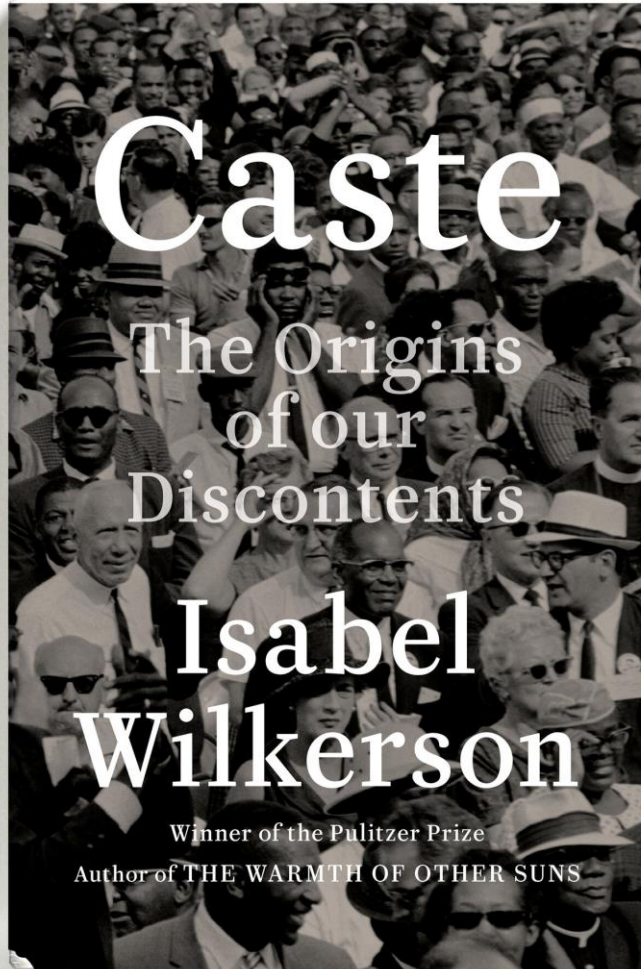
While the requirements to qualify as white have changed over the centuries, the **fact of a dominant caste has remained constant** from its inception – whoever fit the definition of white, at whatever point in history, was granted the legal rights and privileges of the dominant caste. “



## “The R Word”

“Racism has often been reduced to a feeling, a **character flaw**, conflated with prejudice, connected to whether one is a good person or not. It has come to mean overt and declared hatred ...

The fixation with smoking out individual racists **...keeps the focus on a single individual rather than the system** that created that individual ....”



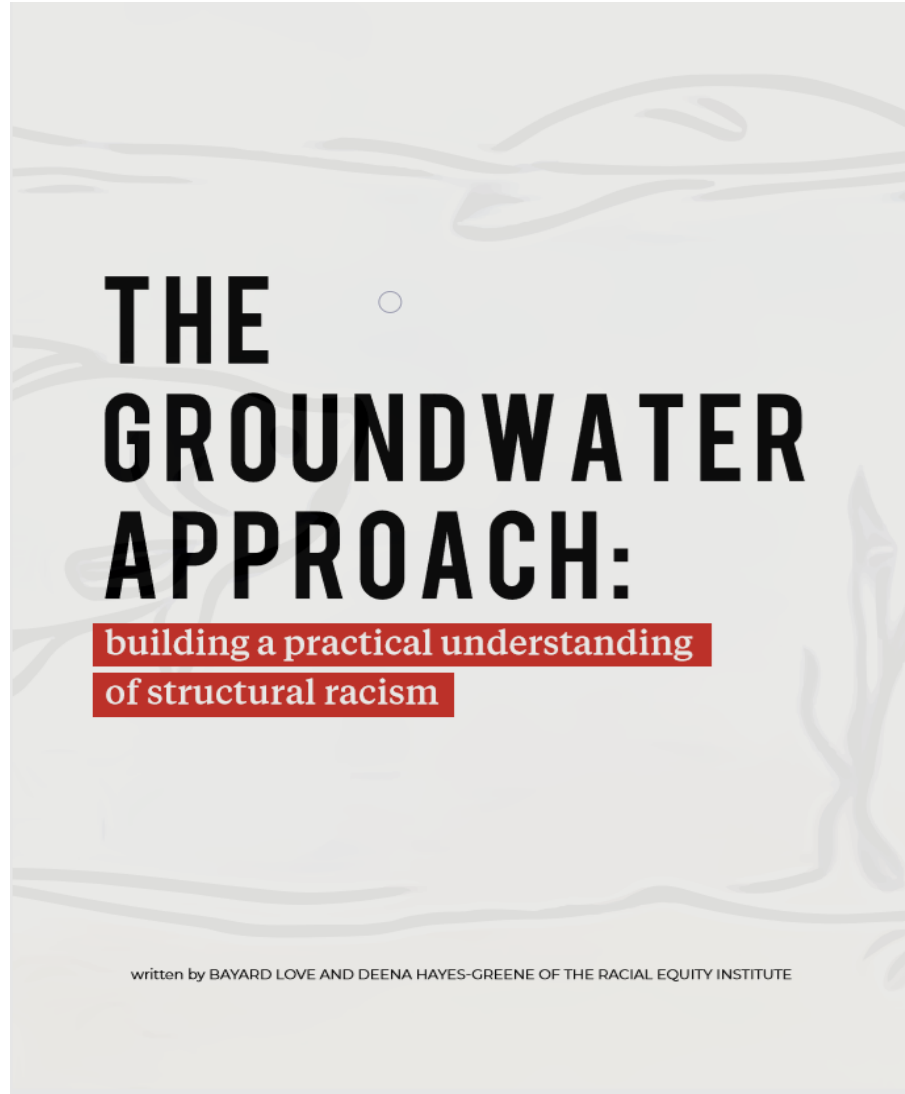
## The power of caste

“Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it **is not necessarily personal.**”

It is the **worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations**, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the **natural order of things.**”

# Understanding Structural Racism

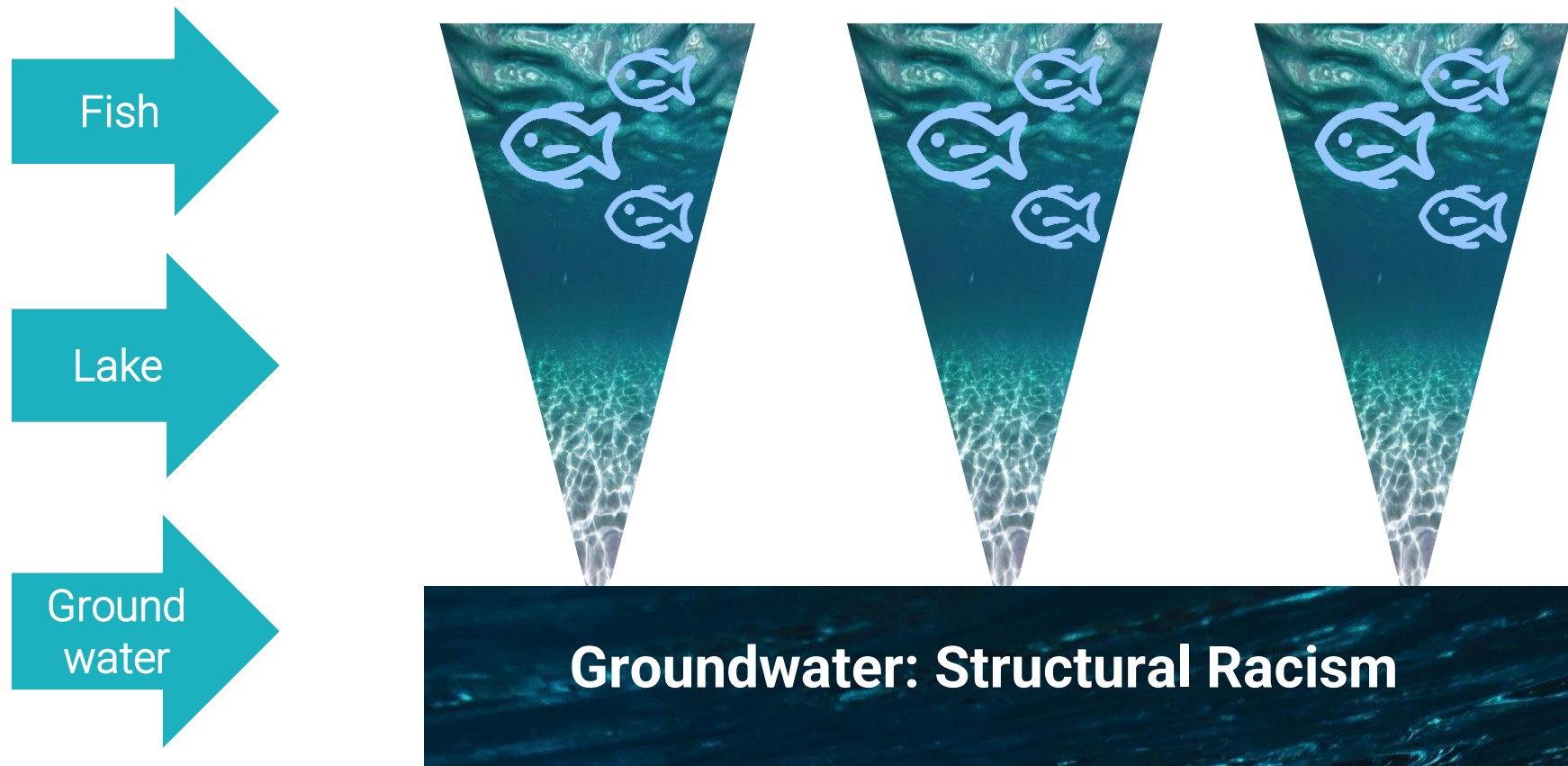
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“We believe that **effective solutions require accurate diagnoses**, and that our collective understanding of why we have inequity is largely incomplete or altogether incorrect.”

*Racial Equity Institute*

# What to do when the fish in the lakes are dying?



\*Concept drawn from Racial Equity Institute's [Groundwater Approach](#)

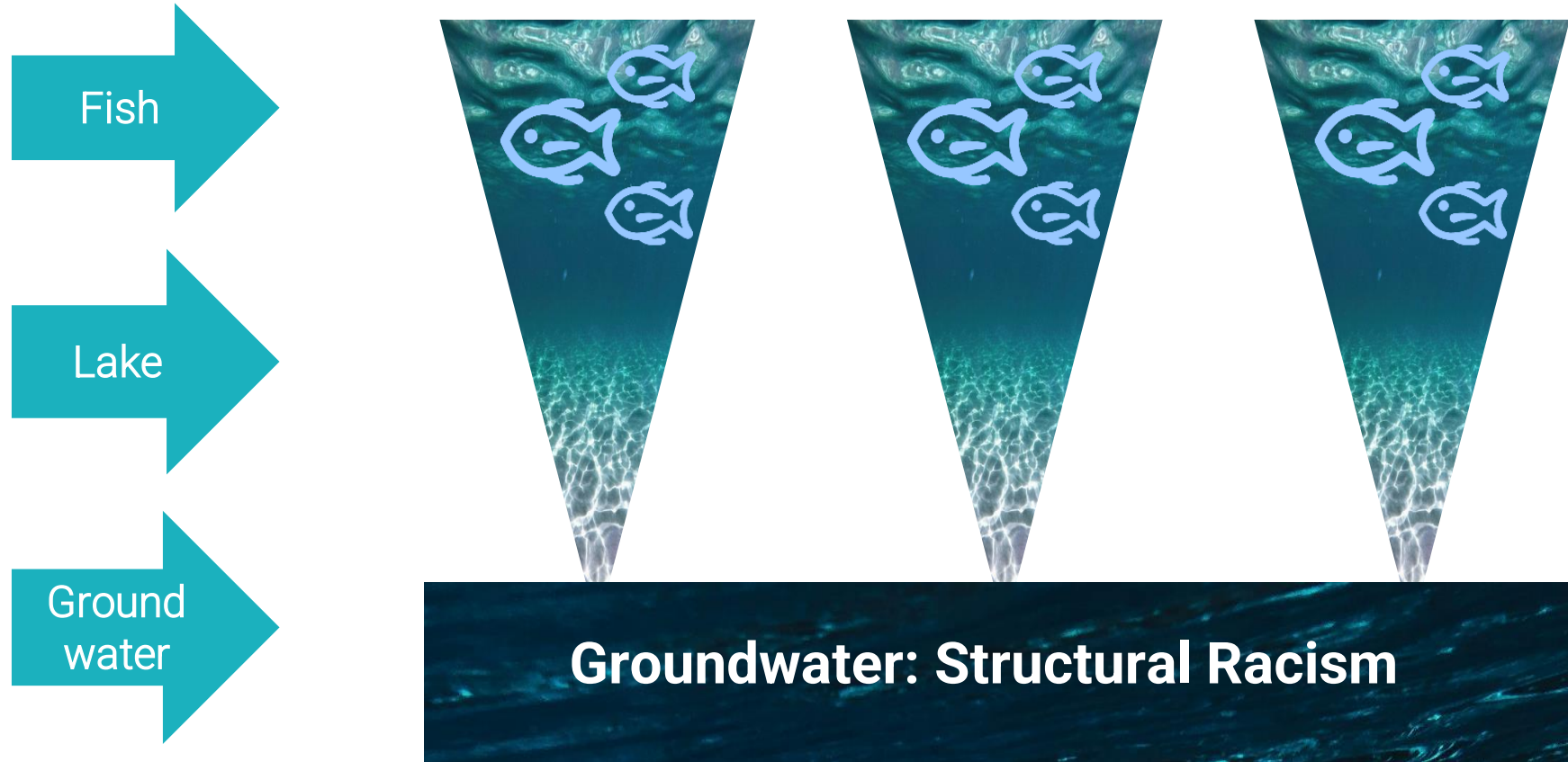


# Systems are interconnected – fed by the same groundwater that produces racial inequities



Source: "The Groundwater Approach", REI, 2018

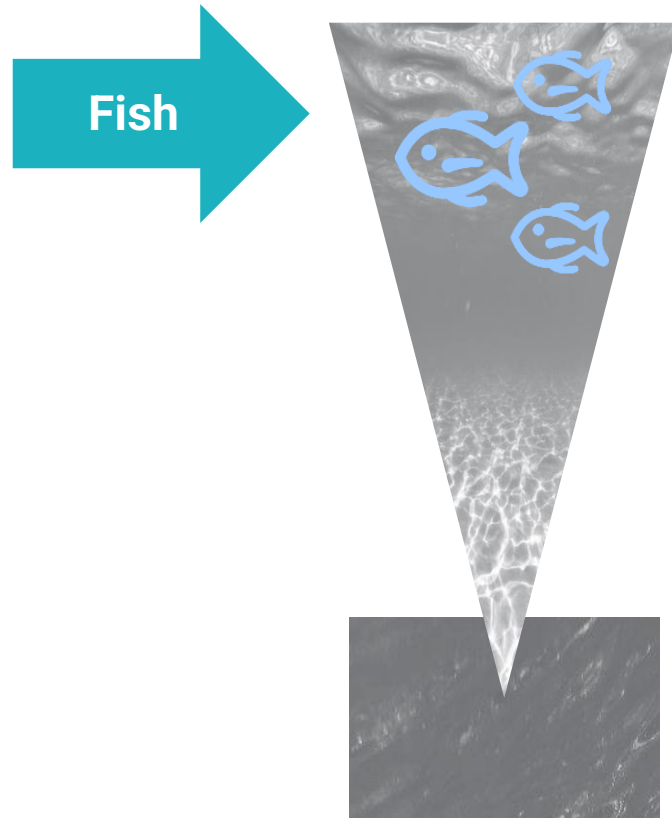
# Strategies for change can target different levels of the Groundwater framework ...



\*Concept drawn from Racial Equity Institute's [Groundwater Approach](#)

# We can try to “fix fish”

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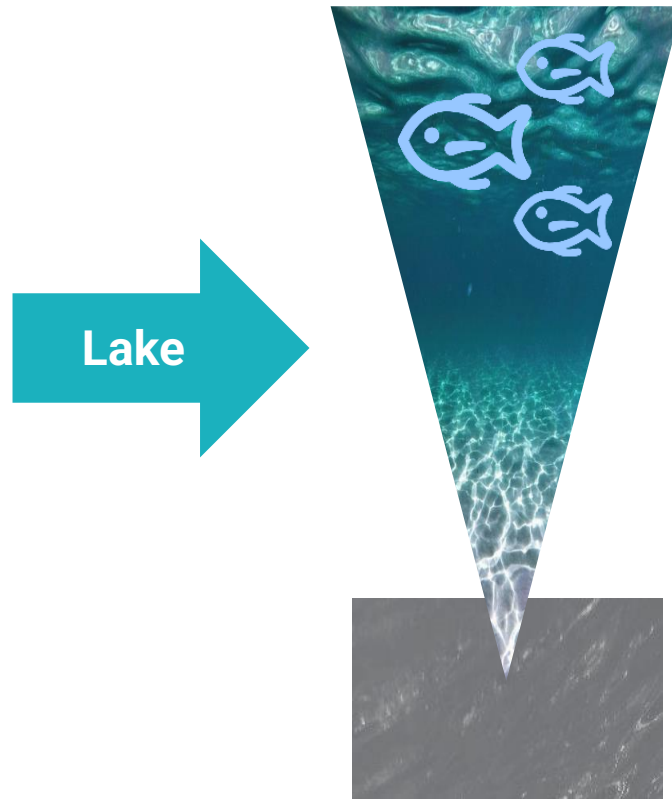


## Fixing “the fish”:

Could try to address racial inequities in educational and developmental outcomes by providing **parent education** and focus on **behavior changes** for parents of color

- This will help **individual parents/families**
- These interventions **do not change the underlying discrimination**

# We can work to clean up “the lake”



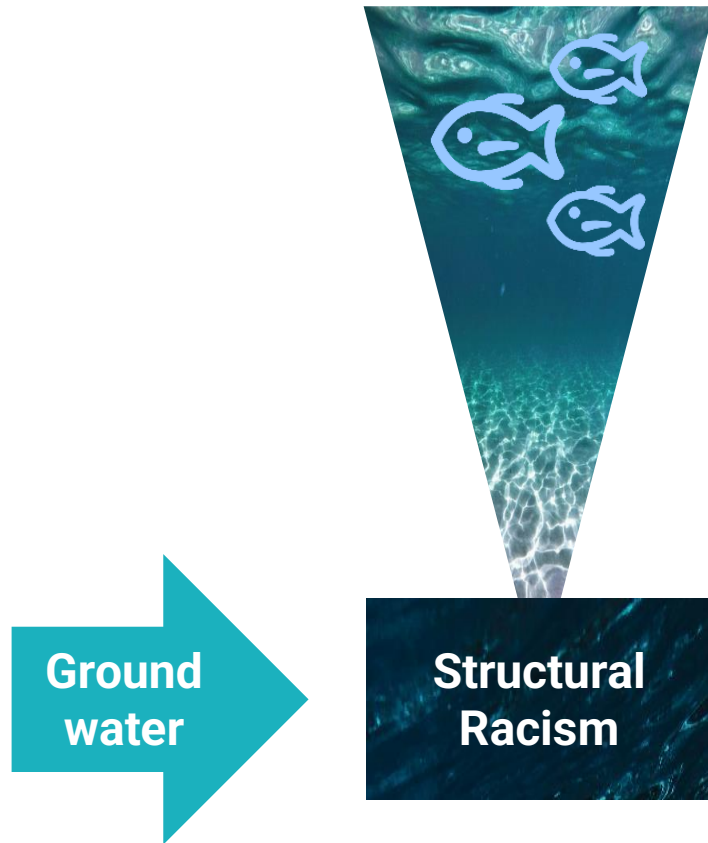
## Improving “the lake”:

Could implement multiple programs to improve **social determinants of health** for **individuals/communities**, such as:

- Screening for social risk factors
- Transportation and childcare assistance
- Inclusion efforts in health care settings

These interventions work to **improve the conditions of the system** while **not addressing the *discriminatory structure*** of the system

# We can work to change “the groundwater”

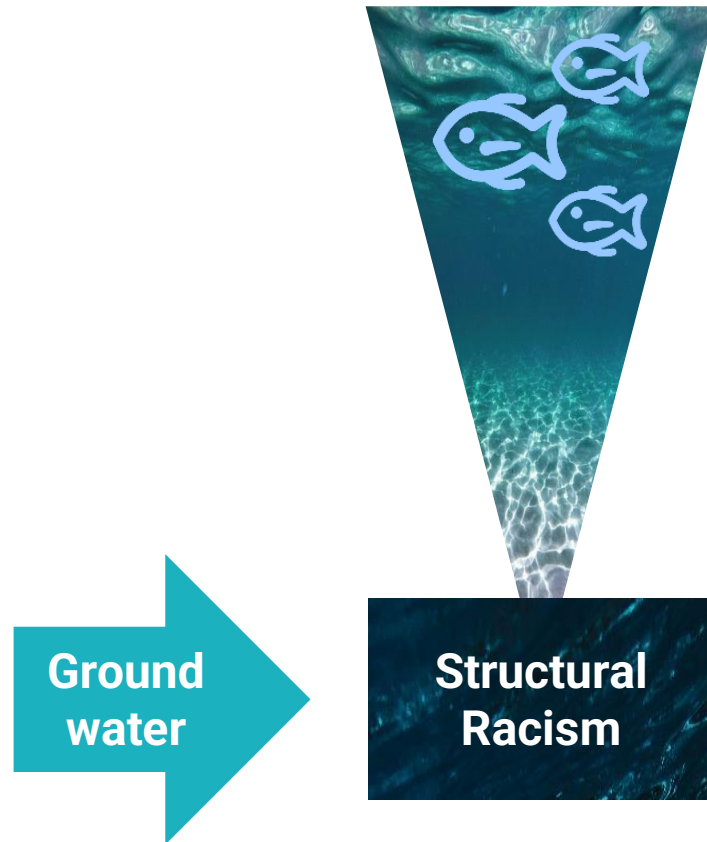


## Changing “the groundwater”: (1 of 2)

Can fundamentally change structural conditions to enable health and wellbeing for children, families and communities of color:

- Taking shared **responsibility** for the **sector’s** role in historical perpetuation of racism
- **Fully auditing** organization’s activities to first **eliminate any activities causing continuing harm** and embed practices in company to be consistently **anti-racist** in approach

# We can work to change “the groundwater”



## Changing “the groundwater”: (2 of 2)

Partnering to systematically dismantle racism in education, health & adjacent systems. This requires broad spectrum of mutually reinforcing activities, such as:

- Support **capacity building of community-based organizations** to promote public health, educational, environmental justice movements
- **Comprehensively reinvest in public health, educational & economic infrastructure** in communities of color
- Promote sustained structural supports for **wealth building** among communities of color

Not everything that  
is **faced** can be  
**changed**, but  
nothing can be  
changed **until it is**  
**faced**.  
- James Baldwin





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