

132 *DEVELOPING A SOCIAL JUSTICE GAUGE FOR A NURSES ASSOCIATION*

OBJECTIVES: Social justice has been identified as a founding pillar of public health and a critical goal of social progress. The first phase of this initiative was undertaken to describe how organizations define and monitor social justice. The aim of the second phase was to develop a social justice gauge and test its utility with board members of a national nursing association that had initiated this work.

METHODS: Relevant articles were identified using a prescribed search strategy in seven health and social science databases. Organizational websites were searched. Seventeen semi-structured key informant interviews were completed. Guided by the literature and interviews, a decision-tree model was developed to examine the potential presence of societal health disparities within issues under discussion. The utility of this model was examined by having staff members apply it to several current issues. A social justice gauge was also developed, again guided by the literature and interviews. The gauge was initially applied by research team members to selected position papers of the Canadian Nurses Association. Adjustments were made. The decision-tree model and gauge were then used by board members.

RESULTS: Although social justice is a term commonly used in public health discourse, there is still considerable ambiguity both with respect to its definition and its operationalization. Only two existing organizational tools to assess organizational influence on, or alignment with social justice were found. Based on the comprehensive review of the literature and consultation with key stakeholders, two complementary tools were developed: a decision-tree model looking at societal health disparities, and a social justice gauge for examining how well policy and position papers align with social justice ideals. Following its application, the decision-tree model and social justice gauge were adopted by the board of the Canadian Nurses Association to guide future board decisions.

CONCLUSION: There is considerable ambiguity surrounding the term “social justice”. An institutional tool, developed to assess social justice in position papers and programs, shows promise as a tool for use by organizations. Further investigation into how health organizations can support social justice and use this institutional tool to monitor progress is needed.