To kick off our quarterly learnings on Combatting Misinformation and Advancing Truth-Telling for Health Equity, the P4HE Collaborative sat down with Dr. Tucker-Seely for a level setting dialogue. This document offers a high-level overview of key themes and takeaways from the session, serving as a quick reference guide for learners and setting the stage for deeper exploration and understanding of Combatting Misinformation and Advancing Truth-Telling for health equity.

P4HE's Working Definition of Misinformation

Misinformation can distort the public's understanding and reactions to health initiatives. Social media can often spread this misinformation, influencing public opinion and discussions. To spot misinformation, it's important to distinguish between what's true and what's made up, which requires strong media and data literacy skills. Confronting misinformation relies on cultivation of media literacy skills through critical thinking and investigative research to promote the spread of reliable information and informed decision making at the individual and community levels.

Key Takeaways

What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?

Misinformation is information that is presented as truthful initially but may turn out to be false. This differs from disinformation, which is outright false information that is disseminated as the truth for propagandistic purposes. Often, "misinformation" is used to convey both meanings – the distinction between the two terms is the intent. Disinformation is *purposefully deceiving*.

Why might individuals be susceptible to misinformation?

There are three key reasons why individuals may be susceptible to misinformation: comprehension, control, and community. Humans have a natural desire to make sense of (i.e., comprehend) the world we are living in, to feel that we have control over our lives, and to be a part of a community. When it comes to misinformation, these desires show up with the following line of thinking: "if people like us believe this thing, then maybe it's right."

How did we get to a place where misinformation is so prevalent?

It is crucial to acknowledge the factors that enable misinformation to thrive, such as the speed of information spread, uncertainty in the world, complex systems and understandings of health, unequal access to information, and historical mistrust of systems. These factors are present in the healthcare delivery system and accelerated by the ability to quickly share information on social media. Additionally, there is a decline in trust of

traditional experts, including healthcare professionals, presenting a challenge for maintaining the relevance and influence of expert knowledge.

How is misinformation related to health equity and inequity?

The presence of misinformation permeates the healthcare delivery system and public health infrastructure. Communities with limited access to healthcare, education, or digital resources are more prone to encountering and believing misinformation about health issues and treatments, potentially worsening health disparities. Language barriers, limited health literacy, and restricted access to accurate information can also create additional barriers for identifying and disregarding misinformation about the healthcare system. This can lead to greater health disparities. Consequent efforts to address misinformation also divert resources that could otherwise be used to tackle underlying causes of health inequities.

What is the role of trust in combatting misinformation and disinformation?

Misinformation undermines trust in the healthcare system by disseminating false data and anecdotes that portray the system as unhelpful and ineffective. This narrative gains momentum due to the historical mistreatment of marginalized groups by the healthcare institutions and these individuals' resulting valid mistrust of the system. To rebuild trust in the health field, it is essential to understand and prioritize the needs of individuals, demonstrate competence and expertise in health-related fields, share accurate information and stories, establish cross-sector partnerships, follow through on commitments, and consistently show up as a reliable ally in all settings.

What are key strategies to combat misinformation and disinformation in pursuit of health equity?

Effectively combatting misinformation and disinformation will require a strategic approach to demonstrate the value of expertise and lived experience and to effectively communicate and disseminate reliable information. It is also important to change narratives and misconceptions on health topics, particularly related to continued discrimination and marginalization within the healthcare system. Meanwhile, identifying and uplifting trusted messengers will also be essential for building ongoing credibility with the general public.

Looking for more on Combatting Misinformation?

Check out this quarter's Topical Exploration Blog and Resource List.