

Intro to Systems Thinking

Understanding Systems



What is a system?

- **System** = a collection of processes working together to produce a defined output

“Every system is perfectly designed... to achieve the results it gets”

Why is Systems Thinking Important?

- Achieving health equity is an **adaptive challenge** involving multiple systems
- To help us go from mostly “downstream” work to also going “midstream” and “upstream”
- So that we can **re-design** our systems to be more equitable



We all hold a piece of the puzzle



And our puzzle pieces are part of even a larger puzzle – it's a bigger system!



Why is Systems Thinking Important?

To Help us figure out who we can/should have on our **Equity Improvement Teams!**

- Who do we need to work with to improve our system?
- How do we collaborate and align for equity?
- What are gaps in our system?



Action and Learning Community Components



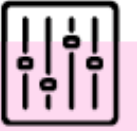
Equity Improvement Teams

Teams working together towards a common goal. Includes internal HCA teams, community teams working on SDoH priority areas, and Population Health Equity Collective teams.



CHILA Sessions

Multi-day learning and relationship-building events for equity improvement teams. These include interactive capability-building and planning activities.



Action Periods

The heart of the Action and Learning Community, when teams work to achieve their aims by testing and refining their plans and integrating what they have learned into their daily work.



Equity Action Labs

A framework of action that involves setting an ambitious goal, designing and testing potential solutions, and developing an action plan.



Improvement Coaches

Advisors who will provide general improvement and measurement support, coaching, and training to equity improvement teams.

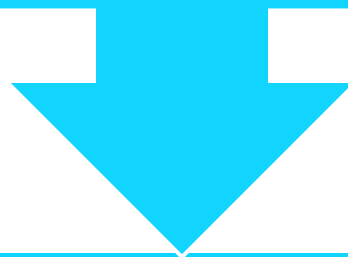


Equity Project Implementation Grants

Grants of up to \$500K will be available to support team projects addressing the SDoH priority areas.

Equity Improvement Teams

A group that will work together to achieve a common aim in one more more of the 3 Priority Areas



Teams can be:

HCA Teams

Community Teams
(with or without an
Implementation Grant)

**Population
Health Equity
Collective Teams**

**Or a “mash-up”
of all three!**

Your equity improvement projects

We'll help ensure that each project has...

- A clear, ambitious aim statement
- A focus on **systems change***
- A way to measure if your change is effective
- Deep codesign and partnership with people affected by the issue
- A coach to talk with when you hit a roadblock
- A positive impact on the lives of our Orange County neighbors!



What is Systems Change?

1. **A strategic approach to problem-solving** based on systems thinking that focuses on how stakeholders influence a problem's causes (upstream) rather than just treating its symptoms.
2. **A lens for thinking** - A way to see complex (adaptive) problems based on systems thinking and complexity theory.
3. **An organizing tactic** - A process of bringing together all stakeholders involved with a problem to address it.
4. **A strategic goal** - Large-scale or transformational change that occurs as a result of changing the conditions that cause a problem or allow it to persist. Common conditions include rules, policies, practices, relationships, power, mindsets, and use of resources.

Source: <https://bryanlindsley.com>



What will be true of the system change projects we design together:



Address one or more of these 3 focus areas



Work to improve the **systems** involved



Include working “**midstream**” and/or “**upstream**”



Apply an **equity lens**



Are **designed with the people** that the effort is for



Use **data** (identify need, track progress, guide decision-making)



Increase **collaboration** (leverage and align)



Are **actionable** and **feasible now**

Foundational Tools for Systems Thinking



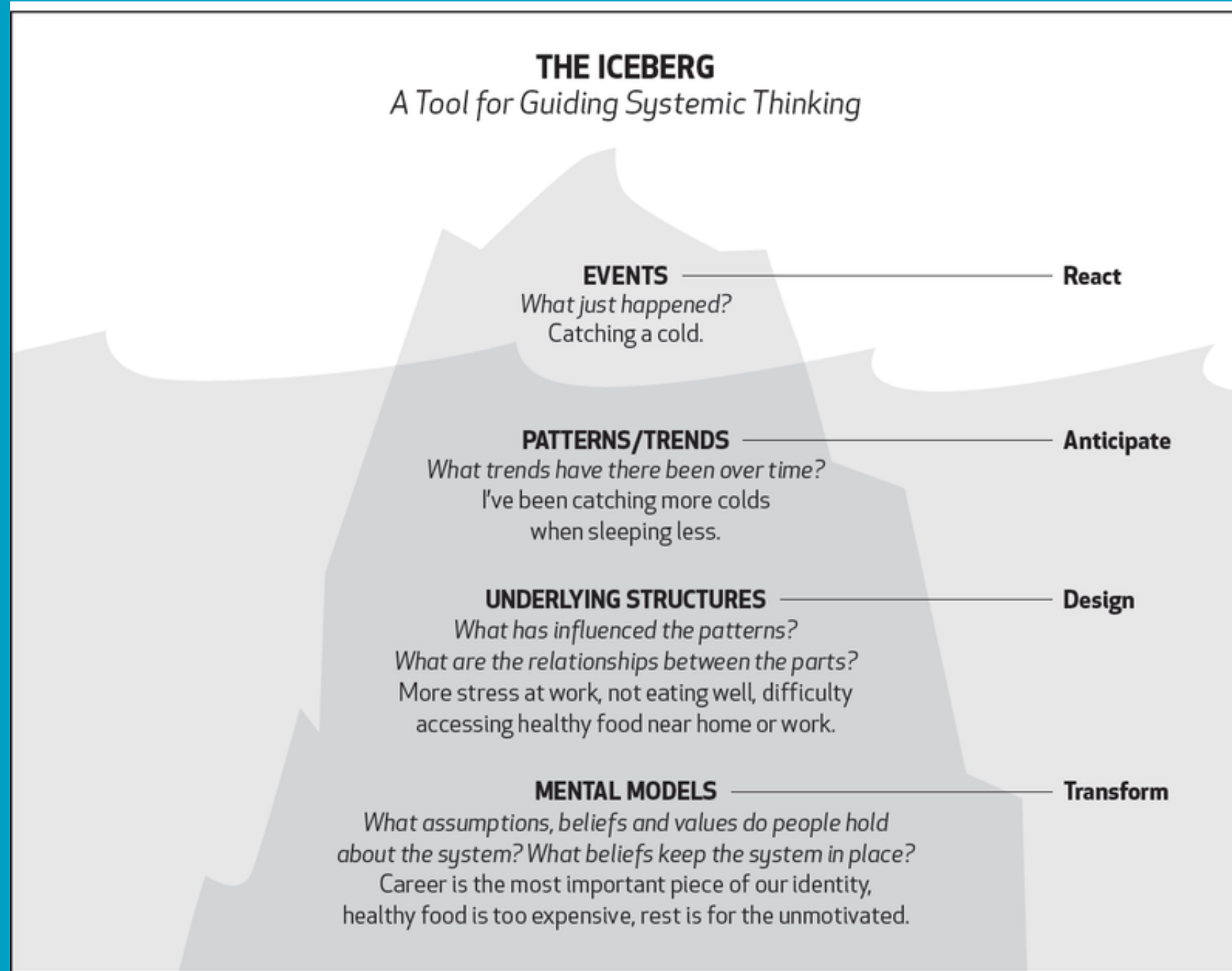
(Some) Foundational Tools

- Iceberg Model
- Process Maps
- Systems Mapping
- Causal Loop Diagrams
- Stocks and Flows
- Driver Diagrams
- Mid-Stream & Upstream Analysis
- Root Cause Analysis
- 7 Stories (Story to Theory)
- Asset Mapping
- Power Mapping



The Iceberg Model

Rather than reacting to individual problems, systems thinking will ask about relationships to other activities within the system, look for patterns over time, and seek root causes.



Topic:
Homelessness

EVENTS

What just happened?

React

People living on the streets
People living in shelters

PATTERNS/TRENDS

What's been happening?
What's changing?

Anticipate

Number of people experiencing
homelessness increasing
Street homelessness viewed as
a problem

STRUCTURES

What has influences these patterns?
What are the relationships between parts?
What are the rules, norms,cultures, values and polices?

Design

Lack of prevention services and
coordinated access to these services,
lack of affordable housing, structural
inequities, and failures of other
systems

MENTAL MODES

What assumptions, beliefs and values
do people hold about the systems?
What beliefs keep the system in place?

Transform

Homelessness is intractable and
too costly to try to solve



Community
Conditions

UPSTREAM

Community
Impact

Individual
Social Needs

MIDSTREAM

Individual
Impact

Clinical
Care

DOWNSTREAM

What is Happening Upstream (structural determinants)?	
	Poverty
	Low wages - jobs that don't pay a living wage
	Income inequality
	Redlining - certain neighborhoods are poorer
What is Happening Midstream (social determinants)?	Poor nutrition - junk food
	Lack of access to healthy food (too expensive)
	Low income neighborhoods don't have healthy options
	Parents don't have time to prepare healthy meals
	Unhealthy foods are cheaper
What is Happening Downstream?	Childhood obesity
	Diabetes
	Hypertension
	Cardiovascular disease



Mapping Our Ideal System



What would our ideal system look like?

For our 3 priority SDOH areas



**Start by thinking of a system that
achieves “all/everyone”
or “zero/no one”**

Why do this?



**Now think of the system from the
perspective of the people
using the system**

Why is this important?



Now think about how to incorporate
the Iceberg and Downstream, Mid-
Stream and Upstream exercises into
your system

Why?



Putting it All Together:
develop your ideal system from the
perspective of your end-users that gets
us to all/everyone or zero/no one



3 Focus Options

Develop your ideal system for:

- **Housing is Health** (Housing)
- **Food as Medicine** (Nutrition and Basic Medical Care)
- **Health and Healing** (Health and Wellness)



Food as Medicine

Aim –Orange county has a food security system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides safe, affordable and nutritious food to every resident



Housing is Health

Aim –Orange county has a housing system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides safe, affordable and decent housing to every resident



Health and Healing

Aim –Orange county has a wellness system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides proven neighborhood and/or sub-population-based strategies to foster physically active lifestyles



Or Choose Your Own Vision

- Based on your Vision from yesterday or a **grand vision** for your work (if your table/group can agree within 5 minutes on which Vision to use), Design the ideal system for that Vision
- Keeping in mind:
 - Designing for all/everyone or zero/no one
 - Downstream, mid-stream and up-stream
 - **From the perspective of the people that use the system**



2 Ways to Develop your Ideal System

- Use flip chart paper, post-it notes and markers to illustrate what your ideal system would look like (see guidance on next slide)

OR

- Use flip chart paper, post-it notes and markers to complete the Mid and Upstream Systems Thinking Exercise (detailed guidance in handout) for your Focus Area



Guidance for Illustrating Your Ideal System

- This is from the point of view of **end-users** - the people that are negatively affected by the system currently and would benefit if the system is improved
- Your group can visualize/illustrate the system in a way that makes sense to you (it is often easier to place most of the writing on post-it notes so that you can more easily move things around and quickly make changes/edits)
- The system should include:
 - **Downstream elements** (how the system will address the immediate needs/symptoms)
 - **Mid-stream elements** (how the system will address social determinants of health related to your focus area)
 - **Upstream elements** (the policies and systems that would be redesigned and aligned)
- It may be helpful to start from scratch as if you have full control of the systems involved and build a system that gets OC to all/everyone or none/no one



Let's Go!

- You have approx. 30 minutes to develop your ideal system (using one of the two options (or a mash-up of the two approaches)
- IHI and HCA staff and faculty are here to provide support – raise your hands if/when you want help and someone will come over
- We will then debrief after this, including how you can use what you come up with!



Our 3 Aims!

Food As Medicine - Orange county has a food security system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides safe, affordable and nutritious food to every resident

Housing is Health - Orange county has a housing system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides safe, affordable and decent housing to every resident

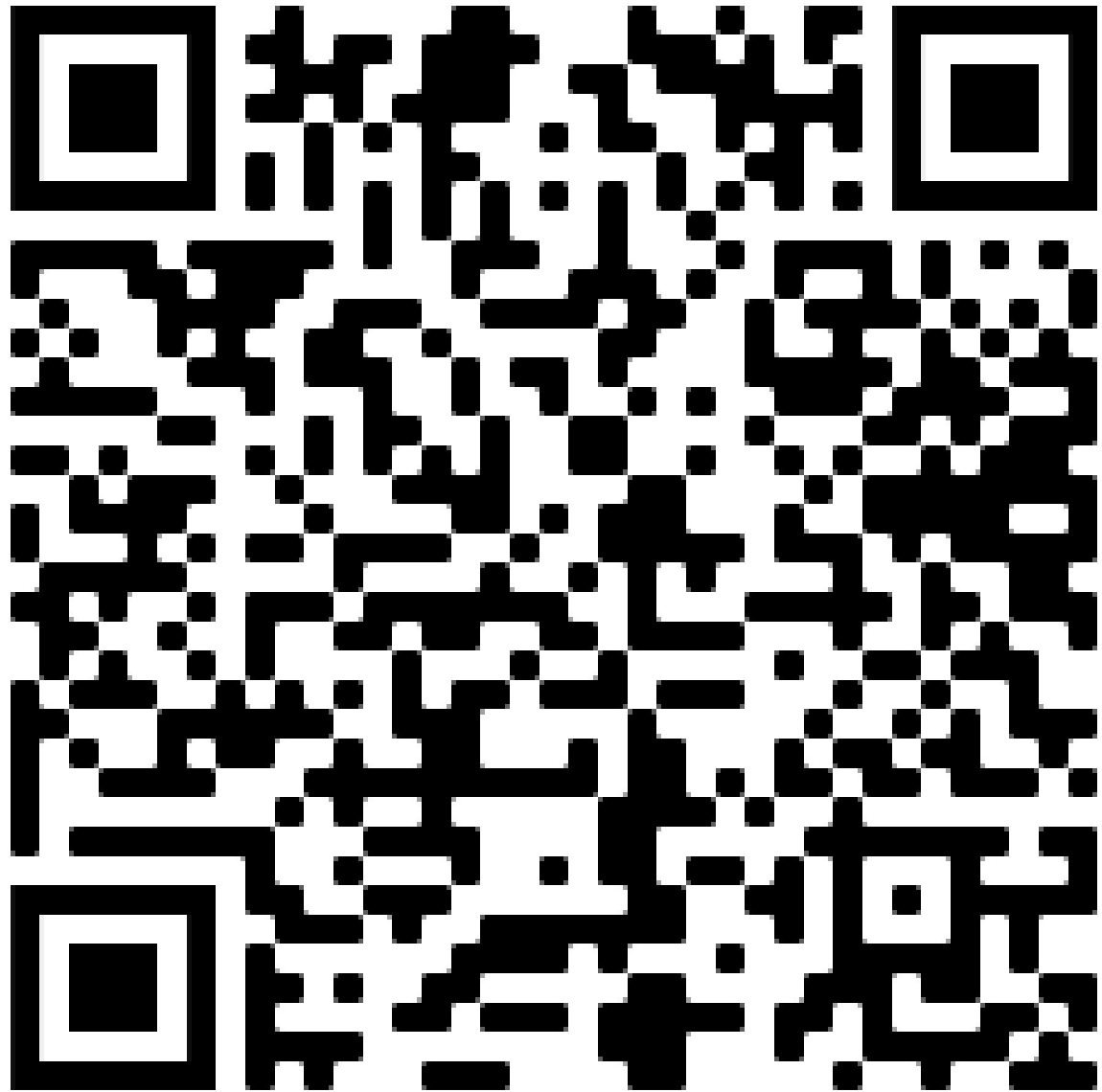
Health and Healing - Orange county has a wellness system (focused on minority and vulnerable communities) that provides proven neighborhood and/or sub-population-based strategies to foster physically active lifestyles



Systems Exercise Debrief

- What did you learn about your system?
- What was hard about this exercise or something you aren't sure you got right (yet)?
- How might you use this as you form your improvement teams and begin to develop your projects?
- Who else will you need to bring to the table to make your vision a reality?





***Please evaluate
this session (intro
to Systems
Thinking)***

**Aim your phone's camera
at the code, and a short
survey will open. Thanks
for helping us improve.**